



Understanding emotions and how to manage them with your child

For over 29 years I have been working with “Big feelings” both within children and parents. I have a bit of a mission to help parents connect, build confidence, prevent stress and most of all help everyone manage and regulate their emotions.

Emotions are a big part of being human and are important for our survival. It is often overlooked by society’s need to focus on developing a child’s thinking capacities but managing your emotions is equally important.

What does emotional regulation mean to you? Do you remember how you were parented emotionally, were your emotions validated?

The core features of Emotional Regulation

Your child’s ability to identify and understand their feelings, the capacity to read and identify others feelings and most of all to manage (regulate the “Big Feelings”).

Children are born with billions of neurons that need to interconnect and fix. This helps children do all kinds of things such as walking and talking but more importantly, to feel and understand emotions.

Children don’t have the capacity to manage big feelings until the age of four onwards, so hold that in mind when you get fed up with your three-year-old.

So, a baby’s first emotional experience comes from you. Your baby experiences strong feelings and sensations and can’t understand what is going on. You

help him by trying to understand him, by comforting him and explaining those feelings for him. You must be tired; oh, you must be hungry.

You soothe the baby so they can calm down and relax. The baby can do this sometimes for themselves, this is called self-regulation. This is a



process that needs to go on for a long time and helps your child feel safe and secure. In the architecture of the brain, interconnections can be fixed (these are neurons trying to fix).

Try to think of the neurons like wires in a computer (the wires that need electricity to go through its circuits). These occur in the front brain which is the prefrontal cortex. They need you to help them make those connections by helping them with their emotions, helping them to feel contained and regulated.

Sometimes, as our children grow and get older we forget to help them thinking that they don’t need us as they are teenagers but this process takes time so this should continue repeatedly so those connections can fix. It takes up to the age of 25 for the brain to mature.

The Institute for clinical interventions have categorised emotions into three clusters:

- **The Sad (disappointment, crying, shame, loss etc.)**

- **The Mad** (irritation, frustration, anger, jealousy, rage, hate etc.)
- **The Scared** (dread, fear, panic, nervousness, anxiety etc.)

Of course, there are happy states too, the happy (joy, pleasure, excitement, happiness, creativity, love etc.)

All children fear strangers, monsters, the dark, and being away from you. This is completely normal, so don't worry. However, if your child is persistently in the top three states:

Flight (sad and scared) and Fight (mad) which lead to feel persistently unsafe. This can be caused by persistent exposure to conflict, violence and post-natal depression. It can affect the architecture in the developing brain and have long term consequences on how they regulate emotions. In these states, hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline are activated to respond to the threat.

In the longer term, this can affect the way they manage cortisol in their brain and so they struggle to manage distress and they will "act out". You may see your child lose control all the time and have long temper tantrums, hit you, or be very scared and frightened or both. The dysregulation may impact on their friendships or their capacity to learn at school.

My top ten tips

You are probably reading and getting scared, but you can try my top ten tips now.

1. Give your children time, call it special time. Negative cycles can grow so this is important.
2. Praise your child, we often forget to do this, it needs to be labelled and specific.
3. Talk about your emotions and use emotional language. Use words to describe their feelings, sad, happy, upset, angry.
4. If your child is hurt or angry try not to dismiss it. Acknowledge it, say hard it is for them.
5. Ask your child how to help them to feel safe, what can you do to help them if they are scared or angry.
6. Talk about your own feelings and say sorry if you lose it and react. We have all been there. Admitting your mistakes help your child know that it is okay to not get it alright all the time.
7. Give your child consistency and boundaries, this helps your child to feel contained, do talk to your partner if you have different approaches, that's fine but lots of research shows consistency counts, so stick to what you have said that you will do.
8. Normally we notice, when our child's tension is building, try and catch it, label it and see if this prevents it.
9. Don't worry if they blow, we can't eliminate emotions whatever the intensity, stay calm wait for it to subside, it can take up to two hours to biochemically calm down following a tantrum. So it's not always the right time to talk about problem solving.
10. Use time out/in but I like to call it the safe space for big feelings. I have suggested a pop up tent.

Good luck and just start with one tip today, be the parent you want to be. Let me help you by contacting me for a one to one consultation or join me at a live Parenting Webinars at <https://www.bristolchildparentsupport.co.uk>