

## Emotion Coaching at Dishworth Airfield Community Primary School:

### What is emotion coaching?

- The steps
- Emotional self-awareness- the chimp paradox
- How emotion coaching is used in school

### What is emotion coaching?

Emotion coaching is all about:

- Teaching the child ‘in the moment’ about the world of emotion
- Supporting the development of strategies to deal with emotional ups and downs
- Accepting all emotions as normal and valid
- Using moments of both negative and positive behaviour as opportunities for teaching and reflecting
- Building trusting and respectful relationships



Many children are unaware of their emotions, they just react with no thought. Emotion coaching aims to support children to become reflective; to notice when they are beginning to feel an emotion and to access the best response for them in that moment. In order to do this we need to train the children (coach them) to recognise how different emotions present physically in the body and through thought, action and behaviour.

Emotion coaching isn't something that is 'saved' for dealing with moments of extreme negative behaviour or crisis. Infact, it is likely to be at its *least* effective at these points. Emotion coaching should be an ongoing process in order to support children to become independently mindful of their emotions and reactions. Emotion coaching can be effective when used before a child goes into crisis as a method of defusing the situation, it can also be effective as a reflective tool to use after the child has calmed down. Emotion coaching won't work while children are in crisis mode, however, using it regularly should reduce the frequency of meltdowns and increase the child's capability to manage any crisis moments independently.

### The steps

There are 3 key steps to successful use of emotion coaching. Remember, this dialogue can be used at any point whenever you notice an emotion and reaction in a child whether this is anger or delight! We are training children to recognise, accept and learn to manage all of their emotions.

#### **Step 1- Name it to Tame it**



Thinking out loud, provide a narrative of what emotion you notice in the child. Explain how you have come to this conclusion, e.g. "I think you might be feeling excited about playing outside

with the parachute, I can tell because you have a great big smile and you're working really fast to get your coat on. Am I right?!" or "oh dear, I think you might be feeling really frustrated with this jigsaw. None of the pieces are fitting into the right place. I've noticed that you're making fists with your hands and have a frown on your face".

Recognising and naming the child's emotion for them validates their feelings. There is no judgement, all feelings are universal, the thing that we want children to be able to control is how they manage and react to their feelings. Naming the emotion for them gives them a bit of breathing space to reflect and either accept the label or explain to you what they're really feeling. Try to use a broad emotional vocabulary- stay away from binary 'happy' or 'sad', encourage children to become specific in their use of their emotional vocabulary.

Respond with empathy to help them to normalise and validate their experiences. E.g. "I sometimes get really excited about using new equipment too, I remember when we got our new trim trail and I was so excited!" or "sometimes I find new things tricky too and that can make me feel very frustrated. I remember learning to drive and I found it so hard I thought I might give up!". This reminds children that all of their feelings are universal- you feel them too. The thing you are in charge of is your response to the feelings.

Help the children to locate their feelings physically in their bodies. Talking about this regularly in class can support children to access this skill more easily when being actively emotion coached. For example when reading a new book you might say "I love this book, it makes me feel so calm and joyful. When I feel calm and joyful I notice that I feel sort of warm and fuzzy inside. There's no tension in my body and I want to smile all the time! I wonder how it feels in your body when you feel calm and joyful?". In the moment you might model how the particular emotion feels to you and ask children to compare, for example "when I feel frustrated I notice that my muscles get tight, sometimes I can feel a knot in my tummy or head. I wonder if that's how it feels for you right now?".

In summary:

- Name to tame "I think you might be feeling x"
- Empathise "I feel x too when I..."
- Locate "when I feel x I feel it in my tummy/head/heart/muscles etc."



## Step 2- Set the limit

We've accepted that all feelings are valid and acceptable. However, the child's response to the feeling might not be. When they have identified their emotion it is up to them to react appropriately. We encourage children to use "I would like" and "I need" statements to help them with this. For this to work you need to be clear in your own mind about what the child's true aim is, why are they behaving in this way? For example in this situation the child's goal is to complete the jigsaw. He is becoming frustrated because he feels that he can't. In order to move forwards he *needs* help. To help him come to this conclusion a conversation might go like this:

Adult: oh dear, I think you might be feeling really frustrated with this jigsaw. None of the pieces are fitting in the right place. I've noticed that you're making fists with your hands and have a frown on your face.

Child: nods

Adult: sometimes I find new things tricky too and that can make me feel very frustrated. I remember learning to drive and I found it so hard I thought I might give up!... Do you think that would have been a good choice to make?

Child: no

Adult: why not?

Child: because then you would never know how to do it!

Adult: that's right. If I just got cross and gave up I would never have learnt how to do it properly and that would be sad because it's something I find really easy now... I wonder what you think you could do now that you're feeling frustrated and finding it tricky to do your jigsaw?

Child: keep going

Adult: You could keep going... do you think you'll find it any easier if you keep going or do you think there's something else that you need that you could ask for?

Child: I need help.

Adult: Great! Who could you ask for help? Maybe someone who is already super at doing jigsaws could show you how they do it?

In this situation, the limit is to not give up. It's fine to feel frustrated, it's fine to ask a friend for help, it's not fine to give up completely. In other situations the limit might be hitting out or throwing in anger or even becoming hysterical with joy. When the child notices and accepts how they are feeling, they are able to respond in a way that helps them to move forward constructively and get what they really want or need.

In summary:

- Identify in your own head what the child ultimately wants from the situation
- Accept and validate the emotion, explain why the action/behaviour is unacceptable (set the limit)
- Support the child to use 'I would like' or 'I need' statements to achieve their goal.

### Step 3- problem solving



You have supported the child to recognise their emotion and accept the limit of their behaviour. Now they need some scaffolding to problem solve and find a solution which enables them to achieve their aim. The problem solving element is carefully scaffolded so that you can actively

guide children towards to most beneficial outcome. With practise this will become second nature to them. The aim is for you to not be needed at all! The conversation might continue as follows:

Child: I need help.

Adult: Great! Who could you ask for help? Maybe someone who is already super at doing jigsaws could show you how they do it?

Child: Yeah... I don't know who's good at that.

Adult: Well, maybe we could stop the class and ask if someone would like to come and help you?

Child: Or you can just tell Jacob to do it for me.

Adult: I could, but Jacob is very busy doing some art work. And if I tell him to do it for you, would that help you to learn and be less frustrated next time...?

Child: No. We could ask everyone to help.

Adult: Great idea, let's do that now!

In this situation the teacher is careful not to simply provide an answer for the child. She steers clear of binary 'yes' or 'no' responses to the child's idea, even when there is clearly a correct and incorrect outcome. Instead she steers him towards the most beneficial outcome resulting in the child feeling a sense of ownership and pride over having solved the problem himself.

In summary:

- Support the child to recognise what he wants/needs
- Support them to recognise their options
- Scaffold them to be able to choose the best outcome independently

### **Emotional self-awareness- The 'Chimp' Paradox**



At Dishforth Airfield Primary School you might hear us talking about our 'chimps'. This is how we explain the model of the brain to young children. The amygdala (also known as the lizard brain) is the first part of our brain to develop. It is responsible for our 'flight, fight or freeze' response. All animals have an amygdala, it exists to keep us safe and help us to recognise danger. We teach children that their 'chimp' (amygdala) is useful and necessary but that he needs to be controlled by the 'upstairs brain'. The 'upstairs brain' is the pre-frontal cortex. This is human part of our brain, responsible for reasoning, emotional intelligence and reflection. Engaging your 'upstairs brain' before making an emotional decision is what prevents adults from having meltdowns at the same level and frequency as a toddler.

We use the 'hand model of the brain' to show children what we mean by the chimp and the upstairs brain. We make an upright fist and show the children that the wrist is representative of the brain stem, the tucked in thumb is the 'chimp' and the fingers closed over the top are the upstairs brain. While the brain is responding like this the upstairs brain is protecting the chimp-

stopping him from popping out and making rash decisions (often leading to crisis or meltdown). Sometimes the chimp can pop out and be helpful (for example in an emergency), sometimes the chimp can pop out and take over situations that would have been better handled by the upstairs brain. In this situation we have to actively engage our thinking brains (upstairs brains) to bring our chimp under control and train him in how to respond. The important message when thinking about the brain is that children know that they are in charge of their brain and their reactions. They may not get it right all the time but the brain is a muscle that needs to be trained and worked like any other.

Children can be supported to actively reflect on their own chimp and what makes him/her react. In Early Years we start with a simple drawing of a chimp, the children colour him in and name him. They think about things that make him likely to react (e.g. my brother taking my toys) and things that make him feel safe and secure (cuddles and stories). With older children or in assemblies we often take part in role plays whereby a situation is presented to the children and they have to react as either their chimp or their upstairs brain. Regularly commenting and reflecting on children's use of their upstairs brain helps them to become more mindful of their actions and train their chimp to stay where it belongs!

If this is something that interests you I would recommend reading the excellent book, 'The Chimp Paradox' by Dr Steve Peters or 'The Whole Brain Child' by Dan Siegal (a copy of this belongs to school). Additionally there is a great youtube video called 'Hand model of the brain for kids- by Jeanette Yoffee' which can be shared with children as a starting point for discussions around this topic.

### Upstairs Brain

Allows us to think before we act  
Decision-making  
Control over emotions & body  
Focus/concentration  
Empathy  
Self awareness



### Downstairs Brain

Allows us to act before we think  
Fight/Flight response  
Emotional reactions  
Bodily functions

Source: Siegel & Bryson "The Whole Brain Child"

## **How emotion coaching is used in school**

Emotion coaching is used to support children to develop their self-regulation, emotional intelligence and autonomy. As mentioned previously, emotion coaching is not at its most beneficial while children are in crisis. It's a helpful tool to support children to reflect on their behaviour choices either before going into crisis or after coming down from a meltdown. It's important to remember that emotion coaching steps can also be applied to positive behaviour as

a method of increasing children's emotional literacy and ability to reflect and notice their own feelings.

We support children to develop their emotional literacy by talking regularly about emotions—steering clear of binary 'happy/sad' 'good/bad' feelings. We encourage children to recognise all emotions as valid and normal and empower them to exercise control over their actions as a result of their feelings. We are mindful of using a wide range of emotional vocabulary regularly for example by narrating how we see children behaving when they are working together, or by wondering out loud when sharing a class book. We have weekly assemblies which are based on emotion coaching principles and enable children to prepare and reflect on their feelings, often in line with upcoming festivities or important events in the community.

Additionally we ran a series of parent workshops in 2018-19 supported by the Educational Psychology team to disseminate information about emotion coaching to parents. This was supported by the offer of emotion coaching 'drop in' sessions for parents in 2019-20.

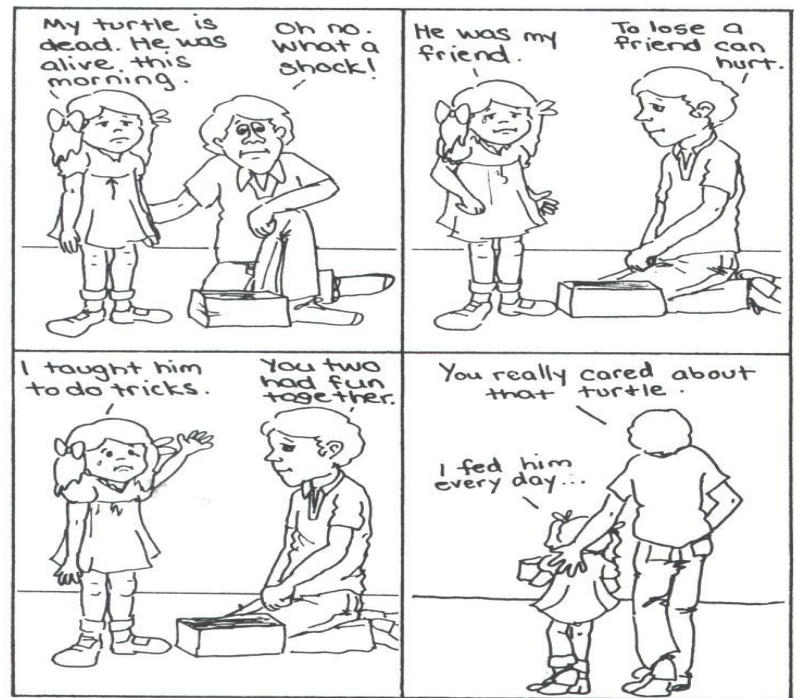
Additional information and resources can be found on the Emotion Coaching UK website <https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/>.

INSTEAD OF DENYING THE FEELING,



It's strange. When we urge a child to push a bad feeling away—however kindly—the child only seems to get more upset.

III. GIVE THE FEELING A NAME.



Parents don't usually give this kind of response, because they fear that by giving a name to the feeling, they'll make it worse. Just the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what he is experiencing is deeply comforted. Someone has acknowledged his inner experience.