



Post Adoption Press

Serving families formed by adoption in Sonoma,
Lake, Mendocino and Napa Counties

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Labeling Emotions

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Tell me how you feel.

Anger...envy...sadness...frustration. These are feelings that come naturally to children. But how do you help them learn to cope with such emotions in a way that promotes both mental and physical health? The answer can be as simple as giving feelings a name.

Children often lack the basic vocabulary necessary to make sense of the emotions they feel, whether it is jealousy, hurt, fear or worry. Caregivers who tell a child with tears streaming down her cheek, "You are feeling sad now, aren't you?" or a child in the midst of a foot-stomping tantrum, "I can see you are feeling angry," perform an important task. Those who help teach their children to name their emotions give them a valuable, lifelong skill.

Putting a name to the emotion not only helps children make sense of what they are feeling. Research studies suggest that it also helps calm their nervous systems and helps them recover faster from upsetting situations.

A key to emotional health.

Labeling emotions is an important step in Emotion Coaching. Research indicates (Gottman, & DeClaire, 1997) that children raised with an "Emotion Coaching" style that encourages healthy emotional development:

- * are more self-confident
- * do better in school
- * have fewer behavioral problems
- * get along better with friends and others
- * have fewer infectious illnesses
- * can weather their parents' conflict better

Strong emotional health, in turn, may make them better prepared to deal with difficult events later in life. One of the fundamental parts of healthy emotional development for children is to learn how to self-soothe during times of distress. This doesn't mean the children feel less angry, scared or frustrated. It's healthy to experience these powerful feelings. These children are just better able to process their feelings, bounce back from emotional events, and refocus on other activities. And when children can bounce back from emotional experiences, they are more able to pay attention to important tasks like maintaining friendships or completing schoolwork.

Soothing the child.

So how does something as simple as naming emotions help? Science provides us with emerging answers and intriguing questions.

Studies from various laboratories show that the act of naming an emotion has a quieting effect on the nervous system, which may in turn help children to recover faster from emotional stress. Exactly why this happens remains unclear, but some scientists believe it has to do with the brain's structure and how emotions are processed. In the brain, there are certain areas primarily responsible for processing emotions, and other areas primarily responsible for handling logical thinking and language. What's important here are the connections between these areas, and neuroscientists are studying these connections very closely.

Verbalizing an emotion engages the language area in the left side of the brain, which is also an area involved in logic and other higher-level types of thinking. Dr. Gottman believes that naming an emotion stimulates the nerve cells in this area, which may activate connections between this 'logic' area and areas of emotion processing. Activating these connections may help a child to think about the emotion in a different way, leading to a calming effect (con't on page 4).

What's Happening at Parents Place

2009 FALL SUPPORT AND SOCIALIZATION GROUPS NOW FORMING !

Parent Support Group meets on the **3rd Wednesday** of each month from **5:30 to 7:30 pm**. This monthly support group is open to all adoptive parents and offers childcare free of charge. First 30 minutes is family brown bag dinner. Facilitated by Liz Jimenez, MSW.

Petaluma Parent Support Group This NEW group will meet on the **1st Tuesday** of each month from **5:45 to 7:45 pm beginning September 1** at B'nai Israel Jewish Center, 740 Western Ave. Facilitated by Liz Jimenez.

Socialization Playgroup for Preschoolers (3-5) **Thursdays 9:30 to 11:00 am beginning September 10**. This group helps adopted preschoolers to strengthen social skills, build positive relationships, and learn to handle conflict and frustration. Facilitated by Amy McIntyre, MA with concurrent parent support group. 2 spots left!

Interest list now forming for the following;

Teen Socialization Group: Understanding Relationships Through Popular Media: A study of the dynamics of teen relationships with peers, family, and school, examined through such mediums as film, music, art, short story, and poetry.

Socialization Group for Young Children (6-8): Help children in the early school years develop healthy social skills.

Healing Hearts: A small, six-session parent support group for parents of children who have experienced severe trauma.

RSVP required for all events. To register or for more information call Liz Jimenez 707/303-1509

New Library Addition: Check it out

Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child; The Heart of Parenting by John Gottman, Ph.D. This book will teach you the five steps of emotion coaching so that you can raise an emotionally intelligent child. See cover story about step 4, "labeling emotions." According to Gottman, "The key to successful parenting is not found in complex or elaborate family rules, or convoluted formulas for behavior. It is based on your deepest feelings of love and affection for your child and is demonstrated simply through love and understanding."

FALL LIFEBOOKS

Call now to Register
303-1509

Creating a Lifebook for your child. Meets one Thursday morning per month. 9:30 to Noon.



Lifebooks for Tweens (9-12). Children meet in a small group with a parent for 10 sessions to create their own books-in their own words, from their perspective. Two Monday evenings per month, beginning August 31. With Mary Hirsch and Barbara Joy. Only a few spaces left!

Lifebooks for Teens (13 and up). Similar to the tween group. Two Tuesday evenings per month, beginning September 1.

SAVE THE DATE

November 22nd, 2009 (12-3)

Join us for our annual
National Adoption Month Celebration

Sonoma County Museum On The Go Exhibits
Face Painting, Talent Show, Lunch and more!

Location: CHOPS

509 Adams Street

Santa Rosa

RSVP is required 707/303-1509

Community News and Events



RACE EQUALITY WEEK & FESTIVAL

September 13-20, 2009

Festival ~ Sunday, September 20
1:00 to 5:00 PM
Free Admission

Elsie Allen High School
599 Bellevue Ave



Spotlighting Issues of
Racism and
Discrimination

Promoting Race Equality

Celebrating Diversity

www.rewfestival.net

DINNER MAKES A DIFFERENCE!

Be a Family Day STAR!

Celebrate Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™ on Monday, September 28th, by joining parents all across the country in logging onto www.CASAFamilyDay.org to take the Family Day STAR Pledge to commit to:

- * Spend time with your kids by having dinner together
- * Talk to them about their friends, interests and the dangers of drugs and alcohol
- * Answer their questions and listen to what they say
- * Recognize that YOU have the power to keep your kids substance-free!

Center for Adoption Support and Education Online Parenting Workshops: Talking to Children about Adoption

Thursday, September 24, 2009 9:00 - 10:00 p.m. (ET)

This one-hour session teaches parents what children understand and think about adoption - and about being adopted - as they grow and develop. Learn how to share your child's adoption story and how to encourage them to comfortably share their questions, thoughts and feelings.

Toll-free dial-in/online format enables parents to ask questions and address personal concerns before and during the workshop. Includes electronic handouts, pre-event Q&A survey and discount coupons for valuable publications.

Online Registration is now open!
www.adoptionssupport.org

Fee: \$20

CASA THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
ADDICTION AND SUBSTANCE
ABUSE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Family Day
A day to eat dinner with your children™
www.CASAFamilyDay.org

(log on to www.jfcs.org for great family recipes)

Helpful Parenting Tips

Labeling emotions seems like a simple approach, but sometimes it is not as easy as it sounds. First, caregivers need to be aware of what their children are feeling, so that they can help find the best word to describe these feelings. That can be tricky. Like adults, children can experience mixed emotions. A child with a new baby sister on the way may feel both excited for the new arrival and anxious about the way life at home will change. Exploring the full range of emotions will reassure a child that it is normal to experience conflicting feelings.

Parents and caregivers can help children develop a rich and accurate vocabulary for their emotions. To do this, parents and caregivers can:

- * Start identifying emotions together early—you can begin even before the child can talk. One way is to use a game that Dr. Gottman calls 'The Guys,' where a parent draws a different face on each finger—one finger might have an angry face, while others could have sadness, happiness, surprise, or fear. These 'guys' then talk about their day, and why they feel a certain way. After hearing from each 'guy,' you can ask your child to grab the finger that is the most like the way they feel (this can start as early as 9 months or so).
- * Use puppets to show different emotions and then talk about what these emotions are called, and when people feel them.
- * Refrain from telling children what they ought to feel—try to identify the emotions they are feeling.
- * Model identifying your own emotions—children learn by watching and copying what adults do.

Other benefits.

There is another powerful reason to help children find the right words for their emotional experiences—it's a way of showing empathy. For some caregivers, a child's emotional outburst can be a time of intense frustration and annoyance. But for others, it provides a perfect opportunity to both teach and grow closer to their child. Labeling an emotion not only gives children a word for what they are feeling, it shows that they are understood, and that is something all of us find comforting.

References:

Gottman, J., Katz, L., Hooven, C. (1997). *Meta-emotion: How families communicate emotionally*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum
Gottman, J., DeClaire, J. (1997). *Raising an Emotionally intelligent child*. New York, Fireside

Parenting Counts is a family of educational materials sponsored by Talaris which provide research-based information about how children think, feel, and learn and supports parents with examples of best parenting practices. www.parentingcounts.org



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