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Ask Dr. Harold**Emotional Management***By Dr. Harold Hoyle, Ph.D.*

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emotional management. Talk about your frustrations and excitements. There are several techniques like controlled breathing, visualizations, or other mental tasks that can help to manage the emotional world that descends on kids without warning. Help your child locate where they hold their emotions in their body. If they hold their anger in their jaw, this can be an important step in a child recognizing when they are having emotions so they can use their tools. Below are some resources for this.

What are some resources?

The classic books in the field of emotional management are by Arnold Goldstein and Ellen McGinnis. The Skillstreaming program gives you a perspective on how we learn the unstated rules that can help us manage our emotions and are used by educators and parents alike. There are Skillstreaming books written for early childhood age to adolescents. Another book I have a lot of parents use is called No More Meltdowns: Positive Strategies for Preventing Out-Of-Control Behavior by Jed Baker. It focuses specifically on meltdowns but also teaches the basics of emotional management.

Dear Dr. Harold,

I was recently at a middle school graduation and was talking to a parent who asked me about how to help her child when he gets angry. The world of emotional management can be overwhelming and complicated for our kids. Here are some clues as to how to help your child or adolescent manage their emotions.

What are emotions and where do they come from?

Think back to when you were a child and first experienced emotions. When we are children, we experience emotions as innate, varied, and unnamed. I am going to use anger in my example, as anger is one emotion that causes a lot of problems for kids. If we follow the average 4 year old or even a 14 year old around, we will see that they just find themselves being angry. If you ask them why or what happened they often can't tell you. If you ask them what they are feeling they often cannot tell you. For kids (and many adults) emotions come and go, they are unpredictable and who knows what each one is called. And that is where you can help.

So what can a parent do about it?

You can help your child sort out what they are feeling and put words to it. You can help them recognize it. One of the biggest mistakes I see parents make is mislabeling children's emotions for them. When we are tired we have fewer defenses against emotional outbursts. When we are children or adolescents we have fewer defenses against emotional outbursts. Put them together and you have the most common mislabeling used by parents: "You are tired." Yes, they are tired, however, just tired is almost never the problem. A kid who is just tired goes to sleep. An angry and tired kid acts out. An anxious and tired kid acts out. Helping your child correctly label their emotions is the first step in helping them manage that emotion.

You can help your child notice the triggers for their anger. It could be an external trigger like being pestered by a sibling. It could be an internal trigger like feeling like they made a mistake. Once a child has a better idea about what triggers an emotion, they can learn to manage their environment more effectively. Many adults do everything they can to avoid crowds or traffic because they know it will trigger emotions that are not helpful. Kids learn to make their way through the world in the same way.

You can help your child by teaching and modeling

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