

HEALTHY MINDS – Parent Supplement

Module 4 – Learning about Emotions

Key Concepts

- Emotions are natural – it is normal to feel the whole range of human emotions at various times
- Emotions provided a survival advantage to humans and therefore have played a key role in human evolution
- Our beliefs about emotions will affect the way we respond to them.
- It is not normal to feel happy 24/7
- The two most common *unhelpful* ways of dealing with emotions are:
 - avoidance
 - impulsively giving in to emotional urges
- As a general rule, emotions do not control our behaviour, our choices do.
- *Reaction urges* are the behavioural urges that come with strong emotions. They may have conferred a survival advantage for humans in the past, but in many circumstances in the modern world may actually be unhelpful.
- *Psychological Muscle* is the ability to feel a reaction urge that results from a particular emotion, yet respond with the ‘thinking brain’ – making a conscious decision about what to do based on what is the most helpful way to respond.

Key Student Activities

- Discussing the ‘Learning About Emotions’ Fact Sheet
- Students watch video examples of famous instances of poor psychological muscle (e.g. John McEnroe; Zinedine Zidane in the World Cup final 2006)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAjWi663kXc>

- Completing the 'Responses to Emotions' worksheet which involves identifying unhelpful reaction urges in various scenarios and choosing the helpful response
- Completing a 'Mood & Response Diary' for a week

Discussion Points

- How do you think most people would answer the question "Do our emotions control our behaviour?" Why?
- Ask your child to explain why emotions are like the weather.
- Your child may be willing to discuss their diary (once completed) – were they able to always choose a helpful behaviour or did they go with any unhelpful reaction urges?
- Can you think of some situations in which the reaction urge might actually be the helpful response?

Parent Self-reflection Questions

- On a scale of 1-10, how would I rate the strength of my own 'psychological muscle'? Do I often get swept up in strong emotions and end up responding according to the reaction urge that goes with those strong feelings, or am I able to choose a helpful response, even if it goes against the urge of the moment?
- If I was to ask those who know me best, how would they rate my psychological muscle?
- What have I taught my child – either explicitly or through modelling – about emotions and how to deal with them?