

Emotional intelligence will help your child secure loving relationships and even a stellar career. Here are ideas for how to build your child's emotional intelligence from a young age.

## Get kids off to a smart start

([www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com))

In September 2013, the *New York Times* ran a fascinating article entitled "**Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught?**" that chronicled the efforts of school teachers who are working hard to teach their students emotional intelligence.

Such curriculum is seen as important in many educational circles because emotional intelligence has been linked to a reduction in bullying and an increase in academic success and social development.

Certainly, though, the teaching of emotional intelligence shouldn't be restricted to the classroom. So what can parents do to improve their child's emotional intelligence?

### What is emotional intelligence?

According to *Psychology Today*, emotional intelligence is "the ability to identify your own emotions and the emotions of others." Emotional intelligence includes three primary skills, which are true for both emotionally intelligent children and adults.

1. **Using emotions effectively.** Emotionally intelligent people use their emotions to help them think and problem solve in school and at work.
2. **Identifying emotions properly.** Emotionally intelligent people are able to accurately identify the feelings of themselves and others, which means they can read situations and relationships.
3. **Regulating emotions skillfully.** Emotionally intelligent people can harness their own emotions, and also use their empathetic responses to other people in helpful ways.

That sounds easy enough, but identifying feelings and learning to empathize doesn't come naturally to everyone. Regardless of the ease with which people learn emotional intelligence, the skill is extremely important throughout life.



## The importance of emotional intelligence

We all know that people who are emotionally appropriate are more pleasant to be around than people who are not. But what are the other benefits of emotional intelligence? Some of the specific benefits for children include:

1. **Academic success.** Children with higher emotional intelligence perform better in school, as a whole, than their peers with lower scores.
2. **Academic retention.** Children with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to drop out of high school or college than children with lower emotional intelligence scores.
3. **Increased pro-social behavior.** Children with higher emotional intelligence tend to be more adept at navigating relationships, cooperating and responding compassionately and appropriately with friends, at home and at school.

## How parents can help

Although schools are beginning to use emotional intelligence curriculum in some classroom settings, parents are in the best position to teach and enhance a child's innate emotional intelligence. Here are a few suggestions for what you can do to help.

1. **Accurately name your own emotions.** Children learn by watching you. If you're sad and crying, or angry, take some time to name those emotions out loud with your child so he or she can learn to identify what you're feeling.
2. **Use a rich vocabulary.** Emotions aren't just "happy" or "sad." Sometimes, emotions are extremely complex, and a rich vocabulary of feeling words can help unfold the complexity of the emotions. Use many different words to describe feelings in your home, so your child can learn about the complexity of feelings.
3. **Validate your child's feelings.** If your child is having a complete meltdown, take some time to validate his or her feelings, even if you don't give in to them. Instead of ignoring a tantrum, say, "I know how frustrated you are that we can't go to the park right now, and it's completely reasonable to feel that way."
4. **Teach empathy.** Talk about compassion and empathy for others' feelings, and model it yourself in your interactions with others.
5. **Understand different viewpoints.** If your child comes home from school feeling angry with his friend about a disagreement, take the time to talk through the disagreement and help your child understand his friend's different point of view.
6. **Model effective communication.** As your child gets older, use effective communication as you navigate your own relationships. Blowing up at your husband and leaving the house won't do it. Instead, use feeling phrases like, "I feel angry with you, and scared about the consequences for our family, when you don't follow through with paying the electric bill like you said you would."

Emotional intelligence is a skill that your child can develop over time as he or she interacts with you and the world. Teach empathy and model your own emotional intelligence to give your child the best start possible.