

Parenting with the Assumption of Emotional Coherence

Part 2: Helping Your Child with Problems

© 2018 Robin Ticic

For an introduction to the concept of emotional coherence, please see:

[Introduction to the Emotional Coherence Framework.](#)

In part 1, I encouraged you to practice observing and talking about feelings, both yours and your child's, during positive, happy family interactions. These skills will come in handy when your child has a problem to deal with, as we will now examine in **part 2** of this 4-part series.

Emotions themselves are neither right nor wrong; they may feel great, or they may feel terrible, or anything in between, but they are there for some reason. And there's no denying that those emotions *are* there, whether they're agreeable or not, so it's worthwhile acknowledging and dealing with them.

Parents mean well when they say things like "Don't be so disappointed" or "You shouldn't be unhappy." And yet those sorts of comments tell the child that it's wrong to have those feelings, and the child wonders what's "wrong" with him or her as a person. The child may even grow up with a deep sense of being defective.

When we assume emotional coherence, that means that we assume our children's feelings are, in some way, emotionally logical. That doesn't mean that we know what led to those feelings; often we don't know. If we had full information, though, the feelings would "make sense" to us.

When your child is bothered about something, try putting yourself in his or her shoes (mentally "switching roles" with the child for a while) and ask yourself what exactly your child needs or wants. For instance, when your young daughter is very tired, it's much more of an effort for her to pay attention to brushing her teeth, even though she understands why it's important. When your teenage son's best friends are all out socializing, it will likely be difficult for him to concentrate on studying for an exam.

Let's say your three-year-old has a tantrum because you won't buy him something he wants. Rather than telling him you're fed up with his yelling (which may well be true), you can take a guess at what he's experiencing and say, for example, "I know you'd really, really like me to buy that for you... and you're so upset not to have it!" If your teenage daughter tells you she's absolutely *not home* if a certain boy comes to the door, you might comment, "It sounds as though you don't want *anything* to do with him right now!"

You can help your children deal with the burden of uncomfortable feelings simply by letting them know—explicitly or implicitly—that you're noticing how they are feeling and that it's important to you. You're sharing the burden, which lightens it for your child.

One of our most important responsibilities as parents is to help our children learn to solve their problems independently. A useful guideline in helping children solve their problems is to provide just enough support so that they can find solutions themselves, learning to become more self-reliant. Often all that's needed is some emotional support, and then the actual practicalities of solving the problem are easy. You're imparting the message that you have confidence in your child's ability to work out problems, given the needed support.

If you notice that your child seems to be troubled, try saying, "You look unhappy" (or scared, or whatever is relevant at that moment), rather than asking, "What's wrong?" Then just notice whether the child finds it easier to talk about what's bothering him or her. Chances are that the child will open up more when you engage empathetically than if confronted by a direct question.

Interestingly, the fewer questions we ask and the fewer suggestions we make when our children are having difficulty, the better they are able to get a grip on the problem. And there will be times that our children don't want to talk about feelings with us. We need to learn to accept that, thereby letting our children know that we're offering our time, interest, and receptivity. It's then up to them to decide what to share and when.

This material has been drawn from [How to Connect with Your Child](#) by Robin Ticic.