

Parenting: Strengths and Love with an Emotional Focus

Session Three – Regulating Conflict

Prayer

Good and Gracious Heavenly Father, we come before you as broken men and women in need of healing and forgiveness. We ask that you bless our lives and our families. Give us the courage to hold nothing back in our relationship with you. Help us to see every moment, every mistake, and even every sin, as an opportunity to run to you. So too, let our homes be homes where conflict is seen as opportunities for connection, and as opportunities to instill deeper intimacy in our relationships. Help us to love as you love, with a love and a mercy that is unfathomable. Amen.

The 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse¹

The “4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse” are the four greatest predictors of divorce in marriages. In relationships on the whole, these are the most damaging interactions we can have with our loved ones.

1. **Criticism** = Pointing out something negative, making statements about something being globally wrong, naming personality flaws, making someone feel there is something wrong with them.
2. **Defensiveness** = Reacting as though feeling personally attacked.
3. **Contempt** = Putting oneself on a pedestal, making a statement from a place of power, control, or superiority.
4. **Stonewalling** = Being in a state of emotional flooding – their feelings (i.e. anger, frustration, sensitivities, etc.) are overwhelming emotionally and physically. Stonewalling is a state of shutting down, becoming silent, disengaged mentally and/or physically from an interaction. Usually this occurs as when one feels attacked or over stimulated.

What is an emotion coach?²

Emotion coaches empathize with children’s feelings, they see emotions as opportunities for connection, and they help label emotions.

Helpful tip = Help children identify 5 Feelings = mad, sad, glad, lonely, afraid.

¹ John M. Gottman, *The Marriage Clinic: A Scientifically Based Marital Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999). Also see Gottman, *Emotion Coaching*, 39.

² Gottman, *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting*, 26.

In addition, emotion coaches...

- are aware of child's emotions and see emotions as opportunities
- help children verbalize what they are feeling and experiencing
- respond to children with empathy and understanding
- set limits and facilitate problem solving

Practical Considerations

Be aware of your child's emotions and how they express their emotions.

1. **Face** = It is scientifically proven that regardless if one is blind or not, and regardless of culture, people produce the same facial expressions. There are seven basic facial expressions for the seven basic emotions: joy, surprise, contempt, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear.³
2. **Voice**⁴
3. **Gestures and movements** = including, but not limited to, clinched jaws or fists, bouncing and fidgeting, tears, open versus closed posture (i.e. folded arms, etc.).

Recognize emotions as opportunities for connection!

Steps of Problem Solving

1. **Identify the problem** = Try not to address the symptoms or the outlying issues, but get to the heart of the issue (which is usually an emotional reaction). Remember that in every relationship there are solvable and perpetual problems. Solve what you can. You can't change temperament or personality. Reactions and understanding can be changed!
2. **Explore possible solutions**
3. **Evaluate and select a solution**
4. **Implement, and follow-up on solution (change if necessary)**

Practical Tips based on John Gottman's work⁵

1. **Communicate your feelings about the child's behavior**
2. **Let them know what is acceptable and unacceptable** = there is no such thing as over communication. Do not expect your child to "just know." We don't want the consequence to depend on our mood!

³ David Matsumoto and Hyi Sung Hwang, "Reading Facial Expressions of Emotion," *Psychological Science Agenda*, 25, no. 5 (2011), <http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2011/05/index.aspx> (accessed Apr. 3, 2017).

⁴ Gottman, *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting*, 64.

⁵ Gottman, *Emotion Coaching: The Heart of Parenting*, 86.

3. **Don't use criticism or contempt as part of punishment** = remember the "4 Horseman."
 - HALT: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired
4. **Small punishments that save face are more effective** = none of us like to look stupid, small punishments that teach your children right from wrong, without making them feel stupid are generally most effective.
5. **Disapproval is the most powerful punishment the child can experience**
6. **Problem solving is important if there is no misbehavior just strong emotions**
7. **Find a solution that meets both parent's and child's goals**
8. **Kids need a positive way to shine for you. Create a culture of positivity and growth within your family**

Wrap-up and Closing

Homework = Develop "5 do's and 5 don'ts for your family"