

# Be the Best You Can Be

*When it comes to parenting, no one is perfect, but arming children with Emotional Intelligence will serve them for years to come.*

by Erin Wiley  
Community contributor

All parents want to be the best mom or dad they can be, and we all worry about whether or not we are doing everything we can to maximize the chance of our children growing up to be healthy, happy and highly functional.

Truth is, of course, no one is a perfect parent. In fact, I tell my own patients to keep in mind that they definitely will “screw up” their kids in some way — just like our own parents did, and every generation before them.

But, in the spirit of being the-best-parent-we-can-be-despite-our-human-failings, I present to you my No. 1 suggestion to parents who want to improve their parenting ability.

Most professionals in the field of mental health recognize Emotional Intelligence, or “EI” as a trait that is just as important as, if not more important than, IQ. Emotional Intelligence is defined as “the ability to identify, assess and control one’s emotions, and to assess, and then respond to the emotions of others in a healthy way.”

Helping your child identify and process their emotions is the first thing I teach to parents who come to therapy to improve their family’s home life. Recognizing and processing our feelings is the foundation of good mental health, which is the cornerstone to a child’s future happiness and success.

When kids are sad or angry, some parents mistakenly (with the best of intentions) urge the child to stop expressing the emotion, or suppress what they are feeling. When adults do that, we teach kids that their emotions



Photo courtesy of Erin Wiley

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are unimportant, foolish or shameful. It undercuts a child’s belief in themselves when they are, for example, crying about a disappointment and a grown-up says, “You are not that upset! You are being dramatic. Stop!”

Instead of having an emotional reaction to your child expressing a negative emotion, first try helping the child recognize what emotion they are feeling. For smaller kids: “Boy! You look angry right now! I can tell by how

you are stomping your feet, and by the expression on your face. Are you mad, frustrated or sad?”

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For older kids, “I’d like to help you; tell me what you are feeling right now. Overwhelmed? Anxious? Sad?”

Helping a child or teen process emotions in this way shows them that you are on their side, because you are clearly invested in helping them in a time they are struggling emotionally.

You can also model this for your kids by speaking about your own emotions out loud and processing them. It might sound like this: “Wow, Mommy is really frustrated right now that things aren’t going the way I expected them to. That makes me feel so angry.” Ideally, a parent would then also model a good choice for handling the emotion: “I am going to take a break right now and go calm down. I’m going to (choose one) take a walk, try to figure out a new solution, have a good cry, call my friend.”

Helping our children develop their EI will serve them for years to come. By guiding our kids through the process of identifying and working through their emotions rather than encouraging them to ignore or stifle them, we will help foster confidence in our children. And the great news is, you don’t have to be a perfect parent to help instill in your child the foundations of strong Emotional Intelligence.