

When Your Child Shuts Down

Parenting the Hypoempathic (Subtype A) Child

Empathy Spectrum Disorder | Subtype A: Emotional Detachment

What It Looks Like:

Your child may:

- Show little reaction when others are upset or in pain
 - Avoid eye contact or physical affection
 - Seem more interested in facts, systems, or solo play than social interaction
 - Withdraw when asked to talk about feelings
 - Appear unaffected—but may have hidden stress or confusion beneath the surface
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What's Really Going On:

This isn't coldness or lack of care. Subtype A children often experience **emotional underactivation**, sometimes due to nervous system shutdown (dorsal vagal response), neurodivergence, or early overwhelm. They may **disconnect** from feelings to protect themselves—or simply not *know* what they're feeling. Their system says: "Stay safe by staying separate."

What Helps:

Gentle Invitations, Not Demands

- "Would you like to draw how you felt today?"
- "I'll be right here if you want to talk later."

Slow, Consistent Eye-Level Connection

- Sit beside them for small rituals (snack, play, bedtime)
- Let presence build safety before pushing for connection

Emotion Coaching Through Observation

- Instead of: “Why don’t you care if your sister is crying?”
- Try: “I noticed you got really quiet when she cried. That can be a lot to take in.”

Bridge Thinking and Feeling

- Use logic to introduce emotion: “When people’s faces look like that, it often means they’re sad. What do you think?”
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What to Avoid:

- **Interpreting detachment as defiance**
 - **Pushing for big expressions** (“Tell me how you feel *right now!*”)
 - **Labeling them as “unemotional” or “cold”**
 - **Assuming they’re fine because they’re quiet**
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