

Secrets of Parenting Podcasts

Karen DeBord, Ph.D.
Professor & Extension Specialist, Child Development
North Carolina Cooperative Extension

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Hello, This is Karen DeBord and today we will be talking about Secrets of Parenting...those little tidbits that will help you as a parent to connect with your child and information that will help you build a relationship with your child.

It is possible for parents to be loving and attentive but not know how to deal with their children's emotions such as sadness or anger. John Gottman, in his book "Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child," There are 4 ways that parents deal with their children's emotions.

What is emotional intelligence? It is

The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1998, p. 318).

Now let's look at the types of parents Gottman discusses.

I will use the same scenario for each one...your child has come home from school saying "Johnny is not my friend anymore" (in an upset, weepy voice) The first type of parents may respond saying: "It will be ok- come on in and let's have a snack!" The parent dismissed the feelings of the child. **Dismissive** parents trivialize feelings – tell children it will be ok, feel uncomfortable or uncertain what to do or downplays their child's emotions. The dismissive parent may treat the child's feelings as unimportant, trivial, may disengage or ignore the child or ridicule the child making light of the emotions. The display of emotions may make the parents feel overwhelmed, anxious or annoyed.

Using the same scenario... Johnny is not my friend anymore" (in an upset, weepy voice, the second type of parents says strongly, "Why? What'd you do? Johnny is a nice boy!" The **Disapproving** parent criticizes or punishes the child for expressions and believes emotions make people weak or that negative emotions must be stopped. Children with both of these types of responses learn that their feelings are wrong or inappropriate. As well, the disapproving parent may Reprimand, discipline, or punish the child for emotional expressions whether the child is misbehaving or not.

Again using this scenario, Johnny is not my friend anymore" (in an upset, weepy voice), the parent of this child sadly looks at the child seemingly at a loss and says "I just hate it when that happens..." and leaves the child hanging with no solutions. The **Laissez-faire** parent accepts all emotions and offers comfort but does not teach problem-solving techniques. This parent only comforts without teaching how to manage emotions. Children accustomed to this sort of response may have trouble concentrating and getting along with others since they have not learned how to respond to their feelings.

Of course, there is a preferred parent. Gottman calls this parent the Emotion coach. **The Emotion Coach** is a parent who has learned to accept their children's feelings but does not belittle their child nor deny their feelings. This sort of parent welcomes opportunities when their child is expressing emotions. It is a time to connect and build a relationship. Instead of focusing on controlling children's behavior—the focus is on connecting with the child.

So with this scenario- the parent may listen and start by saying, " Hmmm, it sounds like you are upset. Let's talk about it and see what we can figure out." There are actually steps to follow with this type of interaction.

The steps the parent takes who is an emotion coach are these:

1. Become aware of the child's emotions
2. See the emotion as a time for teaching and becoming close
3. Listen and take the child's feelings seriously
4. Help the child find the words to label the emotion he/she is having and set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem at hand.
5. Weigh the possible solutions and help the child choose amongst the pros and cons.

This is actually how we teach children to problem solve. Research is showing that children of these parents are better focused and relate better to others. They are better at coping, calming, and soothing themselves and can bounce back better from stress. The important thing is to connect with the child and here is a strategy that works! Seek these times out!

This is Karen DeBord with North Carolina Cooperative Extension.