

A Three Point Strategy for Helping Children (and Adults) with Big Emotions

Big emotions include **fear, worry, anger, sadness, shame.**

Some things we need to understand...

- Sometimes we can fix the source of the emotion, in which case a solution should be offered. Often though we can't fix the problem because it's something out of our control. We can however provide strategies to a) take the next step and b) grow resilience within the circumstance. Sometimes just taking the next step is enough.
- Getting back to doing something productive has many benefits – distraction, an experience of success or achievement, normalising, encouraging. This shouldn't be seen as avoiding the situation or problem. This is training in taking the next step.
- Emotions are a normal part of responding to the world and to the events of life. Sometimes they can be scary and it can feel lonely, but these moments pass.
- We want to teach our children that we have inner resources to deal with and manage these emotions.

Three Point Strategy

1. Acknowledge their pain.

Questions and comments like: How are you feeling? Did you feel like you might cry? What happened next? That's really sad. That's really awful.
Show you accept that this is real for them.

2. Distraction.

Lead the discussion away from their big emotion with some random questions: What are you looking forward to on the weekend? If you could have three wishes what would they be? If you could draw something and it came alive, what would you choose to draw? What's your dream dinner?
If their pain has been acknowledged well, or the root cause isn't too deep, then they will be ready to talk about other things. If they keep wanting to come back to the issue or their feelings, then you might need to stay at step one for a bit longer. Grab a blanket, a bear and a biscuit and settle in for a while. Giving time now will help in the long term.

3. Provide a moment of joy.

When they are done with step one and two, do something that's fun – play a game, watch a cat video on YouTube, two rounds of hide and seek, a quick bounce on the trampoline with them – something you know that your child loves to do. This doesn't include going to get a drink and wash your face because that will remind them of their issue/feelings. It's about providing a super positive moment as a foil to the feelings.

Every victory in dealing well with big emotions is a step towards resilience. The accumulation of these small victories builds lifelong strategies for good mental health, and serves as a reminder that we have weathered big emotions and tricky circumstances before and we can do it again.