

accept the feeling by saying, "That makes sense. You studied so hard for it and you didn't get the results you wanted to." She can then be with or sit with the feelings by literally sitting down beside the child and putting her arm around his shoulders without saying anything further.

These three steps (acknowledge, accept, be with), allow the child to process his feelings. They help the child release his negative emotion rather than

suppress it. Released emotions lead to healthy functioning whereas suppressed emotions may be channeled into physical pain and/or emotional difficulties. Released emotions are the key to emotional intelligence and all of its positive consequences.

When a parent is confronted by a child's bad feelings, the parent herself can feel overwhelmed, disturbed, saddened, frightened, angry and otherwise upset.

Remember to Welcome Negative Feelings

Although steps 1, 2 and 3 above are all easy and straightforward, emotional coaching is emotionally challenging for parents. Parents often have a hard time acknowledging, accepting and being with their OWN negative feelings, let alone their child's! Indeed, when a parent is confronted by a child's bad feelings, the parent herself can feel overwhelmed, disturbed, saddened, frightened, angry and otherwise upset. In some cases, it will be appropriate for the parent to actually share her reaction. Most often, however, the parent must set aside her own feelings temporarily while she attends to the child's

emotional needs. When the child is settled, the parent may take some time to help herself process her own feelings privately.

Parents want their child to be happy. It's hard to allow a child to have scared, sad or troubled feelings. There is a great tendency for a parent to try to make bad feelings go away by trying to cheer up the child, distract him, downplay his feelings or correct his perceptions. Note the following example:

Eli comes in after school looking sad and dejected. "What's wrong, Sweetheart?" asks Mom. "Nobody likes me," replies her son. "What do you mean?" demands Mom. "Everybody likes you! Danny likes you, Leah likes you, Sarah likes you, Nathan likes you and Daddy and I like you most of all!"

Poor Mom! She just can't tolerate Eli's negative feelings! Without even recognizing her own fear and panic, she tries urgently to talk him out of his feelings. This is not emotional coaching! Emotional coaching involves listening and accepting. What Mom should have said when Eli said "nobody likes me," is "Really? That's so sad. I can see you're feeling really badly." With this sort of

acknowledgement and acceptance, Eli probably would have gone on to explain that he had a fight at school earlier that day and he feels so rejected. Most

likely he would also be able to do some problem-solving with Mom after his emotions were released.

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While acknowledging and accepting Eli's feelings helps to release them, offering reassurance actually increases insecurity. Mom's attempt to reassure Eli by naming all the people who like him, distracts him momentarily from his inner reality. It does not, however, remove the bad feeling. Bad feelings must be RELEASED, not

***Offering reassurance
actually increases
insecurity***

covered over. When covered over with reassurance, the bad feeling is suppressed, stuffed deeper down

into the personality. The clue to this syndrome is hearing yourself say, "No matter how often I reassure her, she keeps coming back with the same concerns." Indeed, reassurance itself, reinforces insecurity.

One of the lessons of emotional coaching is that feelings are only feelings. They are not dangerous to own or to acknowledge. Even when they are painful or unpleasant, they needn't interfere with appropriate functioning. A child is allowed to feel unhappy. It doesn't mean, however, that he is excused from his responsibilities or the realities of life.

Emotional Coaching Increases Co-operation

Sometimes a parent needs to teach a child something. Teaching can only occur in a

Teaching can only occur in a "teaching moment" – a moment in which both parent and child are calm

"teaching moment" – a moment in which both parent and child are calm. Emotional coaching helps calm a child and ready her for listening. But it does more than that. It actually creates a learning condition. Look at the

difference between these two dialogues:

2

Child: I'm not going to any more swimming lessons. I don't like it anymore. Anyway, I know how to swim already.

Parent: You need to get stronger in the deep end. I still want you to continue lessons.

Child: I hate going!

Parent: Well, you have to go until I feel you're safe.

Child: I hate it! I'm not going!

Child: I'm not going to any more swimming lessons. I don't like it anymore. Anyway, I know how to swim already.

Parent: Sounds like you're tired of your lessons. They aren't fun anymore?

Child: No. I don't like the new teacher either.

Parent: Oh, that's frustrating. It's not much fun to go when you don't like the teacher. The problem is, I want you to get a little stronger in the deep end. I want you to be perfectly safe in the water and I'm not comfortable that you're quite there. Probably one or two more sessions will be enough, but I don't want you to stop until I know you're really safe.

Child: All right. But just one or two more sessions – not more!

Parent: OK. We'll keep it to that, as long as you pass the deep end test. OK?




Child: OK.

Keeping in mind that dialogues in books are only dialogues in books (they don't necessarily unfold exactly that way in real life), these two conversations do illustrate an important aspect of parent-child communication.

Until the child feels heard, she will not be ready to listen, learn or co-operate

When we try to teach a child something *before* we've done emotional coaching, we're wasting our breath. The conversation will feel like a struggle or outright fight. The child feels unheard and not understood. Until the child feels heard, she will not be ready to listen, learn or co-operate. ***Therefore, always use emotional coaching before teaching or instructing an upset child.***

To further understand why this is so essential, consider the following:

Parent and child form a train. The parent is the engine  and a little ways behind him is the caboose  — an upset child. The two parts are arranged like so: 

Suppose the parent tries to teach a lesson or give information or instruction, without first providing emotional coaching. What happens, is that the engine moves down the track alone, like this:



lecture, lecture, lecture. If the engine wants to bring the caboose with her, she must first BACK UP to where the caboose is, HOOK ON, and then proceed down the track together, like so:



teachlearn, teachlearn. Backing up to where the child is and hooking on (bonding) is the act of emotional coaching. When the child is securely attached, the parent can teach, inform or instruct and hope to be heard. Without that attachment, the parent is talking to himself. The child remains isolated, feeling misunderstood and abandoned. He neither processes the parent's words of wisdom, nor inclines himself to co-operate. Rather, he remains stuck on the track.

Emotional Coaching Soothes Upset Feelings

In addition to helping children learn and co-operate, emotional coaching can help them resolve feelings of frustration or unhappiness, enabling them to accept compromises and consolation. Examine the following two dialogues. In the first conversation, the parent answers by stating the facts and omitting any acknowledgment of the child's feelings. In the second conversation, the parent reflects the

child's feelings using emotional coaching, and then engages in problem-solving. Note the differing results:

3

Child: *Why does Becky get to go out with you and I never get to go! It's not fair!*

Parent: *I'm just taking Becky to get some shoes. We'll be back very soon.*

Child: *But I want shoes! You never get me any shoes!*

Parent: *That's not true. I get you shoes when you need shoes. Right now Becky needs shoes.*

Child: *Runs away and slams door.*

Child: *Why does Becky get to go out with you and I never get to go! It's not fair!*

Parent: *You don't like that Becky's coming with me and you have to stay home right now. You feel that it isn't fair; you want to come too. You're upset with Mommy.*

Child: *Yes. Why can't I come! I want to come!*

Parent: *Yes, you really want to come, I can see that. And I'd like your company too. It's just that Becky needs to get some shoes and it's hard for me to get her shoes and look after you at the same time. I know it's disappointing for you not to be able to come. What if I bring you back some bubble gum from the candy store — would that help at all?*

Child: *No! I want to come! You never get me any shoes!*

Parent: *Oh, you just want to come. Bubble gum won't help. And Mommy never gets you shoes; she only looks after Becky. That's sad.*

Child: *Yes.*

Parent: *Yes.*

Child: *What kind of gum?*

Parent: I was thinking of your favourite – red bubble gum.

Child: Can I have 2 pieces?

Parent: Yes, I'll bring you 2 pieces. We'll be back very soon. Bye, bye Sweetie.

When feelings are accepted ("that's sad"), they clear, leave the system and vanish. The way to change a feeling is to accept it. There is no other way. Once the painful feeling leaves, solutions can be found.

More Examples

Emotional coaching can be used both with a child's small worries and with his largest concerns. When a child says he can't stand life and wants to die, it's time for emotional coaching – for naming, accepting and being with feelings. A child who is able to share this kind of pain with you, needs your response. Even though you may later arrange an appointment with a mental health professional, he's talking to you NOW. Just name the feelings: "You sound completely hopeless." Let's look at this example of extreme negative emotion more closely:

4

Child: I can't stand life. I want to end it all.

Parent: You sound incredibly discouraged. What's going on?

Child: Nothing. That's the problem. Nothing's happening in my life. There's no point in living.

Parent: There's no point in living. That sounds so empty. It's like you're in a dark tunnel or something.

Child: Black. Everything's black.

Parent: Black. Mmm.

Child: It's no use. I'll never get what I want anyway. What's the point of trying?

Parent: I see. It feels like nothing will work, so why try, why not just give up?

Child: Well I can't see any other way.

Parent: Yes, I see how hopeless you're feeling right now.

Child: So what should I do?

Parent: Do you want to see a counsellor – someone who could help you sort it all out?

Child: Maybe.

Parent: I'll look into it for you and let you know what I find.

This would have to be one of the most challenging conversations a parent could have with a child. The parent will instinctively want to try to talk the child out of his feelings – "Don't talk like that! Never say that!" "Don't ever think of doing that!" The untrained parent will rush in with advice, warnings and dire threats.

Unfortunately, this will only cause the child to clam up completely, keeping his thoughts to himself, turning inward to his pain. The child may feel criticised and abandoned, rather than supported and assisted.

In the above dialogue, we see that a parent can support a child even through deep painful emotions. The parent simply names the child's feelings in each of his statements, right down to the deepest feeling near the end of the dialogue – "hopeless." When the child has gone down to this depth of feeling,

he does what most people do – they start upward again. After Mom

A parent can support a child even through deep painful emotions

says "I see how

hopeless you're feeling," the child actually starts the process of problem-solving ("So what should I do?") It's only because Mom had the courage to go all the way down with him, that he's able to start the ascent. Mom also did one other thing: she added the words, "right now" in her sentence ("I see how hopeless you're feeling right now.") By doing this, she has helped bring her child's feeling to the present moment, implying that there are other moments in his life where he wasn't and won't be hopeless. This is a helpful approach when dealing with overwhelming emotions. Draw the child's attention to *this moment, this specific difficulty*. It is a calming technique.

Use your imagination in creating reward charts. Just remember to break down a behavioural goal into a series of smaller tasks. Have the child start with the easiest task and the smallest reward. Increase the size of the next task and the size of the accompanying reward. Continue in this way until the total behaviour is accomplished. Young children should be able to earn each reward within 3 – 5 days and older kids must earn them within a week. The chart should continue for 4 to 6 weeks and it always ends with a grand prize. Have fun!

Positive Tool #4: Emotional Coaching

This technique is so simple, yet unbelievably powerful. Emotional coaching is the skill of accompanying our children on their journey, much as our inner compassionate parent accompanies us. The concept was coined by Dr. John Gottman in his wonderful parenting book, "Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child." Dr. Gottman found that emotionally coached children became emotionally intelligent: they were smart about the world of feelings. They were aware of both their own feelings and the feelings of others. They could relate empathetically to people and therefore had better social skills. He also found that they were better able to regulate their own emotions. They demonstrated better

Emotional coaching is the skill of accompanying our children on their journey

academic performance and experienced better physical health. Like emotionally intelligent adults, these children did better in every area of

life. And, they engaged in much less misbehaviour than other children.

What's the secret to raising emotionally intelligent children? Emotions. Parents acknowledge, accept and be with their child's emotions. That's all there is to it.

How Is This Done Exactly?

5

1. Acknowledge. When a child shows any kind of emotion (happy, sad, scared, disappointed, angry, frustrated, excited, confused, annoyed, etc.), acknowledge it. Do this by *naming the feeling*. For instance, say, "I see that you're upset," or "You look worried," or "You're mad at me." Do this before saying or doing anything else.

As you do this, be sure that your own facial expression, tone of voice and general manner are reflecting the feeling – in other words, *say it with feeling*. For instance, in a low, slow tone, say, "You seem sad about it." Or in a strong, energetic tone say, "I can see that you REALLY don't want to go swimming!"

2. Accept. Rather than argue with, correct or otherwise attempt to change the child's feeling, simply accept it. "You don't want pizza tonight. I understand." This is different than saying, "Why don't you want pizza tonight? You love pizza!" This latter statement is an attempt to get the child to change his feeling. Saying "I understand" or "I see" lets the child know you accept his feeling.

3. Be With. When feelings are strong, the parent should just "be with" them or "sit with" them. Sometimes this means literally sitting beside the child quietly, after acknowledging and accepting a feeling. For example, suppose a child told Mom in a dejected manner that he failed the science test he studied so hard for. Mom can acknowledge the feeling by saying, "I can see you're very sad about it." She can

accept the feeling by saying, "That makes sense. You studied so hard for it and you didn't get the results you wanted to." She can then be with or sit with the feelings by literally sitting down beside the child and putting her arm around his shoulders without saying anything further.

These three steps (acknowledge, accept, be with), allow the child to process his feelings. They help the child release his negative emotion rather than

suppress it. Released emotions lead to healthy functioning whereas suppressed emotions may be channeled into physical pain and/or emotional difficulties. Released emotions are the key to emotional intelligence and all of its positive consequences.

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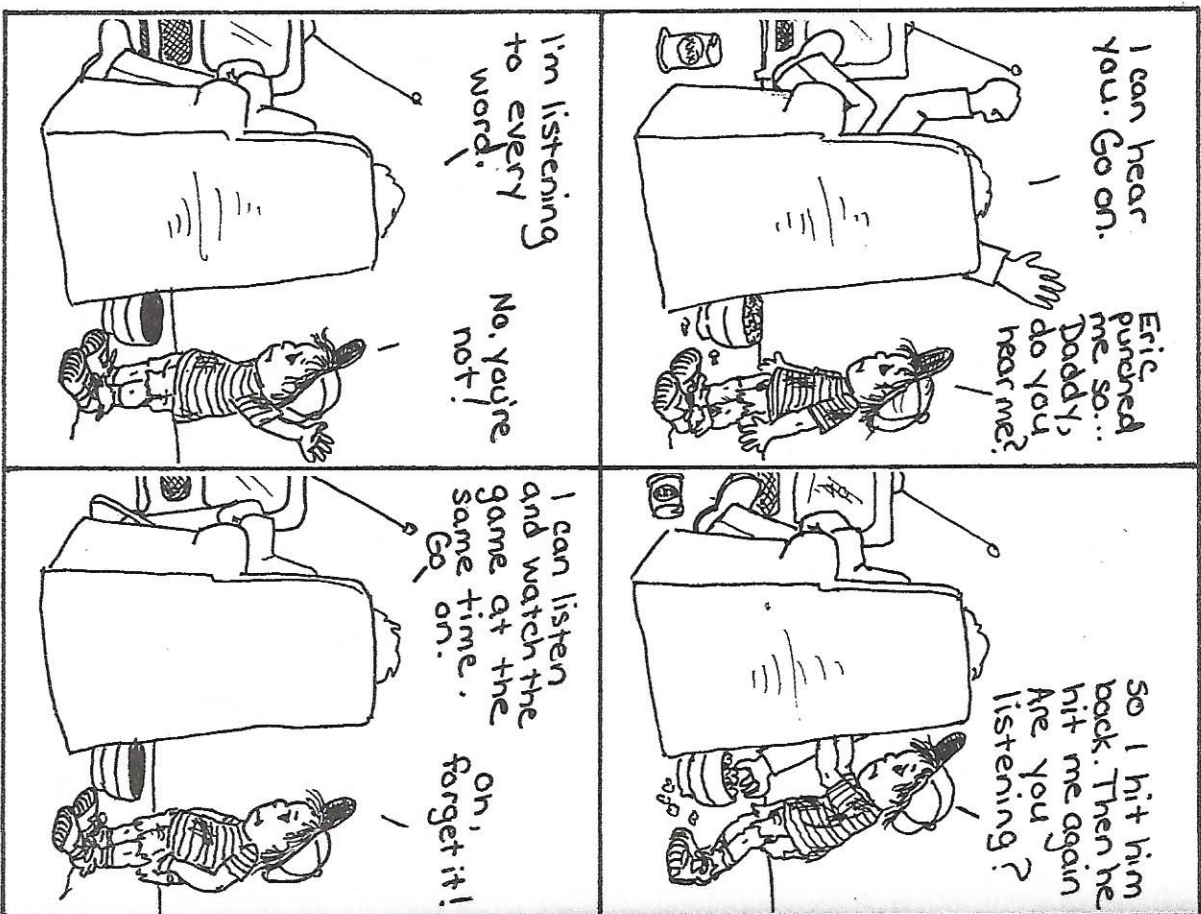
emotional needs. When the child is settled, the parent may take some time to help herself process her own feelings privately.

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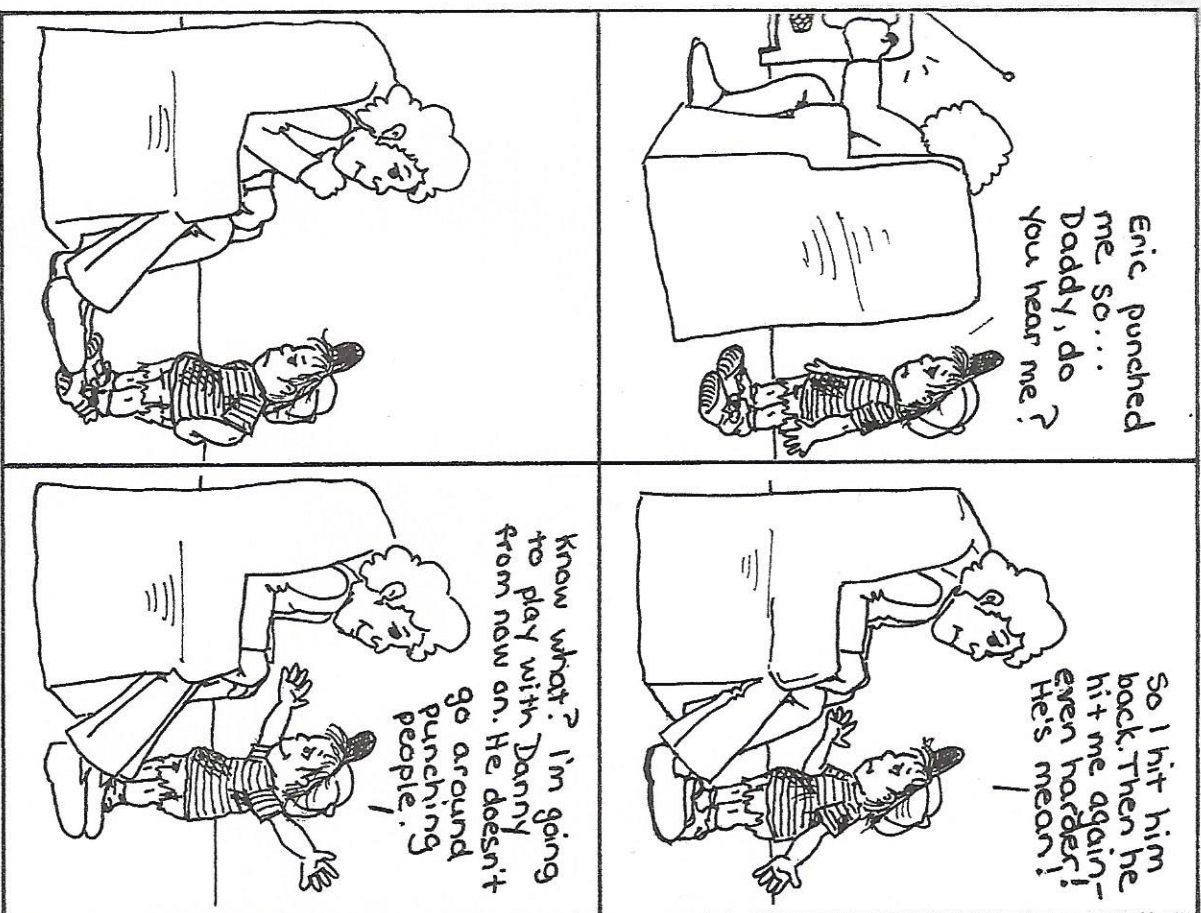
Poor Mom! She just can't tolerate Eli's negative feelings! Without even recognizing her own fear and panic, she tries urgently to talk him out of his feelings. This is not emotional coaching! Emotional coaching involves listening and

INSTEAD OF HALF-LISTENING,



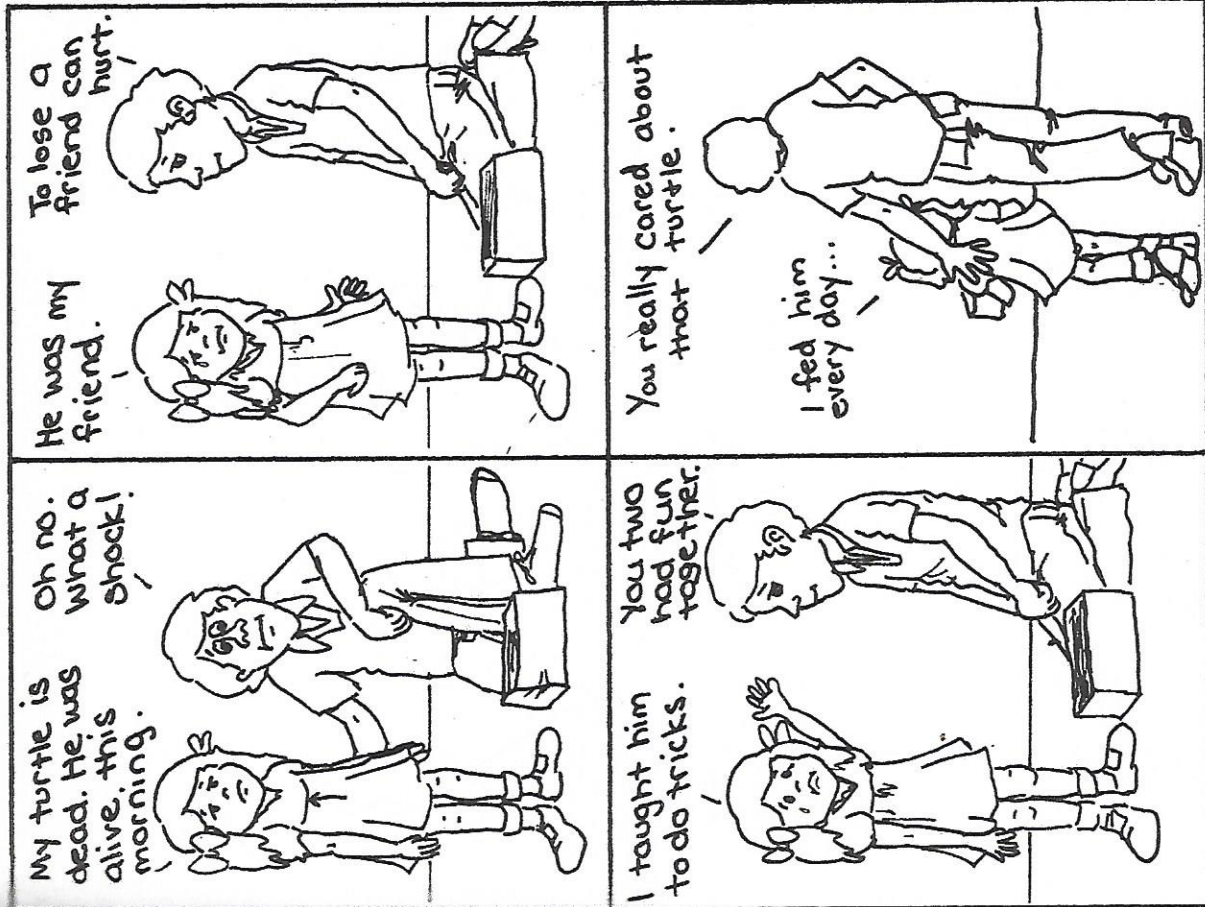
It can be discouraging to try to get through to someone who gives only lip service to listening.

I LISTEN WITH FULL ATTENTION.



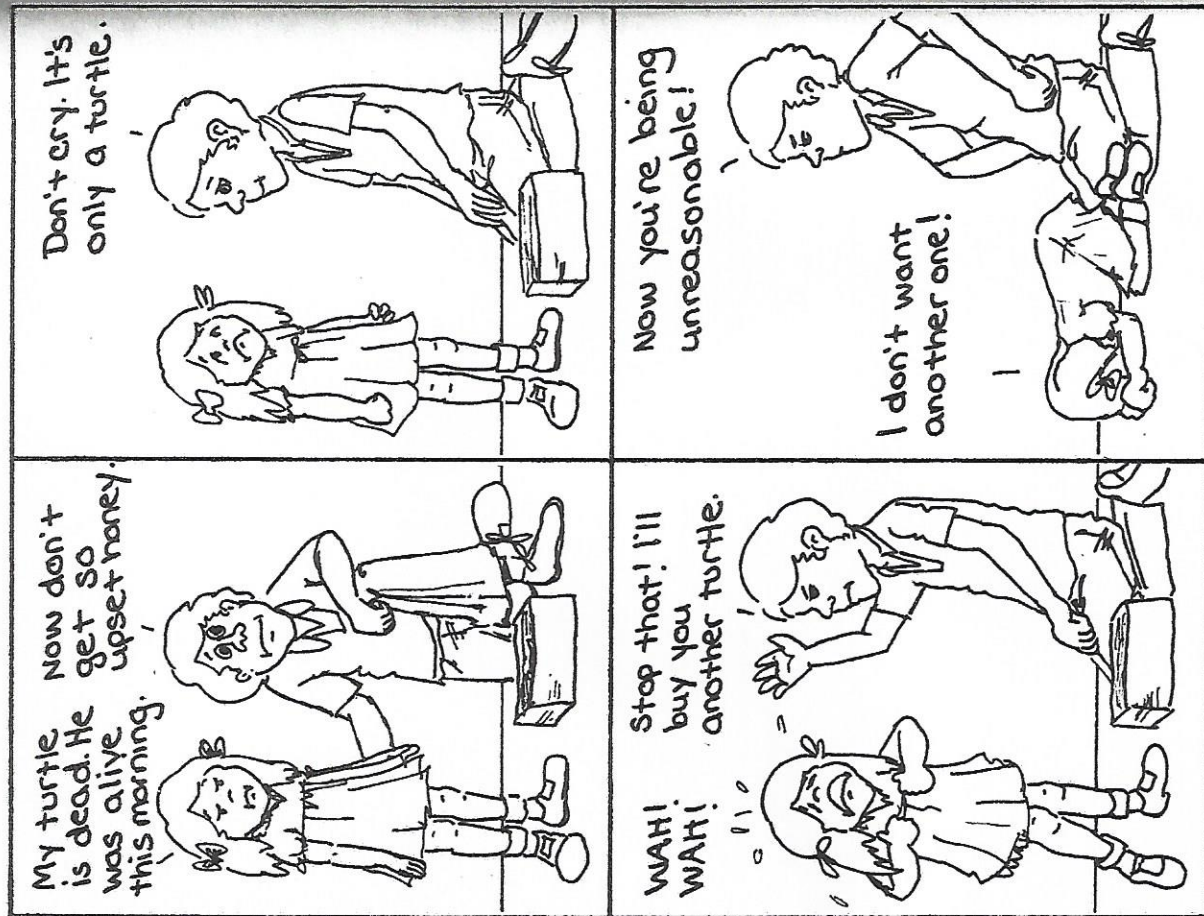
It's much easier to tell your troubles to a parent who is really listening. He doesn't even have to say anything. Often a sympathetic silence is all a child needs.

III. GIVE THE FEELING A NAME.



Parents don't usually give this kind of response, because they fear that by giving a name to the feeling, they'll make it worse. Just the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what he is experiencing is deeply comforted. Someone has acknowledged his inner experience.

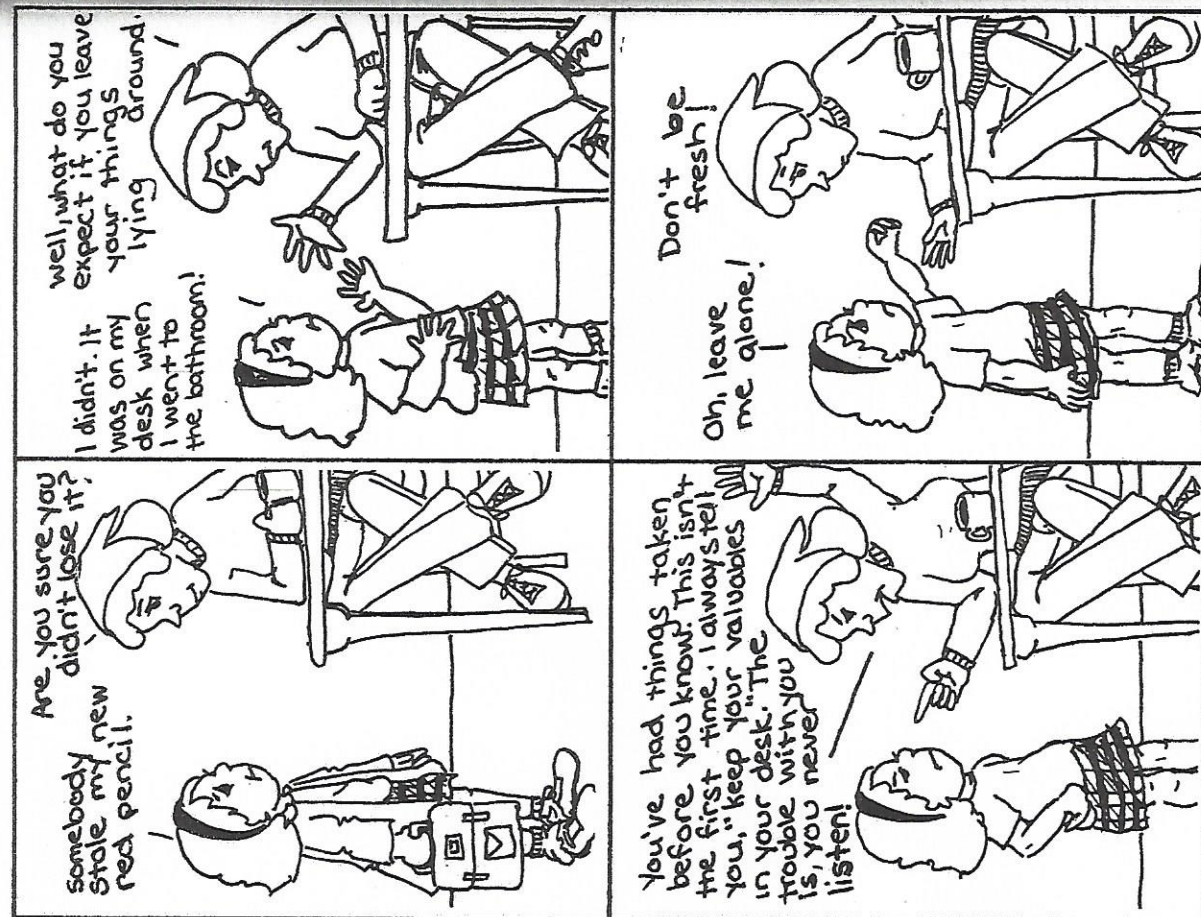
INSTEAD OF DENYING THE FEELING,



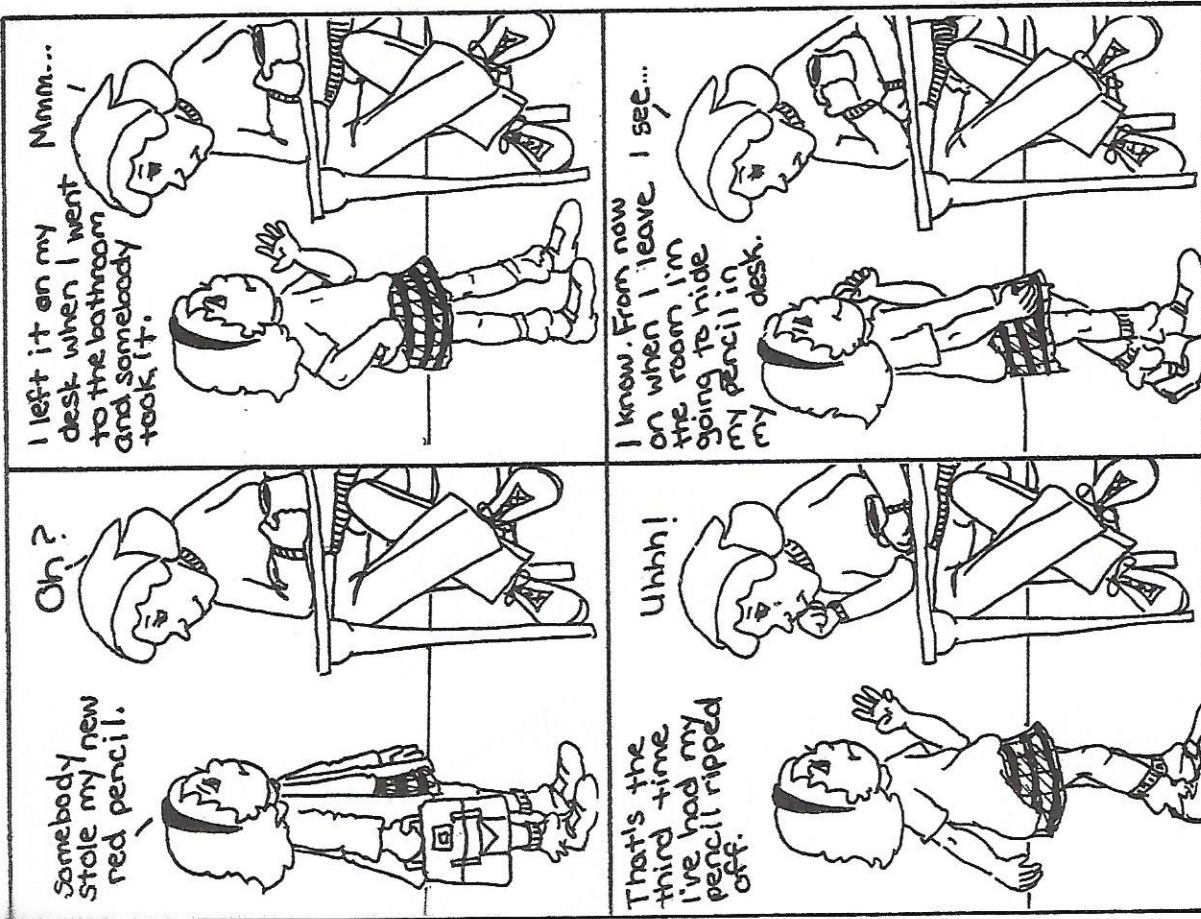
It's strange. When we urge a child to push a bad feeling away—however kindly—the child only seems to get more upset.

INSTEAD OF QUESTIONS AND ADVICE,

II. ACKNOWLEDGE WITH A WORD—"Oh . . . Mmm . . . I see."



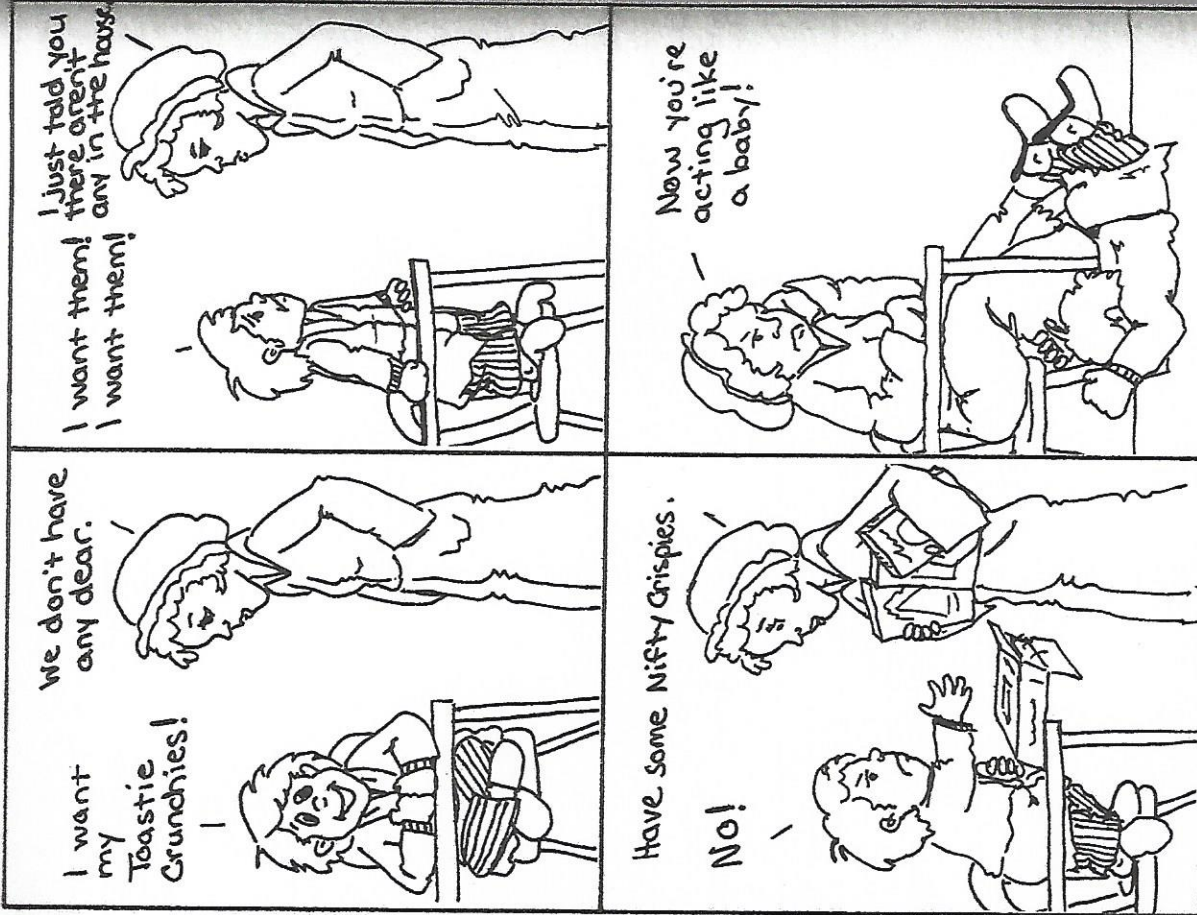
It's hard for a child to think clearly or constructively when someone is questioning, blaming, or advising her.



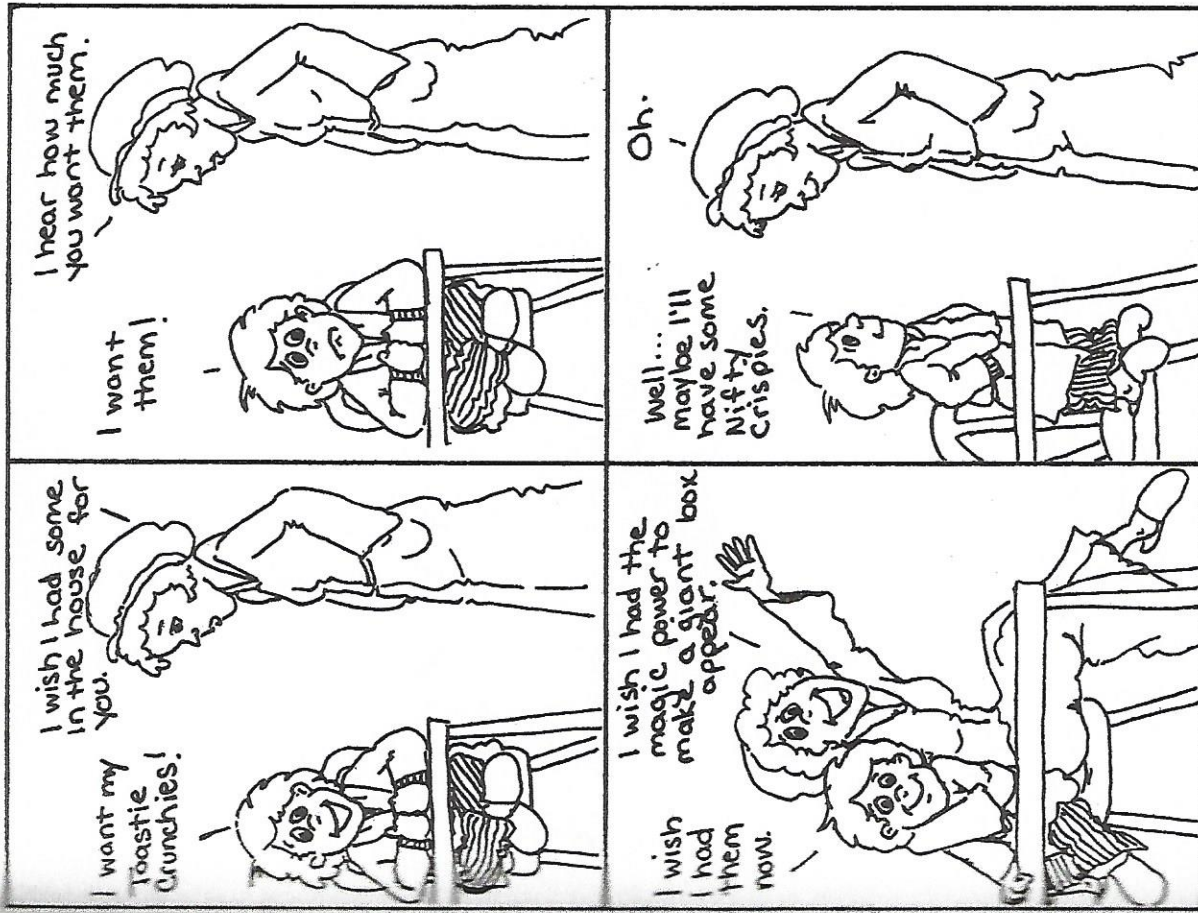
There's a lot of help to be had from a simple "Oh . . . umm . . . or "I see." Words like these, coupled with a caring attitude, are invitations to a child to explore her own thoughts and feelings, and possibly come up with her own solutions.

INSTEAD OF EXPLANATION AND LOGIC,

IV. GIVE A CHILD HIS WISHES IN FANTASY.



When children want something they can't have, adults usually respond with logical explanations of why they can't have it. Often the harder we explain, the harder they protest.



Sometimes just having someone understand how much you want something makes reality easier to bear.