



What's Your Child's EQ?

Six Ways to Raise Emotional Intelligence

by Teal Swan

Much of our identity is shaped in childhood by key events and the emotions and perspectives we associate with them.

All Emotions Count

Emotional intelligence, sometimes referred to as EQ, is often overlooked as a skill set in today's world. The recent animated film *Inside Out* calls attention to effective ways of addressing a child's journey by embracing and better understanding their emotions; particularly those that don't feel positive.

A recent study by the London School of Economics Centre for Economic Performance found that a child's emotional health is far more important in determining future happiness than factors such as academic success or wealth. Parents can help ensure a healthy emotional upbringing by avoiding making three mistakes.

Disapproval of a child's emotions: This involves being critical of a child's displays of negative emotion and reprimanding or punishing the child for expressing them.

Dismissing a child's emotions: This comes across as regarding a child's

emotions as unimportant, either through ignoring their emotions, or worse, trivializing them.

Offering little relevant guidance: While parents may empathize, they don't set limits on behavior or assist each child in understanding and coping with their emotions.

Recipe for a High EQ

Parents can successfully form deeper connections with their kids by recognizing, respecting and acknowledging their emotional range, rather than telling kids they should feel a certain way. Telling someone how they should or shouldn't feel only teaches them to distrust themselves and that there's something wrong with them. As a communication aid, *Inside Out* may speak best to older children, because younger viewers may get the erroneous impression that emotions can control them, rather than that they can control their own emotional reactions.

The recipe for healthy bonding and emotional development is for all parties to model how they value the importance of each other's feelings and respectfully listen for the feelings behind the words. In opening ourselves to being understood, we open ourselves to understanding

others. Good parenting involves emotion. Good relationships involve emotion. The bottom line is that emotions matter.

We all struggle with negative emotions from time to time, and the way we address and deal with them influences our emotional health. The goal is to develop a trustworthy emotional connection with the other person that is important to us, which enhances intimacy and the effectiveness of the relationship in accomplishing good. Using this six-part process of helpful concrete steps applies equally to the children and adults in our lives.

- Become aware of the other person's emotions.
- Care about the other person by seeing their emotions as valid and important.
- Listen empathetically to better understand the way they feel, allowing them to feel safe to be vulnerable without fear of judgment. Seek to understand, rather than to agree or redirect.
- Acknowledge and validate their feelings. We don't need to validate that the thoughts they have about their emotions are correct; instead, simply let them know that it's valid to feel the way that they do. For example, if a friend

says, “I feel useless,” we could validate them by saying, “I can see how you might feel that way.”

■ Allow the person to experience their emotions fully before moving toward any kind of improvement. We cannot impose our idea of when they should be ready or able to feel differently. This is when we practice unconditional presence and unconditional love. We are there as support, without trying to fix them or anything else. Don’t be offended if they don’t accept support that’s offered at this time. A benevolent power is inherent in offering love that exists regardless of what someone does or does not do with it.

■ Help the other person to strategize ways to manage the reactions they might be having to their emotions after—and only after—their feelings have been validated, acknowledged and fully felt. This is when we can assert new ways of looking at a situation that may improve the way another person is feeling. This is when advice may be offered.

When done successfully, this process can transform a conflict encountered in a relationship into solid gold.

Teal Swan is the author of Shadows Before Dawn: Finding the Light of Self-Love Through Your Darkest Times, on how healing hidden wounds reveals our authentic selves (TealSwan.com). Inside Out will be released next month on DVD.