

# Emotion Coaching

Dr Sam Caswell Dr Sara Freitag

Specialist Educational Psychologists with  
the Virtual School

Achieving for Children

Educational Psychology Service



**achieving**  
**for children**

# Emotion Coaching

- Why do we need it?
- What is it?
- How do we do it?
- How are we going to share it?

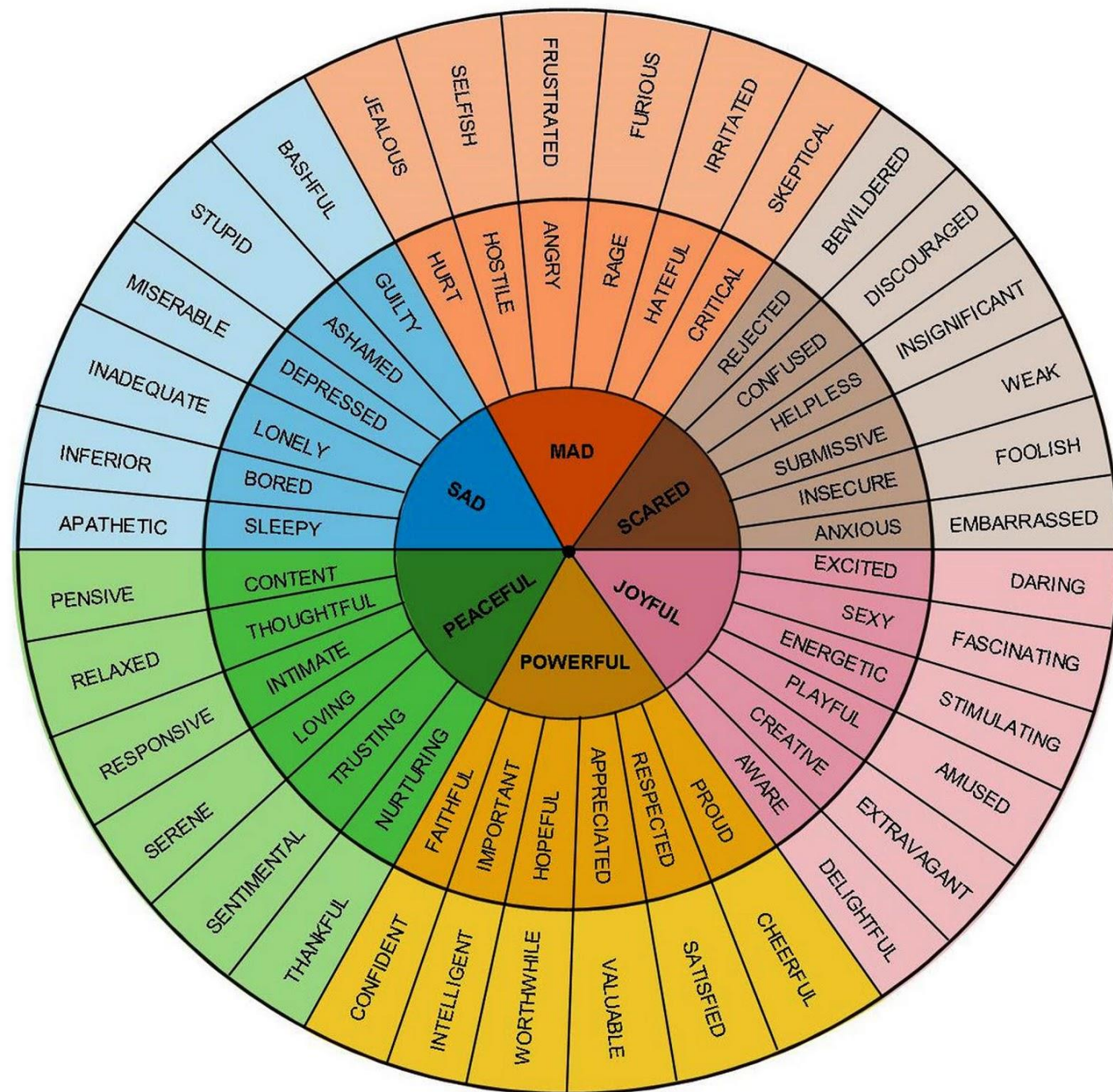
# Why do we need Emotion Coaching?

1. Emotions are innate and hardwired
2. Better life outcomes for children with emotional competencies
3. Identification of skills supporting people to respond to emotions
4. Children need to learn and understand their emotions, especially if these are 'difficult'
5. Children's understanding about emotions is developed through interpersonal relationships with key adults
6. Behaviourist models do not pay attention to the emotions giving rise to the behavior.

# Activity

- List as many emotion words as possible in 60 seconds





- What words did we think of?
- Was there a balance between pleasant feelings and less comfortable emotions?
- What would our priority be if we had to 'coach' certain emotion words in school?



Distress



Fear



Surprise



Anger



Disgust

**These 6 primary emotions are suggested to be innate, hardwired and universal and necessary – there is no such thing as a bad emotion!**



Joy

**Joy** harder to develop and express than other 5  
Need to experience joy to feel it

# Why do we have emotions?

Emotions provide information & motivate us to act. These are the less comfortable/more challenging emotions:

- **Anxiety** tells us there is a threat/problem that requires attention
- **Anger** enables us to defend ourselves from the threat
- **Disgust** helps us to avoid sickness
- **Sadness** encourages others to help
- **Pleasant emotions**, such as optimism, motivate us to explore

## What is Emotion Coaching?

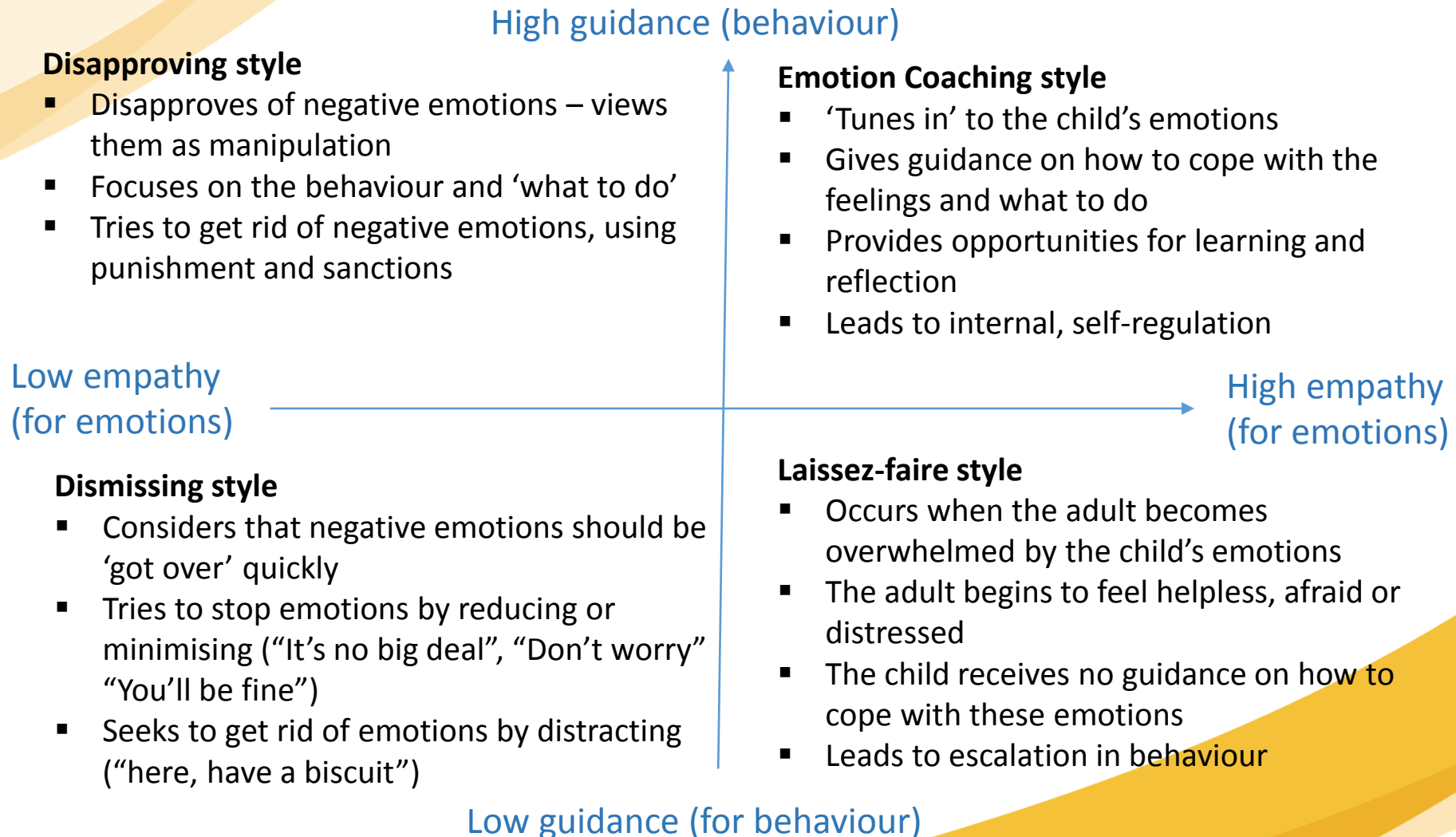
Emotion Coaching is helping people, children and adults, to understand the different emotions they experience, why they occur and how to handle them.

*An extension to Wondering Aloud.*

# Why do Emotion coaching?

- Research at Bath Spa University has demonstrated that Emotion Coaching helps:
  - children to regulate, improve and take ownership of their behaviour
  - children to calm down and better understand emotions
  - practitioners to be more sensitive to children's needs
  - create more consistent responses to children's behaviour
  - practitioners to feel more 'in control' during incidents
  - promotes positive relationships between adults and children

# A very brief introduction to Emotion Coaching (Gottman)





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdhjztWMnVw>

Clip from Inside Out, demonstrating the importance of empathy and attunement

# Emotion Coaching: Connect before Correct

- All emotions are ok – not all behaviours are.
- Empathise with the child from their point of view. This doesn't mean agreeing with them, just viewing things from their perspective.
- Recognise all emotions as being natural and normal and not always a matter of choice.
- Recognise behaviour as communication.
- Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt.
- Help solve problems and set limits.
- **Coach when child is calm enough for words**

# Grounding and calming strategies

- **Grounding and calming strategies**
- Grounding helps keep someone in the present. It works by focusing outward on the external world. You can think of it as distraction, centering, a safe place or looking outward.
- Strategies include:
- Counting breaths in and out, watching clouds, counting backwards from 20, counting how many steps they can walk with a beanbag on their head, placing a cool cloth to their face.

# Grounding and calming strategies

## 54321 game

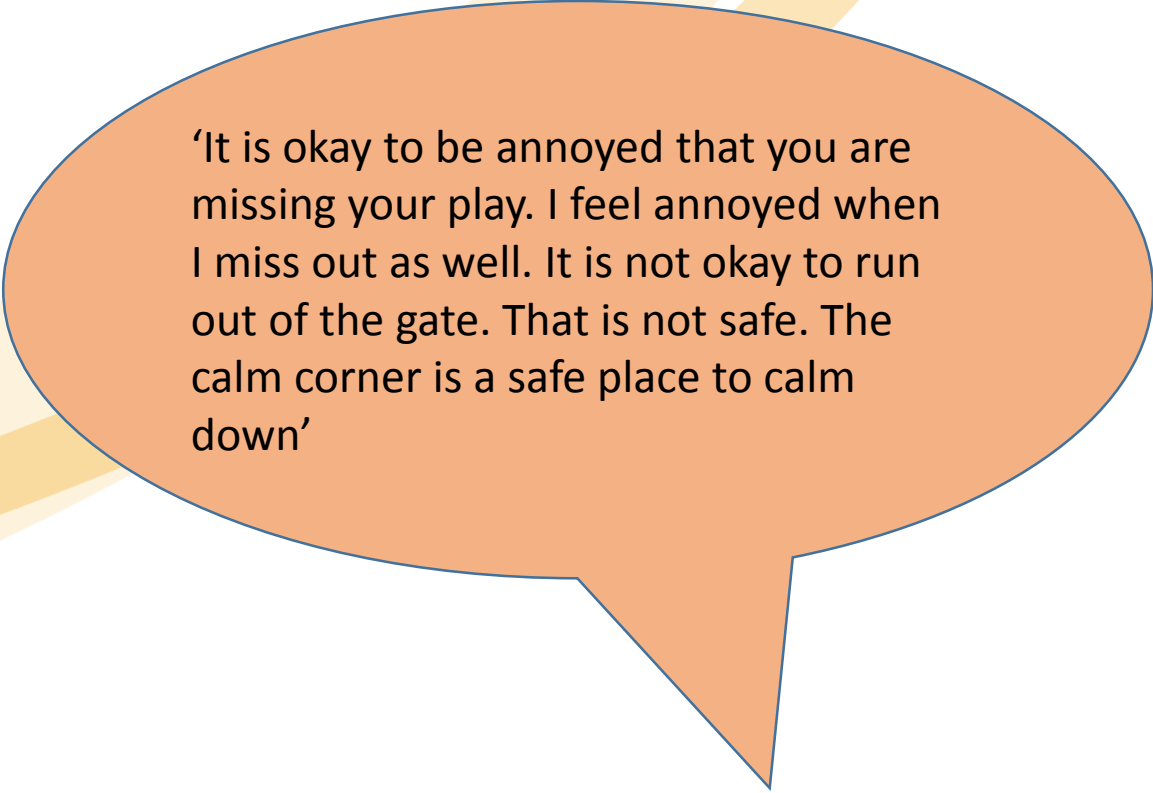
- Name 5 things you can **see** in the room
- Name 4 things you can **feel**
- Name 3 things you can **hear** right now
- Name 2 things you can **smell**
- Name **1 good thing** about yourself
- Let child know they are safe and secure ***“I can see you and I’m going to stay near you to make sure you stay safe”.***

# Emotion coach when in a calm enough state to hear the language

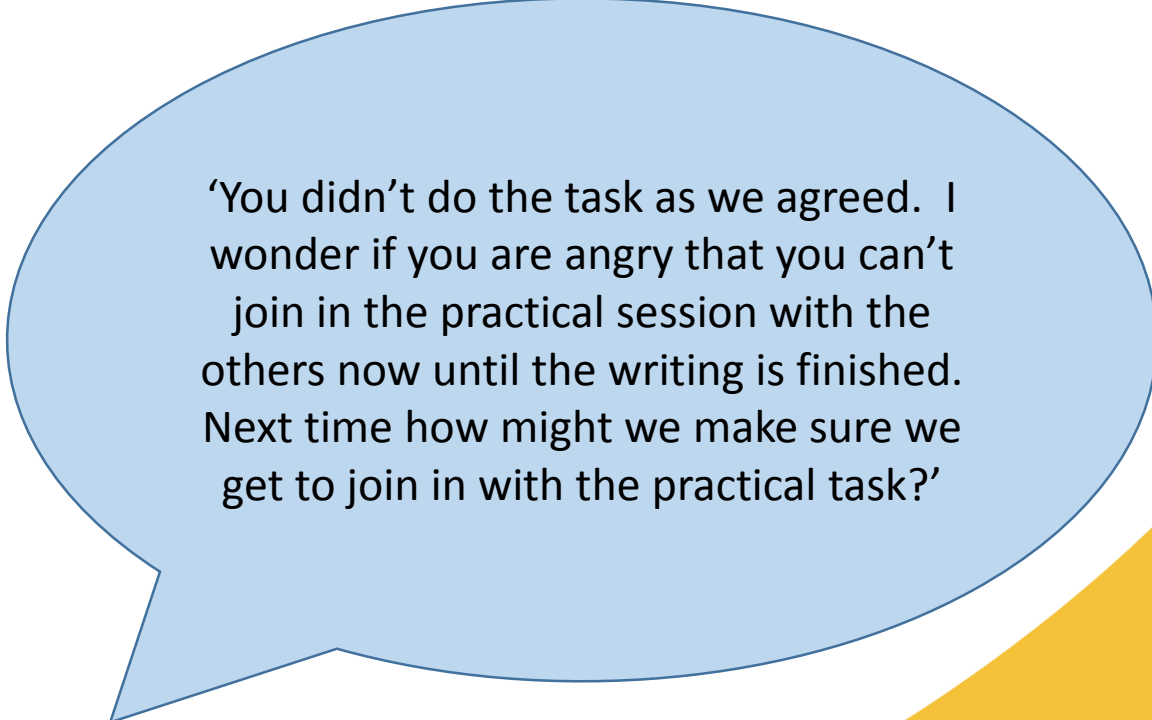
1. Name the feeling
2. Empathising
3. Validating
4. Setting limits (if needed) and Problem solving.



*"I think you're angry because you've had to stop doing your favourite activity. I can see you are clenching your fists and your face is red. I'd be frustrated too if I had been interrupted from something I enjoy. It's ok to be frustrated, it's not ok to say mean things as it upsets others. When I feel frustrated I find it helpful to count down from 20. Let's try it together now".*

An orange speech bubble with a blue outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom left. It contains text about feeling annoyed and the importance of a calm corner.

'It is okay to be annoyed that you are missing your play. I feel annoyed when I miss out as well. It is not okay to run out of the gate. That is not safe. The calm corner is a safe place to calm down'

A blue speech bubble with a blue outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom left. It contains text about not completing a task and a question about future participation.

'You didn't do the task as we agreed. I wonder if you are angry that you can't join in the practical session with the others now until the writing is finished. Next time how might we make sure we get to join in with the practical task?'

## STEP 1

Recognising a person's feelings



## STEP 2 and 3

Empathising with them and  
validating the emotion



## STEP 4

Setting limits on behaviour (if  
needed) and problem solving

**[Recognise]** David, I think you might be feeling annoyed because Katie keeps winning

**[Empathise and Validate]** It can be frustrating when we try hard but can't manage to win ourselves

**[Set limits]** It upsets her when you swear at her. We do not swear in this school because it upsets other people

**[Problem solve]** Maybe you could sit on the bench for a bit to get back in the mood to play together?

## Step 1: Name the feeling to tame it

- Use words to reflect back child's emotion and help child to label emotion.
- Simply observe – saying what you see rather than asking probing questions to which young people might not know answer.
- Try to keep language curious (I wonder if...could it be...I think you might....)

# Reflecting on feelings

- Locate feelings in the body:
  - Your body looks heavy and sad.
  - Sometimes my stomach churns when I have to read aloud. Does that ever happen to you?
  - When we get angry, sometimes we feel really hot.
- Try and reflect feelings in all conversations:
  - oh it sounds like you might have been shocked
  - Could he have been feeling angry then?
  - I wonder if you felt happy when that happened
  - that sounds like a weekend that would make you feel calm and relaxed.

## Step 2: Empathising

- Acknowledge **low levels of emotion** before they escalate to full-blown crisis.
- Try to emotion coach positive and well as less comfortable feelings.
- Demonstrating empathy when stakes are low creates a good foundation.
- Empathic comments: I understand how you feel, I can see how this is hard, I feel X hearing that... , that must feel...

## Step 3: Validation

- It is ok to feel, to have big feelings, to feel that this is all too much.
- Feelings happen.
- I understand why you feel this way.
- Many of us can feel like this...
- This..... can be hard
- We are allowed to feel...

# Emotion Coaching Steps script examples

- “I noticed you looking around at the others who are working on their projects. I think you might be feeling nervous right now about whether your work will be ok. Have I got that right?” *Step 1*
- “I think you might be feeling bit grumpy because we have to go outside and it is raining. I don’t like when it rains either” *Step 1 and 2*
- “Gosh Mondays can be hard, we can all feel a little nervous after a holiday. I don’t like it when I’m not sure what’s going to happen” *Step 1, 2 and 3*

## Step 4: Setting Limits (if needed) and Problem Solving

Validate the emotion and label the feeling  
...BUT...  
certain behaviours cannot be accepted.



## Step 4: Examples of limit setting

- ‘We can’t behave like that even though you are feeling annoyed because it is not safe’
- ‘You didn’t do the task as we agreed. I think you might be angry that you can’t join in the practical session with the others now because you have to complete the written assessment first’

## Step 4: Problem solving

- Exploration of incident/ behaviour and scaffolding (suggesting/supporting) ideas and actions that could lead to a more productive outcome. **Suggesting a next step might be sufficient at times**
- But problem solving could involve many more steps, and be used as an opportunity for learning about self management, social skills etc.

## Step 4: Problem Solving – the follow up

1. **What is the problem?** After you have followed through on consequences for inappropriate behaviour. Find out what was the goal the young person was trying to reach with their behaviour
2. **What could I do?** Ask the child to come up with several possible solutions to the problem. Don't shoot down suggestions if they are not workable.
3. **List what might happen for each** solution. You can help them by asking is this fair, will this work, is it safe? How are you likely to feel/ How are others likely to feel?

## Step 4: Problem Solving

4. **Pick the best solution.** If the child comes up with an unworkable solution it's okay to go forward with it as long as it's harmless. Leave the door open to rework the solution if it doesn't seem to be working. You can help the young person too come up with a plan of action to accomplish the solution.
5. **Do it!**
6. **Did it work?** Thinking about what went well and what you might do differently next time

# Think of scripts you could use (10 minutes)

Year 1 sitting on the bench looking sad and wiping away tears. Tells you that a group have excluded them from the game and are laughing at them because they got upset.

Year 4s want to play football, look angry and are arguing. One child says they 'called dibs' on the ball at the beginning of the day and has more friends who want to play. The other child says that it was agreed yesterday that it was their turn to have the ball.

1. **Labelling the emotion**
2. **Empathising**
3. **Validating**
4. **Setting limits (if needed) and Problem solving.**

## Activity: Next Steps

Discuss with a partner:

- How could Emotion Coaching be disseminated in your setting?
- Who needs to be trained to support your LAC/PLAC
- What level of input do staff need?
- Make a plan: next 24 hours, next week, before the end of term.

# Resources

## Websites:

<http://www.emotioncoaching.co.uk/>

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/an-introduction-to-emotion-coaching/>

<http://empoweredtoconnect.org/the-whole-brain-child/>

<http://www.tuningintokids.org.au/>

Hand model of the brain for Children – Jeanette Roffe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdxnYhdyuY>

<http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/student-wellbeing-emotion-coaching-in-schools/>

## Books:

The Whole Brain Child – Seigel and Bryson

Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child – Gottman and DeClaire

Emotionally Intelligent Parenting – Elias

Evaluation forms  
Any questions...?