

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

## Elaine Halligan's tips for strong mental health

**T**oday the shocking reality is that 1 in 10 of our children will experience some sort of mental health issue ranging from anxiety to addiction, eating disorders, self-harm or depression with children as young as 8 being treated. The impact on the child, and also on friends, families, teachers and carers, can be devastating. The need to talk about this has never been greater.

### Why does it happen?

This is complex. Some reasons include:

- Children are subject to much stress around school performance, where unless they get 10 A\*s they can perceive themselves as a failure. All the A\*s in the world amount to nothing unless your child has a strong sense of self-worth and a good emotional IQ.
- **Overscheduling** can be crippling, resulting in a pace of life that's too fast and damaging our children's ability to just be kids.
- Parents are **too risk-averse**. If we don't allow our kids to make mistakes we inadvertently pass on our anxieties.



### Here are four top strategies for parents:

1. Be an **emotion coach** for your child. This means recognising, respecting and reflecting back to children the feelings they experience. Naming their feelings helps them to make connections between their logical higher brain and the emotional limbic system. Children need to be able to recognise that they're feeling sad so that they can seek solace in a healthy way or to get help. They need to understand what is making them irritated and find constructive ways of dealing with that so that they don't take it out on others. They need to recognise worry and its purpose and they need to be able to put their worries into perspective.
2. **Connect during regular family meals.** Don't let your tween/teen eat alone at their desks in their bedroom and text you whilst in the house!
3. Praise your child descriptively and credibly to build strong self-esteem.
4. **Make failure acceptable by modelling a healthy attitude to your own mistakes and by focusing more on your children's efforts than their achievements.**

Elaine Halligan is the London director of The Parent Practice, an organisation that delivers positive parenting skills to enable parents to bring out the best in their children.

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