

GreatKids (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk>) » Child's brain (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/category/childs-brain/>), Emotional smarts (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/category/emotional-smarts/>) » 6 ways to boost your child's emotional intelligence

## 6 ways to boost your child's emotional intelligence

Help your child become happier, more confident, and more empathetic by teaching them healthy ways to express their feelings.

by: *GreatSchools Staff* (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/greatschoolsstaff/>) | June 10, 2016



In the midst of worrying about our kids' academic success, it's easy to lose sight of their emotional development. But research suggests a child's emotional intelligence is every bit as important as reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Why? Because kids with a high emotional intelligence have mastered the other three Rs: responsibility, resilience, and respect.

Since they've developed more coping skills, these kids are more able to control their emotions and behavior when things don't go their way. This in turn makes them happier, more self-confident, and more respectful of others. Not surprisingly, children with a high EQ (or emotional quotient) also tend to do better in school. They pay attention, easily take in information, stay motivated, and get along with teachers and classmates.

Is this just a matter of inborn temperament? Perhaps in some cases, yes. But research shows emotional intelligence can be taught. Students who have gone through school-based EQ training average 11 percentile points higher on academic test scores. As a parent, you can also teach your kid to handle challenging emotions like anger, sadness, and frustration. From books and toys to family games, here are seven creative ways to help your child become an EQ whiz kid.

## 1 **Play the "What-if" game**

During family car rides or as a conversation starter at the dinner table, the "What would you do if ...?" game gets kids thinking about ways to respond to different situations. Ask questions that encourage your child to behave with more emotional smarts: "What would you do if you saw someone grab a toy away from your friend? Or if I blamed you for something you didn't do? Or if your brother hit you for no reason?"

Asking these questions when emotions aren't running high gives your child a chance to come up with ideas on how to best respond — and for you to offer some ideas of your own. Since you can tailor questions to fit your child's age, this works for young and older kids alike.

## 2 **Get a toy with feelings inside**

Kimochis (<http://www.kimochis.com/>) are plush toys designed to teach kids, ages 4 to 9, how to express their feelings in a safe and playful way. ("Kimochi" means "feeling" in Japanese.) Stuffies, priced at \$24 each, are colorful characters like Cloud (who is moody), Cat (bossy), and Bug (shy). Along with your stuffy, you get three

small pillows representing feelings — such as happy, angry, scared, or frustrated — that can be tucked in its front pocket, plus a how-to "Feel Guide" with ideas for games to teach children about difficult emotions.

Kimochis are also being used in classrooms (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXqalRKrf60>) to teach social skills and conflict management. The school kit includes the 296-page "Feel Guide: Teacher's Edition," the "Feel Guide: Home Edition," all five Kimochis characters, and 29 feeling pillows.

### 3

#### **That's emo-tainment!**

Don't tell the kids, but books and movies can be more than just entertainment. San Francisco-based childhood social skills teacher Dominique Baudry says that reading books and watching movies with children present ideal opportunities to talk about emotions and behavior. "When reading together, ask your child, 'What do you think he's feeling?' Talk about a character's motive and intention. 'Why do you think he did that?'" One of her favorites for younger kids: *Knuffle Bunny* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0786818700/?tag=greatschools-n-20>). "Ask your child, 'Why is she frustrated? Why is the dad frustrated?'" she suggests. (Other great emotional conversation starters, says Baudry: Anything by children's book authors Mo Williams (<http://www.mowillems.com/>) or Kevin Henkes (<http://www.kevinhenkes.com/>).)

Similarly, after watching a movie together, ask your child why a character was angry, frustrated, sad, or excited. These conversations all present an opportunity to expand what Baudry calls "emotional literacy," so that children get used to talking about why people behave the way they do and how they might have responded differently. What's more, adds Baudry, doing this with make-believe characters makes it that much easier for kids to be emotionally fluent when talking about their own emotions — which is the whole idea.

#### **Read it with feeling**

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Not only can you use stories as a launching pad to discuss feelings, you can also get books that address emotions directly. One of the best “I’m feeling bad!” books for young kids: *When Sophie Gets Angry — Really, Really Angry* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0439924936/?tag=greatschools-20/>). As happens with many children, Sophie’s anger is too much for her and her family: She rages, kicks, and screams. To find her way out of her overwhelming emotions, Sophie takes time to be alone and calm down, then returns to her family more cheerful and encouraged.

Other helpful books to add to your emotional library: *Today I Feel Silly and Other Moods That Make My Day* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0060245603/?tag=greatschools-20/>), by Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell, and *Feelings* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/068806518X/?tag=greatschools-20/>), by Aiki.

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### **Give everyone a do-over**

Admit it: When parents — and kids — get angry enough, they yell or throw tantrums. Angry outbursts make everyone in the family feel terrible and usually solve nothing. Childhood communication and social skills coach Ellen Pritchard Dodge recommends that all family members should be allowed a chance to have a “do-over.”

“Anyone in the family is allowed to say, ‘That came out really mean. I’m going to do a do-over. Here’s what I wanted to say.’” Pritchard Dodge explains that do-overs allow kids and grownups a way to gain more self-awareness by practicing less hurtful ways of expressing difficult emotions. “Allowing for do-overs lets the whole family help one another try again in a kinder, better way,” she says. “It’s also a very kind way to cut each other some slack.”

6

### **Work on playing**

With less free playtime at and after school, kids today have fewer chances to practice the social skills that are important for learning emotional intelligence and dealing with difficult issues like bullying. Give your child as many opportunities as possible for unstructured, cooperative and imaginative play with siblings and other kids. Building a fort, putting on a play or variety show, or playing 'restaurant' or 'barber shop' together give kids lots of opportunities to practice communicating their desires and resolving conflicts.

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📌 *Anger management* (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/tag/anger-management/>), *Emotional intelligence* (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/tag/emotional-intelligence/>)

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## 6 ways to boost your tween's emotional intelligence

Teach your tween how to handle challenging emotions with these creative games and conversation starters.

by: *GreatSchools Staff* (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/greatschoolsstaff/>) | June 10, 2016



With increased responsibilities at home and school, more social drama, and adolescence looming, tweens need help learning how to handle challenging emotions like anger, sadness, and frustration. Research shows kids with emotional intelligence are happier, healthier, and kinder. What's more, students with a high EQ (or emotional quotient) tend to do better in school. They pay attention, easily take in information, stay motivated, and get along

with their teachers and classmates. And they're more resilient when things don't go their way. Nurture your tween's emotional intelligence one conversation at a time, even in the midst of a busy day, with these expert tips.

## 1 **Ask your tween "What would you do if ...?"**

On family car rides or at the dinner table, the "What would you do if ...?" game gets kids thinking about ways to respond to different situations. Ask questions that encourage your child to behave with more emotional smarts: "What would you do if you heard someone making fun of a classmate? Or if I blamed you for something you didn't do? Or if your friend said something that hurt your feelings?"

Asking these questions when emotions aren't running high gives your child a chance to come up with ideas on how to best respond — and for you to offer some ideas of your own.

## 2 **That's emo-tainment!**

Reading books and watching movies with your tween is a great way to approach talking about emotions and behavior. If you and your child have read the same book — for example, *Wonder* — use the characters to start a conversation about feelings and motivation. Ask your child, "What do you think he's feeling?" Talk about a character's motives and intentions. "Why do you think he did that?" These books offer age-appropriate opportunities for discussing feelings (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/book-lists/books-that-explore-feelings-for-4th-to-5th-grade/>) and increasing your tween's emotional vocabulary.

Similarly, after watching a movie together, ask your child why a character was angry, frustrated, sad, excited. This helps kids get used to talking about why people behave the way they do and how they might have responded differently. Talking about make-believe characters makes it that much easier for kids to be emotionally fluent when talking about their own emotions — which is the whole idea.

### 3

#### **Help cooling off**

Not only can you use stories as a launching pad to discuss feelings, you can get books that address feelings directly. For preadolescents and teens, anger is one of the most difficult emotions of all. A great book to help them understand — and tame — unruly emotions is *Hot Stones and Funny Bones: Teens Helping Teens Cope With Stress and Anger* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0757300367/?tag=greatschools-20/>). Teenagers talk about their own ways to gain self-esteem, handle stress, and deal with anger. Read it together, or just hand it to your child to learn helpful tips on coping with the emotional roller coaster of the preteen and teen years.

There's also *Hot Stuff to Chill Out: The Anger Management Book* ([http://www.amazon.com/Hot-Stuff-Help-Kids-Chill/dp/0965761002/ref=pd\\_cp\\_b\\_2](http://www.amazon.com/Hot-Stuff-Help-Kids-Chill/dp/0965761002/ref=pd_cp_b_2) ). Among other tips, kids will learn to smile for a few seconds when they feel angry. It works! They can't help but feel better.

### 4

#### **Act it out**

San Francisco-based social skills expert Dominique Baudry says charades is the perfect game for families to learn about and safely express a range of emotions. To play charades: A person draws a slip of paper from a container and silently reads the word written there. Then he or she acts it out for others to guess what it is. You can play in teams — a team wins when one person guesses correctly in a set amount of time.

"It works because anything that removes language and looks at facial and body language helps teach about emotions," says Baudry. "Make up your own categories. Things at a birthday party. Things you can do with your mouth. Animals. Sports." Your imagination is the limit.

#### **Offer a do-over**



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Admit it. When parents — and kids — get angry enough, they yell and and throw tantrums. Angry outbursts make everyone in the family feel terrible and usually solve nothing. Childhood communication and social skills coach Ellen Pritchard Dodge recommends that all family members should be allowed a chance to stop and have a do-over when they lose their cool.

“Anyone in the family is allowed to say, ‘That came out really mean. I’m going to do a do-over. Here’s what I wanted to say.’” Pritchard Dodge explains that do-overs allow kids and grownups a way to gain more self-awareness by practicing less hurtful ways of expressing difficult emotions. “Allowing for do-overs lets the whole family help one another try again in a kinder, better way,” she says. “It’s also a very kind way to cut each other some slack.”

6

### **Play the “Maybe” game**

Understanding why others behave the way they do — or empathy — is an essential EQ skill. To practice your empathy skills, says Pritchard Dodge, play the “Maybe” game. See someone flare up with a bad case of road rage? Everyone in the car can have a shot at guessing why that person is feeling so badly. “Maybe she is late for work. “Maybe her doctor called and had really bad news.” “Maybe she’s an extraterrestrial and can’t stand the way earthlings drive.” It doesn’t have to be serious. Sometimes talking and learning about emotions can — and should — be fun!

And when someone in the house is cranky, the “Maybe” game works wonders for figuring out the reason behind negative behaviors. “Maybe you’re so mad about your homework because you need something to eat first.” “Maybe you’re yelling because I didn’t clean up the dishes when you asked.”

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## About the author

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## 6 ways to boost your teen's emotional intelligence

You can help your teen learn healthy, productive ways to express challenging emotions.

by: *GreatSchools Staff* (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/greatschoolsstaff/>) | June 10, 2016



In high school, academics take center stage and it's easy to forget that teens need to continue to grow and develop their emotional intelligence, too. Teens with a high degree of emotional intelligence are better able to control their emotions and behavior when things don't go their way. This in turn makes them happier, more self-confident, and

more respectful of others. Not surprisingly, students with a high EQ (or emotional quotient) tend to do better in school. They pay attention, take in information, stay motivated, and get along with teachers and classmates. Nurture your teen's emotional development with these conversation starters and games about feelings and empathy.

## 1 **Ask your teen “What would you do if ...?”**

On family car rides or at the dinner table, the “What would you do if ...?” game gets your teen thinking about ways to respond to different situations. Ask questions that encourage them to behave with more emotional smarts: “What would you do if you saw someone being bullied at school? Or if I blamed you for something you didn't do?” Asking these kinds of questions when emotions aren't running high gives your child a chance to come up with ideas on how to best respond — and for you to offer some ideas of your own.

## 2 **That's emo-tainment!**

Books and movies present ideal opportunities to talk with teens about emotions and behavior. If you and your teen have read the same book — for example, *The Hunger Games* — use these fictional characters to have a conversation. Talk about a character's motives and intentions. Ask your child, “What do you think he's feeling?” and “Why do you think he did that?”

Similarly, after watching a movie together, ask your child why someone was angry, frustrated, sad, or excited. These conversations help kids get used to thinking and talking about why people behave the way they do and how they might have responded differently. Talking about fictional characters makes it that much easier for teens to be emotionally fluent when discussing their own emotions — which is the whole idea.

## 3 **Anger management**

Not only can you use stories as a launching pad to discuss feelings, you can get books that address feelings directly. For preadolescents and teens, anger is one of the most difficult emotions of all. A great book to help them understand — and tame — unruly emotions is *Hot Stones and Funny Bones: Teens Helping Teens Cope With Stress and Anger* (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0757300367/?tag=greatschools-20/>). Teenagers talk about their own ways to gain self-esteem, handle stress, and deal with anger. Read it together, or just hand it to your child to learn helpful tips on coping with the emotional roller coaster of the preteen and teen years.

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#### 4 **"Sounds like ..."**

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"It works because anything that removes language and looks at facial and body language helps teach about emotions," says Baudry. "Make up your own categories. Things at a birthday party. Things you can do with your mouth. Animals. Sports." Your imagination is the limit.

#### 5 **Give everyone a second chance**

Admit it. When parents — and kids — get angry enough, they yell. Angry outbursts make everyone in the family feel terrible and usually solve nothing. Childhood communication and social skills coach Ellen Pritchard Dodge recommends that all family members should be allowed a chance to do it over when they lose their cool.

“Anyone in the family is allowed to say, ‘That came out really mean. I’m going to do a do-over. Here’s what I wanted to say.’” Pritchard Dodge explains that do-overs allow kids and grown-ups a way to gain more self-awareness by practicing less hurtful ways of expressing difficult emotions. “Allowing for do-overs let the whole family help one another try again in a kinder, better way,” she says. “It’s also a very kind way to cut each other some slack.”

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