

CASE STUDY

Emotion Coaching Programme

Amber, a Teacher from St Pauls Nursery School in Bristol recently attended the Emotion Coaching continual professional development programme. Emotion Coaching uses moments of heightened emotion and resulting behaviour to guide and teach the child and young person about more effective responses.

Here, Amber shares how the programme has impacted her practice and what difference it has made to children, families and the staff team.



What was your motivation for attending the programme?

“My motivation for attending the event was to deepen my understanding of how to effectively support children in navigating their emotions, particularly through the lens of Emotion Coaching. Having worked as a KS1 classroom teacher for the past seven years, I realised that I had not strengthened this particular area as much as I would have liked. Emotion Coaching emphasises recognising emotions as opportunities for connection and teaching, rather than behaviour simply to be managed. I wanted to build my confidence in applying these principles more intentionally within my classroom practice.”

Now that I am working again with nursery children - three- and four-year-olds, the importance of this feels even more significant. I hoped to equip myself with the tools, strategies, and language needed to guide children through this process, helping them to develop emotional literacy, self-regulation, and resilience.”

What did the programme make you reflect upon?

“The most impactful message today was the importance of supporting children to build resilience. Over my eight years of teaching, I have noticed a significant shift in cohorts, and now more than ever I am seeing children struggle with resilience. This has prompted me to reflect more on how we, as educators, can intentionally nurture this capacity within our settings.

I learned that by slowing down and intentionally acknowledging a child’s feelings, for example, naming the emotion and communicating understanding we help to co-regulate in the moment, which gradually builds the child’s capacity for internal regulation. The first way I plan to implement this in my practice is when supporting children who are struggling with separation. Rather than quickly distracting them from their distress, I will prioritise attunement: acknowledging their feelings, validating their experience, and helping them to name the emotion before guiding them towards regulation.”

“This training has given me both the confidence and the theoretical grounding to begin conversations with colleagues about how we speak to children during their settling-in period at nursery. Reflecting together, we noticed how quickly many of us move towards distraction when children are upset, particularly during separation from their families.

Using Emotion Coaching theory as a framework, I have been able to encourage discussion about the importance of first attuning to and acknowledging the emotions linked to separation anxiety. This has started to shift our shared understanding: rather than viewing distress as something to immediately minimise, we are increasingly recognising it as an opportunity to connect, co-regulate, and build long-term resilience.”



“One of my key takeaways was the importance of acknowledging and sitting with children’s emotions as a crucial part of the regulation process.

Previously, I may have moved quite quickly to soothe or distract a child once they were upset. However, the evidence underpinning Emotion Coaching emphasises that emotional attunement and empathy must come first.”



What difference has it made to children?

“Recently, I noticed a nursery child from another room, with whom I did not yet have a strong relationship, crying because his friends did not want to play with him. Drawing on Emotion Coaching principles, I sat alongside him and gently explored how the situation might be making him feel. He nodded and said, “I am sad but I am also cross.”

As we moved into problem-solving (the boundary-setting and teaching stage within Emotion Coaching), he was able to reflect on the reason for the conflict: he was not sharing the broom. He then expressed his underlying worry – “ what if I don’t get another turn?”

Together, we discussed a practical solution: using a sand timer to ensure fairness and predictability. After suggesting this to his peers, they agreed and successfully re-engaged in collaborative play. A few days later, I observed the same group independently using the sand timer in a similar way. This showed not only restored peer relationships, but also emerging self-regulation, problem-solving skills, and resilience in managing social conflict.”

What difference has it made to families?

“During parent–teacher meetings, I was able to introduce Emotion Coaching as an approach we are embedding in practice. I spoke about “Being a STAR” (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect) and explained what each stage represents in supporting children to regulate their emotions. This provided families with a shared language and framework to use at home.

It also created a valuable opportunity to open up dialogue about boundaries, particularly when and how to set them in a way that acknowledges emotions while still maintaining clear expectations. Parents responded positively to the idea that validating a child’s feelings does not mean removing limits, but instead supports children to internalise regulation over time.”



What next?

- Explore the Education Endowment Foundation’s [Personal, Social and Emotional Early Years Evidence Store](#)
- Watch the [Emotion Coaching videos](#)
- Attend an upcoming [personal, social and emotional network session](#)
- Check out the [Help for Early Years Providers Personal, Social and Emotional Development](#) website

