



SEND Supported

Emotional Literacy Guidance for Parents

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What does Emotional Literacy mean?

Emotional Literacy is the term used to describe the ability to understand and express feelings.

Emotional Literacy involves having self-awareness and recognition of one's own feelings and knowing how to manage them, such as the ability to stay calm when angered or to reassure oneself when in doubt.

How do children develop Emotional Literacy?

Together, the skills of identifying their emotions and reading and responding to other people's emotions combine to create a skill known as Emotional Intelligence or Emotional Literacy.

Children develop Emotional Literacy by social experience and by being taught. Some children have more difficulty than others learning emotions and need more extensive teaching than their peers.

Top tips for parents to help their child develop Emotional Literacy

1. Accept your child's emotions and their emotional responses. Don't immediately judge, criticise or negate how your child is feeling. Name the emotion for them and say things like: 'Oh, that sounds really frustrating,' or, 'How lovely, I can tell how excited you are.'
2. Label their emotions with them. Doing so helps children feel understood. For example, say, 'You sound upset,' or, 'You look worried.'
3. Encourage your child to talk about their feelings. Create an environment where it's safe to talk openly about feelings and emotions, free from judgement, criticism or finger-pointing. Say things like: 'You sound really fed up. Shall we have a chat?' and, 'How did that make you feel?'
4. Help them to recognise the signs about how others may be feeling. In stories, books or TV programmes, ask open-ended questions to help your child step into the shoes of a character or person. Say, 'How do you think that made him feel?' or, 'How would you feel if that happened to you?'
5. Teach them how to calm down and press their imaginary 'pause button'. Encourage them to take three deep breaths and say a simple mantra of, 'I can feel calm inside.' After that, encourage them to go and do something they find calming and relaxing.
6. Teach children alternative ways of expressing their frustrations. Ask your child an open-ended, empowering question to help them feel that they have choices. For example, say, 'How could you explain how you feel using your words?' or 'Can you think of a different way to let me know how angry you are?'
7. Recognise what motivates them to perform at their best. Encourage your child rather than praise them: focus on celebrating their behaviour and effort, not just the result. Say things like, 'I've noticed that when things get difficult you just keep trying – that's fantastic'.
8. Model how to remain calm and in control when you are tired, frustrated or fed up. Say, 'I've had a tough day at work – I am going to have a warm drink and take a walk around the garden?'