

Supporting Children and Youth to Manage their Emotions: The Importance of Parents & Caregivers

What We Know from Science



Managing Emotions

We all need to learn how to manage both positive (for example, joy and excitement) and negative (for example, sadness and anger) emotions. When we are able to manage our emotions, we do not become overwhelmed as often. This can help us make better choices about our behaviour in different situations. For example, taking deep breaths when frustrated. Or, thinking about how our excitement about something might be hard for someone having a bad day. Parents and other adults who care for children play a critical role in supporting the development of emotion management.

Why is managing our emotions so important?

Children, youth, and adults who learn and know how to manage their emotions have better success at school (or work), personal relationships, positive mental health and overall health. For example, a child who is very excited about a special event needs to manage that excitement so that they can focus on their schoolwork (better school success). Or, a child who is angry needs to manage that anger, so they don't use hurtful language or physical aggression against others (better relationships).

How do children and youth learn to manage their emotions?

Learning to manage one's emotions is like learning a new language. It takes lots of practice!

Children and youth learn how to manage their emotions using two ways: **(1)** using their mind and thinking about strategies that help them manage emotions (for example, drawing, talking about their emotions) and **(2)** getting support and reassurance from caring parents and other trusted adults in their lives.

Infants and young children rely on their parents to help them manage their emotions. Parents do this by protecting the infant, so they feel secure, making sure that their bodily needs are met (for example, food, dry diaper, appropriate clothing) and comforting the infant (holding, talking, smiling, playing and singing). Taking care of the infant in this way helps them feel safe and secure.

Young children begin learning words to describe emotions (for example, “I feel happy,” “I feel sad”). They will start to try out ways to manage their emotions. For example, they may hug a favourite stuffed animal when sad. Or they start playing with toys to distract themselves when waiting for an upcoming fun activity. They need a lot of support from parents and other caregivers to learn words to describe their emotions and learn strategies to manage emotions.

Children in elementary school continue to learn ways to manage their emotions because their world is getting bigger as they become more independent. Many teachers teach children strategies to help them learn positive ways to manage their emotions. This learning at school, along with support from parents and other caregivers, is vital for children to develop strong emotion management skills.

In **adolescence**, the brain continues to develop, so even though youth may have more abilities to manage emotions, they are still learning. With so many changes in development during this time, adolescents can feel overwhelmed. During these times, they need a caring adult to help them. Parents and other caring adults can support youth by listening to them, spending time doing things together, and letting them know you will always be there for them.

Important Questions for Parents & Caregivers

How do you manage your emotions as a parent or caregiver?

Adults who are better at managing their emotions can provide more support to help their children and youth learn how to manage emotions. Think of the plane’s safety message: ‘*You have to put on your oxygen mask before you put on your child’s oxygen mask.*’ Parents and caregivers need to manage their emotions first. Letting a child know you need a moment to take care of your emotions is okay. This teaches children that emotions are normal and that we can all learn how to manage our emotions. Adults who have a hard time managing their emotions can get help to learn new ways to manage emotions. For example, attending parenting groups, counselling, and workshops can be helpful.

What is your child or youth trying to tell you?

Remember, just like learning a new language, learning how to manage emotions can be challenging for everyone. Children and youth who experience strong emotions and can’t manage them in an appropriate way may act out. This is their way of saying, “*I need help. This is too much for me to do alone.*” Parents and caregivers who can offer support in a warm, open relationship will help their children’s abilities to grow.

Does my child feel safe and secure in our relationship?

One of the biggest gifts for a child is helping them feel secure in the relationship. Parents and caregivers who use positive parenting (e.g., encourage children, help children see their strengths) and invite their children to express how they feel in socially appropriate ways, help their children become better at managing emotions. Noticing when children and youth struggle with challenging emotions and providing warm, caring, and consistent support is a powerful way to help them grow their skills.

Supporting Children and Youth to Manage their Emotions: The Power of Parents & Caregivers

Where to Learn More



Learning How to Manage Your Emotions as a Parent

- [Managing Your Own Emotions: The Key to Positive, Effective Parenting](#) (From: Zero to Three)
- [Managing Emotions as Parents](#) (From: PBS.org)
- [Parents, Manage your Emotions: Challenges, Practices, Importance, Benefits and More](#) (From: Parent Circle)

Helping Your Child and Youth Manage Emotions

- [Emotional Regulation in Children: A Complete Guide](#) (From: Parenting for Brain)
- [How Can We Help Kids with Self-Regulation](#) (From: Child Mind Institute)
- [How to Help Kids Understand and Manage Their Emotions](#) (From: American Psychological Association)
- [Moods: Helping Pre-Teens and Teens Manage Emotional Ups and Downs](#) (From: Raisingchildren.net.au)
- [How Can I Help My Teen Manage Their Strong Emotions](#) (From: Psychology Today)
- [Emotions](#) (From: Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development)
- [Embracing the Early Years - Responsive Calming Strategies](#) (From: ASCY)

Other Resources on Child Well-Being

- [Sacred and Strong - Childhood](#) (From: First Nations Health Authority)
- [Social and Emotional Learning: Supporting Kids at Home and School](#) (From: Kelty Mental Health)
- [Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development](#) (From: CEECD)
- [Parenting Guides to Support Your Child's Academic, Physical, and Social-Emotional Growth](#) (From: Today)

Selected Research References

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