

How to help our autistic children IDENTIFY EMOTIONS

As adults, we typically identify and process our emotions and those of others automatically. *It can feel effortless to us, but this is an important skill that autistic people can have difficulty with.* There is hope. As a parent guide, you can help your child gain awareness of emotions, which will help them successfully navigate many aspects of their life.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Children who cope well with their emotions are less likely to be aggressive, depressed, or physically ill due to stress, per Cara Bosler, Ph.D., and Laura Hubbs-Tait, Ph.D., Extension Oklahoma State University. These children are more likely to have higher grades, better self-esteem, and experience other positive outcomes.¹

KIDS WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE CAN:



1. Label and talk about their own emotions and the emotions of others
2. Show emotions in appropriate ways
3. Process and adjust to emotions in a healthy manner

Good Therapy describes Emotional Intelligence as, *“The ability to identify and assess his or her emotional state, as well as the emotional state of others.”* Some psychologists believe that the concept of theory explains why many autistics struggle with emotional intelligence.²

Per *The Family Guidance and Therapy Center*, *“According to the theory of mind, the better you are able to imagine the world from another person’s point of view, the better you’ll be able to understand, interpret, and react to their emotions.”*³

“You’ll be better able to empathize, understand what conversation topics are appropriate and anticipate how a person might respond to certain statements. The problem is that someone on the autism spectrum experiences the world differently.”

SIX AREAS OF DYNAMIC INTELLIGENCE⁴

1. EMOTIONAL REFERENCING

2. SOCIAL COORDINATION

3. DECLARATIVE LANGUAGE

4. FLEXIBLE THINKING

5. RELATIONSHIP INFORMATION PROCESSING

6. FORESIGHT AND HINDSIGHT



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD IDENTIFY EMOTIONS

Through you being a role model, your child will learn about emotions and how to process them and express them appropriately by observation. This helps your child learn emotional awareness, the ability to identify and name their emotions, and the emotions of others. Your child learns to think, problem-solve, and regulate their emotions.

PRACTICE EMOTIONAL SKILLS⁵

1. RECOGNIZE

How am I feeling? Use gesturing to model emotions. Describe how you feel, and how your emotions may affect the interactions that you have with others. **Lead your child to model you, and your emotions.**



2. UNDERSTAND

What happened that caused these feelings? Throughout each day, feelings change. Identify and share with your child the things that lead to emotions, especially uncomfortable feelings. This can teach your child that **emotions are normal and that they will occur, and to prepare to take appropriate action.**



3. LABEL

How can I express what I am feeling at the moment? **Model ways to express your feelings.** "I am mad. I am sad. I am disappointed." As you model the expression of your feelings, explain that you are giving your feelings a name and that there are different ways to express your emotions.

At home, consider stomping your foot once on the floor, "I am tired of this (frustrated)!" Then, pretend that you are at school, talking to a teacher, "I am mad. Someone took my notebook." **Explain that it is okay in some situations to say that you are mad, but it is not always okay to react in an inappropriate manner (like stomping your foot).**



4. REGULATE

How can I regulate what I am feeling? **Model how you regulate emotions.** Use real-life situations that include maintaining your feelings (when they are appropriate) or changing your feelings (because you do not want to continue feeling that way). This will teach your child how to manage emotions.

It is crucial to remember that as a parent guide, you must react to your child's emotions in a supportive way to foster their emotional and social development, as well as emotional regulation. **Your emotional state has a direct impact on how your child learns to process and act upon their own emotions** ⁶

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL GROWTH

- AVOID OVERREACTING TO YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONS
- TRUST THAT THEY WILL DEVELOP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
- MODEL EMOTIONAL REGULATION
- REACT SUPPORTIVELY
- EXPLAIN PROPER REACTION AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR CHOICES
- AVOID TELLING YOUR CHILD THEIR FEELINGS ARE WRONG



Your autistic child's emotional development requires **repeated modeling and intentional real-life situational practice**. It will take time for your child to learn to recognize, understand, label, and regulate their emotions accordingly and appropriately.

RESOURCES, EDUCATION, CONNECTION, AND SUPPORT

You are not alone in this autism journey with your child. Whether you are new to the world of autism or have spent years trying to find answers, we can put you in touch with the resources and people to help you move forward. If you'd like to talk to RDI® professionals, parents just like you, and adults on the spectrum, join our online learning community.⁷



1. **Teaching Children About Emotions**

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/teaching-children-about-emotions.html>

2. **Asperger's Syndrome and Emotional Intelligence**

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/aspergers-syndrome-emotional-intelligence-1002124>

3. **Do Autistic Individuals Have Emotional Intelligence?**

<https://familyguidanceandtherapy.com/do-autistic-individuals-have-emotional-intelligence/>

4. **Six Areas of Dynamic Intelligence**

<https://www.rdiconnect.com/six-areas-of-dynamic-intelligence/>

5. **Teaching Emotional Intelligence in Early Childhood**

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2017/teaching-emotional-intelligence>

6. **Emotion-Related Socialization Behaviours in Parents of Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder**

[https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjct55\)\)/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=76925](https://www.scirp.org/(S(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjct55))/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=76925)

7. **RDI Online Learning Community**

<https://www.rdiconnect.com/join-the-rdi-learning-community/>



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