



Building "Piece" of Mind

Your 3-year old: Building emotional health

Children are happier and healthier when they feel safe and connected. The way you and others relate with your child affects the many new connections that are forming in the child's brain. These early brain connections are the basis for learning, behavior and health. Early, caring relationships prepare your child's brain for the future.

Emotional overload

By the time children are three years old, they are often using words to share their needs and wishes. Even young children are able to make good choices and to get along well with others when they are calm, cool, and collected.

But, at times, your child may have too many strong feelings all at once. If he is tired, hungry, scared, upset, or angry, your child may feel very stressed. This stress can lead to poor choices and bad behavior.

Naming feelings

By age 3, your child is ready to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others. Your child is ready to learn new ways to handle strong feelings. For a young child, it begins with naming feelings, like this:

- "You look angry"
- "You look tired"
- "You look scared"

By naming a feeling, you are teaching your child some important lessons.

- You are making the feeling real and normal. You are saying "I get angry, tired, and scared, too." This tells your child that he is not the only one who has these strong feelings. This decreases his stress.
- You are giving a word to use so the child learns how to express that feeling in the future. This allows him to ask for help. Your child will now know how to say, "I'm getting angry!"
- Your child is now able to stop these feelings before they are too strong. He can learn other ways to handle these strong feelings.

Dealing with strong feelings

Naming strong feelings, making them real and teaching healthy ways to cope with them is the beginning of emotional health. Even young children can learn to manage their strong feelings in a healthy way.

They can do this by:

- using words
- playing with a favorite toy
- walking away
- drawing a picture
- dancing or exercising
- taking a nap
- listening to music
- making music
- looking at books

By teaching children healthy ways to deal with stress, they are less likely to use unhealthy ways to cope with strong emotions as they get older.

Your child can learn healthy ways of dealing with stress. Emotional health is an important life skill, whether you are 3, 13, or 30 years old!

