Enhancing Children’s Emotional Literacy

Did you know that a child’s social and emotional development is key to school readiness and overall healthy growth and development? As a parent of an infant, toddler or preschooler, you are your child’s first teacher on how to regulate and control their emotions. Young children look to you for guidance on how to respond when they are angry, happy, surprised, frustrated, fearful and so forth. In early childhood education, we refer to this as helping young children to develop emotional literacy.

Emotional literacy is the ability to identify, understand, and express emotions in a healthy way. It is also is the capacity to recognize, label, and understand feelings in oneself and in others.

Emotional literacy in very young children develops as a result of having respectful, caring, supportive relationships with adults. When children have a strong foundation in emotional literacy they tolerate frustration better, engage in less destructive behavior and generally have greater academic achievement.

On the other hand, children who don’t learn to use emotional language have a hard time labeling and understanding their own feelings or accurately identifying how others feel.

How can you help your child develop his or her emotional literacy? One technique is to verbally acknowledge and label emotions expressed by your child. A gentle positive tone of voice communicates to children an understanding and acceptance of whatever emotions they are exhibiting. Check out how the mother assist her child in regulating his emotions:

“Oh Ethan, sweetie, you bumped your head and it hurt. Let me hold you for a few minutes. Aw, it hurt, didn’t it, and made you mad. We will go away from that counter and find something else to play with. Are you feeling better?”

To learn more ways you can help support your child’s emotional literacy visit http://child.unl.edu and http://child.unl.edu/teachingpyramidresources.