



WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

ESS1503.5S | Fifth Grade

Series III

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota State Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children. If you need additional resources for your family, you can call the HELP!Line by dialing 211 or 334-6646. This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.

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What is Emotional Wellness?

As you read the heading on this newsletter, you may have asked yourself, "What is emotional wellness, and how does it relate to my child's development?" Emotional wellness, or social-emotional wellness, is a developmental process. In the same manner that your child develops physically and intellectually, he or she also develops emotionally. Children need to develop emotional and social competencies in order to do such things as

- recognize and manage emotions;
- develop caring and concern for others;
- establish positive relationships;
- make responsible decisions; and
- handle changing situations.

As a parent, you have an active role in contributing to your child's emotional wellness. According to researchers, in order for children to best develop these abilities, children need to "experience safe, nurturing and well-managed environments where they feel valued

and respected; they need meaningful interactions with socially and emotionally competent people; and they need positive and specific guidance" (www.casel.org/basics/definition.php).

The articles in the Wings for Life series pertain to your children's experiences with other children, competition, the use of free time, daily schedules, money, family togetherness, and many more challenges. The information in each article is intended to help you help your child's social-emotional learning. Key skills that are addressed in the Wings for Life series include:

- Self-awareness—recognizing feelings and managing anger.
- Understanding others—developing empathy and taking the perspective of others.
- Making responsible decisions and following through—this includes considering the long-term consequences of one's actions for oneself and others.
- Understanding oneself—handling emotions, setting goals, and dealing with obstacles.
- Building healthy relationships—saying "no" to negative peer pressure and working to resolve conflicts.

Nurturing your child's emotional wellness will lead to life-long emotional health:

- If a child is able to calm himself when he is angry, he can avoid damaging important personal relationships with others.
- If a child is able to initiate and maintain friendships, she develops both socially and emotionally.
- If a child is able to resolve relationship conflicts respectfully, he will sustain positive personal and professional relationships throughout life.
- If a child is able to make ethical choices, she builds character and her commitment to fairness grows stronger.
- If a child is able to maintain a positive attitude, he handles adversity and challenges in a good way and commits to making the world a better place for himself and others.

This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately. The term "parent" is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.



South Dakota
Cooperative Extension Service



Emotional Intelligence

Would you describe your child as intuitive, sensitive, empathetic, or artistic? Does he seem bright and “tuned in” but struggles to achieve academically? For years, researchers have explored the idea that individuals have different kinds of intelligence. Children who score high on intelligence tests generally have good memory, good math, good reasoning, and good logical thinking skills. The No Child Left Behind initiative requires schools to focus instruction and testing in three areas: mathematics, reading, and science. These are important areas of achievement, both for future careers and for important life skills; however, there are careers and life skills that depend on other abilities.

Howard Gardner, a researcher in the field of intelligence, has proposed that there are actually many kinds of intelligence. Gardner defines intelligence as the ability to process information, to solve problems, or to create products. He refers to our traditionally held notion of intelligence as linguistic (language), logical-mathematical, or a combination of both. Intelligence tests are generally designed to test these specific skills or abilities.

Gardner suggests that one type of intelligence is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is described as the ability to understand oneself and relate well to others. A person with emotional intelligence possesses the following characteristics, which are both inter- and intrapersonal skills:

- Empathy—the ability to see the world through the eyes of another person.
- Managing emotions, handling feelings appropriately, and having self-control.
- Motivating oneself and having self-discipline.
- Recognizing emotions in others—empathy and awareness of the feelings of others.
- Handling relationships successfully. (Salovey and Mayer)

There is disagreement about the theory of multiple intelligences. Some people think these “intelligences” are really abilities, talents, or skills. No matter how one thinks about these individual differences, the discussion has brought attention to the fact that kids learn in different ways. Some children learn best by

- reading to understand (linguistic);
- hearing information to understand (linguistic);
- processing information numerically or digitally (logical-mathematical);
- involving multiple senses through graphics, visual aids, touch, sound, or even smell, to understand information (visually).

As a result, many teachers have begun to use a variety of methods to help kids learn. It has become a well-accepted practice to teach ideas and information in a mixture of ways in a classroom.

If your school holds an open house, be sure to attend. The teacher will explain what happens in the classroom. Ask questions about how information is presented.

- Do children only have worksheets, written assignments, and reading assignments?
- Do children participate in hands-on activities that make use of different approaches to learning?
- Do some parts of the curriculum use three-dimensional models? Or can children represent their ideas graphically?
- Are only written exams used for assessment? Are there other options for assessing student work?

Celebrating Differences

Diversity is usually thought to be differences in the race and ethnicity of individuals. But diversity can be more than that. Diversity is all the ways in which people are unique, including race, age, skin color, cultural background, gender, physical ability, educational background, and more. These traits all come together to shape individuals into the people they are today. Learning about people’s differences AND similarities helps us understand the individuals and their backgrounds.



Learning about differences enriches the lives of children and adults alike. Begin with an exploration of unique personal attributes. How would you describe yourself? Exploring differences often leads both to positive attitudes and to better understanding and tolerance.

Help your child celebrate differences by

- encouraging positive behavior among individuals,
- teaching the value of respecting others and their differences,
- helping individuals become better members of society,
- reinforcing the idea that diversity is everywhere and should be celebrated.

Encouraging respect for differences can help people understand and appreciate both who they are and who others are. There are many things that can be done to help encourage the celebration of differences:

- Talk to your child about what makes her unique. What makes your family unique?
- As a family, help prepare your child for and participate in cultural activities and projects. Join with your child to learn about and celebrate differences

rather than fear them.

- Share your experiences with diversity. Ask your child what her experiences are.
- Play games from other countries or cultures.
- Teach your child some of your own family traditions. Keep a scrapbook of the information. Let your child “design” her own family tradition. Put together a family tree, find old pictures, or connect family members by last names.
- Make family recipes and learn about traditional foods in your family.
- Share the life of other cultures every day through multicultural books, toys, games, and music.
- Be a role model for your child. Respect everyone, be proud of your heritage, and participate in multicultural activities.

Conduct Disorder

Children may try the patience of adults, often doing things to see if they can frustrate or anger them. They may also be aggressive toward other children, trying to establish their place amongst their peers. When these behaviors go beyond “sometimes” or “on occasion,” there may be a greater cause for concern. These behaviors might indicate that a child may have a conduct disorder.

A conduct disorder is a condition in which children are more frequently aggressive than is common among their peers. Children who have been diagnosed with conduct disorder often violate the personal or property rights of others. These harmful behaviors include physical aggression toward people, animals, and/or property; disregard for rules or laws; and problems with academics and school attendance. A conduct disorder is diagnosed when symptoms occur for a period of at least six months and occurs due to both biological and environmental factors. Early detection is beneficial in the treatment of the condition.

Parental support and commitment to working with the child is necessary in the success of addressing conduct disorders. Jellinek, Patel, and Froehle (2002) identified actions helpful in addressing children with conduct disorder diagnosis:

- Seek assistance from mental health professionals. Counseling, parent education, and/or medication may be utilized during the course of action. Family members may also participate in this step of the intervention process.
- Begin interventions as soon as a diagnosis is made.
- Participate in the intervention process with the child.
- Implement consistent responses, consequences, and expectations that are appropriate to the child’s de-

velopmental level.

- Identify community agencies that could lend support. Also, visit with parents who are addressing the same issue to gain support and knowledge from them.
- Instead of using physical punishment, identify other forms of consequences for negative behaviors.
- Look for the positive in the child’s behaviors and encourage those behaviors.
- Establish positive family time together.

If you are worried about your child during this time or feel your child is overly anxious, depressed, or is suffering from a conduct disorder, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

Child’s Transition Time Between Parents



The time following a separation and/or divorce is a challenging time for children and parents.

Your child will probably be dividing her time between the homes of her mother and father, and one of the new challenges is the exchange of the child between the two households. New routines will need to be established, and parents should do the best they can to facilitate the transition from one parent to another.

During the transition time from one parent to another, it is important to be positive. Consider these guidelines to make the transition a positive experience for your child:

- Prepare your child for the separation by talking to her about the upcoming visit.
- Give your child enough time to say goodbye to you and to get comfortable with her other parent.
- Reassure your child that you will return to pick her up.
- Acknowledge your child’s feelings, but also be positive about the time your child will spend with the other parent.
- Allow your child to take along comfortable objects such as a favorite blanket, a stuffed animal, or a picture of you.
- If possible, come to an agreement with the other parent that your child can always telephone either parent.
- Keep routines as similar as possible at both homes to help your child adjust.
- Be as flexible as possible with schedules.
- Treat the other parent with respect.
- Help your child feel safe and comfortable in both homes.

- Discuss rules and discipline with the other parent so you are consistent.

When you are with your child, work at building a strong relationship:

- Find activities that you enjoy doing together—time and task are important elements of spending time together.
- Set aside some time without planned activities just to hang out.
- Make sure your child has her own place in each home, even if it is just part of a room, so she will feel it is also her home.
- Help your child meet other kids in the new neighborhood so she will have friends at both homes.

Some separated/divorced parents want to make the visitation unpleasant so that the child does not want to visit the other parent. This creates a difficult situation for the child, who feels caught between the two. Consider these suggestions to avoid making the situation unpleasant:

- Do not use your child to pass on divorce-related messages.
- Do not fight with the other parent during drop-off and pick-up times.
- Do not make your child feel guilty about spending time with the other parent.
- Do not tell your child that you will feel lonely and sad while she visits her other parent.
- Do not withhold visitation to punish the other parent for problems such as missed child support payments. Withholding visitation punishes your child (who is not guilty).
- Do not withhold phone calls to your child from her other parent.
- Do not hurt your child by failing to show up for visitation or by being late.

Remember to do what is in the best interest of your child (your interests and the interests of the other parent are secondary).

If you are worried about your child during this time or if you feel your child is overly anxious or depressed, please contact your physician, school counselor, or local mental health professional.

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Resources

Collaboration for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. www.casel.org.

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel.

Gardner, H. 1999. *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. New York: Basic Books.

Jellinek, M., B.P. Patel, and M.C. Froehle, eds. 2002. *Bright future in practice: Mental health*. National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.

Oesterreich, L. 1996. *Visitation dos and don'ts. Divorce Matters Series (Pm 1641)*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Extension.

Parenting. ParentLink, 4-H/Youth Development, University of Missouri-Columbia. <http://missourifamilies.org/quick/parentingqa/parentingqa67.htm>.

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