

How to Take Advantage of Sibling Rivalry to Explain Emotions and Feelings to a Child

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SUMMARY

In this episode of the Connected Families podcast, hosts Stacy and Lynn continue their discussion on empathy, emphasizing the importance of understanding one's own emotions before teaching children to empathize with others. They explore practical strategies for parents to help their children recognize and articulate their feelings, as well as how to foster empathy during conflicts, particularly among siblings.

- *Empathy is essential for connecting with children and understanding their emotions.*
- *Children must first learn to identify their own feelings before they can empathize with others.*
- *Physical sensations often accompany emotions, and recognizing these can help children understand their feelings.*
- *Parents should model emotional language and create an environment where discussing emotions is non-shaming and exploratory.*
- *Engaging children in identifying emotions can be facilitated through games, books, and collaborative activities.*
- *During conflicts, parents should communicate that they are for both children involved, helping to de-escalate tensions.*
- *It's important to celebrate small successes in emotional understanding and conflict resolution, reinforcing positive behavior.*
- *Teaching emotional insight and problem-solving skills is crucial for children's development and future relationships.*

[Music] hello parents and caregivers this is the connected families podcast and we're so happy that you tuned in I'm Stacy Bard the host today we are covering part two of a conversation with jimn Jackson co-founders of connected families about empathy Jim's feeling under the weather today he was part of our part one series but today is going to be just Linn and I so one of the most effective ways to connect with anyone is to Express

heartfelt empathy empathy is not just a nice way to connect with your child it's essential for all of our working relationships well last week we discussed the starting point of teaching kids empathy this week we're going to talk about the need to understand ourselves before we can understand or have empathy for others and how that relates to teaching our children so Lynn welcome back to the episode I know Jim's feeling under the weather I hope you're

feeling good today I am feeling good and I'm so empathetic towards my poor husband who is not feeling good yes he has a bit of a fever doesn't he yeah I'm sure you're giving him all the vitamins and healthy food because I know you guys love to eat healthy I just gave him homemade wild rice chicken soup so I'm doing well here good

good well this is the second part of our empathy podcast series it's just two parts and last week

we talked about how some children have a little bit more of a struggle than others using empathy but that everyone has the brain capability the neuroplasticity to be able to learn how to grow in empathy so today let's move into talking about feelings and emotions okay that's a big part of this empathy conversation so I'm going to give you a quote you wrote in a blog post that's going to be coming out with this podcast this is what you said you

said when you express empathy towards your child you are giving them the language to First understand themselves only then can they apply that knowledge to understanding others can you just unpack that and explain it for us well it helps to Think Through what is an emotion and really it's a physical sensation paired with a belief or thought So you you're face gets flush and you think oh no you don't you know

that's a classic parents or you get this knot in your gut and it goes what if he doesn't stop this aggression oh my gosh what's going to happen so there's a pairing between this physical sensation and a thought and we don't often go ah I'm feeling really anxious right now but we experience that physical sensation and then the thought and when we begin to link those we can get insight into emotions and for us you know we can step

back and go my face is flush and I'm thinking oh no you don't I've probably got some anger going which is related to a blocked goal and I have a goal to get this child to do this certain thing and he's blocking my goal so now I'm angry and I feel it in my face so it's this kind of insight into ourselves for kids to have insight into themselves that begins to teach us about emotions so

kids need to experience the sensations of emotions themselves and Pair them with their own thoughts before they can read signs of someone else's emotions and then try to take a guess at their thoughts and what's going on under the surface with them so it really helps to begin to help kids just sort of notice what's going on in their body you know just like wow your face looks really worried right now you've got kind of you

know you got some furls in your brow and your mouth is turned down and are you upset about something are you more sad or worried you know and you just start to help kids pair that physical sensation with the emotion themselves and some people are better at this than others Jim is very emotional and he's very sensitive to other people's emotions and he can read an entire room where I'm busy just analyzing the conversation and he's reading everyone's

emotions and he does it it's like he senses that person's emotions feels it in himself and that's how he knows what they're feeling yeah so it's a very intuitive body oriented thing and you know this was a steeper learning curve for me we joke about how when we got married it was kind of like Italy meets Japan yeah yeah Jim's very emotional expressive and tune with emotions and I'm very cognitive and orderly and so it's going to come easier to some kids

and others but that's the basic function is pairing that physical sensation with the thought that feels hard I'm just going to say it it feels hard and I you know I think about part one of this conversation where we talked about how parents so often get kind of like upset with their kids because they're not understanding what the other little boy on the playground feels because you just hit him can't you understand that and yet in that process we're not

understanding what our children are feeling right so we haven't used empathy to understand our own child in that moment so now here again to help our kids pay attention to what's going on in their body and that feeling we need to understand that so I'm thinking back to that playground scenario what are My Body Sensations in that moment you know I'm looking at the other Mom I'm all the stuff and I think that when I am feeling I think I stopped

breathing probably it's like oh my gosh you feel that knot in your gut yes it's in my stomach it's a combination of horror and embarrassment ment and fear and all the things right brush cheeks yeah so I mean it's not like we have to stop and just sort of like oh excuse me I know you're pummeling each other but I'm just going to take a break and get in touch with myself but yeah enter with a sense of okay calm down figure this

out later before not before but I want to before both of the kids in this situation right and you know to just shift into that belief that goal it's achievable and so it diminishes anger and I can go in and want to help both children then later I might unpack all that was going on with me at that time and and work through it but and then I can just you know enter with that

empathy of oh my gosh your faces are so angry right now and your fists are clenched and this is so hard isn't it you know and just kind of help them tune into their bodies and so that's just like you know kind of a little practical thing but it helps to understand it's the link between Body Sensations and thoughts that give us Clues into our emotions yeah I mean naming what's going on inside of ourselves to help our kids

name what's going on inside of them and pay attention to our bodies and our thoughts this is a skill and it's hard work it's hard really hard work this is I'm GNA say that but I know that it helps to lessen the chaos I think the internal chaos when we don't have words for what's going on inside of us that feels really really chaotic it does yeah I mean it reminds me of it's Daniel seagull isn't it that says name it to

tame it okay so how does that actually work that whole name entailment idea and the purpose of identifying all of this right well our brain goes higher into fight ORF flight if we're confused about what the danger is and you can imagine that's true if you don't know what's wrong if you don't know where the danger might be coming from or what's going on your arousal State just goes higher and higher because you're in more danger if

you're confused so name it to tame it starts to bring order to that and when there's order and understanding then we feel safer inside so there's actually neurological connections between the left hemisphere which is responsible for the left language logic functions the naming putting a label on those emotions and the fight ORF flight centers and so when the cortex the left cortex gets activated left hemisphere gets activated it sort of just

sends signals to the fighter Center is like it's okay you can

calm down we're getting a grip we're understanding this it's going to be okay and so that's that direct function of name it to tame it the brain relaxes kind of feels like ah so that's what's going on and we're not feeling helpless against this amorphous angst amorphous angst is going to drive our arousal State up cause more extreme fighter flight reactions that are going to be upsetting to everyone so name it tame it and then name it to tame it and then

deal with it so that's kind of the sequence of how through a difficult emotion works I want to identify it that'll help me calm down and then I can problem solve it well it seems like there's maybe something that needs to go before that and that is even having the words to identify it yeah in my family growing up it was like happy or angry like sad or mad like I think that was about it and you know I'm married to a

Scottish husband who his emotion is just steady he's just a steady guy and I don't even think that's an emotion how are you feeling honey oh steady fine like I I'm fine yeah so how do people start to identify emotions and just learn that language oh you identified something that's really important is for adults a lot of us adults need to really begin to be more fluent in our own emotional labeling a dear connected fam's Community person it

was a husband and wife and the wife was very emotional and intuitive and the husband was as just concrete sequential objective technical as you could be and when they got married she recognized this and she she looked up on the Internet a list of 50 emotions printed them out put them on the refrigerator and said here's your work we got we got to learn these and talk about these together he actually was really thankful

for that I mean it's a great example of humility and learning he didn't respond like what do you mean you think I need to work on learning emotions he's like oh wow I never really thought about these I think this will be good and he later said that list and those conversations with his wife were such a gift in learning to connect with his very emotional son had sort of an emotional anxious son and because he

learned those feelings words he was able to connect well with them and just followed their Journey Through The Years and it's been really fun to see the maturity in the sun and the compassion and the sensitivity and the bond with his dad as they learn to connect on these emotion words so having a list if it's older kids or a chart with picture faces there's one on our Pinterest site that's an example you can go to the

connected fam's whatever page on Pinterest and you'll see an example of that chart and just getting it out there so you're making it part of part of your everyday life I think that's really good I remember when I knew I need to do some work on this especially with my kids too like we needed words to use and so we have this sort of common chalkboard wall in our common area and so I got us together and we came up with as many

emotion words as we could and we wrote them on the wall so we just had them there and they were probably there for even a couple of years and so it was so good because sometimes it'd be like okay what are we feeling go

find a word just go look at the wall and find a word you know so it got us going but I would just like to say to everyone that we're always working on this like I do not

feel like we've arrived in being able to name our emotions but we're on the journey oh I love that story I've never heard you share that that's so awesome yeah what I love about that is that it's everybody contributing and then it's your modeling is so much a part of it and not like okay children these are the lists these are the words that I want you to work on now you know I'm sure that there was something in how

this wife approached her husband that was very inviting and exciting and just making it seem like a fun thing to be learning and that's what's really critical kind of the phrase that I wrote down here in yellow and italics for this whole segment is the question is learning about emotions in your family associated with shame or Discovery is learning about emotions associated with shame or Discovery so is finding the emotion going to make you feel worse

about yourself or is it about understanding more of what's going on inside of me right and then is there celebration within it so I'll give you some examples of the difference between the two it's like I'll just almost like roleplay with you Stacy it's like Stacy you know that it's not okay to hit you need to use your words you can say I'm mad ready okay you try that right now say I'm mad I'm mad okay that's good you

need to do that next time how did you feel when I did that not good yeah felt harsh and like I didn't feel like I a happy or a good feeling at all it was almost like was angry or something yeah okay so now I'm I'm going to do that in a different way and just step into feeling how you would feel if I responded that way oh Stacy oh you used your hands again didn't you honey wow it

looks like your face is really it's really mad is that right am I right is it mad yes yeah that's so good you figured that out your face is mad how else do you know that you're mad right now my tummy is tight yeah your tummy your tummy and your fists and yeah that's good you're figuring it out and you know what I love that we can learn this together and in fact I know the more you learn about this the more

you're going to be able to keep safe hands and feel good about that so high five I figured out something that was a mad clue and you figured out something that was a mad clue I think it's going to go better next time you see I'm I'm teaching the same thing but it's a huge difference between my teaching shame Discovery so I apologize I don't remember if it was Daniel seagull or Daniel Amen who said that feeling like a

disappointment chronically like a disappointment hinders the function in the hippocampus which is the Center for Learning and memory so kids will not learn as well we're wanting them to learn these emotions they won't learn as well if they feel like a disappointment yeah and so I mean this is where the grace of God just comes in to say child you this is so hard for you it's harder for you than the other kids and I get

that you don't have a bad character you have a brain that this is harder for and I'm passionate about wanting to

teach you this in that process I want to encourage you so then we can use all sorts of other things I talk about this a lot in that blog post about how to use books and movies and other people and gross store and kind of learning out there outside of just me so it's less threatening and making it fun and you

know kind of pretending to be a social detective while we're learning and oh did you see that oh what what's going on with that little guy in the in the grocery store oh he looks mad doesn't he how did you know that you know so then I'm having fun with you learning about that and then we can reflect it back at other times so there's just lots of creative ways to teach emotional intelligence and make it fun and make it

non-shaming this podcast you know along with it we have a blog post coming out on empathy it's packed with links and resources for all sorts of ways to start teaching your kids empathy you know we're going to take a little break right now Lynn I want to share with everyone about an online course that we have actually sibling conflict so I'm going to share about that in a minute and then afterwards we'll come back and we'll

finish up our conversation on empathy sounds good did you imagine your kids would be best friends with a house full of laughter fun and cute memory making moments and yet here you are struggling with constant fighting badgering and teasing you know your kids are capable of close relationships but even with all your effort you feel like you're getting nowhere and sometimes you wonder if you're making things even worse what if you could use the inevitable conflict

between your kids to actually strengthen their relationship it is possible connected families has a self-paced five session online course follow the link in the show notes to register and help your kids move from bickering to bonding all right Lynn we're back after the break and for the rest of our podcast today I want to talk about how we can apply empathy to siblings and sibling conflict also help with play dates too in case you're child very true

yes oo that's so true that even brings up memories I remember when my daughter's little friend kept pulling her hair just girl no and being a new mom and my baby was you know like just over 12 months and I thought yes anyway here we go so empathy is a struggle between siblings or sometimes in playdates do you have any thoughts on how to grow understanding between them for sure it starts with building the values of this connectedness and

understanding with happier feelings you know it's like your kids need a just right challenge so helping them to just see the joy in each other's faces when they share or they play well together or maybe if somebody is a little sad and it's not a conflict situation those are just great opportunities to build that awareness it's like oh look at your sister she's crying I wonder what's happened I wonder what she's sad about should we ask her you know it's that

kind of thing drawing them in when they're not the cause of the sadness oh right outside of conflict times you know so building that value and oh do you want to come here and help me give her a hug or would you go get her favorite stuffy she fell down and hurt herself she's so sad and then the child gets the favorite stuffy and oh you helped me help her feel better draws them into that experience so you're

wanting to create success out of it instead of the classic do you know how your sister feels right now what did you do you must have done something yeah no it's waiting for time when the child has no fault in the situation to promote empathy and then just a general sharing of the happier feelings and enjoying those and then it also helps to just build connection and put the kids on the same team even if it's a peer or whatever you know grab

some recycled paper or or something and make little snowballs and they try to Pelt you snowballs paper balls they try to Pelt you together and you fall over and you know they're on the same team and then you can talk about how fun that is and look at each other's faces and so you're wanting to build that sense of team and uniting against an adult that's being sure to be playfully in EP is just a great example of doing that and then

just engaging your child's inner social scientist there's a book that I referenc in the blog post called you are a social detective and it's a great children's book we actually got it in our family when our kids were teenagers but we had a blast with it you know and there was two of us in our family me being one of them and there was one of the children that that did not read social cues as well and so we would laugh and and if

there was a glitch or something it's like oh you are a social detective and we'd all laugh and I'd be the first to admit that I needed or wanted to be more of a social detective so just kind of making it fun like the discovery thing I talked about but that's a great resource for parents and then starting at a just right challenge level I mean Stacy you talked about you had sad and mad in your

home yeah so wow Branch out and do Glad sad mad glad and worried yeah you know sort of those four cornerstones of you know sad and angry and happy and anxious and then it's like as your kids get a good understanding of those four key emotions then you can almost you could almost like draw a diagram and then out of a sad you might be disappointed hurt bored discouraged you know something like that you know so almost like folks

that are focused around sad and then around mad you might do frustrated jealous crabby things like that so anxious could be worried afraid confused you're sort of teaching kids the nuances over time as they're successful with sort of those four primary emotions okay you said sad is one mad is one what were the other two of the four well could be happy or glad if you want to do the nice sad mad glad you can do that or you can

do sad angry happy anxious you know so it's sad mad or angry or happy worried or anxious kind of depending on the cognitive level of your kids worried or anxious is its own category huh yeah oh for sure oh yeah anxiety is a big one in fact when kids can start to get in touch with how much anxiety they have that actually drives the other stuff anxiety will often Drive mad and sad will often Drive mad mad is like a

coverup for that for those other more vulnerable emotions and I talk about that anger ebook yeah well I will just say that this was the most massive light bulb moment probably in my parenting when I finally figured that out yeah anxiety was driving the Mad yep in the behavior all I saw was mad for years that was more of me right there Lynn yeah what I feel has been really helpful even my own parenting between my kids helping them

understand each other is the idea that we're all different and really celebrating our differences too you know and talking about that so I would love to do things too like C and the family would be really good to help us with that like who has the gifting to do the research to buy the bike maybe or for my girls to get them because I have two girls right it was like man you I think you should go ask Samara to help you

with that because she's really good at it so just growing their value of each other in their own giftedness has been useful too yeah that's a great example of kids just learning to Value each other and appreciate each other and then you can always kind of weave in emotions about that it's like oh you looked so relieved coming out of your sister's room when she was able to help you with that you know so you're just sort of

narrating what you see related to emotions oh that's good yeah well don't tell my kids teachers when they were in elementary school I actually let one of my daughters color the picture for the other one and turn it in at school Oh Stacy they'll never graduate from college if you that it was in the name of collaboration and sibling unity and like they're working together so well right now yeah I love that because it's flexible thinking it's not being

bound to the law it's seeing the opportunity in the moment to build that connection ction and bonding it's awesome yeah it was all right Lyn so I have one more question before we end our podcast today and here it is so as a parent say I have really worked hard at this so I have been looking inward paying attention to my own body my own breath like how do I feel when I get you know riled up and and naming that and

then working with my kids to help them identify those things we've worked on language and worked on learning the emotions and the feeling words and so we have a bigger vocabulary now but now we get to the Heat of the Moment right I've got two kids in my house and they're angry at each other because of something so what do I do then how do I grow empathy in the middle of the conflict the most important thing is to to think

in terms of what messages do I want to communicate to the kids and we always talk about that connected families and I want to go in communicating the message I am for both of you not like I've picked the the good kid and the bad kid or the aggressor and the victim and so I'm going to come down on the aggressor and protect the victim I am for both of you and I get how hard it is to be

siblings when you're kids so going in with that heart it's like oh you guys this is so hard and sometimes you enter strongly with that if they're screaming at each other you got to kind of get to like about 2third of their energy level in order to break through that intensity so it might be oh you guys this is so hard whoa hold on a sec here and just try to get in between them with big

strong empathy and then that could even be a little loud couldn't it exactly one psychologist says about two-thirds of the intensity level is a good is a good way to get kids attention without like screaming and dominating so entering strongly with empathy this is so hard you're both so frustrated oh let's just take a breath try to get in between the two of them does anybody want a hug you know so you're you're not naming emotions but you're implying that you

understand so then that cools them down a little bit then you just figure out how you can guide them to just cool down a little bit it's like this is tough you think you can talk about it now or do you want to just take a break I can set the timer for 10 minutes I'll even get everybody just a little drink to sip on while we're cooling down and then we can get back together what would you like to

do solve it now or cool down first yeah and then you just give them a choice uhuh because empathy is in that part of the brain the frontal lobe and you know it's all in the cortex it's not in the fight ORF flight system so you've got they have to be calmed you've got to get the fight ORF flight system calm down and get the left hemisphere and the frontal lobe engaged again so that you can solve

the problem you can get awareness of feelings and all the things like that so let's assume that the kids are calm and you're going to get them back together and then you just you know you can just use questions observations it's like wow there was a lot of red faces and clenched fist a few minutes ago but you guys look more relaxed now so what was going on you know what were you feeling and and can you share that you know just

asking questions in an inviting not an accusatory way and if you need to process with one child that was really struggling a lot more than the others or more aggressive that could be you know it may well be that the best time is later and not in front of their sibling but then just asking those questions it's like would you say that you were more mad or was there some hurt feelings Happening Here was that part of it too

you know and just relaxed away asking questions and then referring back to previous successes is helpful it's like I remember yesterday you guys gotten quite a quite a brewha about you know sharing those Legos and you calm down and you work through it so I think you can do that again but you let me know how much help you think you need so even in that you know you hear the the four connected family's messages you're safe

with me and you're love no matter what and you are capable and responsible so you know just asking boy I think you can do this but let me know if you need some help and how much you need and if it's really tough maybe they separate maybe you give them a piece of paper I did this with our kids occasionally if they were really struck you know draw the face that you say you were feeling and

then draw the pH that you think that your sibling was feeling or if they're older obviously you can have them write those answers sometimes just getting separate and getting a marker or a pencil in their hand is calming and helps to facilitate that conversation so there's lots of ways but the key thing and we talk about this in the online course is whatever went a tiny bit better is you celebrate that and that ushers in the grace of God because it

says we don't have to be perfect that's Mercy and you can say this out loud God's Mercy is right here with us we don't have to get it perfect but let's look at what went a little bit better this time that's right and it will never be perfect nope it just won't be perfect and you'll go in and out of it so the celebrate is awesome and I loved asking my kids how do you want to celebrate you

want a little snack you want high fives you want you know what do you want to do let's celebrate and sometimes it really was just a high five and sometimes it was I think we should go sit some and have some hot chocolate yeah that's awesome when they can determine what they want to do to just feel good about what they did because working through conflict is one of the most important skills we can send our kids

out the door with empathy for others under you know this whole thing of emotional Insight empathy for others problem solving conflict it's just vital so I would just want to encourage any parents there was so many times it was just chaos in our home and I thought we're never getting anywhere here but we did and you know just hang in there for the Long Haul it's so worth it to see your kids learn those skills so good Lyn

thank you so much for this episode for carrying it with your husband not here Jim will be back next time but thanks for this conversation I know that it was very helpful to a lot of people so thanks good thanks I had fun with you Stacy do I had fun talking about this too hey friends we want to hear from you what did you find helpful from today's episode episode let us know by sharing a comment or feel free to leave a

parenting question there too we might be able to cover it in upcoming question and answer episodes don't miss a single future episode subscribe now next week's episode will be a preview of the new sleep ebook that Lynn Jackson who I was talking with today that she wrote It's a holistic and very practical resource that will be released in the next few days for more information about connecting families and about any of our online courses including the sibling

conflict course go to [Connected families.org](https://connectedfamilies.org) I'll see you next [Music] time