



Building “Piece” of Mind

The 36mo Visit: Building Emotional Intelligence

Children are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others interact with your child influences the many new connections that are forming within the child’s brain. These early brain connections are the basis for more complicated skills and behaviors, and they will affect the learning, behavior and health of your child for many years to come. Early, supportive relationships build your child’s brain and prepare it for the future.

By the time children are 36 months old, many are learning to use their words to express their needs and desires. Even these very young children are able to make good decisions and to get along well with others when they are calm, cool and collected. But, at times, your child may have too many strong emotions all at once. If tired, hungry, scared, frustrated or angry, your child may start to feel overwhelmed. The stress of being overwhelmed may make your child feel even more scared and frustrated! This emotional stress may also keep your child from behaving well. This same process of emotional overload happens with adolescents, too. They can make good

decisions when they are calm, cool and collected. But when they are emotional, they can be very impulsive, rash and risky. This shows that emotional intelligence is a very important life skill, whether you are 3, 13, or 30 years old!

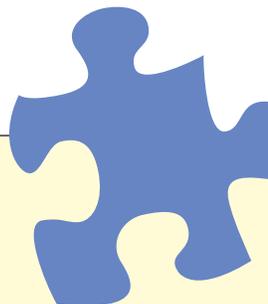
Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand your emotions and the emotions of others. It is also the ability to learn new and healthier ways to handle strong emotions. For a young child, this process begins with naming emotions. Examples are “you look angry,” “you look tired” or “you look scared.” By putting a word on a feeling you are helping your child in many ways. First, you are making the feeling real and normal. You are saying “I get angry, tired and scared too.” This tells your child that he is not the only 3 year old who’s thought about hitting that mean neighbor kid! Secondly, by naming the emotion your child knows how to communicate that emotion. This helps them ask for help in the future. Your child will now know how to say “I’m getting angry!” Most importantly, naming the emotion allows you to teach your child how they should act instead. You can then

say, “The next time you are angry, let’s try using our words instead of hitting. Maybe if we use our words that will make the anger go away without hurting your friend.”

Naming strong emotions, making them real, and teaching healthy coping behaviors is the beginning of emotional intelligence. Even young children need to learn how to manage strong emotions in a healthy manner. They can do this by using words, walking away, drawing a picture, exercising, taking a nap, listening to music, making music, looking at books, etc. If your child learns that these healthy ways of dealing with emotional stress actually work, your child will be less likely to adopt unhealthy coping behaviors as a teenager or young adult. Examples of these unhealthy coping behaviors are addictions to food, gaming, sex, tobacco or alcohol.

*It is easier to build
strong children than to
repair broken men.*

~Frederick Douglass



An Introduction to Purposeful Parenting

Purposeful Parenting begins by thinking about the final result. What do parents want for their children? All parents want their adult children to be healthy, happy and successful. They want them to be all that they can be. Happily, most children want this too! Students of human development have noticed that children are born with a strong need to master new skills and to be challenged. Even children with disabilities! But before children act on these advanced needs (like the need to understand, to be creative, and to be productive), more basic needs must be met. Bodily needs, like breathing, water, food and sleep, are the most basic. Next is the need for safety. Children also need to feel loved and a sense of belonging with family and friends. Children then start to build self-esteem, as the need to grow confidence through contribution and accomplishment is natural. This confidence then leads to the need to be independent and to define for oneself what it means to be healthy, happy, and successful.

Recent research says that bodily needs, the need to feel safe, the need to be loved, the need to feel competent, and the need to be self-directed, are universal. Meeting these needs allows more children to be healthy and successful in school, no matter what their socio-economic or racial/ethnic background is. Unmet needs, though, can cause stress. If brief, stress can be positive and provide a source of motivation. However, too much stress can be toxic, messing up the basic growth and functioning of the brain. The six elements of Purposeful Parenting build on this research. By being Purposeful, Protective, Personal, Progressive, Positive and Playful, parents and caregivers will lessen toxic stress and encourage developing children to be all that they can be.

Purposeful

- Think about the long-term goals of parenting and try to nurture the basic skills that children need to be successful. These include language, social skills, and self-control (also known as emotional regulation).
- Remember that the word discipline means “to teach.” It does NOT mean to control or to stop bad behaviors.
- Determine the “purpose” of infant and child behaviors. Many repeated behaviors are used to meet one of the basic needs mentioned above. For example, repeated behaviors may be the child’s way of trying to say “I’m tired,” “I’m scared,” “I want some attention,” “I need to prove that I can do this,” or “I have an idea or plan.”
- Assist children in learning new, more desirable behaviors or skills to meet their needs and goals.

Protective

- Be sure that infants and children have their bodily needs met. These include food, water, shelter and sleep.
- Be sure that infants and children feel safe.
- Prevent toxic stress by always meeting these basic (bodily and safety) needs.
- But avoid being overly protective or “hovering,” so children will eventually feel capable and safe on their own.

Personal

- Be sure that infants and children feel loved and accepted. Strong relationships decrease toxic stress.
- Be kind and gentle. Being mean, harsh or violent may hurt the relationship and create toxic stress.
- Avoid calling your child names like bad or good, dumb or smart, mean or nice. Naming emotions and behaviors may help with the learning process (like “you look mad” or “hitting is not helpful”), but always love the child unconditionally.

- Help children in learning more helpful or adaptive behaviors instead of just saying “stop it” or “no!”
- Match your way of teaching to your child’s particular needs and strengths. It may take more planning and effort, but your teaching will work better if it is more personal.

Progressive

- Understand that infant and child development is always changing. Discipline and parenting skills need to change, too.
- Have reasonable expectations for your child’s development. Unreasonable expectations create frustration and stress.
- Notice and encourage basic behaviors and skills as they appear (“Thanks for using your words” or “Good job sharing”).
- Remember that it is easier to TEACH the behaviors we WANT, than to PREVENT unwanted behaviors!

Be Positive ...

- In regard. Love your child, not the behavior. Avoid corporal punishments like spanking. They are less effective with time, increase stress, and teach children that adults respond to conflict or strong emotions with violence.
- In outlook. Optimism decreases stress and anxiety. Use affirmations like “I know you can do better the next time.”
- In reward. “Catch your child being good” to strengthen positive, adaptive behaviors. Rewarding effort and steps in the right direction are more important than demanding complete success.

Playful

- Remain playful. Play time lets you teach everything mentioned above. Reading together is a good example. Ask your pediatrician about Reach Out and Read.
- Be engaging and interactive. Allow your child to be creative and to direct the play.