

Children Have Feelings, Too!

by Marilyn Spaw Krock

Emotions are another wonderful gift from God. Feelings make us human. Without this God-given ability to react, we would be only numb shells of beings existing in the world, but not truly living. Children have emotions, too, and they need help in understanding and handling the variety of feelings God bestows on all of us.

Nothing is more detrimental to youngsters' healthy emotional development than telling them not "to feel" a certain way. We feel what we feel! God made us that way. Feelings are good. How we act on these emotions makes the difference. It is self-control that children must learn. That is a tough lesson and one that takes many years of practice.

Anger is an emotion that we are taught from an early age to repress, not express! This inability to express anger can lead to mental health problems in adulthood. Looking at acceptable ways of expressing anger is much more beneficial. If anger can be expressed verbally, a person is less likely to resort to physical actions.

"Big boys don't cry!" is a refrain heard too often still. What are boys suppose to do with emotions that evoke tears? Stifle it? More repression? Might this lead eventually to difficulty in expressing tenderness and concern for others?

Spend time talking with children about how they are feeling. Help them develop the vocabulary necessary to discuss happy, silly, sad, lonely, angry, jealous, loved, unloved, scared, and on and on. Help children learn to name their feelings. Explore with them the wide variety of reactions that God has given them. If children are able to explain what they are feeling, it is easier to help them discover why they may be feeling that way. Communication skills are the key.

Allow children to experience and express emotions that aren't always happy. They are forced into school situations where they must interact, socialize, share, and take turns when they might not "feel" like it. These are legitimate stresses in children's lives. Validate the feelings by acknowledging and accepting the child.

Play games with emotions - make faces at each other and guess what feeling you are trying to show. Sing songs about emotions - "If You're Happy And You Know It - Clap Your Hands" (can become if sad say boo-hoo, if angry give a growl). Use your imagination, it will help children develop theirs!

Reassure children that God made them to have all these feelings. It is part of God's plan for us. Never make fun of how they feel, you've probably forgotten what it was like to be four years old!

NOTE TO PARENTS: Turn on the radio, anytime day or night, every song is about emotions. People sing about them so easily. Why do we have so much difficulty talking about them? Couples need to practice expressing their feelings to one another - the "bad" as well as the "good." Most persons are not mind readers, but they try to guess what the other person is thinking. Chances are you will guess wrong! Discussing openly how you feel is much more accurate. Nip problems early. It is easier to teach a skill to your child if you are proficient in it.

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