



# An introduction to children's emotions for parents

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## Why do children have such big emotions?

Children's brains are still developing. The prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain responsible for impulse control, emotional regulation, problem-solving, and perspective-taking – is not fully developed in childhood (not until a person's mid to late 20's in fact!).

Because of this:

- Children feel emotions more intensely
- They have less ability to pause, reason, or self-soothe
- Emotional outbursts are often developmentally normal, not a sign of "bad behaviour" or poor parenting

Big emotions are a sign that a child needs support.



## Separating emotions and behaviour

Every emotion is OK to feel but not every behaviour is OK or safe to express.

This separation is key in understanding and supporting our children.

- Anger, sadness, frustration, jealousy, excitement - **all are acceptable**
- Hitting, hurting, breaking things, or unsafe actions - **need limits and support**

This sounds like:

- "It's okay to feel angry. It's not okay to hit."
- "I can see you're upset. Let's find a safe way to show it."

Children learn emotional regulation through **boundaries, co-regulation, parent modelling and empathy.**



## Interoception: what is it and why it's important

Interoception is the ability to **notice and understand internal body signals** – such as hunger, tiredness, thirst AND emotional cues.

Supporting interoception helps children:

- Recognise emotions earlier
- Connect feelings to body sensations
- To, overtime, build a space for **responding rather than reacting** to their big emotions

We can help by modelling interoception and enquiring:

- "Where do you feel that in your body?"
- "I can notice my nerves make my legs feel wobbly like jelly."
- "Is your body feeling fast or slow right now?"



## Building emotional literacy

Emotional literacy is the ability to identify, name, and communicate feelings eg. "I feel nervous."

Children can develop this when adults:

- Name children's emotions as they arise (or after the fact for our more sensitive children who can sometimes escalate when their emotions are named in the moment)
- Model emotional language themselves
- Normalise feelings without rushing to fix them

This builds long-term skills in:

- Emotional regulation
- Communication
- Resilience



## Crying is healing

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## Please remember, when navigating your child's emotions and behaviour that...

- This is hard, **brave work**, and it's okay if it doesn't feel natural or easy.
- Your responses are shaped by how emotions were treated in your own childhood - **awareness, not perfection**, is the goal here.
- Supporting your child's emotions can stir up your own feelings, and that's a normal part of the process.
- Struggling at times does not mean you are failing, rather it means you are **learning and growing** alongside your child.
- It may be helpful to remember: **"This is important but hard work. My child and I are both doing our best and that is enough."**



Is navigating your children's emotions and behaviour feeling totally overwhelming?

You're not alone, many parents find it challenging.

The good news? Support is available!

Reach out to Jess, our Parent Support Worker, for guidance, education and individualised, compassionate support.

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