



# Emotional Literacy

by Wendy Fachon

**C**rying is a baby's natural expression in response to emotional distress. At any age, tears are a natural response to stress, anger, sadness, physical pain and sometimes joy and gratitude. Tears contain a natural painkiller, called leucine enkephalin, which might account for why one feels better after a good cry.

Disapproving of tears might actually lead to unhealthy repression of valid emotions. Instead, parents can accept the tears and slowly introduce children to simple words for more clearly expressing discontent—sad, mad, tired, worried, scared—as well as words expressing contentment—joy, love, peace—and model these through facial expressions.

As a baby becomes a toddler, parents can empower the child with a vocabulary that makes communication, and parenting, much easier. How can a parent do this effectively? One way is to model emotional responses using words. If a parent is upset with a child's behavior, the parent can pause, think and respond by defining and

giving meaning to the emotion: "Sometimes I worry about your safety. It upsets me when you step into the street. Please stay on the sidewalk." This sets an example of thoughtful expressiveness.

Drawing simple pictures of faces expressing emotions helps children develop expressive art skills. Parents may want to show children how to create a journal of emoji faces with different mouth shapes, eye shapes and eyebrow angles, and may demonstrate how to spell and write the words that match the emotions. While focusing on a word, like sad, parents and children can explore the feeling and talk about what kinds of things make them feel sad.

Overtime, parents can help their child build a vocabulary for communicating a fuller and more complex range of feelings—sorrow, fear, loneliness, helplessness, guilt, insecurity, jealousy, anger, concern, doubt, discouragement, disappointment, frustration, confusion, irritation, impatience, boredom, excitement, contentment, hopefulness, positivity, enthusiasm, eager-

ness, happiness, passion, joy, love, empowerment and appreciation. These are all valid emotions.

When children become upset, many parents encourage them to "use their words" to express their emotions and to explain what is bothering them. When this happens, it's important for a parent to make eye contact, listen attentively without judgment, try to help clarify the feelings in words, and acknowledge and accept the feelings as valid. Every child wants to be heard and understood, and once this is accomplished, it is easier to let go of the negative emotion and shift into a more positive one. Furthermore, when parents take the time to truly listen, they teach empathy, compassion and kindness.

Words carry frequencies of energy. The higher vibrations of positive words promote positive feelings and carry healthy energy. The books *Angel Words* by Doreen and Grant Virtue, and *The Miracle of Water* by Masaru Emoto present scientific evidence about words, their energetic frequencies and how these words affect our bodies and the people around us. Book illustrations demonstrate the power of positive words and help parents and children better understand this concept.

Then by sharing happy thoughts and memories, parents and children create even more happiness. By writing a list or drawing pictures of happy things—sunshine, rainbows, animals, people playing games—parents and children express appreciation for those things, and this has a magical way of attracting more happy things into existence. Positive words, positive thinking and a positive attitude are key to creating a life that feels really good and helps chase the tears away.

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One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters. ~George Herbert