

NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

Empowering Children to use Emotions as Pathways to Connection

TOPICS FOR TODAY

- Stages of Development
- Common Pitfalls in connecting with our kids
- Strategies for navigating children's "Big Feelings"
- Empathizing with children

FEELINGS CHECK IN



How do you feel today?



Pair up with a partner or small group and take a moment to share an emotion you've experienced today. Utilize the Feelings Chart in your notebook.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT – ERIK ERIKSON

- Erik Erikson: German-American developmental psychologist in the 1900s
- Emphasis on psychosocial development
- Conflicts serve as turning points in development
- Each stage results from the psychological needs of the individual conflicting with the needs of society
- The goal of each stage is to develop basic virtues
- If conflicts are not successfully resolved they will impede future development, but can be resolved later

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Timeline	Conflict	Important Experiences	Aim
Infancy	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	Hope
Early Childhood	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt	Potty Training	Will
Preschool	Initiative vs. Guilt	Exploration	Purpose
School Age	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	Confidence
Adolescence	Identity vs. Confusion	Social Relationships	Fidelity
Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Relationships	Love
Middle Adulthood	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work and Parenthood	Care
Maturity	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Reflection on Life	Wisdom

TRUST VS. MISTRUST

- Birth to age 1: fundamental to all other stages of life
- Infants are completely dependent on their caregivers for survival – trust is formed when caregivers are reliable
- Consistent, affectionate caregivers allow a child to feel safe and secure
- Infants who do not develop trust learn to live in fear of the world being inconsistent and unreliable
- Desired outcome is hope

AUTONOMY VS. SHAME & DOUBT

- During early childhood children are focused on developing a greater sense of personal control
- Children in this stage are learning to develop independence – initiating tasks on their own, making decisions about preferences
- Allowing kids to make appropriate choices and demonstrate some control affords them the ability to become autonomous
- Secure and confident children develop a sense of autonomy as opposed to feeling inadequate and doubting themselves
- Goal: develop a will – a balance between autonomy and shame & doubt by acting with intention within appropriate boundaries

INITIATIVE VS. GUILT

- During the preschool years children begin asserting power over their environment through play and social interactions
- Those successful in this stage feel capable of leading others
- Appropriate balance allows children to both initiate and willingly work with others, which develops a sense of purpose

INDUSTRY VS. INFERIORITY

- Children ages 5-11 start demonstrating pride in their accomplishments and strengths
- As new academic and social demands are met children learn to feel confident
- Children who are commended by parents and teachers develop a healthy belief in themselves, resulting in confidence

IDENTITY VS. CONFUSION

- During the turbulent teen years, individuals are striving to create a unique sense of personal identity
- This sense of identity is foundational to behavior and development throughout the remainder of one's life
- Receiving proper encouragement and validation allows adolescents to emerge with a strong sense of self as well as independence and control
- Our sense of identity is largely formed by our experiences and interactions with others – social interactions are extremely important in this stage
- The goal is to develop fidelity – an ability to live according to the standards and expectations of society

INTIMACY VS. ISOLATION

- Young adults need strong, loving, committed relationships with others
- Those with a strong sense of personal identity will have a much easier time developing healthy relationships
- Those with a poor sense of self are likely to struggle with loneliness, emotional isolation, and depression
- The aim of this stage is to develop love which enables the development of purposeful, enduring relationships

GENERATIVITY VS. STAGNATION

- During adulthood it is important for individuals to contribute to things that will outlast them via careers and/or family
- Successful resolution of this stage leads to a sense accomplishment and contribution
- Care emerges as one experiences pride in accomplishments, participates in the growth of children, and develops unity with a life partner

INTEGRITY VS. DESPAIR

- This final stage results from one's reflections on his or her life
- Fulfillment and regret can emerge
- The aim is for feelings of wisdom to be prominent, as opposed to despair and bitterness

KEY NOTES REGARDING DEVELOPMENT

- Our children's walking through the stages of development is unavoidable
- We can be helpful coaches or defeating opponents to their growth
- As you reflect on your child's emotions, evaluate what developmental stage is emerging
- Evaluate how your own developmental stage may be impacting your reactions and responses

COMMON PITFALLS

- We all make mistakes – it's OK!
- Use this list as a helpful guide, not as a reason to beat yourself up
- Discuss these items with other parents – spur each other on in how you parent instead of comparing

COMMON PITFALLS

We focus on **CORRECTING** the behavior instead of teaching the **HEART**.

Ask yourself – what message do I want my child to walk away from as a result of this interaction?

COMMON PITFALLS

INVALIDATING our kids' emotions

Ask yourself – What may make this a big deal for my child?

COMMON PITFALLS

Making ASSUMPTIONS that we know what our kids are thinking or feeling

COMMON PITFALLS

Prioritizing activity over CHARACTER development

COMMON PITFALLS

Attempting to remove unpleasant experiences from our children – keep in mind that often struggle is a vehicle for GROWTH

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Help children identify their EMOTIONS – this must be taught!
 - Utilize age-appropriate feelings charts – practice regularly
 - When reading books or watching movies, identify how characters are feeling
 - Incorporate emotional identification into board games
- RESOURCES:
 - **A Little Spot of Emotion** box set by Diane Alber
 - **I'm Happy Sad Today** by Lory Britain
 - **In My Heart: A Book of Feelings** by Christine Roussey

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Brainstorm strategies for managing EXPECTED emotions
 - Examples: how to handle disappointment or failure, what to do when looking for a friend to sit with, explore delaying gratification
 - Practice these responses!
- Create a plan for when UNPREDICTED emotions arise
 - Accept that sometimes emotions will catch us off guard – this is normal!
 - Help kids learn to respond rather than react – create a tool kit for when they are caught off guard (will vary by age, maturity, and needs)

EMOTIONAL TOOL KIT IDEAS

- Breathing and relaxation exercises
- Mindfulness strategies – utilize the 5 senses
- Scripture memory
- Fidget toys
- Chewing gum
- Exercise
- Time in with a parent
- Squeezing a stuffed animal
- Writing or drawing in a journal

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Identify common struggles
 - HALT – Am I **H**ungry, **A**ngry, **L**onely, or **T**ired?
 - When are the times my child is most likely to act out or have an outburst?
- Offer support by identifying small steps toward INDEPENDENCE
 - What is one step my child can take toward resolving this conflict on his own?

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- View untrue expressions as WARNING lights
 - When your child is beating himself up unnecessarily – what may he be feeling internally?
 - Listen for language like ALWAYS, NEVER, EVERYONE, NOONE
- Rather than contradicting their statements, validate your child's emotions and help them express that they are actually feeling
- Evaluate if there are any natural consequences that are playing out – but don't begin here

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- PLAY with your children
- Play is children's primary language
- Play builds rich connections between a child and caregiver
- Building positive memories is powerful for connection
- Put the screens away – minimize this interference

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Model healthy responses to STRESSFUL situations
 - Behavior is better caught than taught
 - If children see you react regularly, they are more likely to do the same
 - When children see you practicing deep breathing and relaxation techniques they will be more inclined to use these same strategies
- It is good for our kids to see that even adults encounter stress – it normalizes unpleasant emotions and leads to acceptance

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Explore fills and drains
 - What fills my child up?
 - What drains my child?
- Evaluate whether there is enough balance – teach them to evaluate this balance as well

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Acknowledge inability to CONTROL your children
 - Your children will misbehave at times and embarrass you – it's OK!
 - Remember that children are learning a healthy sense of autonomy as early as toddlerhood – this is healthy and necessary
 - Choose your battles – evaluate whether the struggle at hand has meaningful implications in your overall values as a family

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Accept children's WEAKNESSES
 - Your children will not be good at everything you want them to be good at
 - Evaluate age and ability appropriate standards
 - Encourage growth in areas where your child can experience success while continuing to nurture areas you would like to see improvement

STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING BIG FEELINGS

- Assess for symptoms of underlying mood or anxiety disorders
 - It's ok to ask for help!
 - See Mike's presentation from last night

EXPRESS EMPATHY

- **EMPATHY:** the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner (Miriam Webster)
- Keep in mind that your kids are real people with real emotions – even though the circumstances evoking their emotions may seem insignificant to you; their perspective is different than yours – entering their perspective will help them learn how to receive and in turn express empathy

IDEAL RESPONSE FOR MISBEHAVIOR KARYN PURVIS – EMPOWERED TO CONNECT

- Immediate
- **D**irect
- **E**ffective
- **A**ction-based
- **L**eveled at the behavior – not the child
- Resource: empoweredtoconnect.org/podcast/

THE BIG PICTURE

- Remember that our UNIQUELY designed kids are not truly ours but the Lord's – pray for wisdom to steward them well. Keep in mind the goal for our children to know Jesus.
- “I have no greater joy than this: that I hear my children are walking in the truth.” 3 John 4
- “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6