

Learning to balance emotions



Centre for Community Child Health

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We often think about physical aggression as being something that's a problem in young men. But the foundation for physically aggressive behaviour is usually laid in the early years through children's interactions with adults, and observing how relationships between adults work.

As a parent, there are steps that you can take to help your child to develop a strong foundation for their development, and learn the social and emotional skills they will need to manage strong feelings, without being physically aggressive.

Achieving emotional balance

Your developing child will experience the full range of human emotions, from anger and sadness to joy. However, being able to express and experience that emotional range is not enough for development – your child also needs to develop the skills that let them feel strong emotions and then return to a sense of balance.

To help your child to learn how to feel strong emotions and come back to a balanced state, there are things you can do:

- Sometimes the way your child responds emotionally might seem over the top – too much anger or too much crying in proportion to what has happened. Your child can learn how to manage the way they feel when you fully accept every kind of emotion that they express, and avoid labelling some emotions as good and some as bad.
- By providing consistent structure, guidance and limits (sticking to boundaries in the face of pestering or whining) you help your child to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the way they feel.
- Each child has their own particular temperament. Get to know your child's temperament so that you can safely help them to expand their emotional range.

Experiencing negative emotions in a safe environment, where children do not feel judged, allows them to develop the skills to express their feelings without becoming overwhelmed.