

Sitting on the Sidewalk: Emotion Coaching Worksheet

A reflection tool for parents to strengthen emotional connection and listening skills

1. What It Means to “Sit on the Sidewalk”

Sitting on the sidewalk means showing up beside your child — not above them — when emotions rise.

It's listening to understand, not to fix.

It's presence over performance.

When we sit on the sidewalk, we create a space where our child feels:

☒ Seen ☒ Heard ☒ Safe to feel

2. Identify Your Listening Style

Circle or check what feels most true for you right now:

- ☐ I often listen while trying to fix or advise.
- ☐ I struggle to stay calm when my child is upset.
- ☐ I sometimes interrupt to protect, correct, or comfort.
- ☐ I stay quiet but feel uncomfortable with their big emotions.
- ☐ I focus on helping them feel heard before solving the problem.
- ☐ I can recognize when my child just needs me to be with them.

Awareness is the first step toward change.

3. Recognize Your Emotional Triggers

What feelings arise in you when your child is emotional or struggling?
(Check all that apply or add your own.)

- ☐ Anger or irritation
- ☐ Guilt or shame
- ☐ Fear or anxiety
- ☐ Sadness or helplessness
- ☐ Confusion or overwhelm
- ☐ Disconnection or shutdown
- ☐ Desire to fix immediately

Which of these emotions might make it hard for you to listen with empathy?

4. Your Self-Regulation Plan

When you feel flooded or reactive, how can you calm yourself before or during a conversation with your child?

What helps bring your heart rate down?

(e.g., deep breathing, a short walk, grounding phrase, prayer, water, music)

What phrase can you use to communicate you need a pause without shutting your child down?

Example: *"I want to listen well, but I need a short break to calm my body first."*

5. Sitting Practice: A Real-Life Conversation

Use this section to practice the "sidewalk" approach with your child this week.

Situation / Topic: _____

My role was to:

☐ Listen ☐ Validate ☐ Empathize ☐ Ask open-ended questions ☐ Avoid advice-giving

What I noticed in my child:

What I noticed in myself:

How I responded with empathy:

What I might do differently next time:

6. Connection Reflection

- What did your child's body language or tone tell you about what they needed?
- How did your own regulation affect the tone of the conversation?
- Did you notice any shift in trust, safety, or openness?
- What small step could you take to deepen this connection next time?

"Children don't need a perfect parent. They need a regulated one who listens."

7. Next Steps

Try scheduling a "sidewalk moment" this week — a calm check-in that's not about rules or routines.

Ask:

"How's your heart today?" or "What's been hard lately?"

Then, just listen.

That's where the healing begins.