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| **Age** | **Emotional/moral developmental features** | **Parenting priorities** |
| 0-1 | Feel primary emotions: happy, sad, angry, fear, etc.[[1]](#footnote-1); mirror neurons begin to form allowing the infant to anticipate the actions of others; these neurons are fully developed around age 7. | Attachment is critically important at this age and the others as well. It is the basis for later self-regulation (controlling impulses) and socialization.The parental priority centers on nurture: food, comfort, touch, positive emotional interactions; nurture needs to be predictable & consistent; unconditional positive regard is important |
| 2-3 | 1 ½ - 2 self-awareness begins and with that the beginning of secondary emotions[[2]](#footnote-2): pride, guilt, shame, hubris, entitlement, self-pity[[3]](#footnote-3); around 2 ½ children begin to imitate mothers...this is the basis for self-regulation and the beginning of developing a conscience. | Between now and 8 trying to distinguish guilt from shame is hard for them to do.Provide natural consequences for negative behaviors and rewards for positive ones; helping them repair damage done and/or devise a sharing plan (if the offense involved a sharing problem).Practice empathy toward them and toward others in front of them.  |
| 4-5 | They feel primary and some secondary emotions; they do not tend to attribute secondary emotions to the protagonists in stories, however.[[4]](#footnote-4)  | *Continue with the previous actions*As they draw or play, notice aloud what you see but rather than evaluate it (e.g. “You used a lot of purple here” rather than “That’s beautiful”).[[5]](#footnote-5) Ask what the toys/drawings are feeling/thinking.[[6]](#footnote-6) |
| 6-7 | Feels primary and secondary emotions; they do attribute secondary emotions to protagonists in stories but mainly if a parent is the evaluator in the story | *Continue with the previous actions* |
| 8+ | They feel primary and secondary emotions; attributes secondary emotions to protagonists in stories.[[7]](#footnote-7) | This is when you can begin to cultivate their conscience more directly by criticizing bad behavior and, as appropriate, call on them to notice the impact of their behavior on others.This is also when focusing your praise on the quality of their efforts and on the quality of their work helps cultivate positive self-regard rather than the hubris that develops when they are praised just for being ‘so amazing’.  |

1. Primary emotions are those felt first these feelings may be transient & replaced by secondary emotions in older children OR they may persist as the only emotions felt. Primary emotions match the experience that stimulated them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Secondary emotions are those that follow primary emotions and are often feelings about the primary emotion (e.g. fear (10) may be replaced by anger (20)). Secondary emotions integrate the experience, the reaction to the experience and beliefs the person holds about such experiences into a simple or complex pattern of feelings. At times, secondary emotions may mask or block dealing with the primary emotions. Secondary emotions may not fit the experience; may be more intense that warranted by the experience and persist longer than a primary emotion (fear – anger – resentment of the one evoking the fear). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. from age 2, after causing a mishap children either avoid eye contact and take a closed posture (shame) or busy themselves in reparative efforts (guilt); if they succeed, they not only smile, as younger children do, but look to others for feedback; [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This suggests that the secondary emotions develop prior to the cognitive ability to process those emotions. They feel these emotions long before they can process them. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This helps them to develop an internal, rather than an external locus of reward. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As you play along with them, from time to time, offer your own thoughts about what a character is feeling/thinking/wanting. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ‘He’s proud because he did a hard thing.’ OR ‘She feels guilty b/c she did a bad thing’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)