

Emotion Coaching helps teens learn how to manage powerful emotions and turns would-be power struggles into learning opportunities. Whether you realize it or not, your teen already sees you as their emotion coach.

Here are five steps to start honing your coaching skills:

1. **Listen.** Try to listen and observe without interrupting or correcting (yet). What are they doing? What are they saying? What are they trying to communicate to you by their words and/or behaviors? What led up to this? Sometimes teens need time to vent before they're able to think rationally. Do your best to be patient.
2. **Name the emotions.** *"Sarah, I can see that you are very frustrated. Is that right?" "It sounds like you're feeling very worried." "I've noticed you've been quiet. Are you feeling sad?" "You don't seem like yourself today. How are you feeling?"* Encourage teens to be aware of multiple emotions that may be happening at the same time.
3. **Validate the feeling.** This does not necessarily mean agreeing with their feelings or giving into what they want. It is simply acknowledging how they feel. *"It makes sense that you are frustrated. You want to go to your friend's house now, but there isn't time before dinner." "I know getting good grades is important to you, so I can see why you're feeling worried about your exam tomorrow."* Do not use this as a "taste of your own medicine" learning opportunity, no matter how tempting it may be. Also, try not to turn this into an opportunity for you to talk about your own feelings or experiences. Keep the focus on your teen.
4. **Address the poor behavior.** Emotion coaching doesn't mean letting teens get away with inappropriate behavior. In fact, setting and enforcing clear limits and consequences is a very important strategy to help them regulate their emotions. *"It is okay to feel angry, and I know you were looking forward to hanging out with Veronica. But it is not okay to speak to me in a disrespectful tone. Take some time to calm down, then let me know when you're ready to have a respectful conversation. If you choose not to speak to me respectfully, then you are choosing to not go to Veronica's tomorrow."*
5. **Suggest ways to cope.** When teens are feeling overwhelmed with emotion they have trouble thinking rationally and often forget about their coping skills. Remind them of what they've learned or what has worked in the past. *"I remember in your therapy session we learned that belly breathing technique. Do you think that might be helpful right now?" "I remember you saying that last time you felt sad, drawing made you feel better. Can I get you your drawing supplies?"*

Afterward: Praise and Plan

Take some time when everyone is calm to praise your teen's positive choices and to plan for how to avoid or better manage a similar situation if it were to happen again.

Modeling Emotional Regulation.

Emotion coaching also encourages us to think harder about how we are handling our own emotions. How you express your own feelings either escalates or diffuses a potential power struggle. Part of being an effective emotion coach means modeling emotional regulation. Of course, this is easier said than done.

Here are some tips for your own emotional regulation:

- **Adjust your expectations.** Know your teen's strengths, weaknesses and abilities. Having unrealistic expectations for what they are capable of sets everyone up for failure.
- **Take a break.** With teens, it is okay to take a break and come back to the issue. "I am too angry to talk about this right now. Let's take a break and discuss this in fifteen minutes." Also be aware that your teen may need a break when they are feeling overwhelmed. Try to provide this opportunity for them as well.
- **Know your triggers.** Are you most likely to fly off the handle if nothing is ready in the morning and you are late getting out the door? Create systems that reduce your stress in those predictably tense situations, or communicate with your teen if you're starting to feel stressed and ask them to help.
- **Apologize if you need to.** *"I was really frustrated that you weren't listening to me earlier when I asked you to turn off the computer and come to dinner, but I shouldn't have yelled at you like that. I am sorry for yelling."*

you've
got
this!