

Tips for helping boys express their emotions healthily



Be aware of how you express emotion and what your own beliefs surrounding feelings and their expression look like. For example, avoid saying things like "real men don't cry" or "you shouldn't be angry".



Help boys to name what they are feeling, particularly primary emotions like fear, rejection and sadness which often appear as anger.



Listen calmly, empathise and reflect back what the boy is saying with an emphasis on feelings. For example, you might say; "so you felt a bit scared standing up in front of the class, I can understand that".



For younger boys use an emotion face chart. Get them to point to how they are feeling now or before when a situation or incident occurred earlier.



Untangle feelings from behaviour where possible. For example, you might say; "It's okay to feel angry about [incident], but let's have a chat about other ways to deal with this which don't involve pushing your friend."



Try and see the feelings beneath the behaviour and acknowledge or connect with them first. For example, if a boy age 10 stomps in from school thumps their bag down then slams their bedroom door, focus first on the emotion. "Hey, you seem pretty upset, what's going on mate?" Once they feel better and have calmed down you can address any behaviour that you would like them to change.



Engage on a level playing field where possible and remove factors which may increase pressure or anxiety for the boy. For example, rather than requesting eye contact or standing above the boy, have a chat while driving or kicking a ball, a shared activity where you are both seated, or another situation that lessens confrontation.



Name some things they can do when they feel upset or angry and remind them of these when they are upset. For example, kick a ball, take time out, go for a walk, punch the punching bag.



Normalise emotion however you can, make it something we respect and value, rather than a problem to be removed or fixed. We want boys to learn to tune into their feelings about life not avoid or bottle up feelings until they explode.



With strong emotion coming from a boy, stay calm yourself. Acknowledge the emotion and allow time for them to calm down before talking about it. For example, you might say; "I can see you are really angry right now. Why don't you take some time out and we can chat about it later?"