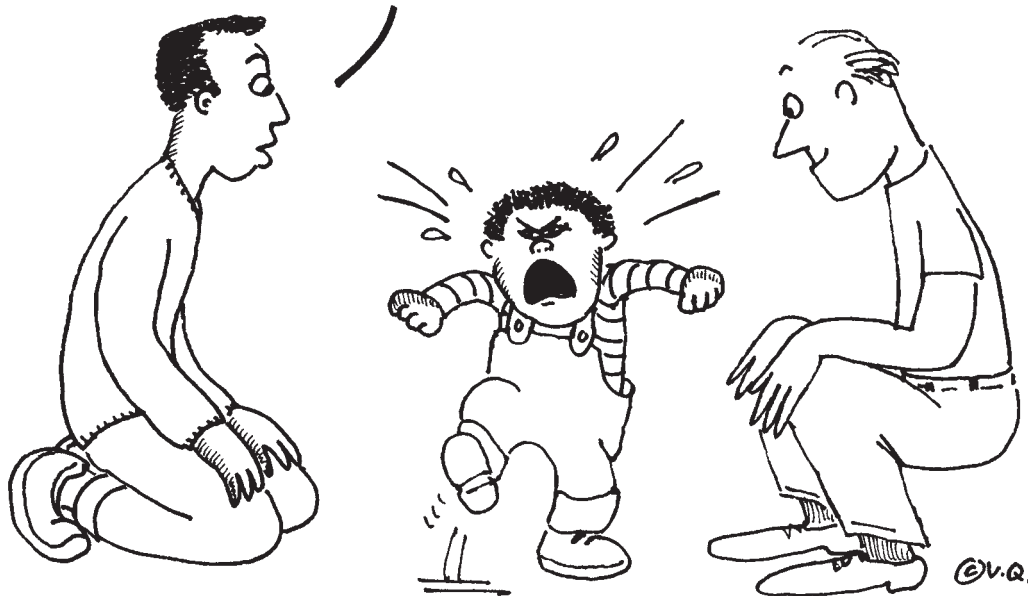


He's definitely angry
about something



CHAPTER 4 Feelings Matter

Being a parent is an emotional business. Children's emotions can be very strong, and difficult for us to deal with sometimes. Children also have the knack of 'pushing our buttons' that is, setting off our own emotions.

Why are feelings important?

Knowing what to do to help our children with their feelings can be one of the hardest parts of being a parent. Yet our feelings are an important part of who we are. They can tell us about our needs and what's good for us. Sometimes their messages are very important. Here are some examples of what our feelings could tell us:

- FEAR can tell us when we're in real danger
- ANGER can mean that we don't accept what's happening to us
- feeling LONELY could tell us that we need more contact with other people
- feeling HAPPY usually tells us that what we're doing is right for us

As we grow up, we sometimes learn that our feelings, or some of them, are 'wrong' or 'unimportant'. Being told 'there's no need to get upset' or 'you shouldn't be angry' teaches us that our feelings are wrong. Being told 'I don't care if you're upset' tells us that our feelings don't matter. Or, if our parents did not show their emotions, we are likely to grow up thinking that it's not OK to show feelings.

If we come to believe that our feelings are wrong, that they don't matter, or that they shouldn't be seen, we may learn to take no notice of them, or to hide them. There can be several problems with this:

- the feelings could build up and explode later
- we might not find out what the feelings could tell us about ourselves or our situation
- we may start to feel bad about ourselves or guilty for feeling the way we do
- feelings that are buried for long periods can make us ill in the end. Anger turned inwards can later lead to depression

We can help both ourselves and our children by learning to accept that feelings are natural, even the uncomfortable ones.



Feelings are natural

YOUR CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

Think about the feelings that your children show.

How do they show their various feelings? (For example, what do they do to show they're angry, bored, hurt etc?)

Which of their feelings do you feel OK about?

Which of them do you *not* feel OK with?

How do you tend to react when your children show strong feelings? (For example, if they scream when they're angry, what do you do or how do you feel?)



Do your reactions to your children's feelings change depending on how you are feeling at the time? (For instance, some people find it harder to hear about another person's happy feelings when they are feeling stressed.)

Some feelings are harder to cope with than others

Feelings can be painful. This is true both of feelings we have ourselves and of feelings other people show us. Very often the feelings we find difficult to cope with, either in ourselves or in our children, are the *ones that we were not allowed to show when we were little*.

For example, if we were told off for getting angry, the chances are that will we grow up feeling bad, perhaps guilty, when we do feel angry. Or if we were always expected to be cheerful and not to appear miserable, we might find that we get annoyed when our own children are feeling fed up.