

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.”

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.



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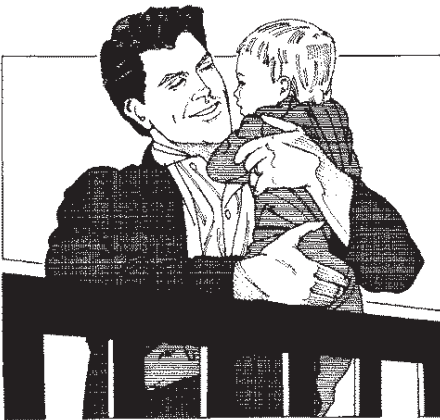
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Fathers and Children's Feelings

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.



Father Times is a set of nine newsletters developed with support from the NDSU Extension Service and the North Dakota Head Start State Collaboration Office.

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- 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 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.

Time Together

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.
- ❑ 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.



- ❑ Teach your child about sink and float. Use two unbreakable 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).

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

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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.

Story Time

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)

Fathering Resources

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.

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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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.

