



Being in touch with your emotions (and those of others) can help you thrive in all areas of your life.

People with higher levels of emotional intelligence earn, on average, about \$29,000 more a year.

PARENTING

Building Emotional Intelligence

Helping your child identify his emotions—and those of others around him—not only fosters confidence but can help set him on a path toward lifelong success.

WRITTEN BY ALYSSA SHAFFER

When one of Supna Shah's 5-year-old triplets gets upset, they don't throw tantrums or hurl a toy across the room. Instead, they'll plop down on the floor, shut their eyes, and start to do some deep breathing.

"I have two boys and a girl, and while they all have very different personalities, each one has learned how to identify emotions such as frustration, anger or fear and have a way to handle those sensations without losing control," says Shah. They've even learned to identify emotions in others. "One of them will come to me and say, 'That boy or girl doesn't look happy—what can I do to make him or her feel better?'"

From a very young age, Shah has worked with her children to refine their emotional intelligence. Also known as EI or emotional quotient (EQ), it's an increasingly popular concept that's found a place in schools, communities and workplaces throughout the country. EI or EQ is typically thought of as a person's ability to recognize, understand and manage both his or her own emotions and to recognize, understand and influence the emotions of others. Although the concept has been around since the 1970s, the EQ movement started to pick up steam in 1996, when science reporter Daniel Goleman published the best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

While some kids may be more instinctively in tune with their EQ, others may need a little more help being taught how to get in touch with their feelings. "It's all about

learning how to build an emotional vocabulary so kids can not only talk about their emotions but also understand where they are coming from and what to do with them," explains Ari S. Yares, Ph.D., a licensed psychologist based in Potomac, Maryland.

More and more schools are also leading the charge in helping students cultivate their EQ throughout the U.S. Today, many districts and even entire states have a curriculum devoted to social and emotional learning (SEL), helping children master the skills of emotional intelligence alongside those of reading comprehension, science and mathematics. In Illinois—which has led the charge to increasing EQ in schools—for example, SEL is integrated into every district's educational programming, from kindergarten through the last year of high school. The goal: To help children develop skills to help calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully and make ethical and safe choices.

The Importance of EQ

It may not sound like much, but developing a high EQ can do more than just help prevent temper tantrums at the grocery store, sibling spats in the backseat of the car or your teen acting out in high school English class. Teaching kids how to recognize their feelings, see where they are coming from and deal with them are essential life skills, experts say.

And research backs this idea. A meta-analysis of 668 studies of SEL programs for children from preschoolers through high school from the University of Illinois at Chicago found that in schools that incorporated SEL programs, up to 50 percent of students showed improved achievement scores, and up to 38 percent improved their grade-point average. SEL programs also had an impact on school safety: Reports of misbehavior dropped by an average of

28 percent; suspensions, by 44 percent; and other disciplinary actions, by 27 percent. Meanwhile, attendance rates improved—and 63 percent of students demonstrated significantly more positive behavior.

Plus, the benefits of a high EQ go well past graduation. In Goleman's book, he asserts that IQ (the more conventional measure of intelligence) accounts for only 20 percent of a person's success in life. The other 80 percent may stem largely from the ability to acquire and apply emotional information. An international study from Six Seconds' Institute for Organizational Performance of 665 individuals ranging in ages from 18 to 65 found that more than 54 percent of the variation in success in key areas

of life—including achieving results, developing relationships, physical health/stress management and quality of life—were predicted by EQ.

Shah, who spent more than a decade working in human resources, noticed the importance of a high EQ in the workplace firsthand. "I found that where companies struggle the most is finding people to promote from within, and much of this has to do with developing the characteristics of a good leader, including a high EQ." On average, she says, people with higher levels of emotional intelligence earn \$29,000 more a year and are highly sought after by hiring managers. "I found that EQ really is the No. 1 predictor of personal success," she notes.

Research shows that teaching EQ in schools improves grades and test scores and reduces absences and disciplinary actions.

4 Steps to a Higher EQ

It's almost never too early—or too late—to help your child start to develop emotional intelligence. Here's how to start.

1

Help your child identify her emotions.

Ask your child to put a name to what she's feeling, such as frustration or fear. Labeling emotions helps children take ownership of them and identify not only what they are feeling but also what others feel. Do this often enough so they have an understanding of what sadness or happiness feels like. For older kids, it can sometimes be hard to get emotional insight. "I don't accept 'I'm OK' as an answer," notes Yares. "We ask kids to create their own words when they don't really know what else to say."

2

Be a good role model.

"Adults have to be aware of our own feelings, as well," says Yares. "Often we don't take the time to listen to our own emotions." After all, the best way to build emotional intelligence is to exhibit it yourself. These don't have to come only from major life events. Tell your children when you are experiencing different emotions, such as being happy because Grandma called or upset because the carton of eggs fell on the floor. "You can keep it basic, especially for younger kids, but it's important to identify what's going on," adds Yares.

3

Develop an action plan.

Some emotions, like anger or fear, require a more immediate response. "It's helpful for kids to understand what to do when they feel certain strong emotions," says Shah. Some children can benefit by doing deep-breathing exercises. (See "Breath Control," opposite.) Others may find it helpful to draw a picture or to write things down in their own journal. "Any outlet your child can use to express his or her emotions will make a difference in helping craft a response to these types of feelings," adds Shah.

4

Identify how others are feeling.

Empathy is a big part of emotional intelligence. For example, if a cashier at the grocery store seems short-tempered or someone cuts your car off in traffic, you can ask your child to identify how that person might be feeling. "It helps them understand that while someone might be rude to them, they have control over how they respond," says Shah. "Once they realize it's not a reflection of them [but] a reflection of that person, it helps build an understanding of how they can react to the emotions of others."

Being able to recognize and understand emotions, even at a young age, can help a child develop empathy and compassion.

Breath Control

One of the easiest ways your child can handle more extreme emotions like sadness, anger or even excitement is to take a deep breath. "We all need a physical outlet to handle big feelings, and consciously slowing down your breathing can help you do just that," says Shah.

*** Breathe in as you count to 5, filling up your belly as you bring in all that good air. * Slowly breathe out as you count to 10, taking time to empty all the air you can out of your lungs. * Repeat this at least 3–5 times; more if you need it.**