

Father Times

Fathers and Emotional Intelligence

Issue 9

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

Taking Time for Feelings

Have you ever heard of being “heart smart”? It’s a term that people are using to describe something called “emotional intelligence” (also known as “E.Q.”), or how well a person understands and manages his emotions and responds to feelings in others. Young children know all about feelings. They can be moody one minute and giggling the next. Children spontaneously express anger, sadness, excitement, happiness, frustration and many other emotions.

Helping children learn to identify and understand their emotions is important in helping them to develop

a sound “E.Q.” Emotional intelligence is important to children for many reasons. A child needs to understand when she is feeling sad. A first grader needs to learn how to control a sudden, angry impulse to hit someone teasing him. A young child wants to know why her friend is feeling bad. Whether solving problems, caring for others, or getting

oneself out of a funk, an understanding of feelings and how to handle them is critical to success.

Learn about emotional intelligence and help your children get off to a start that is “heart smart.”



Once Upon A Time . . .

Child Care Blues

It was Dan’s night to pick up his children from child care. He and Lynn take turns bringing the children to care in the morning and picking them up again at night. One parent drops the kids off at child care, while the other runs errands, makes phone calls or starts dinner. Lately, Dan had found himself enjoying making dinner and running errands more than dropping off and picking up the children.

As soon as Dan pulled out of the parking lot at work, he felt his shoulders start to tense up. Why was he dreading his turns with the children so much lately? He really wanted to see his children at the end of a long work day. What had changed? Dan thought of each child separately in order to assess what the problem might be.

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Child Care Blues

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The baby, Addie, had just turned a year old last week. She had started to wake again a little at night and cry out. She settled pretty quickly once one of them went in to reassure her that they were near. Addie was always happy to see him at pick-up time. She was more of a problem in the morning, not wanting him to leave. He knew that one-year-olds get sad when being separated from parents.

That also held true for their three-year-old, Will. He was having a return bout of separation anxiety — typical for a three-year-old. Will was always five minutes later after the child care provider helped him wave good-bye at the big window, reassured him that Dad would be back after work, listened to and acknowledged his feelings about being separated from his daddy, and

finally led him to an interest area she knew he would enjoy. Occasionally, when the morning had been rushed, he would show his indifference when Dan came to pick him up. He might ignore Dan completely or begin to take out something new to do instead of getting ready to go.

Then there was Reed, his oldest. At five years old, Reed had a great time at child care. He was a physical child who loved to climb, play and run. There was plenty of space indoors and out for this type of activity at child care, and more than enough great friends with unlimited imaginations to make the day fly by. The family's apartment building didn't have the same space or children his age, and his parents were often talking to each other and doing housework. Just last night, Dan and Reed had an important talk about how all feelings were acceptable but hurtful actions had to be stopped. They talked about being mad and how to solve the problem instead of sulking or getting physical with the other person. They both went to bed feeling better about Reed's occasional mistakes and close to each other. It had been well worth the time. Dan wondered if their talk last night somehow fit into this situation.

Yes, it was the younger two with their morning "static cling" (clinging to Dad's leg and giving him static!) as Dan

referred to it, but it was Reed that made pick-up time so tough. Reed was often reduced to a pile of tears by the time they reached the car, and Dan was frustrated and angry. Lynn confessed it wasn't any better for her and that she too was starting to prefer grocery shopping and food prep to the daily struggle of removing Reed from his fun.

Dan entered the child care center yard to see Reed and three other boys digging in the sandbox. They were having a great time. All of them were smiling, laughing and talking. He waved to Reed, gave him a smile and motioned that he was going in the building to pick up Addie and Will first. Reed set his jaw and squinted his eyes but smiled back quickly when he realized he had a few more minutes before his dad would call for him.

Addie was reading a book with her provider. She slid off her lap and ran clumsily toward Dan, squealing with delight at this most welcome familiar face! Next up, Will. "Will he or won't he," mused Dan. He entered the three-year-old room. Will was playing in the water table next to two girls. "Hello William," called Dan, while squatting beside Will. "What are you doing, son?" Will showed his dad the strainer and tube he was using in the water. Dan showed interest and continued

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to talk to Will as he started to collect his belongings.

“I will ask your teacher about your day while you finish up. Can you find your jacket too?” Will looked at Dan, the water and his baby sister. He picked up the strainer three more times and then ran off to find his jacket. Just two reminders later the trio was ready to go pick up Reed. This time, Reed was ready to go. The earlier “warning” that Dad had arrived, was smiling and was willing to pick up the other two first gave Reed the time he needed to finish his important work of play.

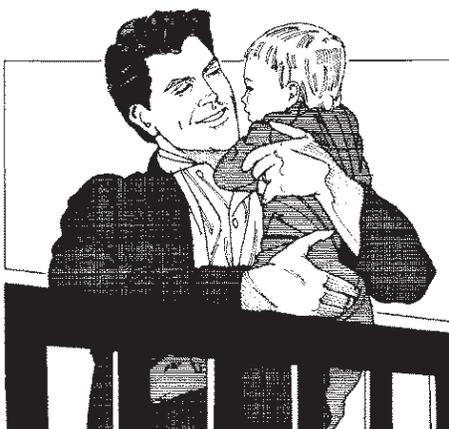
All four family members got in the car semi-peacefully and drove home. Dan thought about pick-up time today and realized how well it had gone. He realized that recognizing his children’s stages of development, honoring their emotions, slowing things down, allowing some time to finish, being interested in their activities, and appearing pleasant — all these things took time, discovery and observation. In the long run, however, time was saved, self-esteem was left intact and feelings were spared. It had been smart to pay attention to his children’s feelings.

Dan thought for a minute about offering to do child duty again the next day just to test his new strategy. Nah, he would just share his new secret with Lynn and wait his turn.

What Children Need

Fathers and Children’s Feelings

Young children have an amazing capacity to learn about themselves and their world. One aspect of development that fathers can especially impact is emotional development. According to one expert, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, modeling your own emotions and creating awareness of your child’s emotions are some of the best ways to help children develop emotional intelligence. Research on fathering suggests that fathers who are involved in healthy ways in their children’s lives also grow themselves in positive ways. Greenspan claims fathers and children “can experience deeper, richer, more satisfying relationships with each other” as they pay attention to how feelings are shared and expressed. To promote healthy emotional development, consider the following ideas.



- Even babies can pick up on the tension in a household and understand and imitate the emotions of another person. Take care to keep your emotional interactions positive and calm around children. Reduce your own stress with exercise and a healthy diet.
- It is important to take care of family members who are experiencing emotional woes and provide comfort after a trying event. Children especially respond to a father’s protective love and concern when they are feeling stress or anxiety due to illness or other issues.
- Even very young babies are able to carry on a non-verbal conversation. When the baby needs a break she will arch her back, turn her head and look away, or simply fall asleep. Respect a baby’s cues. She is learning to regulate emotions this way. She will also learn to self-comfort by sucking her thumb or cuddling a favorite blanket when she is upset or tired.
- It may not be in your character to be animated, but young children love expressive faces. Make faces showing all kinds of emotions, and tell the child

continued

what you are expressing as you show it. Have them make faces showing “sad” or “mad” or “happy” — this will help them learn to recognize feelings and how they are expressed.

- Young children need to know that all emotions are acceptable but hurtful actions have to be stopped. In other words, the child can be angry, but he may not hit his brother or scream loudly in someone’s ear.
- Sending a child off to his or her room when he or she is crying may send a signal that parents don’t accept crying. Crying is a natural response to sadness or frustration for people. If you feel you have been reared that way, how can you change it for your child?
- Young children will try out a range of emotions for any situation. Be ready for laughter that turns to tears and then to sulking or anger. Emotions are complicated and take a lot of practice to understand. Practice patience and be ready to console when necessary.
- Be reassuring to children. Say good-bye every time you leave (no sneaking out!), and let them know when you will be returning. This goes for babies too.

- Children are able to experience all of the same emotions that adults do, only without the experience or knowledge of how to handle those feelings. Help your child express and label her feelings and limit her actions. Let her know about a time you felt that way too. Use children’s books to help children learn about feelings.
- Preschoolers often use fantasy play to work through difficult times, feelings and situations they are trying to understand. If you see a recurring theme, talk to your child about what it means to them.
- All parents question their child’s behaviors from time to time. Use caution not to bring up negative situations or problem behaviors in front of the child. Behaviors that get this kind of attention are likely to come up again. Seek information when the child is busy elsewhere.
- Toddlers need a safe space to explore. Too many no-no’s can turn your relationship into a negative cycle of reminding the child what not to touch and disciplining him for forgetting. Get down on the floor to see what your child sees. Clear out dangerous corners, and concentrate on setting up an environment full of “go for it” exploration and learning instead.

Fathering Facts

On Fathers and Emotions

It is mothers who help children with feelings and fathers who handle discipline — right?

In reality, the idea that fathers don’t help children with emotions is not true. What is true is that fathers provide an example of how to handle emotions just as mothers do, and either can do so in both positive and negative ways. What does the research say about fathers and children’s emotional well-being?

Here are some key findings:

- Young children who have fathers that become absent from their lives suddenly and permanently often experience “father hunger” and may have trouble with sleep disturbances, inability to fall asleep, nightmares, and other sleep-related problems due to emotional anxiety.
- Children who have little contact with their fathers are more likely to become depressed, develop anxiety problems,



and be emotionally impulsive and disruptive than children who have regular contact with their fathers.

- Fathers or father figures who are not involved with their children are more likely to have children who have difficulty in delaying gratification, controlling their anger, and showing clear feelings about what is right and wrong.
- A longitudinal study of fourth-grade students showed that boys exhibited higher levels of aggression when they came from homes without a father's influence versus mother-father households.
- In a 26-year longitudinal study of nearly 400 persons, it was found that the single most important childhood factor in developing empathy for others was a father's involvement.
- Boys and girls who grow up with engaged fathers show a greater ability to take initiative and have self-control in challenging situations.

Thinking About Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence includes a variety of skills such as awareness of your own emotions, empathy for others, ability to manage anger or frustration, and kindness in relationships. Check the following questions to think about your own example of handling emotions.

Give yourself a score between 1 and 5.

Scoring: 1 = Needs Work
2 = Want to Improve
3 = Not Bad
4 = I'm Feeling Good
5 = Doing Well



1. I find myself using my feelings to help make big decisions in my life. Score = _____
2. Bad moods overwhelm me. Score = _____
3. When I'm angry, I blow my top or fume in silence. Score = _____
4. Instead of giving up in the face of challenges, I stay hopeful and optimistic. Score = _____
5. My keen sense of others' feelings makes me compassionate about their situation. Score = _____
6. I can sense the pulse of a group or relationship and state unspoken feelings. Score = _____

This is not a scientific survey. However, just to think about it, look at your scores and consider the following:

- 21-30 = You Are In Touch With Your Emotions
- 15-20 = Do Some "Heart Smart" Exercise
- 8-14 = Your "Heart Health" May Be At Risk

Activities for Fathers and Children – About Feelings

This section provides a variety of activities you can do to spend time with your children and help to understand feelings. Have fun as you spend time with your child!

- ❑ Talk about what your infant is feeling, especially during care giving routines. “You have wet pants, and that’s uncomfortable. Let’s change you into a dry diaper. That will feel much better.” This will help children learn to identify and express feelings.
- ❑ Call your baby or child by her name. Make up songs about her, or put her name in your favorite tune.
- ❑ Use a book with bright pictures for a baby to see. Contrasting colors are best. Point out pictures and identify how a character is feeling.
- ❑ Make a discovery necklace by stringing some “mouth-ing toys” on a piece of yarn. Items such as colorful rattles, plastic measuring spoons and large wooden beads will work well. Wear the “neck-lace” when you are holding your older baby to keep him busy with toys he can have instead of reaching for your hair, nose and glasses.
- ❑ Look through old magazines to find larger faces with

different expressions. Make your own “feelings” book by mounting these on colored paper and putting them in a magnetic photo album. Babies and toddlers love these homemade books. Write the emotion under each and talk about them: “That man looks sad” or “See his tears?” or “Do you feel sad sometimes?”

- ❑ Clothes baskets are an inexpensive and versatile toy. Tie a short cord to it and let your child pull his favorite animal around. Give your child a ride in it by pushing it while he or she steers by pointing which direction to go next. Turn it over on top of a stuffed animal to make a zoo cage. Use the bottom for a drum. Add a blanket to make a baby bed. Use it as a target for balls and beanbags. Pick up time goes faster by tossing items that don’t belong around the house into the basket and sorting into rooms as you go.
- ❑ Play with your fingerprints. Using a non-toxic ink pad, show your child how to make his fingerprint on paper. With a magnifying glass, see how similar or different your print is compared to your child. Talk about how no two

fingerprints are alike.

Draw arms, legs and faces on your fingerprints to make animals and people. Fill in scenery behind them with colored pencils.

- ❑ Teach your child about sink and float. Use two unbreak-able containers or even two towels, one marked sink and the other float. Find a variety of items to experiment with. Start by guessing if an item will sink or float. Try it in water and see if you are correct. Can you figure out why? Put the item in the correct container. Do more items sink or float? This can be a fun bath activity.
- ❑ Jim Trelease, an author of books about reading to children, claims that he passed on his love of reading to his children by saying, “Hey! Listen to this!” every time he found something interesting to share from what he was reading. It was like doing a commercial for the love of reading. Have your child do a commercial to encourage someone else to read a particular favorite children’s book. Get excited about reading their books (over and over again).



How Not to Hurt – Controlling Your Anger

Anger is a normal human emotion. We may feel irritated or angry when we become tired, get surprised, or don't have expectations met. But how you handle and express your anger, especially with your kids, is the difference between hurting them and loving them. Don't let your anger hurt or harm your child. Here are some things to remember about controlling your anger.

- First, where did you learn how to express anger? From your own parents or other adults you have known? Sometimes what we may have learned, such as cursing at someone or yelling loudly, can be inappropriate and harmful to our kids. Think about what you have learned about expressing anger and if you need to learn something different.
- Keep a notebook about how you handle anger. Write about when you became angry, where you become angry, what event or emotion triggered your feelings of anger, and how you expressed your anger. Being more familiar with your own patterns of anger can help you identify problems and possible solutions.
- Work to understand why you may become frustrated with your child. Are your expectations for a child's behavior or abilities too high? For example, a toddler needs

help being shown how to pick up clothes, and not just being told to "do it now!" Or do you clash with a child's personality or interests? Ask other mothers and fathers for insight on your interactions with your child.

- Recognize when you are becoming angry and possibly out of control. Do you get very quiet or start raising your voice? Do you feel increasing irritation or lack of patience? Do you feel your muscles tighten or your heart beating faster? These are all possible signals of anger. Pay attention to when you need to get things in control.
- If you feel an anger outburst coming, give yourself a "time out." Get away for a few minutes. Go to your bedroom and lay down. Go outside and walk for ten minutes. As you do this, don't focus on your anger. Instead focus on something to change your mood. Think about the positive things about your child or the fun activities you do together. Take the time you need to calm down.
- If your anger is destructive and you have problems with yelling, shaking, or hitting your child, do the responsible thing. *Get help.* Professional help may be needed to assist you in learning to control your anger. Learn how not to hurt those you love.

Tips for Raising Emotionally Intelligent Kids

There are a variety of tips for raising emotionally intelligent kids. Fathers and father figures should practice the following:

- Be aware of your child's emotions. Listen with an open heart.
- Recognize emotional moments as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching. Children need their fathers most when they are sad, angry or afraid.
- Listen with love and pay attention to your child's genuine feelings. Acknowledge your child's emotions and respond in gentle, positive ways.
- Help your child recognize and label the emotions he or she is feeling.
- Set limits with your children in how they handle emotions (anger, etc.), and help them to problem solve effectively.
- Set an example for your children by expressing emotions, but handle them in ways that are positive and mature.

Story Time

Books for Dads and Kids

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
by Judith Viorst

I Was So Mad
by Mercer Mayer

There's A Nightmare in My Closet
by Mercer Mayer

Feelings by Aliki
(Greenwillow Press, 1984)

The Gingerbread Boy
by Paul Galdone
(Houghton-Mifflin, 1983)

Going to the Dentist
by Fred Rogers (Putnam, 1989)

Don't Touch My Room
by Patricia Lakin

Fathering Resources

Further Information on Kids and Emotions

200 Ways to Raise a Boy's Emotional Intelligence by Will Glennon, 2000. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.

Daddies and Daughters by Carmen Renee Berry & Lynn Barrington, 1999. New York, NY: Fireside Publishing.

Fathering by Will Glennon, 1995. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press.

Fathering Right From the Start; Straight Talk About Pregnancy, Birth and Beyond by Jack Heinowitz, 2001. New World Library.

How to Raise A Child With A High EQ: A Parents' Guide to Emotional Intelligence by Lawrence Shapiro, 1997. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, Inc.

The Wonder of Boys by Michael Gurian, 1996. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

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