

# Helping children talk about their feelings

A *vital life skill* is the ability to speak about emotional issues rather than bottle feelings up or lash out at others.

If children and young people are to talk openly about their feelings then they need the space and the vocabulary to do so. It helps to acknowledge kids when they feel sad, angry or scared and treat such feelings as healthy and normal.

Children sometimes need assistance to find the words to describe their feelings. The simple act of giving emotions a name can help children contain and recover from troubled feelings. Sometimes it helps to write down or even draw how they are feeling.

Children need to understand that all sorts of feelings are acceptable and can be spoken about but not all behaviours are permissible. It is okay to be angry but it is not okay to hit a sibling or

act destructively. Children need to learn that their feelings are not the problem, but some actions are.

Children don't always have to talk about their feelings. Boys, in particular, will often retreat to their bedrooms (it is a throw-back to the caveman days) when they feel upset, angry or sad. But they will often open up when they are ready.

It helps when parents model healthy ways of dealing with feelings and create psychologically safe environments so children and young people are more likely to talk freely and seek help about those feelings that maybe troubling them.



## Quick Parenting Quiz

- Which of the following strategies (3) would contribute to sibling rivalry?
  - Compare one child to another
  - Ask them to do jobs in pairs
  - Praise one child and criticise another
  - Buy all your children clothes when one child needs them
- Developmentally, children are ready to help at home:
  - Never
  - When they are eighteen years of age
  - From around two or three years of age
  - Early in primary school

Answers: 1 a, c, d) and 2c)

## Vitamins for parents

Empathetic listening can help you tune into how kids are feeling. Empathetic listeners:

- Are aware of the body language of others.
- Are guided by their intuition.
- Listen without giving advice.

## Bright idea



## Reveal your own story

When your child is going through a difficult time or stage talk about similar situations that happened in your life when you were young. It can be reassuring for a child or teenager to know that someone else has gone through a similar situation and felt the same way and survived!

## Wise & Witty Words

"Always keep in mind that parenting is like gardening. You plant and you wait. Some seeds take a little longer than others to grow." **Dennis Waitley**

"Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners no matter what fork you use."

**Emily Post**