# Emotional intelligence: The edge your child needs to succeed

**Source: Neerja Birla, Chairperson, Aditya Birla Education Trust**

By the time my oldest was in school, I had realized that she was already facing social dynamics and academic challenges that were far more complex than any we had encountered at that age. It led to quite a few nights of lying awake wondering what I could do to prepare my children to succeed in the world they were to live in, all while protecting them from all these new “dangers” that I was becoming aware of.

Academic competition at the global level, forming meaningful relationships, peer pressure, [**cyber bullying**](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/how-to-safeguard-children-from-cyberbullying-6076014/), failure and rejection, all of this in a digital age where everything from embarrassing childhood moments to vulnerable moments of failure or rejection would be posted online and would stay there forever. Over the years, I’ve realized that the nature of childhood itself has changed so unrecognizably that the conventional wisdom of traditional parenting methods just won’t work anymore.

Ironically, as technology becomes more advanced, what I’ve noticed is that success in life seems to come from one’s prowess in understanding people and emotions. With this realization in mind, all I had to do now was to figure out how to help my children understand and manage their own emotions and that of others so they could handle increasing complexity and stress, foster positive relationships, develop resilience, creativity, compassion and inner peace. Easier said, than done.

It turns out, imparting practical knowledge and [**emotional intelligence**](https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/emotional-intelligence-heart-of-parenting-tips-5557671/) skills to your child starts with getting some for yourself. Coming from a generation that was big on the power of the brain over that of the heart, I had to learn for myself that emotional intelligence is not the opposite or at odds with intelligence. It’s not about heart versus head but about harnessing the power of both together. One of the most apparent benefits of EQ turned up quite early on – when children have an emotional outburst, coaching them through that moment, helping them accept and understand how they’re feeling and guiding them towards a solution not only helps calm the situation faster but also teaches children how to do deal with similar emotional situations in the future.

Over the years, I’ve refined the ABCs of emotional parenting in a way that’s easy to remember both its benefits and some ways to encourage it:

**Acknowledge the emotions your child experiences**

When you treat their feelings as ‘real’ and help them understand them, it not only sets them on a path to being able to manage their emotions but also towards managing the impact of difficult situations, challenges, stressors, etc, on their emotion, mood and mental wellbeing.

## Balance logic and emotion in problem-solving

Why does something make us feel sad or frustrated? What do we do when someone makes us angry or upset? How can we be productive and stay healthy and happy when we must deal with so many emotions – not just our own, but of those around us too? Teaching children to balance logic and emotion helps them understand why they or someone else may be feeling/behaving a certain way as well as how to respond productively to that situation and resolve it. In the long run, this helps them develop strong interpersonal skills, as well as effective social and communication.

## Coach them to manage negative emotions

They say what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, and the same is true of negative emotions. Learning to deal with the pain of loss or failure or the sting of rejection can be one of the most vital skills we teach our children. Overcoming these things each time it happens helps the mind build resilience in the same way that vaccines help the body become resilient towards viruses. As they navigate their teen and early adulthood years, this will help them develop a strong mind capable of overcoming setbacks as well as a productive mind that can find inspiration and happiness.

However, just as I thought I had it figured out, I learnt the most important lesson of all when it comes to raising emotionally intelligent children – what works for one child need not work for his/her sibling because each person feels and processes emotions differently. Now, when I see them figuring out problems with emotional maturity and overcoming challenges that I wouldn’t have been able to take up when I was their age, I feel like it has definitely paid off. As much as a parent can stop worrying about their children going out into the world, I know that having emotional intelligence gives them an invaluable tool for mental wellbeing and overall success.