

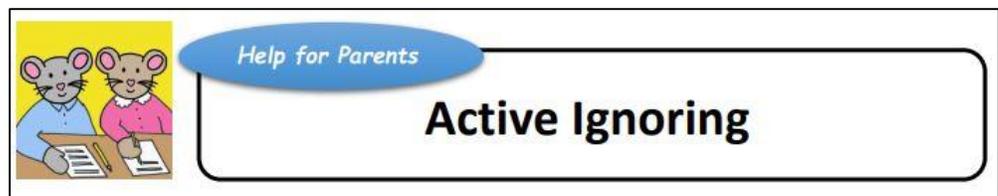
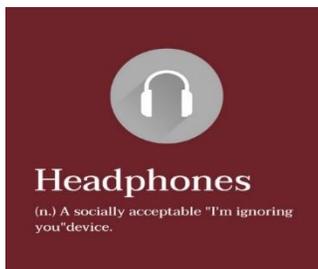


How to Help Children Calm Down & Make Parents & Child Feel Better

It's going on a month or more of being quarantined. Your kids are bored, stressed out not being able to go to friends' houses or gather in the park. As parents, we too are feeling the stress and strain of this pandemic. The last thing any of us wants is a tantrum! Here are some techniques for helping kids regulate their emotions and avoid explosive behavior and consequently, explosive reactions from the adults.

Children have difficulty regulating their emotions. Tantrums, outbursts, whining, defiance, fighting: all behaviors you see when kids experience powerful feelings they cannot control. While some kids have learned to act out because it gets them what they want, other kids have trouble staying calm because they are unusually sensitive. Add to this, stress of a new and hard to understand pandemic-it's important to know strategies to help our children and ourselves find relief. The good news is that **learning to calm down instead of acting out** is a skill that can be taught.

In the first post, we learned a bit about the way a child's brain works. In this, **the second post**, we will get more into action steps that we, as parents or other caregivers can take. It is through our responses that we can help our children learn to calm down. The first strategy is **active ignoring**.



Validating feelings doesn't mean giving attention to bad behavior. Ignoring behaviors like whining, arguing, bad language or outbursts is a way to reduce the chances of such behaviors being repeated. It's called "active" because it's withdrawing attention conspicuously. You're turning your face, and sometimes body, away or leaving the room when your child is engaging in minor misbehaviors in order to withdraw your attention. Dr. Giller explains that "the key to its effectiveness is, as soon as your child is doing something you can praise, to turn your attention back on."



A second tool is **positive attention**. This, the most powerful tool parents have in influencing behavior is attention.

Giving kids positive attention is like handing out candy. It will increase the behaviors you're focusing on. When you're shaping a new behavior, you want to praise it and give a lot of attention to it. Really focus on it. Be sincere, enthusiastic and genuine. And, you want it to be very specific, to make sure your child understands what you are praising.

When helping your child deal with an emotion, notice the efforts to calm down, even if they're very small. An example would be if in the midst of a tantrum, you see your child take a deep breath, and you can say, "I like that you took a deep breath" and join him in taking some more.



A third tool is giving kids **clear expectations**. This is key to helping prevent kids from getting dysregulated. Make your expectations clear and follow consistent routines. Also, keep these expectations short and convey rules and expected behaviors when everyone is calm. Dependable structure helps kids feel in control.

When change can't be avoided, try to give advanced warning. Transitions are tough for kids who struggle with big emotions, especially when it means stopping an activity they're very engaged in. Providing a warning before a transition happens can help kids feel more prepared. "in 15 minutes we're going to sit down at the table for dinner, so you will need to shut off your Xbox." It may still be hard for them to comply, but knowing it's coming helps kids feel more in control and help them stay calmer.



In my next post, we will talk about more tools for our parent toolbox to help our children deal with big emotions.

~ Child Welch – Door County Partnership for Children and Families