

Emotion Coaching Parent Workshop

November 2021



Training



Research

Alison Russell,
Senior Educational
Psychologist



*“I would like to
learn more about
.....”*





Share something
that you are
currently doing
to support your
child understand
their feelings

Why Emotion coaching?

Emotion Coaching is evidence-based and is based on the work of John Gottman

Emotion Coached children are better able to:

- ▶ Control their impulses
- ▶ Delay gratification
- ▶ Self soothe when upset
- ▶ Pay attention

As a result Emotion Coached children:

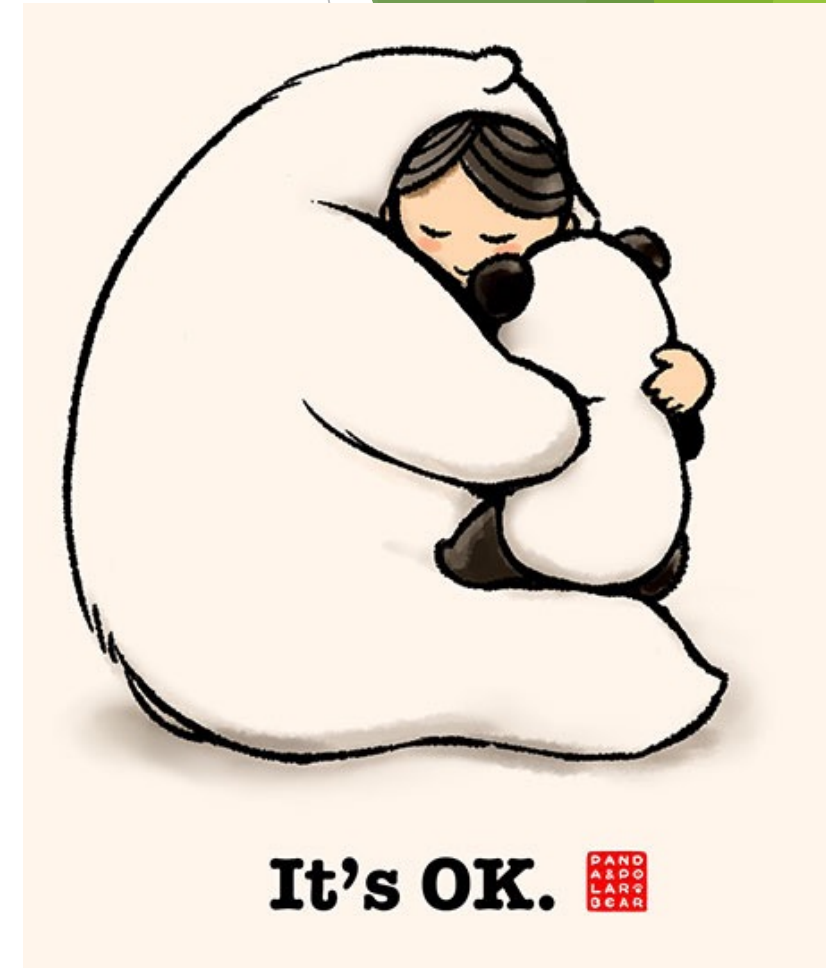
- ▶ Achieve more academically in school
- ▶ Are more popular
- ▶ Have fewer behavioural problems
- ▶ Have fewer infectious illnesses
- ▶ Are more emotionally stable
- ▶ Are more resilient



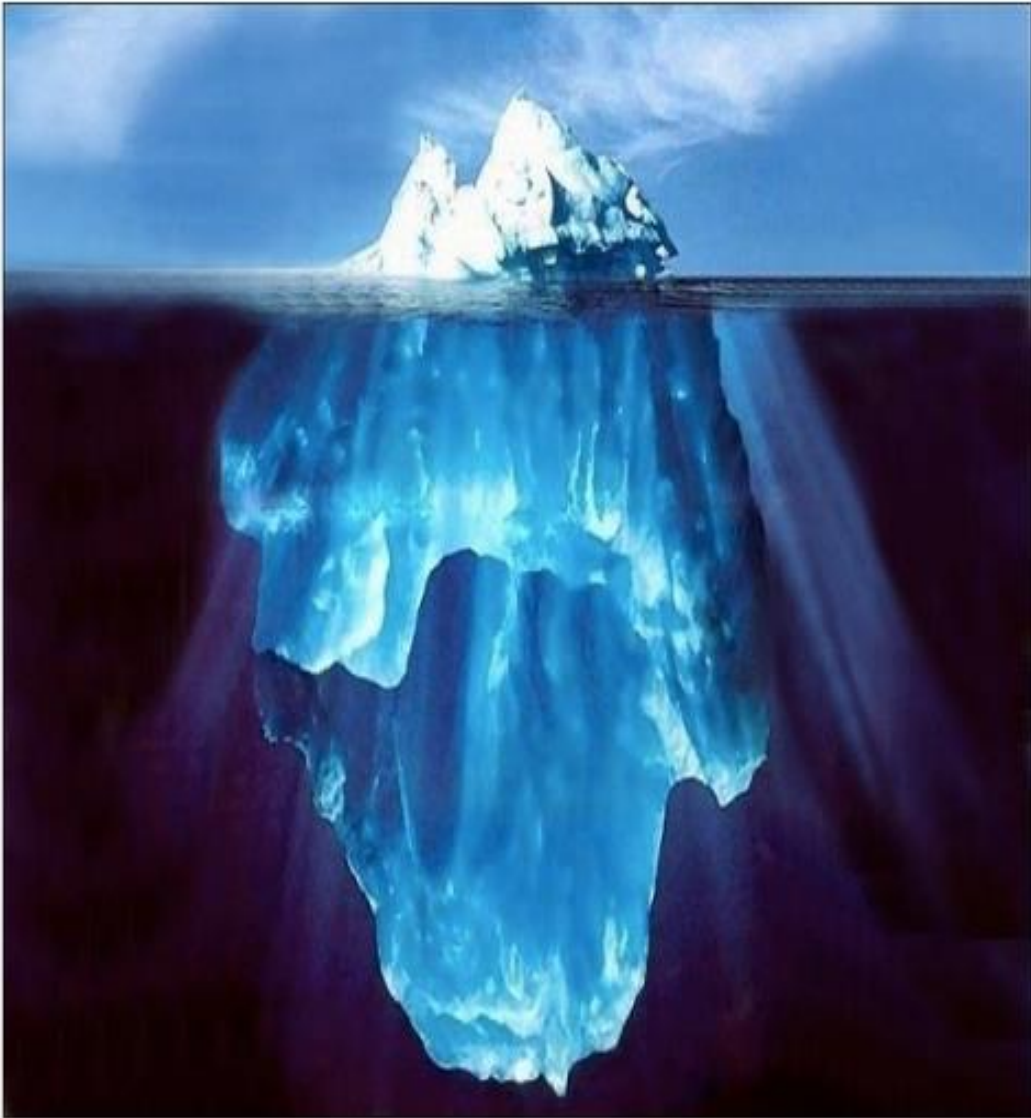
Gottman et al, 1996

So what makes Emotion Coaching different?

- ▶ All emotions are **natural and normal**.
- ▶ Challenging behaviour is often a result of a young person struggling to regulate their emotions and then becoming overwhelmed. Behaviour is **not always a choice**.
- Behaviour is a **means of communication**.
- **Emotional first aid** or calming is needed first as a foundation of coaching.
- Children cannot successfully self regulate until they have experienced an **adult co-regulate**.



Under the Surface



Anger Iceberg

Sometimes when we are angry, there are other emotions under the surface

Icebergs are giant floating pieces of ice found in the coldest parts of the ocean. What you can see from above is just a tiny part. Most of the iceberg is hidden under the surface.

Angry

Anger, Straight Ahead!

Watch Out!

Let's go deeper!

Embarrassed Annoyed
Offended Disgusted
Attacked Rejected
Pressured Shame Scared
Overwhelmed Guilt Alone
Grumpy Unsure Grief Distrustful
Angry Nervous Insecure Disappointed
Hurt Tired Trapped Disrespected Helpless
Jealous Tricked Sad Frustrated
Regret Uncomfortable Worried Name another feeling

Fight Flight Freeze

The fight flight freeze response is the basic, 'primitive' part of the brain (amygdala) that is well developed at birth as a survival mechanism. The instinctive stress responses which are controlled by the 'primitive brain' are to:

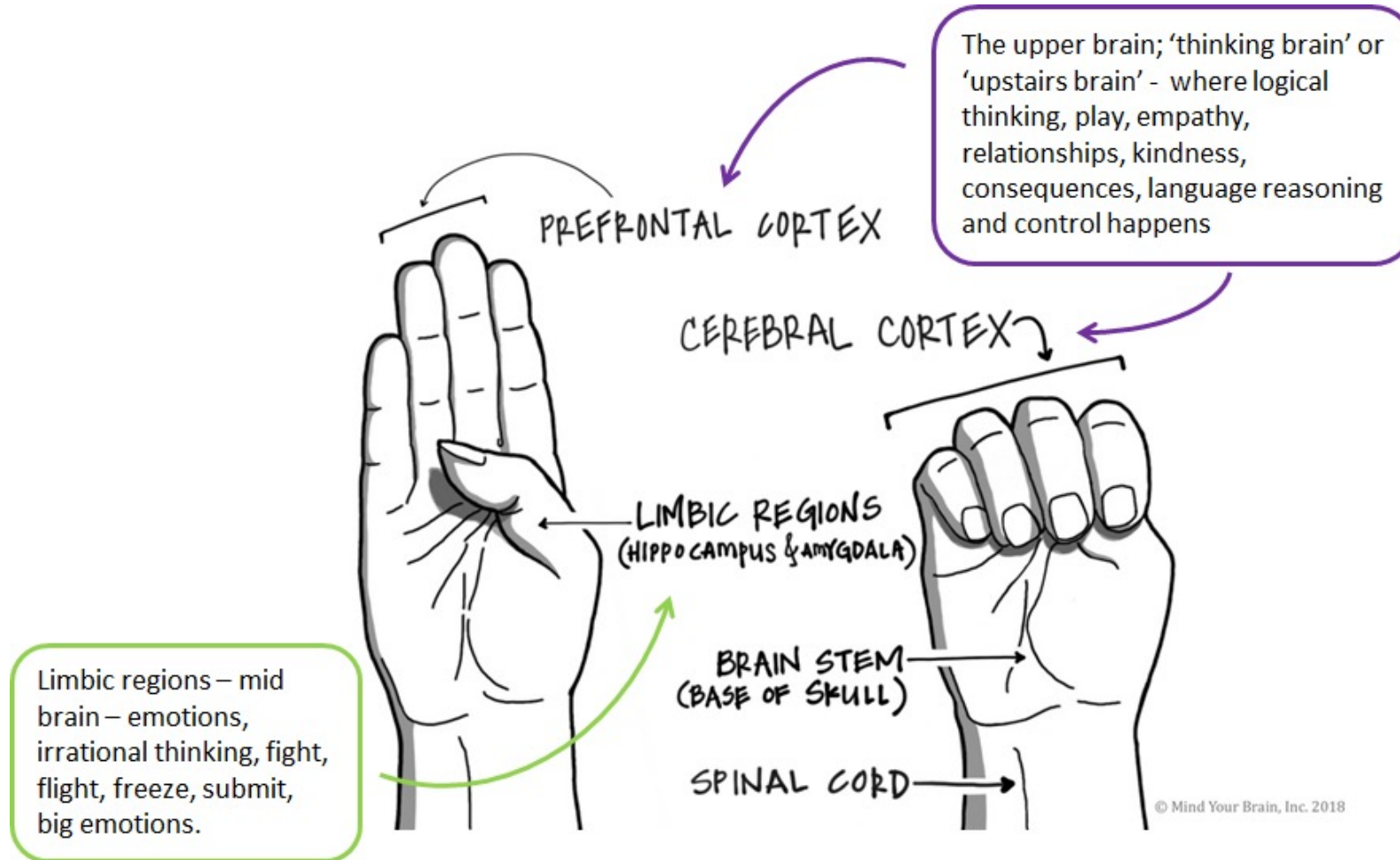
- ▶ Face it and fight (FIGHT)
- ▶ Flee from a dangerous situation (FLIGHT)
- ▶ To freeze (FREEZE)

Adrenaline floods the body which means there are physiological responses; the heart beats faster, pupils dilate, blood flows to large skeletal muscles, breathing rate increases, less blood flow to digestive system. Cortisol (stress hormone) is also released more slowly and can stay in the body for days.

When in a hypervigilant state it does not take much to enter fight, flight or freeze mode. Prolonged exposure to cortisol (particularly during early childhood) can mean that our bodies are physiologically more ready to respond to perceived threats.



The Hand Model of the Brain (Siegel, 2010)



The Handy Brain - 'Name it to tame it'



Reflect on the following...

- ▶ If a child cannot read we teach
- ▶ If a child cannot swim we teach
- ▶ If a child cannot multiply we teach
- ▶ If a child cannot behave we....



How do we as parents/carers respond to emotion in our children?

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

Disapproving Style



- ▶ Disapproves of negative emotions 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.

Dismissing Style



- ▶ Despite good intentions (wants to make child feel better) is uncomfortable, fearful, anxious, hurt, annoyed or overwhelmed with 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 like, 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.

Laissez-Faire Style

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

Effects of dismissing, disapproving and laissez-faire styles of dealing with emotions upon children

- ▶ 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 their 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 Steps

► 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)

► Step 4

Problem-solve with the child

Step 1: Recognising the child's feelings and empathising with them



Be a STAR



STOP - don't act or react straight away.



THINK - what is going on for the child right now? What feeling might lay underneath the behaviours I'm seeing?



ATTUNE - yourself with that feeling by putting yourself in the child's shoes and maybe...



REFLECT - what would be an equivalent situation for you that could cause you to feel that way?

How to attune....

- ▶ Empathy not sympathy

<https://youtu.be/KZBTYViDPLQ>

What have you found most helpful when you have felt understood and listened to?

Step 2: Label and validate the feelings

- Use words to reflect back the child's emotion and help the child to label the emotion.

I can see that you get angry when that happens. I would feel angry if my work had been lost. It's OK to feel like that.'

Oh dear. That's not nice when someone breaks your Lego. That must be really disappointing when you've worked hard at something then someone else breaks it. It's OK to feel cross about that. I would too.

I imagine that must be really difficult for you when he grabbed your favourite toy. It's ok to feel upset.'

- Simply observe - saying what you see rather than asking probing questions to which young people might not know answer

I've noticed you're looking a bit sad. I wonder if you are missing your friends right now?'

- Telling the child that you understand their emotional situation and that you don't blame (you are focusing on what they are feeling and now just on their behaviour) is believed to help soothe and calm.

Mmm. I wonder if you're worried about getting it wrong. It's normal to feel a bit anxious when you're learning something new. Learning new things can feel hard sometimes.

Step 3: Setting Limits (if needed)

- ▶ State the boundary limits of acceptable behaviour (use positive limit setting).
- ▶ Make it clear certain behaviours cannot be accepted.
- ▶ ALWAYS retain child's self-dignity

It's really important in our school/ family, that we have kind hands with each other, and with our things. It's not OK to hit people, or to break or throw things when we are sad.

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 behaviour/problem/incident
- ▶ Scaffold alternative ideas and actions that could lead to more appropriate and productive outcomes
- ▶ Empower the pupil to believe s/he can overcome difficulties and manage feelings/behaviour.

e.g. If someone pulls a mean face to you/ breaks your lego in the future, what could you do?

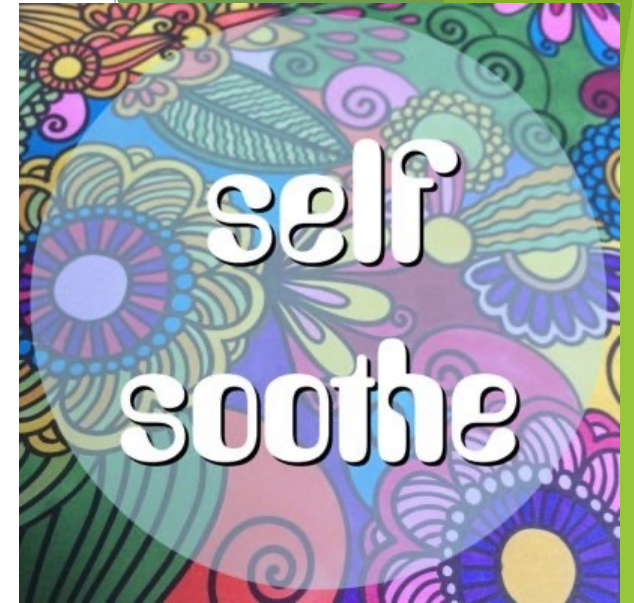
Can you think of a different way to deal with your feelings?

I can help you think of a different way to cope

Can you remember what we said before?

Activities

- ▶ Provide a ***place*** where children can calm down or take time out such as a peaceful corner or quiet place where there is reduced stimulation and a space for reflection.
- ▶ Calming activities can include those with a focus on wellbeing such as a cuddly toy, story book or music. Developing a ***calm box*** over time can then help your child choose activities that help them self soothe when they first notice that they start to become a bit dysregulated.
- ▶ ***Sensory activities*** such as giving your child a hug or gentle squeeze can be soothing for certain children.
- ▶ ***Mindfulness activities*** can help regulate breathing and reduce anxiety, for example, 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste, finger breathing and .b



10 Things to Say instead of Stop Crying



1. It's ok to be sad

2. This is really hard for you

3. I'm here with you

4. Tell me about it

5. I hear you

6. That was really scary, sad, etc.

7. I will help you work it out

8. I'm listening

9. I hear that you need space.

I want to be here for you.

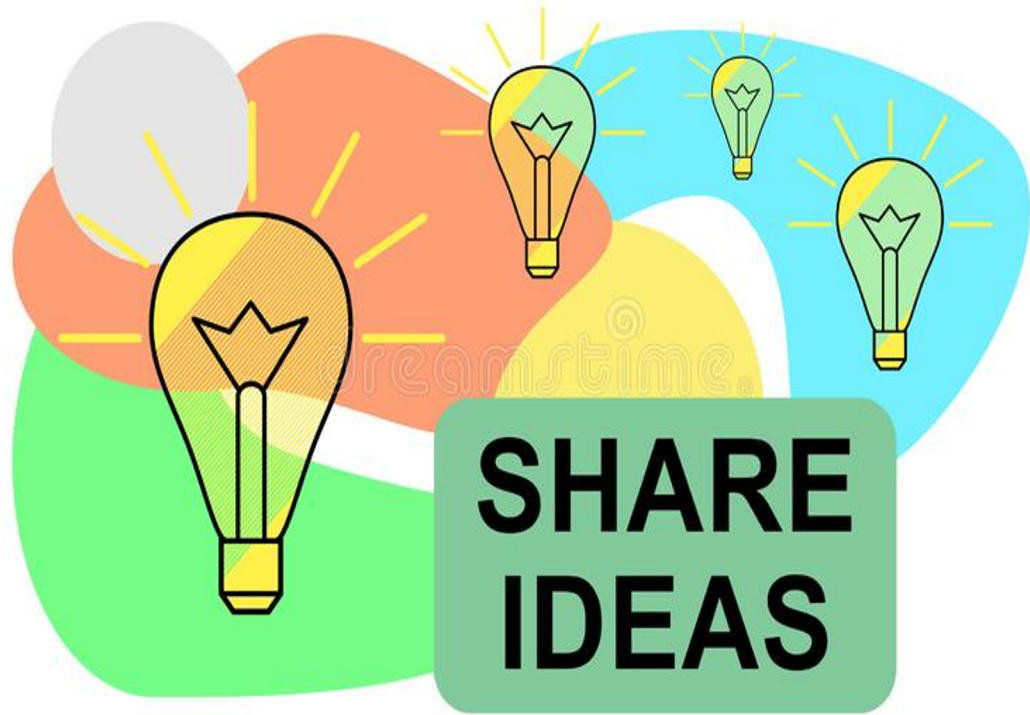
I'll stay close so you can find me when you're ready.

10. It doesn't feel fair

happinessishereblog.com
The Gottman Institute

Emotion Coaching summary...

- ▶ Inside Out clip
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8>
- ▶ Any questions?



**How might you
support your child
understand and
regulate their
emotions**

**What's one thing
you might take
away from today to
support your child
understand and
regulate their
emotions**

