

Emotional Intelligence

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My career in education has afforded me the privilege of working with students from various abilities and backgrounds. I have found there are many variables that help determine a student’s success in school and life. One factor that comes to mind is the student’s intelligence quotient, or IQ. We expect our brightest students to excel and are sometimes disappointed when their work is mediocre or when they seem to want to do just enough to get by. Some of the smartest children I taught turned out to be the least successful. On the other hand, I have taught students with average intelligence who became highly successful in their business and personal lives. What makes the difference? What more than intellectual ability does a student need?

Some would say that IQ makes less of a difference in a person’s success or failure than his EQ, or emotional intelligence. Many would go even further to say a person’s emotional intelligence predicts success better than achievement scores.

Emotional intelligence is an awareness of your actions and feelings and how they affect those around you. It means you value others, listen to their wants and needs, and are able to empathize or identify with them on many different levels. Students with a high EQ can learn to assess a situation, consider possible courses of action, and then work with others to reach the best solution.

People with emotional intelligence are aware of their emotions, but don’t necessarily let their emotions drive their actions. They know how to control impulsive behavior, get along well with others, and are good with handling conflict without parent or teacher intervention. They are usually self-motivated and can delay immediate rewards for long-term gains. They consider the needs of others and not just their own perceived needs. They are honest with themselves about their abilities and know their strengths and limitations. They can empathize with others and build strong relationships, making them good team players that work for the success of the team or project and not just for their own success.

Leaders in the business community tell educators that students too often lack these soft skills. Many employers now view emotional intelligence as being more desirable than technical ability. They tell us they can teach technical skills to their employees, but the emotional skills are vital. Although a person’s IQ is relatively fixed in childhood, it is encouraging that emotional intelligence skills can be developed as late as adolescence.

To help your child develop his emotional intelligence, encourage him to join in activities with other children. Our schools have excellent athletic programs and many clubs that cater to a wide range of interests. Teach him to be assertive, not controlling, and support him when he doesn’t make the team or isn’t the star player. Children who learn to accept “no” at an early age are more likely to know how to handle the many “no’s” that will come later in life.

Children need to learn how to lose without getting sad or angry. One of the best ways to teach this is through modeling what it looks like to be a good loser. In every game, there is a winner and a loser. Your child is watching to see how you respond when his team loses a game. Talk with him to encourage positive ways to react when things don’t go his way.

Teach your child to listen to the opinions of others. Use every opportunity to talk with your child—not to him—and validate his opinions by listening to what he has to say. Give him a safe environment to learn how to negotiate conflicts. When he misbehaves, ask him to express his feelings about why he doesn’t need to be punished. You may decide to still punish him, but he will be developing valuable skills of negotiation that will serve him well in later life.

Emotional intelligence is vitally important to children and adults. Children with higher emotional intelligence make better grades, are more likely to graduate, and have more friends. As educators and parents, we are responsible for helping students develop their emotional intelligence skills. Doing so helps them gain a better understanding about themselves, about others, about what drives individuals to action, and how to work with other people.