

Does Your Child have EQ?

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EQ?! What's EQ? EQ is short for emotional intelligence and the latest research is showing that your child's EQ is more important than their IQ for success later in life.

In short, emotional intelligence takes into account how your child relates to others, how adept they are at expressing their feelings, how empathetic they are, whether they have self confidence, can delay gratification, control their impulses and feel optimistic in the face of adversity.

I had a wonderful opportunity to observe emotional intelligence recently at my 10-year-old's slumber party.

Consider the following scenarios:

1. If your child is watching "Cheaper by the Dozen" and the older kids call their brother "Fed Ex" does your child:
 - A. Say, "That's mean. They shouldn't call their brother names."
 - B. Ignore it.
 - C. Laugh.
2. If a bunch of older kids go snow tubing and there is a 5-year-old in the group, does your child:
 - A. Think it's weird that a 5-year-old is along and ask "What's that baby doing with us?"
 - B. Seem oblivious that a 5-year-old is along.
 - C. Bring the 5-year-old's snow tube up the hill once in awhile.
3. If a friend was icing an injured foot and said "I'm thirsty" would your child:
 - A. Find an adult to get the water for the girl.
 - B. Tell the girl "I'll go get you some water!"
 - C. Expect that the injured girl could get the water herself.
4. If the plan is to snow tube for two hours at the party first and then go home, does your child want to:
 - A. Leave the event before it's over so she can open presents earlier.
 - B. Open presents the first thing you get home from snow tubing.
 - C. Open presents after the snack since all of the kids are hungry after snow tubing.

As you can see, there are many opportunities each day for kids to practice empathy, sensitivity, kindness, impulse control and delayed gratification. At the pajama party, I observed a wide range of emotional intelligence among the girls.

It's in these everyday experiences that your child can develop a strong EQ, if you can coach them to recognize their own feelings, empathize with others and delay gratification while thinking through their choices. Emotional intelligence is learned and we are the primary teachers.

Let's focus on one aspect of developing emotional intelligence, expressing feelings. As parents, we can help or hinder the process for our children. Here are several tips for how to do this:

1) **Accept your child's emotions rather than denying the feelings.**

If your child comes home from school and says "I had an awful day. Everything went wrong." say "You seem upset. Tell me what happened." rather than "It couldn't have been that bad!" Open doors for your child to express feelings, rather than shutting them down.

2) **Help the child name their feelings.**

If your oldest child has a friend over and your youngest child starts acting out because he doesn't have a friend over, you could say "Do you feel left out? Are you sad because you don't have a friend over, too?" rather than just responding to the misbehavior that will inevitably occur.

3) **Teach the child a feelings vocabulary.**

Take a set of index cards and write the name of 20 different feelings on the cards. (If you want to be really creative put pictures of faces that correspond with the feelings.) Keep these cards at the dinner table and once in awhile pull the cards out. Pick one card, read the name of the feeling and have each person at the table share a time that they felt guilty, happy or embarrassed, etc. Not only are you teaching your child a feelings vocabulary, but you're showing that you talk about feelings in your family.

4) **Model healthy expression of feelings.**

When you express your own feelings, use "I" statements to express your feelings rather than blaming others. For example, you should say, "I feel disappointed that you didn't finish your chore the first time I asked" rather than "You make me so mad when you don't do something when I ask you!" No one can make you mad. You are responsible for your feelings. A subtle difference, but an important one!

5) **Listen empathically to your child.**

If your oldest child gets to have a sleepover and your youngest yells "It's not fair!" She gets to do everything!" you can empathize by saying, "It isn't fair is it? It's so hard when your sister gets to do things that you can't do yet." Life isn't fair and there will be many times that your child is disappointed. If you empathize with them, they'll learn the skill of empathizing with others, too.

Children who have parents who serve as “emotion coaches” will have stronger friendships, fewer behavior problems, less aggression, better academic success and will be “emotionally healthy,” according to John Gottman, in his book “Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child.” If you’d like more information on the topic, this is a good choice.

Byline: Toni Schutta is a Parent Coach and Licensed Psychologist with 17 years experience helping families find solutions that work. To receive the **free report “The 7 Worst Mistakes Parents Make (and How to Avoid Them!)** visit <http://www.getparentinghelpnow.com/7mistakesignup.html>. Toni also offers a complimentary 30-minute “Happier Family for You” Planning Session, that’s done by telephone, at your convenience. Please contact Toni at toni@getparentinghelpnow.com to set up your session.