

Emotional Intelligence: An Essential Component of Education

By Leah Davies, M.Ed.



Why do people with high Intelligence Quotients (IQs) sometimes fail and those of modest IQs often do surprisingly well? In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman concludes that our view of human intelligence is far too narrow.* He stresses that a high score on an IQ test does not guarantee future success or determine a child's ability to be self-disciplined, motivated, or display enthusiasm for life. He postulated that in recent years we have experienced a degeneration of "emotional literacy" across racial and class boundaries, and that the results have been an increase in cynicism, social pathology, violence, and suicide. Goleman believes that society has overemphasized IQ to the neglect of emotional skills such as empathy, responsibility, persistence, impulse control, and caring. However, he stated these attributes can be taught.

According to Goleman, childhood is "a special window of opportunity for shaping children's emotional habits." We must help children recognize and understand their emotions and the emotions of others. If children learn to persevere and accept mistakes as a natural part of learning, they will be better able to control themselves and handle their frustrations in positive ways. Since children need emotional training to grow into productive, satisfied adults, he urges educators and parents to integrate their emotional and rational minds which are two basically different ways of knowing. Goleman states that promoting EQ (emotional intelligence) in children is vital to the safety and civility in our society.

How can we fulfill our responsibility to assist children in becoming emotionally literate?

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Increase self-awareness by using materials that help children identify their feelings, build a feelings vocabulary, and recognize links between feelings, thoughts, and actions. Help them assess their strengths and weaknesses and thus develop a realistic view of themselves.

2. MANAGING EMOTIONS.

Teach students to manage their emotions. It is normal to have mood swings, but children need to know that they have the power to cope with negative feelings in constructive ways. They can respond to put-downs and adverse situations by using "self-talk." For example, "Something bad must have happened to Tommy today because he doesn't usually say mean things," instead of thinking, "I hate Tommy and I'm never going to play with him again." Other methods of dealing with negative emotions are to write down your feelings, count slowly, breathe deeply, love a pet, tell someone what happened, sing, read, or draw.

3. NORMS FOR ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

Call attention to norms for acceptable behavior in our society and help children see themselves as contributing members. Increase their social interaction skills by stressing the importance of empathy. Teach them to acknowledge and appreciate differences in others' feelings and perspectives.

4. CONTROLLING NEGATIVE IMPULSES

Teach them to control their negative impulses through self-regulation. Help students think about their feelings and behavior and evaluate their choices before acting. Provide opportunities for them to delay gratification and to practice using refusal skills when

appropriate. Emphasize that the choices they make today will determine the kind of future they will have.

5. DEVELOPING LISTENING & COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

Help children develop listening and communication skills. Increase children's awareness of nonverbal communication including tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Train them to be good listeners and to express their ideas and emotions clearly and effectively. Teach problem solving, stress management, and negotiation skills. Help children learn to be assertive rather than aggressive or passive.

6. MOTIVATING

Challenge children to motivate themselves, set clear goals, and develop a hopeful, optimistic attitude. Encourage self-confidence, zeal, patience, and require students to take responsibility for their actions.

7. INVOLVING PARENTS

involve parents as much as possible, so that they will be encouraged to model emotionally healthy behavior in the home.

8. NURTURING YOUR OWN EQ

Since the children are looking to you for guidance on how people in our society live, nurture your own eq. Strive to be empathic, self-disciplined, enthusiastic, tolerant, and compassionate.

*Goleman, Daniel. (1995), Emotional Intelligence, New York: Bantam Books.

