

Raising Emotionally Intelligent Kids

Age-by-age tips

What Is Emotional Intelligence, Really?

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage feelings — your own and others'. Research shows that children with strong EQ have better relationships, perform better academically, and experience less anxiety and depression throughout their lives. The good news: EQ is not fixed. It can be learned, practiced, and grown — especially through stories.

Age-by-Age: What to Do and Why It Works

Age	Try This	Why It Works
Ages 3–4	Name feelings out loud as they happen: 'You look frustrated — did something feel hard?'	<i>At this age, children are building their emotional vocabulary. Hearing adults name feelings teaches them that feelings are normal and safe to talk about.</i>
Ages 4–5	Use stuffed animals or book characters to talk about feelings: 'How do you think Fiddleswerth felt when...?'	<i>Distance through characters helps children explore big emotions without feeling put on the spot.</i>
Ages 5–6	Validate before you solve: 'That sounds really frustrating. I get it.' THEN help with the problem.	<i>Children who feel heard are more cooperative and better able to regulate. Jumping to solutions too fast teaches them their feelings don't matter.</i>
Ages 6–7	Create a 'feelings check-in' ritual at dinner or bedtime: 'Rose and thorn — one great thing, one hard thing.'	<i>Routine emotional check-ins normalize talking about feelings and help you catch problems early.</i>
Ages 7–8	Teach 'I feel... because...' sentence structure. Practice it yourself too!	<i>This builds the brain's capacity for emotional language and helps children understand cause and effect in their inner world.</i>

The Single Most Powerful Thing You Can Do

Model it yourself. Children learn emotional intelligence by watching the adults around them. When you say 'I'm feeling frustrated right now, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths' — you teach more in that moment than any book or lesson could.