

PARENT INFORMATION 2

Managing Moods with Mapping

Mood is often associated with the word moodiness, which for most parents, results in a resounding 'Uuughhh.' Managing a moody child is anything but fun.

Firstly, it is important to establish that mood management is a developmental process. The developing human brain takes years and years to wire up the connections between the emotional centre in the brain (that is very much the tantruming toddler – I want it and I want it now!) and the part of the brain responsible for rational thought and emotional regulation.

Here's an example. A 2 year old will pass by the sweets in the shopping centre and will repeatedly demand to have some... NOW! That same child, at 12 years, should be able to walk past the sweets and accept, "Not today, maybe next time," - without a tantrum. That child has learned to stay calm and control his/her feelings. It's a process of maturation in the human brain with assistance from the outside world (parents, teachers, grandparents, peers) that helps children to manage big feelings. It would have taken many trips past the sweets, with lots of support initially, and then an increasing reliance on the child's own skills at managing their emotional response to walk past without a request or a complaint.

There's good news and bad news here. The good news is most children get there eventually - with consistent help from the outside world, and the natural process of their brain maturing. The bad news is that it takes longer for some children to learn the skill of emotional self-regulation than others, which can be very trying for parents, siblings and teachers.

The earlier children develop a good vocabulary to express the feelings that they are experiencing, develop an awareness of when the feeling is starting, and know how to manage that feeling, the better that child becomes at learning the skills of emotional self-regulation - which in turns helps with mood management.



What's the difference between a feeling and a mood? A feeling or emotion generally refers to what a child feels in the moment of something happening. It might last for a while and then it generally fades. Feelings that don't fade and hang around can grow into moods. Moods can last anywhere from an hour, to a day, to days.

Of course, in older children surging hormones play a role in moodiness. Most parents understand that this is a very normal part of maturation, and make accommodations around the times when their child is hormonally moody.

It is essential though, for parents to play a role in helping their child to take more and more responsibility for managing their mood as they get older. There is little enjoyment in managing a moody teen who still needs Mum or Dad to 'jolly' them out of their mood. While it is always useful to assist a child to change their mood, it is a life skill to develop the necessary TOOLS for your child to manage their own moods.

The earlier children are taught about feelings, how they start, what helps them to grow and then what helps them to stick around and become moods, the better children become at monitoring where they are at emotionally - and doing something about it - **before** it develops into a mood.

The Triple B's 4 What's My Mood is a useful TOOL to help your child understand the contributing factors to mood. Here they are:

Brain 'What am I thinking; what am I telling myself?' ***Your child's self-talk is very powerful in how they manage their mood.***

Breathing 'What's happening with my breathing; is it slow and relaxed or fast and 'jerky'?' ***Breathing rate tells the brain whether the body is relaxed or tense. Controlling breathing is essential to mood.***

Body 'What's happening with my muscles; are they tense and tight, or soft and loose? And what about my shoulders; are they hunched up around my ears, or are they sitting loosely at the bottom of my neck?' ***A loose, relaxed body helps with breathing.***

This week, talk to your child about The Triple B's when they're experiencing a big feeling. This can be a positive feeling or a negative feeling. Excitement, for example, leads to positive body tension, rapid breathing and lots of excited internal and external chatter.

This week your child will be mapping their mood so that they develop an awareness of the different moods that they can, will, and do experience over a day. Again, this is a useful discussion point - especially if you reference your own mood and how you might have used The Triple B's 4 What's My Mood to focus on your Brain, Breathing and Body.

REFLECTION POINT:

How do you monitor and manage your mood? Do you think to yourself, 'I'm in a bad mood today!' If you do, how do you manage your mood? Quite often, adults use The Triple B's without knowing it. A stern talk to yourself about, 'Snap out of it!' is usually followed by some deep breaths and a loosening of the shoulders and stretching out of tense muscles. How can you incorporate The Triple B's into your daily life to better assist your own mood management?