

EMOTIONAL MILESTONES

ARE MY KIDS ON TRACK?

With David Thomas & Sissy Goff

Emotional Milestones Overview

There are four emotional milestones children need to reach:

1. Vocabulary
2. Perspective
3. Empathy
4. Resourcefulness

Learning an emotional vocabulary involves answering the questions:

- What am I feeling?
- What do I do with it?

A feelings chart is a great way to help kids name their feelings.

Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes progress.

TIP: Download a feelings chart and place it in a prominent place in your home. Use it as a resource to help your child name what emotion they are feeling.

Emotional Stumbling Blocks

Generally speaking, boys can have a tough time expressing their feelings, and girls can have difficulty controlling their feelings.

If you don't process your emotions, your emotions will process you.

Kids' Stumbling Blocks:

1. The culture they live in
2. The words they use
3. A lack of resilience

Adult's Stumbling Blocks:

1. Over-attending
2. Under-attending

As a parent, do you lean toward over-attending or under-attending to your child's emotions?

What our kids need from us is attunement and consequences.

Emotional Building Blocks

As parents, we need to give our kids:

1. A Scale for Self-Regulation (a Drama-Mometer)
 - a. Define their 1-10.
 - b. Listen.
 - c. Go back to the scale.
2. Time, Space, and Coping Continuum
 - a. Give them time to self-regulate.
 - b. Give them space to self-regulate.
 - c. Give them coping skills to move toward resourcefulness.

TIP: Check out the book *Are My Kids on Track?* for more than 40 practical ideas to help kids reach emotional milestones.

SOCIAL MILESTONES

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Social Milestones Overview

There are four social milestones children need to reach:

1. Awareness
2. Reciprocity
3. Ownership
4. Boundaries

There are three guiding principles for social development for kids:

1. Prioritizing a child's emotional development will help their social development.
2. Kids are experiential learners.
3. Every child develops at their own pace.

TIP: Use books and movies. Pause to ask your child what they think a character will do next based on what they've observed so far.

Social Stumbling Blocks

Boys' Stumbling Blocks:

1. Blame
2. Avoidance
3. Denial

In general, when something goes wrong in a boy's world, he blames someone else.

In general, when something goes wrong in a girl's world, she blames herself.

As parents of boys, we can't care more about something for them than they care about it themselves. We must let them experience natural consequences and learn to problem-solve on their own.

In general, boys have a hard time respecting boundaries.

In general, girls have a hard time setting boundaries.

Girls' Stumbling Blocks:

1. Hints
2. Mind Reading
3. Going Out on the Dock (and hoping someone follows them)

When we participate in a child's hints, mind-reading, and going out on the dock... we are reinforcing insecurity, manipulation, and passive-aggressiveness.

Big Picture:

As parents, we must decide to value our children's character over their happiness.

Next Steps:

1. Think about a situation where you valued your child's happiness over their character.
2. Think about a situation where you valued their character over their happiness.
3. Think about the outcome of each situation.

Social Building Blocks

As parents, building blocks we can use are:

1. Enforcing
 - Create boundaries—boundaries create security in kids.
 - Give kids consequences, mixed with the truth of who they are.
 - Trust your gut.
2. Teaching and Empowering
 - Help kids mix strength and kindness.
 - Ask really good questions.
 - Teach healthy ways to work through conflict.

Addressing conflict:

1. Affirm the relationship.
2. Use "I" statements.
3. State your contribution to the conflict.
4. Come to a resolution.

TIP: Check out *Are My Kids on Track?* for 40 practical ideas to help kids reach social milestones.

SPIRITUAL MILESTONES

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Spiritual Milestones Overview

There are four spiritual milestones that track with a child's physical development:

1. Foundation: Early Years
2. Identity: Elementary School Years
3. Mercy: Middle School Years
4. Meaning: High School Years

Foundation: Early Years

In this stage, we are helping kids answer the question: **What do I believe?**

This starts with an understanding of who God is—his character and his attributes.

In this stage, kids are concrete thinkers. Be black and white with your responses.

As a parent, you are your child's first and best teacher. Your voice is the loudest, and you are the person they trust the most.

TIP: Read Bible stories to your child and discuss them together. We recommend two resources to help in this stage:
1. *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones
2. *My First Message* by Eugene Peterson

Identity: Elementary School Years

In this stage, kids are determining who God has uniquely created them to be.

They are asking two primary questions:

1. **Who do you say that I am?**
2. **Who does God say that I am?**

As parents, communicate to your child who they are in these years. Speak words of truth into your kids and give them experiences that anchor them to the truth of who God says they are.

TIP: Share with your child a daily devotional. We recommend *Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions for Kids* by Sarah Young.

Mercy: Middle School Years

In this stage, students are asking two questions:

1. **Why do I need a relationship with Jesus?**
2. **How do I treat others?**

Middle school years bring biological changes, emotional intensity, and relational complexity. This is an important time for students to begin to know and understand their need for grace.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. – Titus 3:4-5

Students need to learn to experience for themselves the truth of the above Scripture.

Connection to a local church, specifically a youth group or small group, provides a great opportunity for them to be with other students—and trusted adults who will speak truth into their lives.

TIP: As a parent, don't just talk about mercy. Look for ways to show mercy to your student, even when it's tough.

Meaning: High School Years

In this stage, students want to know that their lives can matter and see the differences they can make to someone else.

They are asking the question: **Who has God called me to be?**

“You are the only you this world will ever know and something about you is meant to make something about God known in a way no one else can.” – Dr. Dan Allender

There is power in students discovering this truth for themselves. When they do, it takes root in their lives.

TIP: We recommend the book *To Be Told* by Dan Allender. As you read it, discuss observations with your student.

Final Thought for Parents:

“You can have hope in this journey—in your child's journey—because of Christ. He calls and equips us to love the children he has given us. We love because he first loved us. They understand because we first loved them. Relationship ripples out. Trust does the same. And hope washes over it all with a sense of God's love—his foundational, merciful, purposeful love—that not only changes their identities... but ours, too, in the process.”
– Melissa Trevathan, *Are My Kids on Track?*

TIP: Check out *Are My Kids on Track?* for more practical ideas for building foundation, identity, mercy, and meaning.