

Emotional Intelligence

Raising a well-rounded child

By Damon Korb, MD

For many years, people have tried to equate a person's intelligence to success. Schools used intelligence quotient (IQ) tests to choose children for gifted programs and some companies even used IQ scores when hiring. But, do people with high IQ's make good friends and happy marriages? Not necessarily. Do all intelligent individuals rise continually up the corporate ladder? Not always; there are smart people who stall in their climb. There seems to be another factor that corresponds better with success in life. This factor is emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is the social side of being smart. It includes an awareness of one's feelings, and the ability to trust those feelings to make good decisions in life. It's the demonstration of self-control in the face of emotional upsets. It's coping with frustration and being motivated and remaining optimistic despite setbacks in working toward goals. It's taking the perspective of others and demonstrating empathy. And, it's social skills – getting along with and leading others.

In practical terms, the emotional quotient (EQ) is the ability to read between the lines, to size up situations, and to be intuitive. Since 1995, when psychologist Daniel Goleman wrote his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, EQ has become a popular term. Researchers now postulate that it is the EQ, and not the IQ, that is a stronger determinant of a person's success in life. Unlike the IQ, an EQ is a concept, not a standardized test that results in a score. Emotionally intelligent people possess five qualities:

- Self-awareness – a person's ability to understand and be aware of their feelings and moods.
- Self-control – the skill that helps people display their emotions and actions in socially appropriate ways. It helps one control anger, sadness, and fear.
- Motivation – the trait that helps a person use their emotions to persevere and reach their goals.
- Empathy – the ability to understand how another person feels.
- Social-skills – how to interact with others in social situations, the ability to carry on a conversation and deal with other's emotions, and being socially competent.

In order to raise a well-rounded child, parents must sometimes make decisions that seem to go against the grain. In the movie, *The Shining*, Jack Nicholson delivers the famous line, "All work and no play makes Johnny a dull boy." In the conversation of intelligence, that quote could not be more true. Parents often overlook the importance of the EQ and focus their parenting efforts on promoting a child's already advanced skills reflected by the IQ. Generally speaking, if a child lacks critical EQ skills, parents should seek out opportunities to improve weaker skill areas in order to develop a well-rounded child. Therefore, a talented math student does not need to solve more math problems and a child with a sole interest in computers should cut back on the video games; parents should, instead, look for activities that will promote other areas where they might need improvement.

Another important skill to develop for increasing your child's EQ is to help your child identify what he wants and how he feels. This first step is where many parents falter, because some were raised by parents who taught them to hide or deny their feelings. Don't squelch your child's emotions, but give him words to identify how he feels. Say often, "What are you feeling?" In addition, parents should model open communication about emotions. For instance, instead of directly scolding your child, say, "I'm so angry right now!" Name your emotions, whatever they may be, and encourage your child to do the same. Next, help your child frame their dilemma. So, for example, when a child becomes upset about having to turn off the television say, "You would like to watch TV, but our family always eats dinner at six o'clock." Once the dilemma is set, invite your child to solve the problem, "What should we do?" This process, referred to as Collaborative Problem Solving, teaches a skill the child can use in any setting. Additionally, be sure to model emotional self-control for your child. Don't yell when a mistake occurs. Engage in a positive discussion. Yelling teaches your child that to get his point across, he must yell at others. Childhood games can also teach self-control. Games such as "Red Light/Green Light" and "Simon Says" allow a child to practice exerting control over his whole body.

Perseverance is another skill that can help motivate children in a variety of situations. To persevere requires patience and patience can be practiced. Teach ways to develop patience and give examples (i.e. earning a toy slowly over a period of days or weeks, waiting to play with a friend, saving up money for college and other examples that may have meaning for your child). Practice patience, for example, if you are in line at a store, tell your child, "Hey, let's practice patience." Or say, "Let's flex our patience muscles. Wow, you're getting strong!" Discuss how patience can be "short" or "long," and how sometimes patience can be "used up."

Research suggests that there are many benefits to raising a child's EQ. Well-rounded children live happier, healthier lives. But, be realistic, it is not necessary for children to excel at everything, often it helps to have a specific area of strength. It should be noted that children with high EQs have one important thing in common: they have had diverse experiences. Self-awareness develops as children experience how they feel over multiple experiences. Empathy and social skills are supported by getting to know many different people. Motivation grows out of trying new things and experiencing struggle and success. Let your child watch you and know how you feel as you move through your experiences. It is certainly possible to increase your child's EQ, but it is a process. It may put all your patience practice to the test, because raising an EQ takes time, but your whole family will benefit from the attempt.

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