

Helping your kids to be happy

This technique sounds 'out there', but it's being used worldwide to make kids happy. BY SUE SHORT

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is an energy-based tool being used around the world today by psychologists, medical doctors, counsellors, therapists and dentists to improve children's self-esteem and alleviate negative emotions such as fear or anger. It might sound like this month's latest craze, but it's getting results, and has been adopted by 'serious' health professionals – psychologists and psychotherapists – in Australia. EFT is a simple procedure involving tapping on certain points of the body to alleviate 'stuck' emotions. In fact, it's so simple, anyone can learn to do it. See the easy 'how to' instructions on the next page.

Gary Craig, the US-based originator of EFT says, "The basic idea is simple. While kids are being tucked into bed, parents should ask, 'Can you tell me about the good and bad things that happened to you today?' Then, as the events are being told, the parents should gently and lovingly tap or rub the EFT

points. Tapping on the EFT points is likely to resolve the issues or, at least, lighten their impact on the child.

"This is critical for children as they're constantly picking up 'stuff' from peers, parents, teachers, TV and so on. These inputs go on daily and accumulate over the years to fill what we adults often call our 'emotional garbage bags.'"

Australian uptake

Perth psychologist Steve Wells and Sydney medical practitioner and psychotherapist Dr David Lake run workshops worldwide teaching EFT. They've trained over 800 professionals in Australia alone. Steve says he has used EFT on his own children (he has three under 10) since they were young. He also uses it daily in his busy practice.

"As a parent, it is great to help my kids with all those fears, and to actually have a tool I can use to eliminate the fear, or help them calm down. For example, we were at church for Easter and the church

put up on the big screen a graphic image of Jesus being crucified. I used EFT on my son and another little boy who were totally upset by that image. A couple of rounds of EFT calmed them straight down and they were able to go on to do what they wanted to do," says Steve.

"One of the great values of EFT is for the parent to treat themselves for their own upsets about their children. We get anxious about our children's anxieties and if we treat ourselves, we can live in a much calmer and more responsive way, responding to the children rather than to our own concerns.

"While I have treated many children with learning problems, I must say that EFT won't teach a child to read; they still need appropriate instruction. What it can do is overcome their negative emotions about the experience of learning to read, or reading itself.

"What EFT does is get them over the emotional problem and enables them to access things so they are not scared, and are open to learning.

"Kids who have temper tantrums or get angry can be taught EFT to manage their emotions. I also see lots of kids who are perfectionists and may not be producing work because they're too scared to do anything wrong or they are down on themselves."

Make it a game

Dr David Lake, who has worked with EFT for six years and has 20 years' experience working with children, says that kids are ideal candidates for EFT as they're so receptive and responsive.

"If it is introduced like a game, they'll




PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES

be in it," says David. "They are easy to work with because they don't have the emotional baggage. It is one of the most gratifying areas. If you help a distressed child, you are helping the whole family.

"EFT is marvellous. Kids go straight with it. They immediately change gear and are off in another direction. They feel every feeling – in fact, a lot of primitive feelings, according to analytical thought. Rage, joy, etc – these feelings were designed to move through us. If they get stuck, you have problems. EFT and all the energy methods help the dysfunctional emotions move through you very quickly.

"I find EFT is really good for the stuff kids tend to hold on to. Certainly, by the time they are early adolescents, it becomes a huge feature. For example,

if your best friend says, 'I hate you', it becomes the end of the world.

"It is also good for anxiety and phobia in kids. When you see these in an adult, you say they have a fear or a phobia. When you see them in children, they are a little muffled. They don't seem so clear and apparent. But, obviously, this child is very sensitive and will grow up into an anxious, phobic person by virtue of their nature. But, they're beautiful kids and you think how sad it is that they will have to grow up with those traumas. EFT will help them each day and make it a lot easier for them growing up." 

For more information, call Steve Wells on (08) 9271 9271, or visit his website www.excedge.com.au, or Gary Craig's website at www.emofree.com.

HOW TO DO EFT

1 To begin, identify the feeling or problem and rate how intense it is. Steve Wells and Dr David Lake use a 0-10 rating, where 0 is no intensity at all and 10 is the worst it could be.

2 A set-up phrase is used for adults, but is not normally necessary for young children. A set-up phrase for children could be, "Although I can't read well, I am an awesome kid".

3 Using acupressure, you tap on the seven specific points. As you're tapping on each point, you repeat a reminder phrase. For example, "Yucky teacher" or "Fear of reading".

4 Using the first two fingers of your dominant hand, lightly tap 7-10 times on each of the following points. **FIRST POINT** – between the eyebrows, more towards one eyebrow. **SECOND POINT** – at the end of the eyebrow, at the side of the eye. **THIRD POINT** – under the eye in the centre of the cheek.

FOURTH POINT – in the hollow under the nose, in the midline.

FIFTH POINT – in the hollow under the lip, in the midline.

SIXTH POINT – this is found by touching the hollow in the throat and feeling the two heads of the collarbone on either side. You then pick one head and tap directly underneath the collarbone.

SEVENTH POINT – underneath the armpit, on the side of the body, level with the nipple (or in the middle of the bra band for women).

5 When you have finished the first sequence of tapping, check the feeling on a rating of 0-10. See if it has changed intensity. Keep repeating the whole tapping sequence until the intensity has gone to zero.

Information supplied courtesy of the Pocket Guide to Emotional Freedom (Waterford Publishing, \$19.95) by Steve Wells and Dr David Lake. Published with the permission of Steve Wells.

DR DAVID LAKE'S TIPS FOR MUMS AND DADS

1 Learn the technique yourself.

2 Use it on yourself; for your worries about your children.

3 Introduce EFT to your child in the right way. Make it light-hearted, make it fun, make it a game.

4 Take it steadily, step by step, so that the child will use it.

5 After age six or seven, encourage your child to do it themselves. I've taught it to seven- and eight-year-olds and they've taught it to their friends.

6 Persist, even if you're not sure if it's helping or if you're getting it right. It is a robust, flexible technique – even if you do it all wrong, it works anyway.