

Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child

By John Gottman

A book summary by Lily Talley

After reading this book, I've been thinking that my life would have been much easier if I had more empathetic parents. It would have been great if someone taught me how to label my emotions and how to deal with them. Now that I am in the field of childcare, I read a good amount of parenting and child development books to be a better provider of care to children. I picked up this book by John Gottman titled: *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* and I learned a lot from it. I was able to identify the mistakes my parents made in raising me. I also got a lot of ideas on how to teach and discipline the children at my center and how to parent my future kids. I will now share with you my notes from the book and I hope you will find Gottman's philosophy helpful. This is not a one solution fits all, but I believe that he has some good points that we can all include with our parenting and teaching style.

Gottman states that children will comply, obey, and be responsible if they experience a sense of love and connectedness within their families. He believes that good parenting involves a lot of emotions. We learn about our emotions through our families. He conducted a research on 119 families and concluded that there are two types of parents: those who give their children guidance about the world and those who do not. He created the new concept of an Emotion Coach Parent. These parents teach their children strategies to deal with life's up and downs. They don't object to negative emotion nor do they ignore them. They use negative emotion as a fact of life and use emotional moments as opportunities for teaching their kids important life lessons.

He advises parents to empathize and provide children guidance on how to deal with uncomfortable feelings. For example: if a child is feeling sad because mom will leave him to daycare to go to a meeting, the mom should acknowledge the child's sadness and not scold him for being sad. She should let the child know she respects his feelings and that his wishes are valid. She should also let her child know that she can't be late for work and break her promise to her co-workers just because he is sad. Through this, the mom taught her son to identify, experience, and accept his emotions, and that it is possible to move beyond sad feelings.

Gottman believes that emotion coaching can help a child get through painful life events like divorce. He also has a strong belief that when Dads adopt an emotion coach style of parenting, it has an extremely positive impact on their children's emotional development. Their research showed that a father's influence to a child is much more extreme than the mother.

I definitely agree with Gottman when he said that sadly, we inherited a tradition of discounting children's feelings simply because children are smaller, less rational, less experienced and less powerful than adults around them. I experienced this myself with my parents. I could not count the times when they told me to 'suck it up' when I'm feeling sad. Unfortunately, many children experienced the same thing.

Gottman listed Diana Baumrind's styles of parenting and how an emotion coach parent is different:

1. Authoritarian-these are parents who impose limits and strict obedience without any explanation
2. Permissive-parents that are warm and communicative but set no limits
3. Authoritative-parents that set limits but are more flexible

Gottman suggest that to become an emotion coach parent, we could follow Haim Ginott's advice that parents should honestly express their anger provided that it is directed at a specific problem and does not attack the child's personality or anger. Emotion coach parents serves as their children's guide through the world of emotion.

- They go beyond acceptance to set limits on inappropriate behavior.
- They teach their kids how to regulate their feelings and to find appropriate outlets and solve problems.

- They encourage emotional honesty in their children.
- They teach them to express their anger in ways that are not destructive.
- They are not afraid to show their emotions around their children.
- They give their children clear and consistent messages about what behavior is appropriate and what behavior is not.
- They believe that when children know the rules and understand the consequences for breaking them, they are less likely to misbehave.

Gottman believes that this type of parenting approach makes the bond between the parent and child strong and children are more responsive to their parent's requests. An emotion coach parent recognizes when they are feeling an emotion. They can identify their feelings and sensitive to the presence of emotion in other people. They let their feelings show in a non-abusive way.

Gottman outlined the 5 key steps to emotion coaching:

*Empathy: the foundation of emotion coaching,
it allows children to see their parents as allies.*

1. Being aware of child's emotions
2. Recognizing the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching.
3. Listening empathetically and validating the child's feelings
4. Helping the child verbally label emotions
5. Setting limits while helping the child problem solve

Gottman also listed some additional strategies:

1. Avoid excessive criticism, humiliating comments, or mocking your child
2. Create a mental map of your child's daily life
3. Think about your child's experiences in terms of similar adult situations
4. Don't try to impose your solutions on your child's problems
5. Empower your child by giving choices, respecting wishes
6. Share in your child's dreams and fantasies
7. Be honest with your child
8. Read children's literature together
9. Be patient with the process
10. Understand your base of power as a parent
11. believe in the positive nature of human development

The book also has helpful chapters on divorce, emotion coaching for dads, and emotion coaching as your child grows. I enjoyed reading this book and I suggest that if you like Gottman's ideas from this summary, you should get a copy.