
Teach Your Child How to Express Feelings

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So often as parents we get caught in the trap of telling our children *how not to express their feelings*. “Calm down,” “This behavior isn’t okay” and “Stop it or else...” are all statements with which most parents are familiar. The problem with these types of statements is that they do not teach our child how to solve the problem of expressing strong emotions. These statements only educate them on what not to do.

In my private practice, I have parents use a ‘script’ in order to teach their child how to express intense feelings. The script I teach parents is, “I feel _____ because _____.” With this script, the child is instructed to insert an *emotion* in the first blank space and a *reason* in the second. An example of this script in action is a child who might respond to a parent by saying, “I feel mad because you won’t let me play videogames.”

Even though using the script may not result in your child getting what it is that he wants, following up with empathy and a statement recognizing your child’s effort may be reward enough for him to continue using the script in the future. An example of an appropriate parent response would be, “I understand that you’re upset about not being able to play videogames right now but I am really proud of you for being able to use your words.”

Talking to your child and recognizing his emotional growth or telling your spouse about his use of the script while he is within earshot is another way that you can praise your child for his efforts and insure that he will continue to express feelings appropriately in the future.
