

# Emotion Coaching

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Coventry EPS

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Coventry City Council

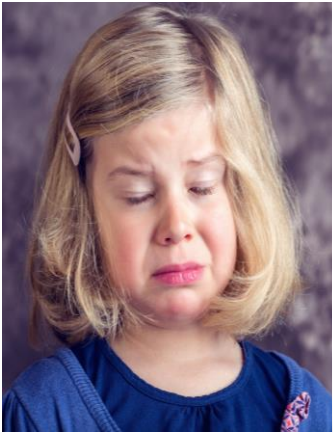


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# **Aim of the session:**

To explain the what, why,  
where, when, and how of  
emotion coaching

# Name the emotions...



Distress/Sadness



Fear



Anger



Surprise



Disgust



Joy/Happiness

- 6 emotions that are observed across cultures and countries.
- Our emotions are natural, normal and hardwired for our survival.

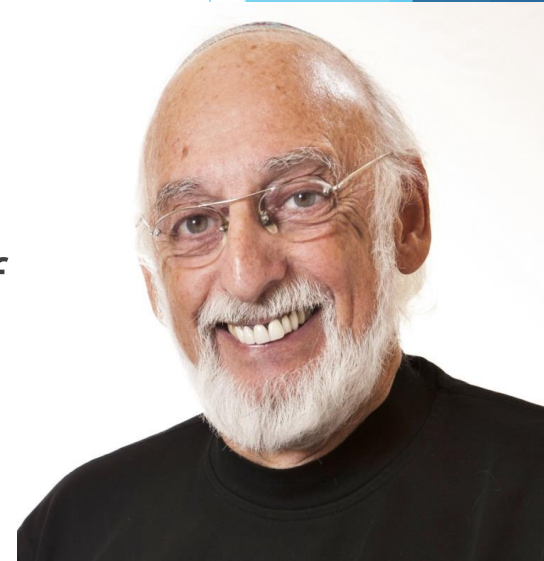
**Have you heard  
of Emotion Coaching?**

# What is Emotion Coaching?

- ▶ Using moments of heightened emotion, and resultant behaviour, to guide and teach children about their emotions and about more effective responses.
- ▶ Reacting with empathy and care to children's emotional states to support their own emotional regulation.
- ▶ Based on the principle that emotions are natural and normal; it's what we do with them that counts.
- ▶ Drawing from neuroscientific research on the link between brain, emotions, the body and behaviour.

# Research behind Emotion Coaching

- ▶ John Gottman - a developmental psychologist who studied family dynamics and the emotional lives of families for 20 years (University of Washington)
- ▶ Gottman's research was based on the work of Dr Haim Ginott - child psychologist - whose belief was that it is important to talk to children *whilst* they are emotional
- ▶ Gottman's research was a ten year longitudinal study involving lab observations, parent and child interviews, home and school observations and teacher interviews.



# Research Findings

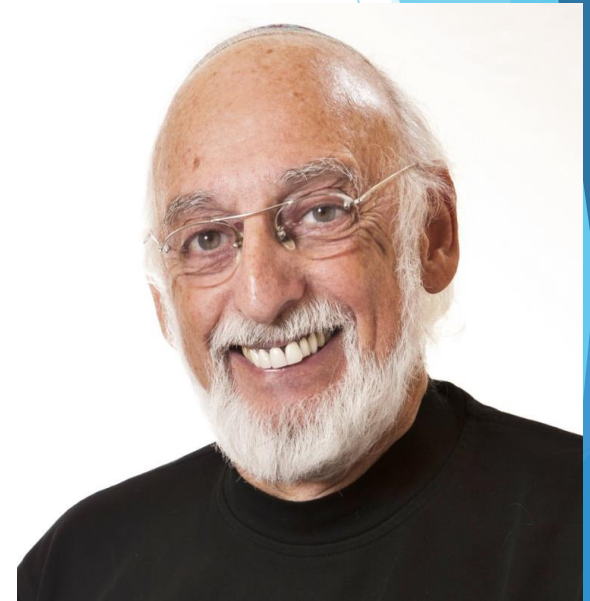
- ▶ Interactions involving emotions between parent/carer and child have a great impact on a child's long term wellbeing
- ▶ Careful and well thought out interactions with children when they are emotional, appear to lead to protective factors within children
- ▶ Success in school depends on the emotional characteristics and development of youngsters
- ▶ Being loving and caring with children, is not enough by itself to develop protective factors that promise emotional and social well being
- ▶ Warm and caring parents/carers often could not talk to their children when they were angry, sad or afraid
- ▶ What was enough to elicit protective factors in youngsters, was how adult caring was channelled into some basic skills that were used *whilst* the children were displaying emotion



# Why use Emotion Coaching?

Gottman (1997) found that Emotion coached children could:

- ▶ Regulate their own emotional states
- ▶ Be better at soothing themselves when upset
- ▶ Calm down their hearts faster
- ▶ Had fewer infections and illness
- ▶ Be better at focussing attention
- ▶ Relate better to other people (even in challenging social situations, for example being teased)
- ▶ Were less prone to acts of violence
- ▶ Be better at understanding people
- ▶ Be better at forming relationships
- ▶ Be better at academic performance





# Why use Emotion Coaching?

Research findings demonstrate that emotion coaching helps parents to:

- ▶ be more sensitive to children's needs
- ▶ be more consistent in responses to children's behaviour
- ▶ feel more 'in control' during emotional incidents
- ▶ promote positive relationships with their children

# The Neuroscience of Emotion Coaching

# Note of Caution

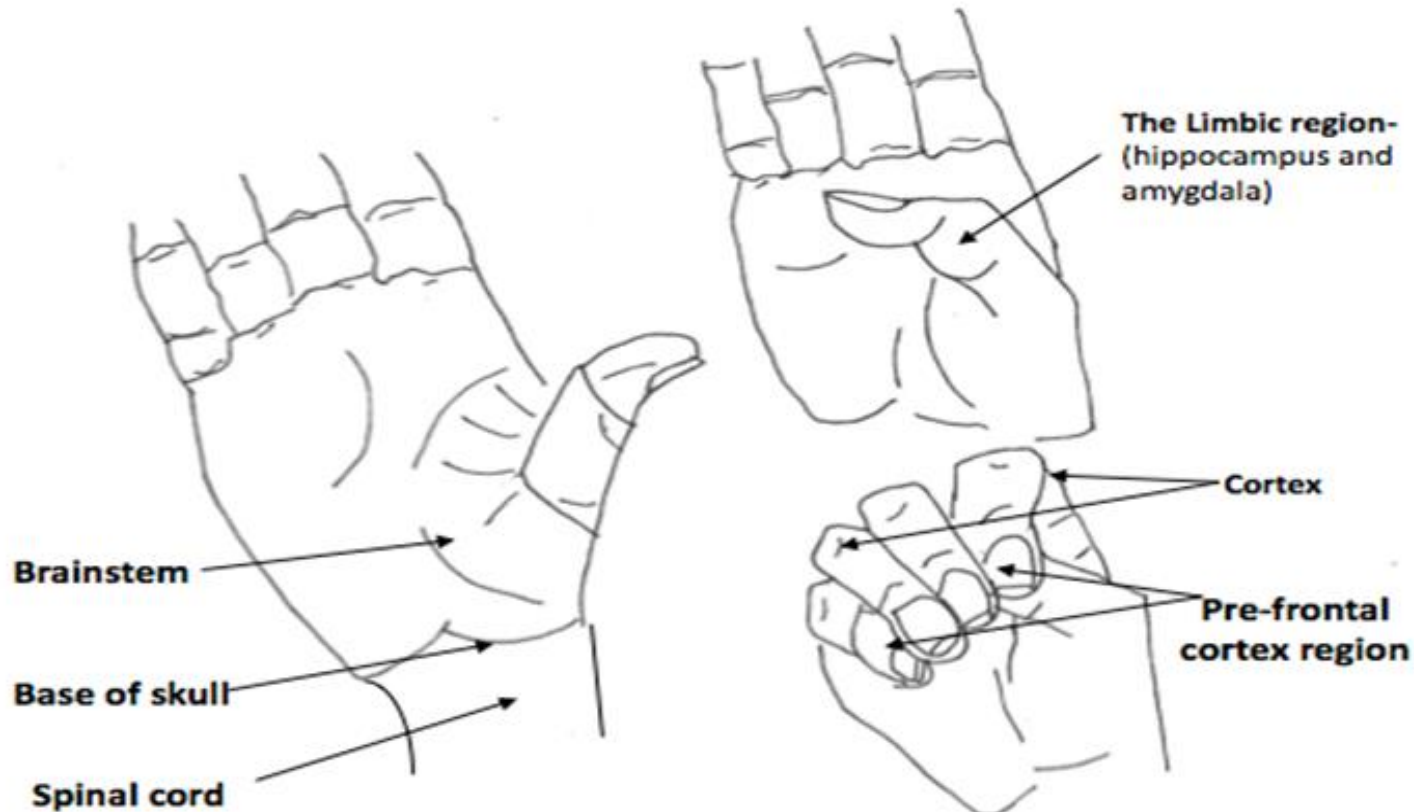
- ▶ Care must be taken in the interpretation of neuroscientific research.
- ▶ As an emerging field, we must ensure we do not over-interpret the conclusions we draw from such research.
- ▶ Neuroscience myths
- ▶ BUT- don't throw the baby out with the bathwater - with care, data from neuroscience can support our understanding of child development.

# Neuroception - Porges (2011)

- ▶ A sub-conscious system for detecting threats and safety
- ▶ Stephen Porges defines this process as “how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous or life threatening”. We constantly look to our environment and others for cues about whether we are safe or not.
- ▶ Neuroception describes the way our autonomic nervous system scans for cues of safety, danger, and life-threat without involving the thinking parts of our brain.
- ▶ This includes internal processes, which may make us feel as though we are at risk, even when we are not.



# The 'hand brain model'



Siegel, 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9C1J740xw>

# Homeostasis



# Types of Stress



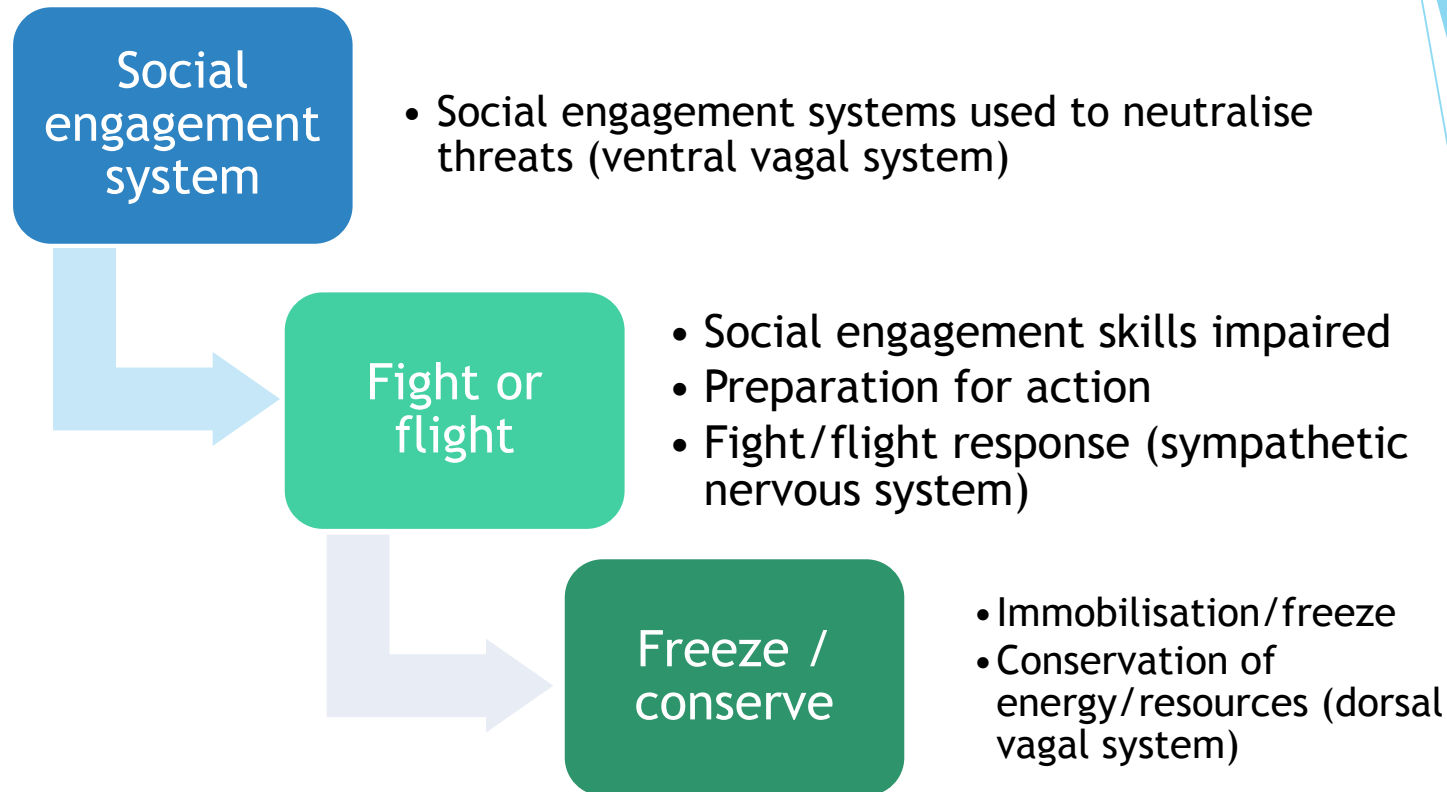
**POSITIVE**

**TOLERABLE**

***TOXIC***

- ▶ Develops skills to cope, essential for healthy development. Buffered by consistent, supportive, reliable adults, short-lived and manageable. Over time and through repetition resiliency develops.
- ▶ Stressors more prolonged and serious and body's stress response activated to a greater degree. If limited and buffered by consistent, supportive, reliable adults, the child can recover.
- ▶ Stress response continually activated by stressors that are strong, frequent and prolonged with inadequate supportive relationships or adverse environments.

# Poly-vagal theory



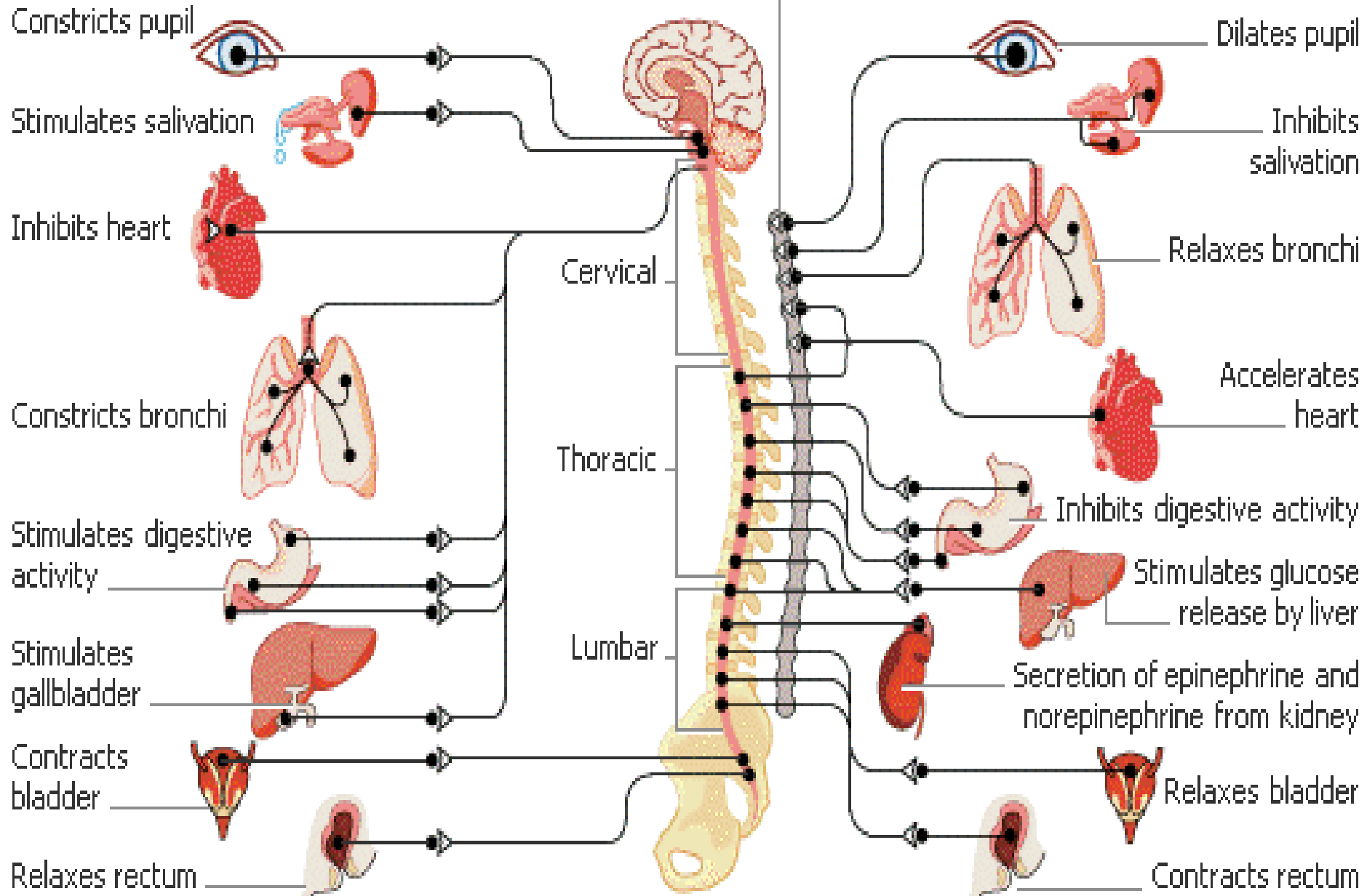
- When responding to emotionally-based behaviour, we must take account of the activated system that the person is operating within.
- To regain homeostasis, we must move back up through one system at a time.
- Resilience and wellbeing is reflected in an individual who can move with ease through the different systems, rather than being stuck.



## Parasympathetic

## Sympathetic ganglia

## Sympathetic



# Vagal tone

= How well your fight/flight response and vagus nerve are balanced and work together to regulate emotional responses to inform behaviours

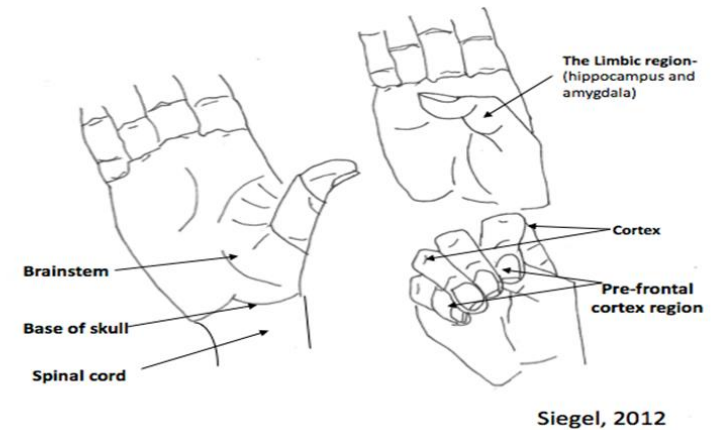
- ▶ Good vagal tone is related to;
  - ▶ Better emotional balance
  - ▶ Clear thinking
  - ▶ Improved attention
  - ▶ More efficient immune system
  - ▶ Greater resilience
  - ▶ Better social relationships
- ▶ Typically, vagal tone is developed by;
  - ▶ Initially, soothing, compassion and physical comfort
  - ▶ Learning to self- soothe and self- regulate from our ongoing relationships with parents and significant others
  - ▶ Experiencing and practising empathy
  - ▶ EMOTION COACHING

(Gottman 1997)



# Children's brain development

- ▶ The child's prefrontal cortex (*higher brain*) is functionally less mature at birth than the limbic system (*lower brain*), so young children are easily overwhelmed by emotions.
- ▶ Because neural connections between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex are developing and proliferating, children need help and time to think, reason and calm themselves down.
- ▶ With consistent, supportive, emotional responses from adults, a child's frontal cortex will develop the essential pathways that, over time, support self-regulation to better manage alarm states in the limbic system.



# Approaches to managing emotions

# Meta-Emotion Philosophy

= The thoughts and feelings we have about emotions (in general, in self and in others)

## Discussion Point:

- ▶ Identify some of the messages you received from your own parents, siblings, extended family, carers and others about emotions.
- ▶ How might the experiences effect responses to children's emotions?



# Styles in Managing Emotions

- ▶ Emotion Dismissing
- ▶ Emotion Disapproving
- ▶ Laissez-faire
- ▶ Emotion Coaching

## Activity: Role play

- ▶ In pairs, take turns to read the different emotion style scenarios.
- ▶ Each person take the role of either adult or child. Keep that role for each of the scenarios.
- ▶ In your pair, discuss how you felt in your role in each scenario.

# Dismissing (distracting) Style



- ▶ Despite good intentions (wants to make child feel better) is uncomfortable, fearful, anxious, hurt, annoyed or overwhelmed by negative emotions
- ▶ Wants negative emotions to go away quickly
- ▶ Considers paying attention to such emotions will make them worse, prolong them
- ▶ Tries to stop negative emotions by reducing/ minimising/ making light of their importance/significance e.g. it's no big deal, don't worry about it, be a big girl, that's life, you'll be fine
- ▶ Often motivated by need to rescue and make things better, fix the problem e.g. 'have a biscuit', 'I'll buy a new one', 'you need to do this'
- ▶ Focuses on getting rid of the emotion with logic or distraction rather than understanding the feelings



# Disapproving Style



© 2005 Ross Young

- ▶ Disapproves of negative emotions - viewed as a sign of weakness, lack of control, unconstructive
- ▶ Lacks empathy, noticeably critical and intolerant
- ▶ Tries to get rid of negative emotions via discipline, reprimand, punishment
- ▶ Focuses on the behaviour rather than the emotions generating the behaviour
- ▶ More likely to view negative emotional displays as a form of manipulation, lack of obedience, sign of bad character
- ▶ Often motivated by need to control and regain power and/or to 'toughen up' child

# Laissez-faire Style



- ▶ Freely accepts all emotional expression from the child.
- ▶ Offers comfort to the child experiencing negative feelings.
- ▶ Offers little guidance on behaviour.
- ▶ Does not teach the child about emotions
- ▶ Is permissive; does not set limits.
- ▶ Does not help the child solve problems.
- ▶ Does not teach problem-solving methods to the child.
- ▶ Believes there is little you can do about negative emotions other than ride them out.
- ▶ Believes that managing negative emotions is a matter of hydraulics; release the emotion and the work is done.

# Effects of dismissing and disapproving styles

- ▶ Child learns ‘what I am **feeling is not right**, my assessment of the problem is **wrong**, I must not feel this way’
- ▶ Child does not learn to trust own feelings affecting decision-making
- ▶ Not given **opportunities to experience** emotions and deal with them effectively so grow up unprepared for life’s challenges
- ▶ Not given opportunities to **self-regulate or problem-solve**
- ▶ Can lead to **suppression of natural emotions**, less or lack of self-regulation, reliance on distraction to get rid of emotion
- ▶ Generates **more negative feelings** - resentment, guilt, shame, anger

# Emotion Coaching Style

- ▶ Teaching children about the world of emotion '*in the moment*'
- ▶ Giving children *strategies* to deal with ups and downs
- ▶ Accepting negative emotions as *normal*
- ▶ Using moments of negative behaviour as *opportunities for teaching*
- ▶ Building *trusting and respectful relationships* with children



# How to Emotion Coach

# The 4 steps of Emotion Coaching

- ▶ Step 1  
**Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them**
- ▶ Step 2  
**Validating the feelings and labelling them**
- ▶ Step 3  
**Setting limits on behaviour (if needed and appropriate)**
- ▶ Step 4  
**Problem-solving with the child**

# Step 1: Recognise and empathise

- ▶ Recognise all emotions as being *natural and normal* and not always a matter of choice
- ▶ Recognise behaviour as communication
- ▶ Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt
- ▶ Take on the child's perspective (mentalising/ mind-mindedness)
- ▶ Affirm and empathise, allowing to calm down

# Why is step 1 so important?

*“Proposing solutions before empathising is like trying to build the frame of a house before you lay a firm foundation” (Gottman)*

- ▶ Emotional first aid is needed first
- ▶ Emotion coaching builds a ***power base*** that is an emotional bond - ***this creates a safe haven, a place of trust, a place of respect, a place of acceptance, a sense of self etc.***
- ▶ This in turn leads to children and young people ***giving back*** respect, ***acceptance*** of boundaries, etc.

**CONNECT BEFORE RE-DIRECT (Siegel, 2013)**  
**RAPPORT BEFORE REASON (Riley, 2009)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>



## Step 2: validate and label

- ▶ Validate the emotion and acknowledge its existence
- ▶ Use words to reflect back child's emotion
- ▶ Help child/ young person to label emotion
- ▶ Provide a narrative/translation for the emotional experience (creating cognitive links)

# Video Clip: Inside Out

- ▶ Compare Sadness and Happiness in the following clip.
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdhjztWMnVw>
- ▶ Who is emotion coaching, who is emotion dismissing and why?

# Step 3: Setting limits (If needed)

- ▶ Safety first
- ▶ State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour
- ▶ Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted
- ▶ But retain the child's self-dignity (Crucial for responsive behaviour and well-being)

## Step 4: Problem-solving with the child

- ▶ When the child is **calm** and in a relaxed, rational state:
  - ▶ **Explore** the feelings that give rise to the behavior/problem/incident
  - ▶ **Scaffold** alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
  - ▶ **Empower** the child to believe s/he can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour

# Helping emotional behavioural regulation

- ▶ Can do so by ‘containing’ - sharing, supporting and ‘carrying’ the child’s emotional state by tuning-in/empathising - ***‘I understand how you feel, you’re not alone’***
- ▶ Helping the child to cope with and come to terms with boundaries - ***‘We can’t always get what we want’***
- ▶ Working with the child to resolve the problem until they can self-resolve and self-repair - ***‘We can sort this out’***
- ▶ This ensures affect (emotional) develops in tune with cognitive (thinking) - i.e. cognitive and affective meaning of experiences

# Instead of denying the feeling ...



# Empathise, validate, label...



Faber and Mazlish (2001) *How to talk to kids so kids will listen*



# Activity: Making scripts

## KNOWING WHAT TO SAY

*Choose a scenario and work out what you would say for each step - Making scripts*





# Applying Emotion Coaching at home

- ▶ In pairs or small groups, discuss times where it may be appropriate to use Emotion Coaching at home.
- ▶ Are there any times in the past you can think of that it might have helped?
- ▶ Can you see any possible challenges?

# A few final points...

- EC is not just about responding to intense emotions, it is also about modelling the language of emotions (positive and negative), empathy and problem-solving in relation to self, others, characters in story books etc.
- Emotion coaching is a skill - start small - don't try to surf the biggest wave!
- Emotion coaching is not a panacea - it will not work with all children at all times - remember the 40% advice!
- Experiment, practice and reflect with others.

**Thank you for participating**

**If you have any questions or would like  
further support please contact us:**

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