

Emotional coaching for couples

Emotions come and go. They are like the weather! We can't dismiss them easily. They are there to be felt and to be known at various level of intensity. They give us valuable information about ourselves and our surrounding. We can develop emotional coaching for ourselves and others which becomes sound emotional hygiene.



We can have extreme emotional outbursts to quite minor triggers as we learn the difficult task of managing our own emotions. We will make mistakes, we will over-react, and this is part of the human condition: “Not our fault”, but we are still responsible for our emotional reactions. We can choose to react less and respond more in a way that serves others and ourselves better to create a stronger relationship and more harmony in our dealings with others. We learn to better regulate our own emotions by practising emotional coaching so we can better problem solve. Key is to first acknowledge, empathise, then validate, normalise, name the emotion and then problem solve. This emotional coaching is something we can practice between ourselves so we can better communicate and relate to each other. In this way we can better help our children to manage their own emotions to promote emotional intelligence and resilience.

1. Acknowledge, recognize the emotion. We can try to notice the emotion as they arise before they become too intense, so we can think more clearly before our amygdala is over-engaged. Emotions give us a tunnel vision and narrow our focus of thinking. Notice, acknowledge your emotional reactions to certain triggers. Finding the words to describe how you are feeling, saying something like, using a calm, quiet tone of inner voice: “What am I feeling now?”, “Am I feeling frustrated, disappointed or angry?”.

You can also explore how this feeling feels in your body and in your mind. Asking yourself: “How is this emotion expressed in my body?”, “Where are the areas of tension or discomfort in the body?”, “What am I saying to myself about this situation?”.

2. Recognising the struggle, validate: Acknowledging that emotions are difficult and unpleasant, indicating a time of struggle. This is a moment of mindfulness. Saying something like: “This is difficult”, “ouch this hurt” or “this is stressful”.

3. Validate, normalise: Sensitively, recognising our common humanity, that is, that we are not alone or different. Other people in a similar situation would feel those emotions or react in this way. Saying this not in a dismissive way but more as an acknowledgement that we are together in feeling those difficult emotions. Saying when appropriate: “in a similar situation, other people would feel like that”, “it is a normal way to react”. “I am not alone”.

4. Naming the emotion with acceptance: Being aware of the emotion and then naming it gently as a way of pointing out that you are more than this emotion. This emotion does not define you and is only one part of you, not the whole of you. In this way, we become the observer of our emotion. For instance, saying softly and gently: “This is anger”, “This is how anger feels”

5. Compassion and self-compassion: having a sense of what it is like for the other person involved in this situation, their struggles, their fears, their grief. Taking time to explore their perspective even if we

don't agree with it. Then finding our desire to help and support. We can also have compassion for ourselves being in this situation and practising the self-compassion break (see another handout)

6. Problem-solving. It is not the feeling that is the problem but sometimes it is often our reaction that causes the problems. Remembering that we are more than our feelings, we can notice our feelings and then decide to respond in ways that are helpful and constructive, according to our good intentions.

We can focus on managing the feelings by using practices such as: “breathing out”, “belly breathing”, “being present using the 5 senses to be in the here and now”, “hug and other soothing touch” “coming into the body, feeling the feet touch the ground”, going for a walk, having a glass of water and so on.

We can ask ourselves: “what does this feeling need now?” or “what are the ways to deal with this”, “what would I do next time?” and so on. Asking ourselves how we can resolve this situation in a positive, constructive way.

This advice is of a general nature only and does not take into account particular conditions. For further assistance contact a psychologist.

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