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# Things You Might Not Know about Emotion



Dr. Deborah MacNamara  
macnamara.ca

**EMOTIONS ARE NOT A NUISANCE,  
THEY ARE NATURE'S WAY OF TAKING CARE OF US**

## 1. EMOTION NEEDS TO BE EXPRESSED

Emotions seek expression and fuel a child's behaviour so that it catches our attention and we can understand their needs. Emotion needs to move and does so when kids play, dance, scream, or use their words. It is important to help our kids find ways to express emotion in increasingly more mature ways, knowing that it takes up to 5 to 7 years (7 to 9 for more sensitive kids), to get there. When we tell kids to 'cut it out' they can hear it as - 'it's not okay to have that emotion!' The biggest problems are not created by expressing emotions but in the absence of expression. It is better to get it out than hold it in.

## 2. EMOTIONS CAN BE DISPLACED

Emotions are not always expressed where they are created. Kids can have a hard day at school or a long day at daycare and then explode at the small things when they get home or before bed. This is not a mistake but part of a sophisticated design to ensure emotions come out when it is safe. Emotional displacement can be confusing for adults but it can be helpful to think of the emotional system as a pressure cooker. When things get pent up there needs to be a way to blow your lid to reduce pressure.

## 3. EMOTIONS ARE NOT THE SAME AS FEELINGS

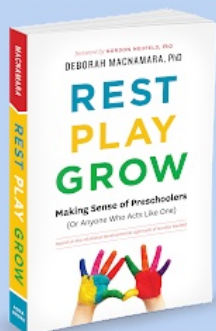
We often use the word emotion and feeling interchangeably but they refer to different things. Emotions are the raw impulses and arousal, chemical reactions, and action potential that is created when we become activated by something in our environment. Feelings on the other hand, are the names and words we give to describe our emotional arousal. A feeling is the subjective appraisal we make for what has happened in our body that has stirred us up. The capacity to recognize our emotional state and give it a feeling name is something unique to humans and allows us to communicate with others and get our needs met.

## 4. EMOTIONS ARE UNCONSCIOUS

Neuroscience has now confirmed that we are not always aware of the emotions that are stirring us up, and for good reason. Emotion has work to do. Emotions are what drive us forward to solve problems and effect change when needed. Awareness is a luxury in an emotional system that was designed to work at getting our needs met. A child who cries is not always aware of what is not working for them. This doesn't stop their emotional system from creating signs of distress so as to bring caretakers near who can help them.

## 5. EMOTIONAL DEFENSES TAKE CARE OF US

We are not always capable of feeling our emotions in a vulnerable way, even if we want to. For example, children can get hurt yet appear unaffected. They can lack tears when faced with things that should upset them. Teens (and adults) can lack shame in the face of things they should be embarrassed by. The emotional system can press down on strong emotions when needed, to prevent vulnerable feelings from coming to the surface. The brain has its own reasons for numbing out emotions, but over the long term this poses challenges for healthy development.



*There is no greater test to our emotional maturity than our own children's emotional immaturity.*