



10 Keys to an

Emotionally Intelligent Child

by Dr. Jenn Berman

Intelligence experts estimate that only 20 percent of a person's success is attributed to IQ but that as much as the entire remaining 80 percent may be a direct result of what has become known as EQ, or emotional intelligence. Psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer, who are believed to have first coined the term "emotional intelligence," define it as "a subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."

The Dumbing Down of America?

While children have gotten intellectually smarter over the years, emotional intelligence has not risen accordingly. Scientists have noted the "Flynn Effect", apparent since the advent of IQ testing a century ago, that in every industrialized nation each successive generation has scored higher than the previous generation. American IQs, for example, have consistently risen by an average of 8 points per generation. EQ, on the other hand, appears to have plummeted. Out of control violence, mental illness, risky sexual behavior, poor impulse control and school drop out rates are indicators of this problematic trend.

The Benefits of High EQ

According to Lawrence Shapiro, PhD, the author of *How to Raise a Child with a High EQ*,

"having a high EQ may be more important to success in life than a high IQ as measured by a standardized test of verbal and nonverbal cognitive intelligence." Children who have high EQs achieve better academically, have fewer temper tantrums, are better problem solvers, are less impulsive, have better attention spans, are more motivated, physically healthier and are more well-liked by their peers. The great news about EQ is that parents are the greatest influencers of high EQ scores. Children learn most of their emotional lessons from their parents and so there is a lot that parents can do if they are interested in increasing their children's EQ.

10 Things Parents Can Do to Increase EQ

1 Pay attention to your child's cues, starting from birth.

Studies show that infants whose caretakers don't pay attention to their cues have difficulty developing the ability to regulate their own emotions. If, for example, a mother with post-partum depression is too depressed to respond to her child's cues, that baby might give up on crying as a means of communication and become passive and disengaged. Without his mother's help learning how to calm himself down, he may not learn effective calming skills.

2 Teach self-calming skills.

An anxious baby cannot recognize social cues from those around him and an anxious child cannot learn in school or make friends. Children look to their parents to gain these soothing skills. An easy way for parents to help is to hold, rock, talk to and sing to their children to help them calm down. As children get older, their skills become more complex. When my daughter, Quincy, was 18 months old, she went through a period where she was waking up during the night and having trouble calming herself back to sleep. Every night before she went to sleep, I would talk to her about "The Plan." I told her that when she had trouble sleeping she should put her pacifier in her mouth, hug her piggy (a stuffed animal) and snuggle with her blanket. I made these suggestions based on my own observations of what had worked for her previously. The plan became so ingrained that sometimes she would start to cry and remind herself out loud, "paci, piggy, blanket."

3 Help children understand and identify their emotions.

For young children, intense emotions can be scary and overwhelming. Identifying and labeling their emotions can normalize those emotions, allow them to identify the responses in others, and help them to develop empathy. Believe it or not, studies show that

the act of labeling an emotion can have a soothing effect on the nervous system, which allows kids to recover more quickly from upsetting events. According to John Gottman, PhD author of "Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child", "This doesn't mean telling kids how they ought to feel. It simply means helping them develop a vocabulary with which to express their emotions."

4 Reduce television viewing.

The average child spends 38 hours each week watching television. According to Shapiro, "it is passive time spent in front of the TV that stunts the growth of EQ skills." Studies show that children who watch a lot of TV are more fearful, anxious, and aggressive as well as desensitized to the pain and suffering of others than that of their peers who watch less television. Experts have found that children who are frequently exposed to inappropriate images and situations are 11 times more likely to be disruptive, fight with family members, hit other kids and destroy property. To make that statistic stand out even more, those same researchers claim that children who watched a lot of TV when they were eight years old are more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults than their peers who did not watch as much TV. To add insult to injury, all that tube time is time not spent interacting with peers, developing social skills, or problem solving.

5 Give accurate praise.

Give accurate, honest praise that reflects back to your child an accurate mirror of her accomplishments. Excessive and lavish praise prevents children from seeing you

as an accurate judge of her abilities and prevents her from getting to know her own strengths and weaknesses.

6 Teach problem solving.

The ability to solve problems is developed primarily from experience. Sometime it is easier for parents to solve their child's problem rather than teach them how to do it on their own. Children start to learn to problem solve in infancy. When my daughter, Mendez, was 9 months old, we were sitting together while she played with a ball. The ball slipped out of her hands and rolled away from her, just outside of her reach. My first instinct was to solve the problem for her and hand her the ball, but I held back and allowed her to solve the problem for herself. She ultimately crawled over to the ball stretching in a way she never had before and proudly showed me the ball. As children become more verbal, they tend to need their parents to brainstorm problem-solving ideas with them. The key for parents is sending the message that every problem has a solution and having the patience to help children find their own age-appropriate resolutions.

7 Model empathy.

Empathy, which usually develops within the first six years of life, is the ability to understand the perspective of another person and on a deeper level feel what another person is feeling. When parents can demonstrate empathy to their children it makes those children feel supported and allows them to see their parents as allies. According to Gottman, "If we can communicate this kind of intimate emotional understanding to our children, we give credence

People who have a high EQ exhibit the following:

- Impulse control
- Problem solving skills
- Empathy
- The ability to self-soothe
- The ability to delay gratification
- Self-motivation
- Read other people's emotional cues
- Self esteem
- Adaptability
- Resilience
- The ability to identify, express and understanding feelings

to their experience and help them learn to sooth themselves." Empathetic children have a much better time making and keeping friends.

8 Set clear limits and enforce them consistently.

Giving your children clear and consistent rules shows them you care about their well-being and makes them feel safe. Imagine driving your car in a world with no rules or regulations to aid drivers; it would be chaotic and scary. A home without consistent rules for a child is the same as a lawless road. Children need boundaries to feel contained and cared about. Without rules to live by and the ability to follow the "laws" of the family, children grow up anxious and disrespectful. They believe it is permissible to behave however they choose because no one has taught them otherwise. This creates narcissistic children who lack empathy and emotional intelligence.

9 Allow your children to suffer the consequences of their actions.

Helping children understand at an early age that they are responsible for the choices they make as well as for the consequences of their actions promotes a sense of mastery and self-confidence. One of the most difficult tasks for parents to master is allowing their kids to suffer the consequences of their choices and actions. But in order for children to grow up to become responsible, high EQ adults, this is a crucial developmental step for them to take.

10 Don't protect your kids from all of life's stresses, pains and difficulties.

Coping with stress and pain is the best way to learn coping skills. While children should not be exposed to material that is beyond their comprehension or development, they should be exposed to day-to-day stress and difficulties. When Carol and James started to notice that Buster, the elderly family dog, was nearing the end, Carol started to talk about death with four-year-old Stella. When Buster passed away, they allowed Stella to see them cry and talked to her about their grief. This helped her to understand her own grieving process, develop empathy and normalize her own feelings.

*Dr. Jenn is a licensed Marriage, Family and Child Therapist in private practice. She is the author of the Los Angeles Times bestselling book *The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids*. Her "Dr. Jenn" column won the prestigious Parenting Publications of America award in Parenting and Child Development. She has appeared as a psychological expert on hundreds of television shows including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *The Today Show*, and *The Tyra Banks Show*. Dr. Jenn lives in Los Angeles with her husband and twin daughters. For more information on Dr. Jenn go to: www.DoctorJenn.com.*

