



Connecting with Your Child During Challenging Moments



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Practice calming down together before your child has a challenging moment.

Practice belly breathing. Have your child lie on their back. Place a small stuffed animal or toy on their belly, and encourage them to watch the toy rise and fall with big belly breaths in and out.

Make meaningful connections with your child when things are going well.

Find joy in each other by playing, reading, storytelling, singing, laughing, or cuddling together. Notice and describe when your child is doing something positive. Here is an example of describing a positive behavior: “You are petting the dog so gently!”

Check in about your own feelings.

Remind yourself that your child is doing the best they can, even in hard moments. It might feel like your child is trying to provoke you on purpose or that they know better. However, in that moment, your child might not have the skills to behave in a different way. You are here to teach and remind your child that there is a different way.

Understand and name your child’s feelings.

When you name children’s feelings throughout the day, it shows that you see them and love them no matter what they are feeling. You want your child to know all feelings are OK and that adults can help them work through their big feelings safely. Here are some examples of naming feelings: “You look disappointed.” “You are excited to go to the park.” “You are yawning and seem tired.”

Talk about solutions to work through feelings.

Connecting with your child does not mean giving in to their challenging behavior. We want children to know we love them and can help them through a challenging moment. Offering choices, making a plan, being consistent, and following through can help children work through hard times.

Offer your child comfort.

Children often wonder whether their caregivers love them no matter what. This is especially true after hard moments. It might be helpful to let them know, “We are OK.” You can do this by giving them a hug, apologizing, reading a book together, or telling them you love them.



Strategies to Try

When you see your child is frustrated:

Instead of: “Is that too hard? Want me to do it for you?”

Try: “That looks tricky! I see you’re working hard. Keep trying!”

When your child is angry:

Instead of: “You need to calm down now!”

Try: “Let’s take some deep breaths together to feel less angry.”

When your child is disappointed:

Instead of: “Stop crying; it’s not a big deal.”

Try: “You’re really sad right now. It’s OK to feel sad. How can I help you feel better?” Offer some gentle ways to help, such as giving them a stuffed animal to hug, singing a quiet song, or rubbing your child’s back.

When your child is not being safe:

Instead of: “That’s it. If you hit again, you’re going to Time Out. I’m sick of this!”

Try: “You are angry. Your hands want to hit. I am going to keep you safe by stopping you from hitting.”

When your child fears something new:

Instead of: “You’re fine. You have nothing to worry about.”

Try: “Oh, you seem scared! Everybody feels scared sometimes. We can do it together the first time.”

When your child is very excited:

Instead of: “I need you to calm down. It’s not time yet.”

Try: “You are excited! It is so hard to wait. What can we do until it’s time for our fun activity?” Offer some suggestions, such as to sing a song, color a picture, play a game, take a walk, count to 10, or read a book together.

Resources

- [Strategies for Supporting Self-Regulation: Snapshot Series](#)
- [The Turtle Technique](#)
- [Help Us Calm Down: Strategies for Children](#)



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