

Emotional Health & Maturity

What is it? Emotional health and maturity is the ability to recognize and express both positive and negative emotions in ways that are healthy, respectful, and appropriate to the situation. It is also empathy and the willingness to help and comfort others.

Why is it important? Children who are emotionally healthy, and able to understand and get along well with others, are children who are prepared to learn and succeed—at school and throughout life.



Encourage your child to reflect before acting

- Play the “What next?” game. Tell him or her about a challenging scenario, then ask, “What next?” For example, “Sam broke his mom’s vase... What next?”
- Encourage your child to use words when problems arise (e.g., “I’m mad”). During a disagreement, allow your child to express his or her emotions—both positive and negative—and encourage your child to listen when others express their emotions.



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Develop a balance between fearfulness and impulsiveness in your child

- When your child does something inappropriate, give him or her a consequence that matches the behaviour. For example, if your child is colouring on the table instead of the paper, gently take the crayon away until she or he is ready to colour on the paper. Remember to give your child another chance and praise him or her immediately for the appropriate behaviour.
- Provide choices every day, such as selecting snacks, clothes, or toys. This will help your child become confident in the decisions he or she makes.
- Don't push your child to do things that make him or her afraid. Instead, give your child time to take small steps toward the activity.



Encourage your child to empathize with other people's feelings

- Respond to your child with empathy when he or she is hurt, sick or upset. For example, when your child falls down and gets hurt, respond to his or her cries in a caring and consoling manner. Your child will learn to respond to others in the same way.



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Help your child deal with feelings at an age-appropriate level

- Label your child's feelings when he or she is upset, then show him or her different ways to cope. For example, "You seem mad. Would you like a hug? Would you like to look at a book in a quiet place?"
- Show your child how to maturely deal with strong emotions, such as anger, sadness or frustration. Your child is always watching and learning from you, so remember to keep your cool and show your child appropriate ways to deal with emotions.



Start teaching emotional health and showing attachment from the very first moments of life

- Respond sensitively to your infant's needs, especially every time your baby cries during the first six months. Use your words to label the emotions you see. For example, "so sad... baby's crying."
- Play "Pet the Dog": First, you pet your cat or dog. Then, with your hand over your baby's hand, gently pet your cat or dog together.
- Play different types of music with a variety of "moods." Take your baby in your arms and dance.

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Give your child opportunities to be caring and thoughtful to others

- Give your child some cuddly toys to care for (e.g., wash, feed, hug). Talk about what your child is doing, and how helpful and caring she or he is being.
- Make a “Teddy Bear Hospital” for all your child’s cuddly toys, complete with blankets, beds, bandages and medical tools. Then act out imaginary situations as you and your child help the toys “get better.”
- Play “Guess the Feeling”: You act out an emotion and your child will guess what you are feeling. Include your child’s teddy bears and other stuffed animals. This adds other personalities and situations to the game.



Show your child the importance of helping and getting along with others

- Help your child organize a playdate with one or two friends. This is a chance for your child to design the invitation, or practise manners on the phone if he or she prefers to call.
- Every week give your child a few jobs around the home (e.g., dusting, making bed, tidying up toys). Tell your child how much this helps the family.

For more information, visit

www.peelcc.org

www.teachmorelovemore.org

www.investinkids.ca