



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 second post, we learned some tactics to use to help our kids learn positive behaviors. In this, **the third post**, we will learn more 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 **giving options**.



When kids are asked to do things they're not likely to be excited about doing, giving them choices may reduce outbursts and increase the likelihood they will comply. For example, "You can either come with me to grocery shop or you can go with dad to pick up your sister." Giving two options reduces the negotiating that can cause tension.



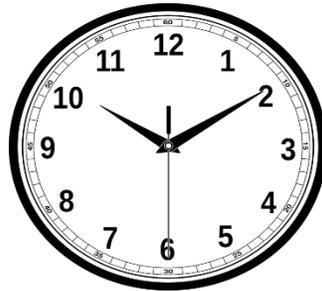
A second tool is **coping ahead**. This is planning in advance for something that you predict may be emotionally challenging for your child or both of you. It means talking when you are both calm about the coming change. It's being direct about what negative emotions may arise and strategizing how you will get through it.

If the child was upset last time she was at grandma's because she wasn't allowed to do something she gets to do at home, coping ahead for the next visit to grandma would be acknowledging that you saw that she was frustrated and angry and discussing how she can handle those feelings. Together you might come up with something she is allowed to do with grandma that she can have fun doing.

Talking about stressful situations in advance help avoid meltdowns. The bottom line is if you plan in advance, it increases the chances that you will end up in a positive situation.



A third tool is **problem solving**. If a child has a tantrum, parents are often hesitant to bring it up later. A negative experience is something we would rather not deal with again so we may want to put it behind us. But it's good to revisit briefly in a non-judgmental way. Revisiting an earlier event-maybe a meltdown in the grocery store-engages the child in thinking about what happened and to strategize about what could have been done differently. If you can come up with one or two things that might have led to a different outcome, your child might remember them next time he's starting to feel overwhelmed.



A final tool for our parental toolbox is simple and rewarding. Set a goal of giving 5 special minutes every day to your child. Even such a small amount of time set aside, reliably, every day, for mom or dad to do something chosen by the child can help the child deal with stress at other points in the day. It's a time for connecting, without parental commands, ignoring any minor misbehavior, just being with your child letting her be in charge.

For example, this can help a child struggling at school to know she can look forward to that special time. Make sure that this 5 minutes of your attention is not contingent on good behavior. It's a time, no matter what, to reinforce that "I love you no matter what."



In the end, the entire family can be less stressed and better able to deal with emotions as they arise. That will make everyone happy!