



November 2008

Emotions and Learning: Turn on Your Child's Ability to Learn**IN THIS ISSUE:***Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it.*

~ Vincent Van Gogh, 1889

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Can you recall a time when you were overcome with powerful emotions -- anger, sadness, anxiety, or frustration? As the intensity of those emotions swept over you, was it difficult to maintain concentration, finish a task at hand, or read and follow complicated directions? There is no question that powerful feelings can become so intense - like static in your head - that they affect your ability to concentrate, pay attention, and accomplish even the simplest of tasks. Coping with feelings like these while trying to perform academically is a challenge some students face on a daily basis.

Learning requires tasks such as understanding, memorizing, analyzing, and reasoning and a student's ability to accomplish these tasks is frequently dependent on his or her emotions; some refer to emotions as the "on/off switch for learning" because of the close, causal relationship between emotions and learning. Children with emotional challenges or mental health diagnoses may struggle with the performance demands placed upon them in a school setting, and it is also not uncommon for children with learning or social issues to have secondary emotional reactions that come from school being hard. As parents it is important to understand the impact emotions have on our children's learning and steps we can take to help our children handle the intensity of their emotions so they can learn and grow as individuals. Read on for some helpful tips and links to other resources that will help you "turn on" your child's ability to focus and learn.

Understand the Relationship between Emotions and Learning:

Educating yourself is important to understanding why your child's short-term or long-lasting emotional challenges are impacting their learning. The following articles are great resources for deepening your knowledge and understanding of the subject:

- [The Connections Between Emotions and Learning](#) by Candy Lawson, Ph.D.
- [5 Emotions that Block Learning: Kick-start Your Child's Readiness and Ability to Learn](#), by Margery D. Rosen
- [Center for Development and Learning Emotional Functioning and Behavior Page](#)
- [The Role of Emotions in Learning](#) by Priscilla L. Vail, M.A.T.

Help your Child Cope with Short-Term Emotions:

Even if your child does not struggle with emotional challenges on a daily basis, every child will likely experience frustration, anxiety, sadness, or anger at some point that will impact their school day or homework time. If you sense that your child is unable to concentrate or complete learning tasks because of powerful feelings, try the following:

- Encourage them to take a break. Go for a walk, shoot some hoops, ride a bike -- being outside and active can help discharge many negative emotions.
- Nurture them. Fix a favorite soothing food or warm drink, sit down and give them your undivided attention, encourage them to talk about anything they want to talk about -- just be there for them.
- Create a soothing environment. Put on calming music, remove outside distractions from the area -- give them a comfortable place to decompress.
- Know your child and be emotionally aware. Not all children will tell you when they are struggling with powerful emotions...many do not

Feelings are much like waves. We can't stop them from coming, but we can choose which one to surf.

~ Jonatan
Martensson

even know how to label the emotions they are feeling. Watch your child for signs of emotional distress and assist them by labeling and talking about feelings. Often putting a name to a feeling helps children make sense of it. Read the article, [Emotional Awareness](#), for steps to help get you in tune with your child's emotions.

Appropriately Address Long-Lasting Emotional Issues:

If your child's emotional struggles are ongoing you can collaborate with their educational team to determine possible responses. If your child has an IEP, you can request a meeting and discuss with the team whether a referral to Community Mental Health (CMH) is necessary; the Matrix handout, [Understanding Community Mental Health Referrals](#) is a helpful reference sheet. There also will be a training titled, **Students with Emotional Challenges and the IEP** at the Matrix office in Novato on *Thursday, December 4th from 9 AM to 11:30 AM*. [See below](#) for more information. You may also want to talk to your child's pediatrician and consider if a referral to private counseling or therapy would be helpful. If your child is not in Special Education, contact the school-based counselor at your child's school (or if their school doesn't have one, the school principal or nurse) to discuss your concerns and desire to seek help.

Take Care of Yourself:

When our children have emotional challenges, it affects our emotions as parents. The obsessive stress and worry our children's struggles cause us can take a tremendous toll on ourselves and our loved ones. It is important to take care of your own emotions so that you can be the best parent you can be for your child. If you find yourself struggling, find help for yourself - whether that be talking to a close friend, meeting with a therapist, or attending a support group. Knowing that you and your child are not going through this alone can be tremendously comforting. Visit [our website](#) for a listing of Matrix support groups and links to support groups sponsored by other organizations. Getting in touch with your own emotions and learning to express them effectively has the potential to not only make you feel better, but your child as well.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

Navigating the Social Skills World, Children and Youth with Disabilities. *Thursday, November 13th, 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM*, presented by Marin SELPA and SEAC at Novato District Office. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

Special Education: What a Parent Should Know about Special Education and IEP Papers. *Friday, November 14th, 8:30 AM to 10 AM, Anna Kyle Elementary School, Fairfield Healthy Start.*

Accessing Services through Regional Centers for Developmental Disabilities, *Saturday, November 15, 10 am to 12 Noon*, presented by Matrix, Solano/Napa Office. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

Students with Emotional Challenges and the IEP, *Thursday, December 4th, 9 AM to 11:30 AM. Matrix office in Novato.* Training will include an overview of the Community Mental Health referral process, ED eligibility, and structuring the IEP.

When Behavior Impacts Learning, *Wednesday, December 10th, 9 AM to 11:30 AM, Sonoma County Office of Education.* The training will cover components of a behavior intervention plan and how a plan can support your child.

* Pre-registration is required for all trainings. Please visit [our website](#) for more information.

LIBRARY AND BOOK NEWS

The Matrix Library is a valuable resource that has many titles on Emotions and Learning. Come check out the following titles:

- *Emotion: The On/Off Switch for Learning*; Vail
- *Straight Talk About Your Child's Mental Health: What to do When Something Seems Wrong*; Faraone
- *Lonely, Sad, and Angry: How to Help Your Unhappy Child*; Ingersoll & Goldstein
- *Unhappy Children: Reasons and Remedies*; Smith
- *Positive Self-Talk for Children*; Bloch
- *Ready, Set, Relax: Relaxation, Learning, and Self-Esteem for*

Children; Allen & Klein

- *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools*; Bluestein
- *When You Worry About the Child You Love: A Reassuring Guide to Solving Your Child's Emotional and Learning Problems*; Hallowell
- *Freeing Your Child from Anxiety*; Chansky
- *Help Me, I'm Sad*; Fassler & Dumas

Staff Pick: The book *Childhood Roots to Adult Happiness* by Ed Hallowell, MD is a helpful, insightful book for all parents. The author discusses the 5 basic tenets children need to be happy: to feel connected, to play, to practice, to attain mastery, and to receive recognition. He also discusses important concepts, such as "flow" - the idea that we are happiest when we are in activities that we get so wrapped up in that we forget ourselves; the concept that children need to learn how to fail and how to cope with failure, and that being bored is an opportunity.

MATRIX SPECIAL EVENTS

The Matrix Online Auction will be commencing soon and will run through December 12. Please see [our website](#) for updated information, including start date, link to auction site, and more.

Holiday Toy Run with Marin Harley Group, Sunday, December 7th. More details to follow. See our website for updated information.

17th Annual Happy Holidays Celebration at Silveyville Tree Farm in Dixon for Children with Disabilities, Thursday, December 18th, 10 AM to 12 Noon. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

MORE USEFUL INFORMATION

Raising Self-Disciplined and Confident Kids, a training sponsored by Parents Education Network (PEN), *Monday, November 17, 7 to 9 PM at Convent & Stuart Hall at 2222 Broadway, San Francisco.* [Click here](#) for more information. If you are not a PEN member you will need to join in order to attend this event. Visit www.parentseducationnetwork.org/join before you register; the membership covers a family and will allow multiple bookings.

Autism Speaks, Walk Now for Autism - Informational Meeting. *Wednesday November 12, 7 PM, Marin County Office of Education.* [Flyer.](#)

Cochlear Implant Training presented by MCOE Early Start Program. Friday, November 14, 9 AM to 3 PM in San Rafael. See [Flyer](#) for more details.

Tamalpais Unified High School District Speaker Series. Tam Union has monthly speaker meetings for parents of students with learning differences. For more information visit: <http://www.tamdistrict.org/students/sped/p2p.htm>

Marin 2009 Challenger League. A community youth program is currently being organized for youth with special needs (ages 5 to 18) who reside in Marin County. Formal registration process will begin in the Spring, but the organizers are asking all interested participants to contact them at this time so they can determine how many teams they will need. Contact janetm@ri-net.com and see [flyer](#) for more details.

Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center is a non-profit organization helping families of children with special needs. As a clearinghouse of information and resources, it is our policy not to recommend or endorse any one specific diagnostic or therapeutic program or to engage in legal advocacy.

Matrix serves families in 4 counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma, with offices in Novato and Fairfield.

NOVATO

94 Galli Drive, Suite C • Novato, CA 94949
415-884-3535 tel • 800-578-2592 toll free
415-884-3555 fax

FAIRFIELD

1615 W. Texas Street, Suite 4 • Fairfield, CA 94533
707-423-2545 tel • 800-578-2592 toll free
707-425-4585 fax

info@matrixparents.org • www.matrixparents.org

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