

Highlights from Dr. Larry Cohen's  
KSPTA Parent Education lecture  
Kentfield School District, March 18, 2015

According to Dr. Cohen, there are three keys to children's emotional and social development:

1. Love and affection

For more on the power of **love and connection**, see the information on Filling the Empty Cup, below.

2. Playfulness and lightheartedness

For more on **bringing problems into the Play Zone**, see the information on Knots of Tension, below.

3. Understanding how emotions work

For **understanding emotions**:

Accept, welcome, and mirror ALL emotions (even ones you don't like so much).  
Did anyone do this for you when you were growing up? (Probably not!)

Emotions are SPARKED by a thought, then HEAT UP with the physical experience of the emotion, the expression of it, and the urge for action (to hit, to hide, to cry, etc.). There is also FUEL for the fire, which can be being tired or hungry, or could be a belief about the world (if you believe no one likes you, then not being invited to a party will result in a highly inflamed emotion). There is also COOLING, which is talking about your feelings, labeling the intensity from 1-10, or thinking about the consequences of acting on the urges (if I hit my brother I will get in trouble).

If your child is anxious, try the "second chicken technique" (you will have to read The Opposite of Worry to learn why it is called that!).

"Can you look in my eyes and tell me what you see?"

"Can you look around you for signs of safety?" (since anxious children are pulled to only notice signs of danger)

"Can you create signs of safety from within by using relaxation or mindfulness?"

If you are anxious yourself, you might say: "I am worried about that too. This is what I am doing about it: I am taking care of the practical aspects (such as locking the door if the worry is about burglars), and I am taking care of my feelings (such as splashing cold water on my face or taking deep breaths)."

Lawrence J. Cohen, PhD

Author of Playful Parenting and The Opposite of Worry

Co-author of The Art of Roughhousing, Mom They're Teasing Me, and Best Friends Worst Enemies

## **“FILL MY CUP”**

### **A GUIDE TO EMOTIONAL REFUELING**

Imagine that every child has a cup that needs to be filled -- with affection, love, security, and attention. Some seem to have a full cup most of the time, or know good ways to get a refill. But most children get a little nervous when their cup gets near empty.

#### **Some ways that children deal with having an empty cup:**

- steal from other people's cups
- misbehave to get your attention and show that they need a refill
- seem to have bottomless cups or need constant “topping off”
- can't sit still for refills or actively refuse them
- bounce off the walls when they approach “empty”
- think they have to fight or compete for every refill.

#### **What fills a child's cup:**

- play
- friendship
- one-on-one time
- love and affection
- connection
- succeeding
- doing what they love to do or what they choose to do.

#### **What empties the cup:**

- stress and strain
- rejection by peers
- loneliness and isolation
- yelling and punishment
- failing
- fatigue
- doing what they're forced to do or they hate to do.

Lawrence J. Cohen, PhD

Author of Playful Parenting and The Opposite of Worry

Co-author of The Art of Roughhousing, Mom They're Teasing Me, and Best Friends Worst Enemies

## THE KNOT OF TENSION

*A Knot of Tension is a set of distressing feelings and behaviors linked to a particular situation.*

Children often develop knots of tension around emotionally charged experiences, such as:

separations	bedtime	rules	meals
school	chores	friends	siblings
losing at games	musical practice	doctors	medicine

These are (no surprise!) areas where *parents* tend to have anxiety or emotional intensity. In fact, it usually takes at least two people to “pull on the knot.” Knots are most likely when children feel helpless and not in control.

*These things tend to tighten the knot of tension:*

Punishment	Time-outs or other separations
Labeling a child as “bad”	Trying to “teach them a lesson”
Withdrawing love for misbehavior	Forced compliance
Scolding, yelling, threats	Attempts to control
Giving in and then resenting it	Avoiding the issue

*These things tend to loosen the knot of tension:*

Laughter	Play*
Surprising and unexpected responses	Empathy for child’s feelings
Increased closeness	Avoidance of power struggles
Unconditional love	Release of feelings
Looking at our own behavior and feelings	Reconnection

*\*Two types of play loosen knots of tension best:*

- One-on-one special time between a parent and child. The child is in charge of choosing what to do while the parent is extra enthusiastic.
- Playtimes where the parent gently introduces themes that are related to the knot of tension (for example, with tension about separation, you can playfully introduce lots of goodbyes and reunions).

Lawrence J. Cohen, PhD

Author of Playful Parenting and The Opposite of Worry

Co-author of The Art of Roughhousing, Mom They’re Teasing Me, and Best Friends Worst Enemies