1. Become Aware and Intelligent of ALL Emotions

The parent must be aware of and be comfortable with their own emotions first, and experience them daily. It is crucial in allowing for all feelings in a non-shaming way. Start by writing down your secondary emotions every day. Try to find at the least 30. Help your child find 10.

* + TIPS– Put up a poster of emotions on the fridge. Smaller children will need faces of emotions. Put a white board with different colors of markers in a common area in the house to go to after a strong emotion. Keep emotional journals that are color coordinated. Emotion bags of SAD or MAD or HAPPY. Put things in that bag that add to that emotion and help self-regulate (squeeze ball, play dough, favorite rock, paper, small book etc.)

1. Recognize an Opportunity for Teaching and Intimacy

As parents we need to teach by modeling empathy, build intimacy and trust, how to “sit” in a strong emotion, and how to produce a behavior after the emotion. All emotions are not a threat to our authority or something WE need to FIX.

* + TIPS—Show that you are their ally and face struggle together…that they are not alone or weak. Know what empathy really is. Be constituent with your response and emotion and model that. Children will mirror you!

1. Listen, Validate, and Reflect

You can listen in many different ways to your child. With physical evidence, seeing your child's perspective, and with reflection of facial response. But most important with your heart. “I can see why you would be so upset, I would be too.”

* + TIPS—Observation is best! State what you see, hear, feel, touch! No correction, or fixing at this point. No questions, just statements.

1. Coach the Child to Label How They Feel

After you have listened and empathized, and been in their “space” you label and/or investigate the emotion your child is having in that moment. State what you see and hear, not what the child OUGHT do or feel. Explain when the last time you felt this way if appropriate. Label and investigate several secondary emotions.

* + TIPS—Try this verbiage! You look\_\_\_\_\_. It seems\_\_\_\_\_. It’s normal for\_\_\_\_\_\_. I can see\_\_\_\_\_. What does your body feel like? I see that you are crying, kicking, yelling, shaking, content etc. Put a number on it 1-10. 10 being an extreme.

1. Set Limits and Problem Solve

1. State clear limits on behaviors, actions, appropriate wishes that align with your family value system (if you don’t know what those are, find them). Provide pre-set consequences that are consistent and fair related to the behavior not the emotion.

2. Identify the goal and what you would like to accomplish with this strong emotion and if it resulted in a behavior that needs to be repaired go to a solution (broken item from a tantrum).

3. Think of a possible solution towards the goal and what works best for self-regulation, recognizing emotion, or just sitting in it.

4. The solutions have to align with your family values and the child’s.

5. Help your child to find solutions with choices, encouragement, coaching, challenging, and processing the outcome with logical thinking. Sometimes a good distraction helps so put that in the solution list (jumping jacks, talking on the phone, white board, drawing the emotion, etc.)

Caryl Ann Duvall LCMHC, CFLE

Gottman, J. M. & DeClair, J. (1997). The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child