

Managing and communicating feelings is a critical skill of the nurturing parent. Feelings of discomfort like anger, stress, anxiety and depression hold many people in a virtual emotional jail. In order to break out, many people resort to drugs, alcohol, violence and other destructive behaviors. Learning to control feelings and to express emotions in constructive ways builds a sense of emotional competence in both parents and children.

Communication is a key to healthy adult relationships, and healthy relationships between children and adults. The ability to communicate is the ability to share oneself and to care about others. Communication is the process of asking for help, of accepting guidance, of listening and of caring. Parents learn proper ways to express their thoughts and feelings in constructive, positive ways. Problem solving, negotiation and compromise, decision-making, and the differences between criticism and confrontation are presented in this Section.

<b>Goals</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To increase parents' ability to manage and express their feelings.</li> <li>2. To increase parents' ability to help their children manage and express their feelings.</li> <li>3. To increase parents' ability to use confrontation instead of criticism.</li> <li>4. To increase parents' abilities of problem solving, decision making, and negotiation and compromise.</li> </ol>	
<b>Lessons</b>	<b>Materials</b>
* 9.1 Recognizing and Understanding Feelings	Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, small pieces of paper, pens/pencils
* 9.2 Helping Children Learn to Handle Their Feelings	Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, video player  <b>Nurturing Parenting® video</b> <i>Nurturing Parenting® for Parents of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers</i> Part 2 - Ages & Stages: Having Appropriate Expectations of Children"
* 9.3 Criticism and Confrontation	Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, video player  <b>Nurturing Parenting® video</b> <i>Nurturing Parenting® for Parents of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers</i> Part 2 - Ages & Stages: Having Appropriate Expectations of Children"
* 9.4 Problem-Solving, Decision Making, Negotiation and Compromise	Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers

**\* Core Competency Lessons**

**Goal:** To increase parents' awareness of how feelings dictate behavior.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, small pieces of paper, pens/pencils

**Procedures:**

1. Today's lesson will focus on recognizing and understanding feelings in us and in our children.
2. Ask each parent to respond to the following statements:

**One feeling I have difficulty handling is \_\_\_\_\_.**

**When I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I usually behave \_\_\_\_\_.**

3. Explain to the parents that every experience we have leaves us with both a memory and a feeling about the experience. Good experiences leave us with good memories and feelings of comfort. Bad experiences leave us with unpleasant memories and feelings of discomfort. If we do not talk about the bad times and express our feelings of discomfort, we end up suppressing (consciously) or repressing (unconsciously) our feelings; i.e. keeping our feelings hidden inside.
4. The purpose of having emotions is to express them. All emotions need expression, and the expression of feelings has to follow three rules: 1) Respect yourself, don't hurt yourself; 2) Respect others, don't hurt others; 3) Respect the environment, don't hurt the environment.
5. Mention that every experience is like a giant spring full of feelings and thoughts. When we choose not to talk about how we feel, or what we think, we have to stuff these feelings and thoughts inside. It is like standing on a spring: the spring wants to pop up, but we have to use our energy to keep it down. People have generally been taught to keep painful and scary feelings hidden (suppressed).
6. Have each parent take one piece of paper and tear it into thirds.
  - a. Have parents write one feeling on each piece of paper. The feeling could be any they want.
  - b. Instruct each parent to fold each piece of paper into a small square.
  - c. Ask parents to stand up and walk around taking their pieces of paper with them. As parents are walking around, have them notice their freedom of movement.
  - d. Have each parent drop one of their pieces of paper on the floor and cover it with their shoe. Mention that when we choose to hide our feelings, we are essentially covering them up.
  - e. Have them continue walking, dragging their paper with them under their shoe. Mention that freedom is restricted when we choose to cover how we feel or stuff our feelings inside.
  - f. Next, have them drop the second piece of paper on the floor and cover it with their other shoe. Have them walk shuffling both feet as they are covering the pieces of paper.
  - g. Instruct the parents to drop the third piece of paper on the ground. Keeping both feet on the ground, have them cover the third slip with their hand, assuming a three-point position. Ask them to move. Listen to the moans and groans.

- h. Have the parents stop in their position and look around. What do they notice? Instruct parents to pick up their pieces of paper and return to their chair. Note that when we accept what has happened to us, we can move again and get on with life.
  - i. Ask parents to share the feelings they wrote on their paper that they were not allowed to express. Have them notice the range of feelings.
7. Mention that each piece of paper represents an emotion, a thought, or an experience that people do not want to deal with or accept. The more we try to cover up our feelings, the less freedom we have. The more experiences (pieces of paper) that a person tries to cover up, the more energy it takes; the less movement a person can make. The feeling of depression is when there are so many experiences that the person uses most of their energy to cover up their feelings of discomfort.
8. Mention that children and adults receive messages all their lives that only certain feelings are acceptable (or good) and the majority of feelings are unacceptable (or bad).
9. On your clipboard or flip chart, make two columns: label one **GOOD FEELINGS**; label the other **BAD FEELINGS**.
10. Brainstorm with the parents “Good” and “Bad” feelings. Write them in the appropriate columns.
11. Explain to parents that instead of referring to feelings as good or bad, refer to the two categories of feelings as **FEELINGS OF COMFORT** and **FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT**. Refer to the feelings the parents expressed at the beginning of the exercise as the feelings they have difficulty handling. Notice that feelings of discomfort are generally feelings people have difficulty handling.
12. Ask parents to share with the group the messages they received as children (and still may receive) regarding expressing their feelings.
13. Discuss with the parents that every feeling has a physical expression. When we feel a feeling, our body responds. Using the list of feelings generated, have each member of the group discuss ways in which their body responds to the feeling. Example: People who get angry often tighten their jaws, clench their fists, become rigid, etc.
14. Have the parents locate the information titled, “**Feelings Exercise**” on **Page 69** in the **Parent Handbook**. Work with the parents to complete the exercise.

**Notes and Suggestions:**

The goal is to teach parents the importance of recognizing and expressing emotions in healthy ways.

**Goal:** To teach parents ways to help their children handle their feelings.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard & paper, small pieces of paper, pens/pencils, small bag or container, video player

**Video:** *Nurturing Parenting® Alternatives to Spanking Series: I'm Only Doing This For Your Own Good - Part 3 – "Masters of the Universe"*

**Procedures:**

1. Begin by stating the significance of helping children be able to express their feelings. Mention that children who can identify their own feelings and recognize feelings in others are better adjusted. Have parents locate the information titled, "**Recognizing and Understanding Feelings**" on **Page 68** in the **Parent Handbook** and use this as the basis for instruction.
2. Ask parents to brainstorm a list of feelings children commonly have to deal with. Write the feelings on the clipboard. Discuss the feelings of loss, rejection, abuse that many children have to handle. Mention that the feeling of loss is one that almost all children have to deal with. Children experience loss as it relates to love, belonging, security, trust, and for many, the loss of their happy childhood.
3. Present the **Nurturing Parenting® video: Alternatives to Spanking Series: I'm Only Doing This For Your Own Good: Part 3 – "Masters of the Universe."** Stop the video when the program is over.
4. Play the game "Charades." Write down feelings on small pieces of paper; one feeling per paper. Fold each in half; mix them up; have each parent pick a slip of paper with a feeling on it. Without words, they are to try to have the others guess what they are feeling. Parents are to make a noise that represents that feeling; e.g., grunting for anger; giggling for happy; etc. Make sure everyone gets a turn.
5. Use the following open-ended statements to facilitate further discussion regarding feelings by asking each parent to respond to the following statements:
  - a. Do you let your feelings show or do they hide within you?
  - b. Do you give your children permission to express their feelings?
  - c. What feelings do children generally have difficulty handling? Why?
6. Suggest to parents that feelings are always okay and feelings can always be accepted, but not necessarily the behavior. Behavior must have guidelines of appropriateness. Suggest the following ways parents can help children with their feelings:
  - a. Label the feeling you see or think you see. "*You look angry,*" or "*proud,*" or "*happy.*" This will give the child a feeling of being believed and respected.
  - b. Do not dominate conversation. Let the child do the talking. Encourage sharing by looking interested in what they are saying. Children can think better when someone is not advising, or blaming, or criticizing.

- c. When the child wants something, honor the desire. If you are in the store and your child wants a CD or video, rather than saying “No,” tell them you wish you could get them what they want. *“If I had the money, I would buy you the CD.”* This can have almost a magical effect on a situation because you have joined the child, not forbidden him or her. Children feel you understand and appreciate their desires. This can be very restorative for many children. Once children realize that their feelings are honored, they are more open to listening to the logic why they cannot have what they want.
7. Role-play the technique. Have parents form pairs. One parent will be the “child,” the other will be the “parent.” Ask the “child” to demonstrate a feeling without telling the “parent” beforehand what the feeling is. Ask the parent to use the three steps just discussed to process the “child’s” feelings. Afterwards, reverse roles.
8. Ask the parents to share their experiences. How did the “child” feel when the “parent” honored the request?

**Notes and Suggestions:**

Help parents understand that sometimes the best solution for helping children handle feelings is to talk about what and how they feel.

**Goal:** To increase parents' ability to use confrontation instead of criticism.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers, video player

**Video:** *Nurturing Parenting® for Parents of School-Age Children*  
Part 8 – “Owning & Communicating Feelings”

**Procedures:**

1. Welcome the parents to class. Mention that the focus of this lesson is on understanding the differences between **CRITICISM** and **CONFRONTATION**. Write the terms on the clipboard/flip chart.
2. Discuss differences between criticism and confrontation: Criticism leaves a person feeling badly about himself or herself. The person feels worthless, terrible and inadequate as an entire person. Confrontation leaves a person knowing they have done something you don't like, but still feels positive about themselves. The difference between criticism and confrontation is the feelings the person is left with. **Criticism uses blaming “You Messages.”**
3. Present the **video: Nurturing Parenting® for Parents of School-Age Children: Part 8 – “Owning & Communicating Feelings.”** Stop the video when the program is over.
4. Ask adults to form pairs. Each person will get a chance to experience being confronted and criticized by the other.
5. Have one person identify themselves as Person A, the other as Person B. Have each pair identify an issue that is a problem for them, as the basis for practicing criticism and confrontation. Instruct Person A to criticize Person B. The person being criticized cannot say anything back or defend themselves. Have the criticism go on for about 15 seconds.
6. When Person A is finished criticizing Person B, switch roles. Person B criticizes Person A for the same issue. Again, conduct the exercise for about 15 seconds.
7. Ask pairs to discuss with each other how they felt being criticized or being critical? Was any position easier than the other? Ask members to relate an experience at home where they are criticized by someone and where they criticize someone else. Share the feelings of both experiences.
8. Keeping the same pairs, this time each person will practice using confrontation. Person B confronts A; Person A confronts B. Remember, confrontation does not tear down people. One way to confront someone is to use “I Statements” and to take ownership of one's feelings. Review the formula:  
  

**I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.**  
**What I need is \_\_\_\_\_.**
9. Ask people to discuss how they felt being confronted or confronting others as opposed to criticism. Was one approach easier or more difficult than the other?
10. Ask parents to locate the information on **Pages 70-72** in the **Parent Handbook** titled, **“Criticism, Confrontation, and Rules for Fair Fighting”** and use this as the foundation for your discussion. Mention that arguments can quickly get out of hand when people use blaming “You Messages.” To ensure that neither person in the argument emotionally hurts the other person, follow these rules:

- a. Decide upon a time limit before you begin and stick to it! No more than 30 minutes, better if it is 15 or 20 minutes. If you do not finish in the amount of time allotted, schedule another time the next day.
- b. Decide how many “zaps” you will permit before you (or the other person) walk out. A zap is a hurtful remark, an insult, a threat, a sarcastic dig, etc. If a person feels he or she has been zapped, he or she has been. Any attempt to threaten, shame or blame is another zap. When you get to the number agreed upon ahead of time, walk out.
- c. Choose one problem per session. Have a session every day for a while if you need it, but stick to one problem per session.
- d. Try to stay in the present. It is helpful to stay in the relative present rather than bring up things that happened 12 years ago.
- e. Stick to the point. Do not get carried away with other problems. One problem per session, stay in the present, and stick to the point.
- f. Own your own feelings. Avoid blaming your partner for your feelings - they are not any one else’s, they are yours.
- g. Listen to the other person. You need to hear both of your points of view to find an agreement for both of you. Agree upon a solution that is good for both of you, not just one or the other of you.

**Notes and Suggestions:**

If people never confront others, bad things happen to them, such as getting walked all over, blowing up at their kids when they are angry with someone else, and not getting their own needs met. If people always confront others, bad things happen, such as not having any friends or anyone who even dares to be around you. So, a balance is necessary.

## Lesson 9.4 Problem Solving, Decision Making, Negotiation & Compromise

**Goal:** To increase parents' abilities of problem solving, decision-making and negotiation and compromise.

**Materials:** Parent Handbooks, clipboard/flip chart, magic markers

### **Procedures:**

1. Welcome the parents to class. Mention that this lesson focuses on two very important skills in communication: problem solving and negotiating. Ask parents to locate the information on **Pages 73-77** in the **Parent Handbook** titled, "**Problem Solving, Decision Making, Negotiation and Compromise**" and use this as the basis for discussion.
2. When parents and children both have different ideas on what to do, what to wear, when to come home, etc., conversations usually reach an impasse. When this happens, both parties feel frustrated and the discussion often leads to arguments. To reach a settlement while leaving both parties with power is the goal. Problem solving and negotiating will leave both parents and children feeling satisfied.
3. Have each parent identify an issue that is currently a problem between them and their children. After each parent has identified one problem, begin discussing the problem solving and decision-making process.
4. Explain the difference between problem solving and decision-making.

**PROBLEM SOLVING** What to do when you have a problem but don't know what the solution is.

**DECISION MAKING** What you do when you know what your alternatives are.

5. Problem Solving. Solving problems can be a person process or a family process. To reach a point of action in solving problems, both personal and familial, certain steps need to be followed. Identify a problem from the group and model how the process can work:

**Step 1** Identify the problem. Write it down for you or other family members to see. The first step is an important one. Work on only one problem at a time. Have the group gain consensus on "the problem."

**Step 2** Determine ownership of the problem. Is someone doing something you don't approve of but does not see the behavior as a problem? Is the problem yours or someone else's? Determine ownership.

**Step 3** Discuss what you have tried. Talk with the person involved with the problem and review past efforts on solving the problem. Remember to use "I Statements" rather than blaming "You Messages."

**Step 4** Write down a goal statement. What behavior do you want to see instead? This is the crucial step and perhaps the most difficult of them all. If it is a family member's problem, tell them the behavior you would like to see instead. Discuss the behavior you would like to see instead, and make sure the behavior is reasonable and attainable. The absence of behavior is not behavior. Do not identify what you do not want to see; identify what you do want to see.

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**Step 5** Brainstorm ways to achieve what you would like to see instead. Whether your problem or someone else's problem, brainstorm ways to achieve the desired behavior. This is an important step in the problem solving process.

**Step 6** Make a decision. Pick out your favorite three and work on the desired behavior.

6. From the brainstormed ideas, the decision ought to be clear. If not, check the problem statement and the goal statement to make certain they are still accurate reflections of what you mean. If the problem still exists, begin the process with Step 1 again.

7. Mention that when the problem solving process does not resolve the issue, family members utilize negotiation and compromise. Suggest that negotiation and compromise is used extensively in society. Get group members to define what compromise means. Get some examples where negotiation/compromise is used. Some examples are in sports between players and owners over salaries; in buying a car; between governments in arms control; between union and management; etc.

8. Discuss the four steps involved in **NEGOTIATION**.

**Step 1** When asking for something or stating a view, first determine if there is a difference of opinion between you and the other party.

**Step 2** State your views and what you think the views of the other person are. Remember to confront, not criticize, and to use "I Statements," not blaming "You Messages."

**Step 3** Ask the person if your impression of the problem, and your understanding of their views, are accurate. Listen openly to their views. Do not walk away, or argue, but listen. Remember, their views are equally as valid as yours.

**Step 4** Offer a compromise. Be sure to take into account their views, as well as your own. Keep negotiating until an agreement is reached.

9. Offer an example:

**Step 1 Determine if there is a difference of opinion.**

Mom: *"Son, you and I seem to disagree on what time we should establish your curfew."*

**Step 2 State your views and the views of the other person.**

Mom: *"I believe curfew should be 8 o'clock at night on weekdays. In my opinion, that gives you plenty of time to be with your friends. However, you feel that you should be able to stay out until 9 o'clock because you're the only one coming in so early."*

**Step 3 Get clarity.**

Mom: *"Am I understanding what the problem is?"*

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### **Step 4 Compromise. Offer choices.**

Mom: *"I can see how you might feel a little funny being the only one coming in at 8 o'clock. Tell you what, how about 8:15?"*

Son: *"Still too early. How about 8:45?"*

Mom: *"Too late. How about if we compromise - 8:30 pm."*

Son: *"OK. 8:30 pm. Other kids have to be in then too."*

10. Have parents form pairs. Have each parent identify a problem, identify what to do instead, and role-play negotiation with the other parent being the "child."

### **Notes and Suggestions:**

1. Helping families identify the problem, what they want to see instead, and ways to achieve the desired behavior should serve as a process for them to use in any problem situation.
2. When the problem is the child's, encourage the parents to help the child brainstorm desired behaviors and ways to achieve the desired behavior.
3. The most important outcome in this activity is encouraging parents to communicate with each other and their children.
4. Negotiation is a process used to handle day-to-day differences between parents and children that leaves both parties empowered.