

# Five Steps to Help Children with a Strong Emotion

## 1. Notice and identify the emotion

If your child looks like they need help to calm down, stop. **Pay attention to what your child's behavior is telling you** about their feelings before you do or say anything else. You can do this by:

- looking closely at your child
- watching their body language
- listening to what your child is saying.

For example, if you ask your child to turn off the TV and have a shower, your child might ignore you, or roll around on the floor and complain loudly. This gives you a clue that your child is feeling angry.

## 2. Name and connect the emotion

The second step is to label the emotion and connect it with the event. This teaches your child to understand:

- **what they're feeling and why**
- how their body reacts to this feeling
- what words go with the feeling.

It also shows your child that you understand how they feel and that this emotion is OK, even if their behavior isn't OK.

For example, if your child is rolling around on the floor and complaining loudly about turning off the TV, you could say, 'I can see that you're feeling angry about turning off the TV'.

## 3. Pause and say nothing

Pausing and saying nothing for a few seconds gives your child time to take in what you've just said. It's hard not to jump in and start talking. You might find it helps to **count slowly to five in your head** while you wait.

This pause might be enough for your child to calm down and move on to something else. Or they might solve the problem for themselves. For example, 'Could I watch more TV after I've had my shower?'

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## 4. Support your child while they calm down

If your child is very upset, they might take more time to get their emotions under control. For example, they might keep shouting or acting out physically.

Here are some **things to try if your child needs longer to calm down**:

- Make sure that they're safe and you're safe.
- Stay calm and close to your child. This shows that you understand and can handle their emotions. It also helps them understand that emotions don't have to be overwhelming.
- Go back to step 1 – for example, 'I can see you're really furious about this'.
- Get someone to help you if you need it – your partner if you have one.
- Wait for the strong emotion to pass. Be patient. It can be very hard for young children to manage strong feelings.

It's important to let your child know that it's OK to feel strong emotions. When your child is calm, you might need to help your child understand the difference between the emotion and the behavior. For example, 'It's OK to feel frustrated and disappointed. But it wasn't OK to yell at me and kick the wall.'

It's tempting to say things like 'Use your words' or 'Try taking some deep breaths'. But your child might not be able to respond to these suggestions until their emotions have passed. **It's often best just to wait.**

## 5. Address the behavior or solve the problem

Your child needs to calm down before you can help them solve a problem or change a behavior. What you do after your child has calmed down will depend on the situation. You might need to:

- suggest other ways to react to strong emotions – for example, 'If you feel excited, clap your hands and jump up and down on the spot' or 'If you feel angry, go into your room and squeeze your pillow hard. Come back when you're calm'
- reassure or comfort your child – for example, 'That was a scary thing that happened' or 'I'm sorry to see you so sad. Let's have a hug'
- suggest some solutions for the problem – for example, 'You could ask for your toy back'
- set some limits – for example, 'I know you were angry, but hitting is never OK. You'll have to miss the party tomorrow'.

Remember that you're best able to help your child with their emotions when you're calm yourself. Staying calm also gives you the chance to be a positive role model for managing emotions.