

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

by Dr. Bill Dymont

What is Emotional Intelligence, exactly?

"Emotional intelligence is about using the intelligence of emotions as a source of information, motivation and connection." --Kate Cannon, M.Ed.

"Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships." --Daniel Goleman, Ph.D.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is not one's personality style, nor is it IQ or academic performance. What is emotional intelligence (EI), exactly? We will define EI more fully as we explore how it relates to our children. The term, "Emotional Quotient (EQ)" is also used in describing Emotional Intelligence. EQ refers to one's overall score on a test of Emotional Intelligence in contrast to one's Intelligence Quotient (IQ) one's overall score on a test measuring general intelligence.

Why is Emotional Intelligence (EI) important?

Whether one can cite a textbook definition of EI, everyone instinctively senses emotional intelligence is far more important than raw IQ or what grades one gets in school. We all know smart people who are socially and emotionally "challenged". Here are two studies that illustrate the importance of emotional intelligence in children:

Study One: Stanford's Preschool Marshmallow Study and its 14-year follow-up.

Researchers challenged preschoolers in their study with the following: "You can have this marshmallow now if you want, but if you don't eat it until after I run an errand, you can have two when I return."

Those who could wait [5 minutes or so] later scored 210 points higher on their SAT, were less likely to fall apart under stress, less likely to become irritated or pick fights and more likely to resist temptation in the pursuit of their goals.

Study Two: Successful compliance in taking insulin--a 2002 study of teenage diabetics.

Teens with diabetes were tested for self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a fancy way of saying you have a sense you can achieve what you wish for in life vs. a sense of helplessness and despair.

Those who scored high self-efficacy were far more likely to comply and continue with their ongoing insulin injections.

Emotional Intelligence and parenting

Why does EI matter most? Here are two quotes from the experts:

"EI is much more powerful than IQ in determining who emerges as a leader. IQ is a mere threshold competence. You need it, but it doesn't make you a star."--Warren Bennis.

"Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them." --Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence.

The five **EI** skills parents and teachers need to model and communicate to their children are:

Self Awareness-How well does your child know him/herself? Children out of touch with their own feelings will be emotionally out of touch with others.

Other Awareness-How well does your child empathize with others? Bullies, of course, lack compassion, so do future delinquents. As C.S. Lewis once said: Educating "devils" simply creates "smarter devils".

Adaptability-How flexible and resourceful is your child? Can your child identify his or her weaknesses and gather a team to help?

Stress Management-Are you subject to weekly "meltdowns" by your child? Or, is your child able to sooth his- or herself aided by your help at times?

General Mood-What is the emotional "metabolism" of your child? Unhappy children usually grow into unhappy adults. Given that happiness is the number 2 EI trait found among highly successful leaders (see immediately below), how well does your child manage his or her moods?

Emotional Intelligence and future leadership potential

"Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions."

--Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee in Primal Leadership

Emotional Intelligence research has identified the following emotional quotient (EQ) factors, in order, as most common among those identified as "Star Performers." How is your child doing in these traits? What can you do to help in the years you have left before he or she turns age 18?

1. Self-regard
2. Happiness
3. Interpersonal Relationship Skills
4. Reality Testing
5. Self-Actualization

An EI quality for our uncertain times-Resiliency.

What is resiliency? It's defined as: "The capacity to respond to adversity--with little or no damage. Rebounding, springing back, buoyant, not easily discouraged." It's more important than grades, it's more important than being successful all the time. It's about handling failure, tragedy and setbacks well, even when others do not.

The research is clear: Resiliency in children who have experienced terrible trauma in their growing up years is directly related to having at least one stable adult in their world. Such adults model resiliency, permanence and communicate examples of others who have been resilient. Want to help your child to become more resilient? Help your child to spend time with, interview and learn from the most resilient role models available beginning, of course, by modeling resiliency yourself. Don't have any kids? Volunteer to be that stable mentor and role model for a child who has no stability in his or her life. No activity is more rewarding.

What you can do today for your child's tomorrow?

"Your foremost job as a leader is to take care of your own emotional energy and then help orchestrate the energy of those around you."--Peter Drucker.

Expose your child to emotionally intelligent role models--become one yourself. As you read the above descriptions of Emotional Intelligence traits, how did you do yourself? Are you modeling a high EQ for your children? Consider how you can shore up areas of persistent weakness. Remember, your kids are watching your life not just your words.

Teach your child the key EI skills for the 21st century:

The above listing highlights the 5 global EI factors measured by the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory. Below are some EI skills specifically helpful for children--

Self-awareness - Children out of touch with their emotional selves make wooden, emotionally shallow or insensitive adults no matter how gifted or intelligent. Hold a mirror up to your child. Reflect to your children the splash they make in the world--with their expressions, talents, interests, feelings and actions. A leader must not always express what they are feeling but it is essential that a leader always knows. There is a big difference. Never let it be said about your children: "If you say you're so happy, tell your face!" Their future spouse will bless you.

Empathy - Do you have a budding bully on your hands--a child who cannot handle anger? Most often, part of the solution is helping your child increase his or her empathy for others. While it is not all the psychological story--anger and rage can also be an expression of depression, for example-- building empathy can be an important component in helping your child grow out of early cruelty toward others. One family I know makes sure their adolescent frequent travels down to Mexican orphanage with his church youth group. Another serves food together at a homeless shelter in downtown Los Angeles.

Resiliency - Build a set of adult pillars that will help your child weather any storm. Are you a single mom or dad? Begin early to identify opposite sex role models to help your child succeed. Remember, you may have to become more networked in your community, church or school system yourself! Modeling connection and community is more than dropping off your kid at soccer practice.

Team-building- Today's workforce is not just looking for intelligent people. Bright people abound. Instead of just teaching your child to be a good student, teach your child a much more valuable skill set: How to identify his or her strengths and weaknesses when faced with any project. Then, teach your child how to identify and gather a team of helpers to achieve that goal.

Resourcefulness - I am blessed to have a father who used to engage us in a game of "who can find out the information the fastest". We could not simply say: "You find out, Dad." Instead, he would make a game out of challenging us to find the Red Sox schedule, a restaurant location or the library hours by ourselves using the phone book, 411 and our telephone. If we failed, and we often did as young children, he would find the information for us and then we would all sit down and he would tell us how he did it. When it later came time to do research in school or to work around an information problem as an adult, my father's training made it fun and a challenge. In fact, I still call him today when I get stuck!

The Internet has made becoming resourceful a breeze. Challenge your children to go online and check everything from movie times to the nearest pizza parlor. (Worried about what they'll explore? Put the computer in the living room or use parental controls.) Soon they will be booking flights for you to see the relatives back East and downloading college applications.

Stress Management - How well do you manage your own stress? While occasional "mini-meltdowns" are par for any family member, can you contain your own anxiety and stress enough to communicate to your child that all will be well? Can you help your children develop positive self-talk to calm themselves when overwhelmed, scared or anxious? There are a number of great resources available today to help teach these critical self-management skills. A child who can do so, and remember each child is somewhat genetically unique in this regard, will not procrastinate or avoid scary but ultimately rewarding opportunities.

"Don't die with the music still in you!"