



EMOTION COACHING

DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH WHAT TO SAY OR
DO WHEN YOU ARE FACED WITH A
STRESSFUL PARENTING SCENARIO WITH
YOUR LOVED ONE?



IT COULD BE AN **ANXIOUS** CHILD
REFUSING TO GO TO SCHOOL BECAUSE
THEY ARE AVOIDING CONFLICT WITH
FRIENDS.

...

PERHAPS YOU HAVE A **SAD** TEEN
SAYING THEY HATE THEIR LIFE.

...

OR, AN **ANGRY** KID WHO DOESN'T LIKE
YOUR EXPECTATION TO PUT THEIR
PHONE AWAY.



I HAVE A CLEAR PATH TO HELP YOU USE A THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUE, ROOTED IN NEUROSCIENCE, TO SUPPORT YOUR LOVED ONE WITH THEIR BIG EMOTIONS AND HELP THEM FEEL SOOTHED AND UNDERSTOOD, EVEN IN THE MESSY MOMENTS.

THIS WILL INCREASE RESILIENCY FOR YOUR LOVED ONE'S MENTAL HEALTH AND STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

LET'S USE THE EXAMPLES ABOVE AS WE GO THROUGH THE INTERVENTION PLAN.



REFLECTION FOR YOU AS THE PARENT

PAUSE NOTICE YOUR DEFAULT RESPONSE.

What is your first instinct when faced with a stressful parenting situation (SPS)? The default response is rooted in your love and desire to help your child. The problem comes in when this response is not effective, even though the intention is so positive. Here are some typical examples.

WHICH ONE DO YOU RELATE TO MOST?



THE FIXER

- DETERMINED TO FIND THE PERFECT SOLUTION
- WANTS TO SHARE THEIR WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE WITH THE CHILD

EX: WITH THE ANXIOUS CHILD - THE “FIXER” MAY JUMP TO TEXT THE PARENTS OF THE FRIENDS AND FIGURE OUT SOLUTIONS.

STRENGTH: THE FIXER DESPERATELY WANTS TO TAKE AWAY THE PAIN OF THEIR LOVED ONE AND OFTEN IS VERY GOOD AT PROBLEM-SOLVING.

DOWNSIDE: THE LOVED ONE MAY NOT FEEL HEARD AND THEY MAY BE DISEMPOWERED IF THEY CAN'T CHOOSE THEIR OWN RESPONSE. THEY MAY NOT LEARN THAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF HANDLING SITUATIONS THEMSELVES.



THE COMFORTER

- LIKE A SOFT AND COZY BLANKET, THIS PARENT TRIES TO WRAP UP THEIR LOVED ONE WITH COMFORT AND MAKE THEM FEEL BETTER.
- THEY MAY REASSURE THEIR CHILD AND TRY TO CONVINCING THEM TO FEEL OR RESPOND DIFFERENTLY.

EX: WITH THE TEEN WHO IS SAD, THE PARENT MAY QUICKLY RESPOND, “THAT IS NOT TRUE! YOU WILL BE FINE, YOU HAVE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO LOVE YOU.”

STRENGTH: THE COMFORTER IS OFTEN VERY NURTURING AND WORKS HARD TO MOVE THEIR LOVED ONE PAST THE PAIN.

DOWNSIDE: THE LOVED ONE DOES NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO SIT WITH THEIR EMOTIONS AND PROCESS THEM FULLY. THERE IS ALSO A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DEEPER CONNECTION.



THE CONTROLLER

- THIS PARENT TURNS TO CONSEQUENCES AND LIMITS AS A WAY TO HELP THEIR LOVED ONE CHANGE BEHAVIOURS LINKED TO MENTAL HEALTH.

EX: WITH A CHILD WHO IS ANGRY, THE PARENT MAY RESPOND BY TAKING AWAY THEIR DEVICE.

STRENGTH: THE CONTROLLER FEELS A STRONG RESPONSIBILITY TO TEACH THEIR LOVED ONE APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AND CARES DEEPLY ABOUT THEIR LOVED ONE'S SUCCESS.

DOWNSIDE: PUNISHMENTS OFTEN DON'T WORK LONG-TERM AROUND THE BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE, BUT THEY CAN CREATE CONFLICT AND DISCONNECTION IN THE RELATIONSHIP.



THE MINIMIZER

- IN AN EFFORT TO CONVINCING THEIR LOVED ONE THAT THEIR CONCERN IS NOT REALLY SO BAD, THE PARENT MAY USE STATEMENTS SUCH AS “AT LEAST” OR “YES, BUT WHAT ABOUT ...” TO MINIMIZE THE CONCERN SHARED AND TRY AND RELIEVE THE SUFFERING OF THEIR CHILD.

EX: WITH THE ANXIOUS CHILD, THE MINIMIZER MAY SAY, “THAT’S ROUGH WITH YOUR FRIENDS BUT AT LEAST YOU HAVE YOUR SISTER - SHE LOVES YOU!”

STRENGTH: IT CAN BE HELPFUL TO MODEL A POSITIVE OUTLOOK AND POINT OUT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

DOWNSIDE: THE LOVED ONE MAY FEEL DISMISSED OR UNCERTAIN WHETHER THEIR PARENT REALLY WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR TRUE FEELINGS. THEY MAY NOT LEARN TO TRUST THEIR OWN FEELINGS OR EXPRESS THEM.



EMOTION COACHING

Now that you have reflected on your own default response, you are ready to learn an alternative response, called Emotion Coaching. This is an advanced caregiver skill, used specifically to cope with an **SPS** and/or to support your loved one with any intense emotions.

STEP 1 DEEPLY VALIDATE YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE. THIS INVOLVES RESISTING YOUR DEFAULT RESPONSE!

- Allow yourself to try and see this situation through the eyes of your child.
- What is most painful about this for them? What might they be feeling, underneath the surface words or behaviour?
- Look for underlying vulnerabilities and struggles. Attempt to put that into words for them.

START THE SENTENCE WITH ONE OF THESE:



“No wonder you feel ...”

“I can understand why you want to/ don't want to ...”

“If I put myself in your shoes, I would feel ...”

TAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS ABOUT WHAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE FEELING OR THINKING. EXPRESS IT FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW:

→ “I can understand why you feel worried about going to school.”

TRY REPLACING “BUT” WITH “BECAUSE”:

→ “I wonder if you **might be** scared to show up at school **because** you don't know if they will talk to you, or whether you have to eat lunch alone today.”

CONVEY THAT YOU "GET IT" BY EXPRESSING THEIR UNDERLYING VULNERABILITIES, POSITIVE INTENTIONS, OR EFFORTS TO ESCAPE FEELINGS OF PAIN.

→ "If I put myself in your shoes, I can understand why you feel so hopeless right now because you have been dealing with your depression for a long time, and despite doing the right things, you still have this dark cloud that hangs over you."



AIM FOR 2-3 STATEMENTS THAT SHOW EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING. THIS IS HOW WE VALIDATE WITH WORDS.

ALSO, PAY ATTENTION TO THE TONE OF YOUR VOICE, THE EXPRESSION ON YOUR FACE AND YOUR BODY LANGUAGE, WHICH CAN ALL HELP TO MAKE YOUR LOVED ONE FEEL SEEN AND HEARD. THINK OF YOURSELF AS A MIRROR FOR THEIR EMOTIONS.

YOU MAY NEED TO DO A FEW MORE ROUNDS OF VALIDATION, DEPENDING ON YOUR CHILD'S REACTIONS. ONCE YOU SEE THEY ARE SOOTHED AND FEEL UNDERSTOOD, YOU CAN MOVE ON TO...

STEP 2: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

This is where some of the **"DEFAULT RESPONSES"** we covered earlier can actually be used, now that we have validated the emotions. If you are a "comforter" you will love this step!

Consider what emotional support will be the best fit for your child, in this SPS:

- reassurance and comfort: "You are going to be OK, I know you can get through this".
- Some physical touch, such as a hug.
- Positive regard for their efforts: "I know you are trying your best in a hard situation."
- Sense of being a team: "Let's talk this through, I am always on your side and here to help".
- Understanding "I get why you feel this way".

SPACE some loved one benefit from 5 minutes of time alone to process their feelings. Reassure them you will be back and follow through on that by returning.

STEP 3: **MOVING TO PRACTICAL SUPPORTS.**

This is where the **"FIXER"** will shine! Once you have covered **Validation** and **Emotional Support**, it is often more effective and welcomed by the loved one to provide some targeted practical support.

However, sometimes nothing further is required. If the child is soothed, you can stop here.

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICAL SUPPORT:

- **DISTRACTION:** you may want to suggest another activity that is healthy for them, such as going for a walk together.
- **TEACH A SKILL,** such as a relaxation strategy to practice together, or how to think more flexibly about the situation.
- **GRADUAL EXPOSURE** when anxiety is at play, which involved a baby step forward toward whatever they are anxious about.
- **SET, OR RE-AFFIRM** an expectation or limit that continues to be important to follow through on.



LET'S PULL IT ALL TOGETHER!

IF WE TAKE THE FIRST EXAMPLE, OF AN ANXIOUS CHILD AVOIDING SCHOOL BECAUSE OF CONFLICT WITH THEIR PEERS.

HERE WOULD BE A SCRIPT FOR THE **3 STEP EMOTION COACHING INTERVENTION:**

#1 “Hey, I can understand why you don’t want to go to school today, since you are having such a hard time with your friends. I can imagine you are nervous that they won’t talk to you and you may feel alone. And I know how when you are anxious, you get kind of shaky and feel unwell, so no wonder you want to stay home.

Also, if I put myself in your shoes, I think you have been trying really hard lately to get along with that friend group, and it must feel so upsetting that despite your best efforts to be a good friend, there is still tension with them.”

#2 “Right now it feels so terrible, but I promise you are going to be OK and it will not feel this way forever.”

#3 “Why don’t we not worry about school right this moment, but just work on getting some food into you? If you come downstairs, I will make you something to eat, then you can see how you feel. One step at a time.”

THANK YOU FOR CHECKING OUT THIS RESOURCE!
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE
ABOUT HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH THEIR
EMOTIONS AND CREATING RESILIENCE AROUND
MENTAL HEALTH, I WOULD WELCOME YOU TO
CONNECT WITH ME.

My Instagram page offers free content related
to parenting, mental health, grief & therapeutic
interventions. Follow along



Emotion coaching is the first of three main
therapeutic interventions taught as part of my
course, “Supporting Your Family’s Mental
Health”. You are welcome to reach out if you
would like to learn more. Details can be found
here: [https://doucettetherapy.com/supporting-
your-family-mental-health/](https://doucettetherapy.com/supporting-your-family-mental-health/)

Other workshops and courses will
be offered soon, so keep an
eye on your email inbox!

The content in this guide is adapted from “Emotion Focused
Family Therapy” and training completed with Dr. Adele Lafrance.
You can access more helpful resources about EFFT here:
www.mentalhealthfoundations.ca

