

Helping our Kids develop their Emotional Intelligence through Art

Play is the essential way we expand our abilities and master our environment, especially as young children. Art is a form of play. Art is also a form of emotional expression. Emotional expression is a part of developing emotional intelligence.

How do we as parents give our children the opportunities to develop their emotional intelligence? And, why would we want to?

Recent research indicates that emotional intelligence (EI) is more important than IQ for success, health and happiness in life. That is a groundbreaking concept. We always thought that IQ was what made us successful. However, did you ever meet someone who was not academically successful but who had created a balanced life for themselves? And, have you ever met someone who was incredibly intelligent but who could not communicate or relate well to other people and ended up isolated with an impoverished lifestyle? This is the difference between EQ (emotional quotient) and IQ.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognize, manage and express our emotions in a way that is respectful of self and others. This is the missing link to a healthy and happy life. In the North American culture, not much emphasis or support is given for allowing us to have all our emotions. But this is changing. We are recognizing the need for our emotions and the part they "play" in our lives.

James Pennebaker, a researcher and professor of Psychology at Southwestern Methodist University in Texas carried out a series of studies on the impact of emotional expression and emotional inhibition. He found that people who express their emotions verbally and in written form have less visits to the doctor than those who inhibit emotional expression.

So, what can we do as parents to encourage emotional expression in our children? I am not talking about temper tantrums. I am talking about healthy emotional expression in the moment that will eliminate a high incidence of temper tantrums.

Encouraging healthy emotional expression in our children can be done by asking how they feel. If they are pre-verbal, they tell us how they feel with body language and tone of voice. We can mirror back to them in words what we think they feel. This will help them develop the emotional vocabulary they need for verbal expression of emotions.

If your child is older and he or she has a natural inclination to write, you can encourage her written expression by giving her a diary or by sitting together from time to time to write together. If she likes it, she will continue on her own. It can become one of her tools for life.

And, another way you can encourage your child to develop their EI is emotional expression through art.

Art is play and an expression of who we are and a way to process and integrate our perceptions about life. It is a healthy vehicle of expression for your kids in all its forms, whether it be drama, words, mixed media or just pencil, crayon, paints or pastels. Look for opportunities for your child to be involved. Have some supplies at home. Colour with them. Try different medias. It's a fun way to be with your children and to get to know them more deeply. Look for events that have a craft or art setup for kids. Sign them up from time to time for a course in art. Consult with them before you do to see what they would like. Ask them at a very young age. You will be surprised at how naturally they know what they want and don't want to do.

Integrating art into your child's world is part of developing emotional intelligence in your children. This is one of the ways that you are contributing to the greater good of your child and in turn to the greater good of the world. What more, as stewards of the sacred trust of children, could we want? Enjoy.

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