

# Helping Your Child Develop Emotionally



## Highlights

Emotional development in children is complex and starts in infancy. Strong emotional development may help your child develop resilience and good emotional wellbeing.

You can help your child learn how to manage their emotions by teaching them ways to manage upsetting situations.

If you are concerned about your child's emotional development, it's important to get help early.

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## **Understanding Emotional Development**

Emotional development is when you learn:

what feelings and emotions are  
how and why your feelings and emotions happen  
how to know your own feelings  
how to see other people's feelings  
how to take care of your feelings

Emotional development is a complex task that starts in infancy.

## **The Importance of Emotional Growth**

Emotional development is important for your child's emotional wellbeing.

Good mental health and wellbeing enable your child to thrive in their early years and as they grow older.

Children with good social and emotional development:

are confident  
communicate well  
have good relationships  
persist with challenging tasks  
do better at school  
develop the skills to succeed in life

Strong emotional development may also help your child become resilient.

## **Emotional Milestones in Early Childhood**

Your baby may be able to show:

anger  
fear  
joy  
sadness

As your baby gets older, they will develop more complex emotions like:

elation  
embarrassment  
empathy  
pride  
shame and guilt  
shyness  
surprise

## **Self-Regulation Explained**

Self-regulation is the ability to control your attention, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours even when there are other distractions.

Babies are not able to self-regulate.

Self-regulation in preschool children is related to better:

social competency \ (ability to navigate their social world)  
school engagement  
academic performance

Your child will have a period of rapid self-regulation development between the ages of 3 and 7 years. Early self-regulation development is affected by both biology and environment.

## **Emotional Growth Over Time**

Toddlers and preschoolers are just beginning to learn about their emotions and how to take care of them. Their rate of emotional development will vary from

child to child.

Your child may show a high level of emotional skill development while young, or they may still show behaviours like aggression and emotional outbursts. But over time, they will learn to handle their emotions better.

They will also learn what situations are likely to upset them, which continues as they grow.

Learning to self-manage emotions helps your child feel more confident, capable, and in control.

## **Family and Cultural Influences**

Cultural background is an important factor influencing emotional development due to differences in beliefs between cultural groups, which affect how children express emotions.

The amount of stress in the family can also influence a child's emotional development.

## **Teaching Emotional Awareness**

You can help your child learn how to manage their emotions by teaching them:

- problem-solving and decision-making skills
- strategies to use when they're feeling out of control
- ways to manage upsetting situations
- how to express their emotions in other ways, like by drawing or acting out their feelings
- the immediate and long-term consequences of their actions

It's also important to acknowledge and react to emotional communication from your child. You can help your child develop empathy by talking about emotions and how people may react differently to events.

Using picture books and videos can be helpful to teach your child about emotions.

## **Supporting Big Feelings**

When your child is young, you can help them manage their emotions by holding and rocking them.

As your child gets older, they will be able to calm themselves from low-intensity feelings. However, bigger emotions may require co-regulation.

## **What Co-Regulation Means**

Co-regulation is when you step in to help your child calm down. You can support your child to feel safe and calm through connection and nurturing.

As your child grows, they will be able to calm themselves down most of the time.

It's important to be aware of your own emotions before trying to co-regulate. You cannot calm your child if you're upset.

## **Responding to Tantrums and Meltdowns**

A tantrum is when your child loses control of their feelings and behaviour and can't calm themselves down or think about what's happening.

When your child has a tantrum, stay with them to help manage their feelings. It also helps them build trust, feel secure, and learn that big emotions can be managed.

Tantrums can be scary for both you and your child.

There are ways to help lower the frequency of tantrums.

## **Helping a Struggling Child**

Here are things you can do to help your child with emotional regulation difficulties:

**Routine:** A predictable day can help reduce emotional regulation difficulties.

Good sleep: Ensure your child has good quality sleep.

Healthy diet: This is essential for good health.

Physical activity: This helps with brain growth and emotional regulation.

Sensory play: This supports emotional development.

Role play: This lets you and your child act out situations that may be upsetting them.

## **Encouraging Open Conversations**

You can talk with your child about ways to deal with strong and uncomfortable emotions. You can also role model how you manage your own feelings.

## **When to Seek Professional Help**

If you are concerned about your child's emotional development, seek help early. You can talk to a doctor or child health professional for advice.

They might refer you to a:

counsellor

psychologist

early intervention service

paediatrician \ (children's doctor)

## **Tools And Assistance**

Visit parenting websites for additional help and support. You can also consult a maternal child health nurse.

Some helpful resources include:

Parenting education programs

Books and videos to help your child understand emotions

Services for emotional regulation and support