

## *Exercise: What Was Your Family's Philosophy of Emotion?*

Below are a series of scenarios in which a child is expressing an emotion to his or her parents. After each scenario, there's a list of four different responses parents might have to these situations. Thinking back to your childhood, choose the response that best represents the one you might have heard from your parents under similar circumstances. If your family was divided in its philosophy—that is, if each parent would have responded differently—choose the response from the parent who influenced you the most, the one whom you felt most inclined to follow.

1. You tell your parents you're angry because your younger sibling always gets to sit in the front seat of the car.
  - A. "It's okay. It's just a short ride to the store anyway."
  - B. "I know you get tired of sitting in back by yourself all the time. Can you think of a pretend game you could play back there to make it more interesting?"

- C. "It sounds like you're kind of jealous. I was jealous of my little brother when I was your age."
- D. "I don't want to hear you complain. Your brother is little, and you should understand why he needs to sit next to Mom."
2. Your uncle has just had a car accident and is in the hospital. Now you're unable to attend the championship football game with all of your friends. You're so angry you want to break something.
- A. "It's just a football game, you know. Sometimes other things come up."
- B. "I don't blame you for being upset. Maybe you could call one of your friends after the game and get some play-by-play."
- C. "That's a real shame. I know you'd really been looking forward to this game."
- D. "Honestly! You should listen to yourself. What would your uncle think if he knew you thought a football game was more important than him?"
3. Your younger cousins are visiting again, and they're messing up your toys. It's really making you angry, and you complain to your parents.
- A. "They're just little kids. You can put it all back the way it was after they leave."
- B. "That makes you mad, doesn't it? You put a lot of effort into keeping your room neat. I'll help you clean up later. In the meantime, maybe it would be fun to just play with them."
- C. "Yeah! Those little guys can really trash out a room in a hurry, can't they?"
- D. "I think you could be a little more generous. You know, you have some things they don't have. Go find something else to do if you can't play with them."
4. Your classmates keep borrowing your new color markers during art projects. When they return them, almost all the ink is gone!
- A. "Aren't there twenty-four colors in that set? Just use another color."
- B. "That must be frustrating. Maybe you could suggest they bring some new colors to share for the next week's art class."
- C. "Unbelievable! Why don't they get their own markers?"
- D. "I don't understand why you're letting them use your new markers in the first place. Those things are expensive."
5. Your best friend has moved to a distant suburb and a new school. You talk on the phone and see one another every now and then, but it's just not the same. It's been weeks now, and you're still sad about it.
- A. "People come and go. You just have to get used to these things."
- B. "I can remember going through the same thing when I was about your age. My friend's name was Angela. It's really, really hard. Let's sit down and try to think through some ways to deal with this."

- C. "Yeah, people come and go in this life. It can be tough. Really tough."
- D. "What's wrong with the friends you've got right here in your own neighborhood? Are they not good enough for you?"
6. You hear that an acquaintance had a party and invited most of your friends, but not you. You don't understand why you've been left out, and it makes you very sad.
- A. "Oh, people are fickle. You know that."
- B. "I'm sure that hurts your feelings. Maybe it was an oversight. Why don't we plan to have some of your friends over here soon? We can work on the invitations after dinner."
- C. "Ouch, that can sting! Better luck next time, huh?"
- D. "Really, I don't want to hear it. You have a more than adequate social life. I seem to spend half my time carting you and your friends all over town. I should own a taxicab!"
7. Your dog Shortstop died. You're sad.
- A. "We'll get a new dog."
- B. "I'm really sad, too. I've been thinking all day about the funny things Shortstop would do. Maybe it would be nice to gather some of our photos that he's in, and make a Shortstop scrapbook."
- C. "I'm really sad, too. Shortstop was a good dog."
- D. "I hate to break it to you, kid, but he was just a dog. And walking around like a sad sack all day isn't going to bring him back."
8. You've put heart and soul into applying for the yearbook staff. You wrote an essay, you were interviewed, and you thought you did a good job. But you're passed over for this plum after-school assignment. Worse, several of your friends were selected.
- A. "It's not like there aren't any other clubs for you to join."
- B. "What a shame. You worked really hard for this. Tell me all about what happened."
- C. "What was that sponsor thinking? Your essay seemed really good to me."
- D. "Are you going to mope around every time something doesn't go your way?"
9. You're afraid of the dark. Very afraid.
- A. "Believe me, there's nothing to be frightened of."
- B. "I can remember being afraid of the dark. It can seem strange when you can't see what's around you. You stay with us tonight, and tomorrow we'll get a new night-light for your room."
- C. "I can remember being afraid of the dark."
- D. "Don't be such a baby!"
10. You have an ear infection, and you're going to the doctor—the same doctor who gave you all your vaccinations. Afraid you'll get another shot, you start to cry.

- A. "Crying isn't going to help. I'm the parent, and you're going to the doctor."
- B. "I know you're afraid of the doctor. But he's going to help you feel better. Can we talk about what you're afraid of?"
- C. "I still hate getting shots."
- D. "Oh, grow up!"
11. Your family is flying to California for vacation. You saw a news story about a bad plane crash the previous month, and you've been scared to get on the plane ever since.
- A. "There's no reason to be nervous."
- B. "The thought of a plane crash is frightening. But it's really, really unusual for something like that to happen. And I wouldn't take you on this trip if I didn't think it was safe. Do you think it would help if we tried to think of some games to play during the ride?"
- C. "Yeah, I know what you mean. What goes up must come down, and all that."
- D. "Really, you're such a worrywart! It's safer than crossing the street. You always get carried away by the worst-case scenario!"
12. Your mother is having surgery. You're afraid she might die in the hospital.
- A. "It's not a big deal. She'll be home in a couple of days, as good as new."
- B. "It's scary to think of her being operated on, huh? It's a safe procedure, though, and she has a good doctor. Let's make some cards for her. You can tell her how you feel."
- C. "It's scary to think of her being operated on, huh?"
- D. "You've got to be braver than this. She expects you to be a big kid while she's gone."
13. You're ten years old and you have your first crush on a classmate.
- A. "When I was growing up, they called this puppy love. Don't worry about it."
- B. "Oh, yeah . . . I know who you're talking about. So tell me all about it."
- C. "Oh, yeah . . . I can see how you'd feel that way."
- D. "Oh, give me a break. You're only ten years old!"

### SCORING

Count the number of times you answered "A": \_\_\_\_\_. These answers represent an emotion-dismissing philosophy.

Count the number of times you answered "B": \_\_\_\_\_. These answers represent an emotion-coaching philosophy.

Count the number of times you answered "C": \_\_\_\_\_. These answers represent a laissez-faire philosophy.

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Count the number of times you answered “D”: \_\_\_\_\_. These answers represent an emotion-disapproving philosophy.

Compare your score in each category to see which of these philosophies best describes your family. Then read on to learn more about these philosophies and how they can affect your skill at emotional connection.