

Summary: Emotion Coaching

Why Emotion Coaching?

Emotion coaching helps parents connect with their teens by validating their emotions and guiding them through big feelings. The goal isn't to stop emotions (even the hard ones) but to help teens recognize, understand, and manage them effectively.

This week, we discuss how to respond to common emotions like fear, sadness, and anger, and how parents can model calm, intentional reactions even during challenging situations.

Understanding Big Emotions

- Emotions are signals that something is important. For teens, this often involves their independence and self-expression.
- Teens are more emotionally reactive and sensitive to their environments, making parental reactions especially impactful.
- Responding with calm, supportive emotion coaching can help de-escalate intense situations.

Responding to Your Teen's Emotions

Fear and Worry

- Avoid invalidating or minimizing their fears.
- Acknowledge their feelings rather than rushing to problem-solve or reassure.
- Example: *"It makes sense you're feeling nervous about the presentation. Talking in front of others can be tough."*

Sadness

- Listen without interrupting or reacting.
- Avoid trying to cheer them up too quickly, as this can dismiss their feelings.
- Acknowledge how sadness can make even small tasks feel overwhelming.
- Example: *"I can see that you're feeling really down about the test. It makes sense—it's hard when you've worked so hard."*

Anger

- Separate the feeling from the behavior: *"I understand you're angry, but swearing at me isn't okay."*
- Recognize that anger is often a secondary emotion (e.g., covering up feelings of hurt or disappointment).
- Model calm behavior and apologize if you overreact: *"I'm sorry I raised my voice earlier. Let's talk about this calmly."*

Continued on the next page

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Parent Coping: The Cognitive Triangle

We introduce the Cognitive Triangle to help parents reflect on how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors influence their reactions.

Example Situation

Your teen rolls their eyes and says, “This is so stupid,” when asked to put their phone away during dinner.

- Automatic Thoughts: “They’re so disrespectful.” “They don’t care about family time.”
- Feelings: Frustrated, sad, disrespected
- Behaviors: Responding sarcastically or escalating the situation.

Alternative Approach

- Thoughts: *“This is a normal phase for teens.” “They aren’t doing this to hurt me; they just want to check their phone.”*
- Feelings: Calmer, more understanding
- Behaviors:
 - Stay calm: *“I understand it’s hard to put the phone away, but we agreed on this rule.”*
 - Redirect: *“Let’s finish dinner first, and then you can check your phone.”*
 - Praise: *“Thanks for following through—I know it’s not easy.”*

Home Practice

Reflect on a Stressful Parenting Moment

- Draw the Cognitive Triangle:
 - Label the three points: Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviors.
 - Write down what you were thinking and feeling, and how you responded.
- Reflect: Were your thoughts helpful or unhelpful? Could a different approach have shifted the outcome?

Practice Emotion Coaching

- Look for opportunities to validate your teen’s emotions this week.
- You can use this template: *“I imagine you are feeling _____. This makes sense because _____.”*
- Example: *“I imagine you’re feeling overwhelmed by the project. It makes sense because it’s a big assignment, and you want to do well.”*

We’ll check in the next session to hear your “flowers and weeds” related to emotion coaching and reflections from the Cognitive Triangle exercise.