

FREE RESOURCE

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# Raising Emotionally Intelligent Kids

*Age-by-age tips from a licensed mental health counselor with 25+ years of experience*

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*“Emotional intelligence isn’t something children either have or don’t. It’s a set of skills — and you’re teaching them every single day.” — Dr. Sandra Munoz, PsyD*

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## What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and express emotions effectively. Research consistently shows that children with high EQ have **better academic outcomes, stronger relationships, fewer behavioral challenges, and greater resilience** as adults. The good news: EQ is built in everyday moments — not in therapy offices or classrooms alone.

### Ages 0–2: Building the Foundation

*At this age, everything is about co-regulation — your calm is their calm.*

◆ <b>Name feelings out loud</b>	<i>“You’re crying. You feel hungry. I’m here.”</i>
◆ <b>Respond consistently</b>	<i>Quick, warm responses build secure attachment</i>
◆ <b>Mirror their emotions</b>	<i>Match their face gently — it builds neural pathways</i>
◆ <b>Create predictable routines</b>	<i>Predictability = safety for infant brains</i>

### Ages 3–5: Building the Vocabulary

*This is the prime window for emotional vocabulary. Use it generously.*

◆ <b>Feelings charts everywhere</b>	<i>Kitchen, car, bedroom — point and name daily</i>
◆ <b>Validate before you redirect</b>	<i>“You’re so angry. AND we still can’t hit.”</i>
◆ <b>Read books about feelings</b>	<i>Stories are the safest way to try on emotions</i>
◆ <b>Play feelings games</b>	<i>“Make a scared face! Now a happy one!”</i>

## Ages 6–9: Building Self-Awareness

Children this age can begin to understand their emotional patterns.

◆ Ask, don't tell	<i>"What do you think you were feeling when...?"</i>
◆ Teach the pause	<i>"What can you do when your body gets hot?"</i>
◆ Debrief after conflicts	<i>Not to punish — to understand and learn</i>
◆ Celebrate emotional courage	<i>"That took real bravery to say how you felt."</i>

## Ages 10–13: Building Emotional Autonomy

Pre-teens need space to develop their own emotional identity.

◆ Don't fix — witness	<i>"That sounds really hard. I'm here."</i>
◆ Share your own emotions	<i>Model healthy expression — they're watching</i>
◆ Respect privacy more	<i>Not every feeling needs to be processed out loud</i>
◆ Teach repair	<i>How to apologize, reconnect, and move forward</i>

### The Most Important Thing

*You don't have to be a perfect emotional coach. You just have to be present, curious, and willing to try again after the hard moments. Your child is learning emotional intelligence by watching you — including how you handle making mistakes.*

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