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"Teaching your children to understand and think about their emotions"

Children enter the world as very lively and complex little creatures. From birth they are aware, responsive to their surroundings and wanting to interact with those around them, particularly their parents. They want and need love, contact, affection and concern but are also capable of hate, rage, fury and destructiveness. It is these negative feelings that can be most distressing for parents to manage, both for themselves and for their children. The way in which parents demonstrate their capacity to manage these difficult feelings is vital to how children develop an understanding, and their own ability, to think about their emotions.

Practically speaking, parents need to help their children learn the words that express how they are feeling and they can do this by repeatedly describing what is going on in the moment. For example, if a five year-old child is having a tantrum, telling the child to calm down is not helpful because the child feels left alone in their experience and this can be terrifying for them. What can be helpful is for the parent to talk to the child about how overwhelmed and frustrated they feel. This way the child feels understood and now has the words to understand what it is that they are feeling.