

John Gottman-The Five Key Steps to Emotion Coaching

- 1. Become aware of the child's emotion-**To do this, a parent must be aware of and comfortable with their own emotions. This can be scary or intimidating, but is crucial in allowing for all feelings in a non-judgmental way.
- 2. Recognize the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching-**As parents, we can teach empathy, build intimacy with our children, and teach them ways to handle their feelings. Here, negative emotions are not threats to our authority or something else we need to fix. When you talk to your kids when problems are small, you show that you are their ally, and that together you can face their difficulties-they don't have to do it alone!
- 3. Listen empathetically, validating the child's feelings-**Here, listen in many different ways, with your ears for information, with your eyes for physical evidence of emotion, with your imagination to see the situation from the child's perspective, and with your words to reflect back what they are hearing and to help label emotions. But most importantly, use your heart to feel what the child is feeling. Simple observations may work better than probing questions in making a connection. Also, avoid questions to which you already know the answer-don't set up mistrust or ask them to lie.
- 4. Help the child find words to label the emotion he is having-**this goes hand in hand with empathy. Saying to a child who is in tears "You feel very sad, don't you?" not only shows understanding, but helps the child to describe this intense feeling. This is labeling only what IS, and not telling what kids OUGHT to feel. Be as precise with the child as possible-not just angry, but frustrated, jealous, enraged, or confused It is important to name and allow for several, often contradictory feelings at once.
- 5. Set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem at hand-**There are five steps involved here. 1-SET LIMITS-set limits on the behaviors or actions, not the feelings or wishes. State clearly what is not appropriate about what happened. Allow here for "normal" kid stuff. Provide consequences that are fair, consistent, and related to the misbehavior. 2-IDENTIFY GOALS-Ask or work with your child to figure out what they would like to accomplish related to the problem at hand, whether it's accepting the loss that led to the anger, or fix the broken item that led to the tantrum. 3-THINK OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS- What can get you toward the goals? Have the kid come up with these as much as possible, directing them toward past successes (when older), but when young, try several and then decide what worked the best. 4-EVALUATE YOUR PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BASED ON YOUR FAMILY'S VALUES-Validate their ideas, and perhaps use these questions-Is the solution fair?, Will this solution work?, Is it safe?, How am I likely to feel? How are other people likely to feel? 5-HELP YOUR CHILD CHOOSE A SOLUTION-Encourage them to choose, but involve yourself a bit more here. Tell how you solved a problem like this and what you learned from it. Allow them to pick one that you don't think will work, and encourage them toward another if it fails. Help this be a learning process and show that failures don't mean all is lost.