

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Feeling Stoppers and Feeling Encouragers



BY KIM DeMARCHI

Many adults as children were not allowed to express their feelings. You might have been told “Don’t cry, or I will give you something to cry about.” Today, however, most parents want to invite their children

to express their feelings. They want to have a communicative relationship with their children. Even with the best of intentions, however, Feeling Stoppers are tools that parents sometimes use that put a stop to their children sharing their feelings. Feelings are simply feelings. They are not good, they are not bad, they just are. When a child comes to you to share with you and you use tactics such as scolding, reprimanding, ignoring, sarcasm, punishing, etc, it immediately stops that child from wanting to come to you next time and wanting to share feelings.

Examples of Feeling Stoppers:

Child: “I got a “C” on my report card.”

Parent: “You are grounded until next month! AND, no technology either!”

Feeling Stopper: Punishing

Child: “Some boys were picking on me at school today.”

Parent: “Oh, you poor thing. Those mean boys shouldn’t be picking on you like that.”

Feeling Stopper: Pitying

Child: “I got in trouble at school today.”

Parent: “I’m so ashamed of you! I’m going to school with you every day and will sit in class and make sure you don’t act up.”

Feeling Stopper: Humiliating

Child: “I don’t understand why my teacher got so mad at me for forgetting my homework.”

Parent: “Oh yeah, right! Like this is the first time you forgot your homework.”

Feeling Stopper: Sarcasm

Child: “My spelling test was really hard. I think I failed it.”

Parent: “I talked to Jenny’s mom and she said Jenny got an A. What’s wrong with you?”

Feeling Stopper: Comparing to Others

Child: “I got in a fight with my boyfriend today.”

Parent: “Oh, don’t worry about it. Everyone gets in fights with their boyfriend. It’ll blow over.”

Feeling Stopper: Minimizing

Child: “I don’t think my teacher likes me.”

Parent: “I’ll go down to school tomorrow and talk to your teacher.”

Feeling Stopper: Rescuing

Child: “I got in trouble at soccer today.”

Parent: “You probably got in trouble because you’re always talking when you should be listening.”

Feeling Stopper: Assuming

Child: “I HATE my sister!”

Parent: “You don’t hate your sister!”

Feeling Stopper: Denial of Feelings

Child: “I was jumping on the furniture and I knocked over your vase.”

Parent: “How many times have I told you not to do that young woman?”

Feeling Stopper: Reprimanding

Child: “Can’t we have something else for breakfast?”

Parent: “I can’t believe you’re doing this to me. I got up early to make this breakfast for you.”

Feeling Stopper: Using Guilt

Child: “I forgot to bring my homework home from school.”

Parent: “You are so stupid to forget your homework AGAIN!”

Feeling Stopper: Calling Names

There are even more Feeling Stoppers that parents sometime use: Ignoring, Interrupting, Enmeshment, Lecturing and Solving the Problem for their child. How will parents encourage their kids to open up and talk about their feelings, if they are shutting them down immediately? If you are squelching your children’s feelings, you are denying your child the right to feel what he feels. It will teach your child to not trust his judgment. They will feel it isn’t safe to express who they really are, so they will stuff their emotions. An emotion that is repressed, persists. An emotion that is expressed, dissipates.

A Feeling Encourager, on the other hand, invites expression from your children. Listening intently, asking curiosity questions, empathizing with them, validating their feelings, inviting their feelings and identifying them...those strategies are what you want to be using because when your children are teenagers and older, you want to have that kind of open dialogue with your children. Create a warm, accepting atmosphere for talking and sharing. Respond to your child as you would with a close friend. Use silence to help with listening. Focus on increasing your understanding of their feelings. Children, like adults, want to be heard and understood.

Examples of Feeling Encouragers:

Child: “Ava wouldn’t play with me.”

Parent: “It sounds like you might be sad about that.”

Feeling Encourager: Identifying Feelings

Child: “I want my baby sister to go away.”

Parent: “I can understand why you’d want to send her away. It’s hard to share your things with her.”

Feeling Encourager: Validate Feelings

Child: “Bobby my best friend is moving and I’m going to miss him.”

Parent: “Losing your best friend really hurts. You will really miss playing with him.”

Feeling Encourager: Be Empathetic

Child: “Jake took my book and threw it to Alex and some pages ripped out.”

Parent: “How did you feel about that? You sound sort of angry.”

Feeling Encourager: Inviting Expression of Feelings

Child: “I was late for school today.”

Parent: “And then what happened?”

Feeling Encourager: Be Curious

Additionally, you could Listen Intently. As often as possible, stop what you are doing and focus 100% on what your child is saying. Close your mouth and open your ears and heart. Obviously, this can’t be done every time your child comes to you, but you can start with baby steps. Seek improvement, not perfection. Begin this when your children are young, so that by the time they are teens, it’s the established pattern in your relationship.

Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed., Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 16 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through Positive Discipline, as well the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children’s Behavior. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing workshops, coaching families and writing articles for our newspaper. Kim is a monthly guest on KATU’s AM Northwest.



She also blogs twice a month for Knowledge Universe’s Kindercare online community. Kim’s goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through www.EmpoweredParenting.com.