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We're teaching our kids to FEAR their emotions
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As a parent, which of the following statements do you use when your kids are crying?

Go to your room. Calm down.
Stop crying. That's enough.
Quit it! It's OK.
Get over it! What's the matter?
Stop it, or no TV for a week!
Are you sure he did that?
Your sister would never do that.
Stop crying and I'll get you a treat.
You don't need to cry about it.
What happened this time?(sarcastic)
He didn't do it on purpose.
If you want to cry, I'll give you something to cry about!

We say these things to get the kids to calm down, either so we can fix the problem, or just to make them stop because we're irritated with all the crying over nothing. It's natural for parents to want to do both of these. And both are very dangerous.

When you try to calm someone down, the underlying message you give is, "It's not OK for you to be like this." When you use these statements, you are taking away your children's emotions. We teach two destructive lessons when we use the above phrases:

- #1. We teach our kids to not talk to us, especially about what they are feeling.
- #2. We teach our kids that their feelings are dangerous.

Humans are born with only two fears-the fear of heights and the fear of loud noises. Parents manage to teach their kids all of the other fears. Right from birth, we start teaching our kids to not have emotions. Do you remember holding your crying newborn saying, "There, there. Don't cry. It's OK." Right from birth we start giving our kids the message, "Don't feel anything or show me any feelings that I don't approve of." Now that I have a 14 year old, I wonder why he won't talk to me and tell me what he's feeling. The answer is, I've trained him not to.

Many of us who are now parents learned the same lesson. It was OK when we were happy, laughing, or calm. But if we felt lonely (and complained), scared (of the monsters under the bed), excited (and jumped around), bored (on a bright, summer day) or any of the other myriad of emotions that we do feel, our parents tried to fix it or shut us down.

Now, we're teaching our children the same thing. Have you ever felt sad, lonely, or excited and found yourself yelling instead?

You were taught that your feelings were dangerous. Instead of saying, "I feel really excited about this," your safety brain (amygdala) sees the excitement coming up, knows it's dangerous to feel excited, and you instantly get defensive.

Anger is not an emotion. Anger is our defense mechanism of attacking. We only get defensive when our safety brain sees something that is unsafe. The emotion is fear. The action or intent to attack is anger.

We get angry and attack any handy target, (the nearest child?) instead of admitting to a 'dangerous' feeling.

If you keep giving solutions or shutting the kids down when they show their emotions, they, too, will be adults angry at their kids without the ability to admit to their feelings.

Lots of parents get irritated when the kids cry just to get their own way. At the Shriners' Circus last year, my then six year old was determined to spend her money on an elephant ride. The toys were too enticing, and she spent her ride money long before the elephants were available. When she realized what she had done and could only watch all those other kids up on the elephant, she cried as if her heart were breaking. I was so tempted to just give her the money and 'fix' the situation. If I had, the lesson I would have been teaching is, "You get paid to stop crying." (That's an ugly lesson to carry into adult life!)

It broke my heart until she said, "Mommy, you have money in your purse." Was she manipulating me? It doesn't matter. Whatever the reason for her tears, she gets to feel what she's feeling. And she gets to ask for what she wants. I stayed calm. And I didn't give her the money!

These following three responses will show your children that it's safe to have emotions and that you are safe to talk to.

#1. Sit with them and acknowledge the emotion they are feeling. "I can see you feel hurt." "You're feeling lonely. Are you going to do anything about it?" "Waiting for your birthday party to start is really exciting, isn't it?"

#2. Let them know their emotions are fine, but that you're not sticking around to watch. One child I know can cry for 2 ½ hours straight. His mom has learned to hold him on her knee giving comfort until she starts to feel 'enough is enough'! Then she'll say, "I'm getting up now. But you can sit here on the couch and cry until you're done."

#3. Let them know that what they're feeling is OK, but they have to take it elsewhere. "I know you're excited. Go jump around downstairs until we're ready to leave."

Fear. Sad. Lonely. Excited. Happy. How you react to their emotions teaches them how to react. By staying calm and choosing one of the above three responses, you'll be raising children who feel safe with themselves and their emotions.

That's called high self-esteem.

And it's never too late to start! Teenagers and adult children respond just as well as the younger ones.

Calgary author Jeanette Kasper is an acclaimed professional speaker who's Canadian BEST SELLER, Anger is NOT an Emotion, is revolutionizing how we deal with others. This unique perspective on human behavior gives us an understanding of how people relate to each other that leads naturally to using the over 300 solutions Mrs. Kasper gives in her book.

As a best-selling author, international professional speaker, and syndicated columnist, Jeanette is always willing to answer your questions, give interviews, and do a training session with your company, association, or parenting group. Jeanette concentrates on helping others create harmonious relationships at work, home, and play.