

PARENTING TIPS

Learn to Recognize Emotional Signals

The minor emotional signals you experience many times a day can help you know when and how to discipline your children. This takes some work and you may need to spend time educating yourself on the emotional signals you're already receiving.

Imagine a car's control panel with many little lights. They flash occasionally, sometimes even intensely. With experience you begin to learn about all those lights and what they mean. One indicates that the oil pressure is low, another reveals that the trunk is open. Yet another tells you that it's time to take the car in for maintenance. Emotions are like those little lights. It takes time to understand what they mean and how to respond rightly to them. When you become more in touch with the emotional signals in relationships and are more sensitive to others then you can begin to respond in healthier ways.

Hundreds of times a day, you make decisions about life. You'd be surprised at how many times it's a minor emotional signal that gets you started. A salesman knows just the right time to close the deal. A husband is amazed at his wife's perceptiveness to sense a problem in their son. A teacher decides to let the class take a stretch break. If you ask those people how they knew how to respond to a situation, they may not be able to articulate what it was that gave them the clue. They just felt as if it was the right thing to do.

If you analyze all of the above situations, you will discover that each involved specific objective signals that don't have to do with emotions. People relied on details that they saw, heard, or remembered. However, those cues trigger emotional responses, not intellectual reason. Salesmen, teachers, and parents often learn to look for signals and clues in others in the form of expressions or behavior. But some of the best skill comes from an emotional sense that this is the right response for the current situation.

Considering emotional cues may seem contradictory to what you've heard in the past. We've all been warned, "Be careful about making decisions based on emotions." That's good advice, especially as you're growing in your experience, because emotions can give unclear signals about life situations. It would be unwise to leave the house messy just because you don't feel like cleaning it, or confront someone just because he made you mad. That's not what we're talking about here.

When a decision is very important it's essential to base it on more than a hunch or an emotional cue, but you'd be surprised how anger can become an asset in your parenting if you learn to keep it in check and understand what it is telling you.

To learn more about emotions and parenting, take a look at the book, [Good and Angry, Exchanging Frustration for Character in You and Your Kids](#), by Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN