



Be Your Child's Calm Center

Parent stress, agitation or upset strongly affects children's feelings and behavior. *Here is why:*

- We are the world to our children. The way we react to their feelings and behavior becomes the way they see and talk to themselves. Our responses to our children also become the way they believe the world sees them.
- If we don't know how to manage stressful feelings we are more likely to respond to children's behavior in ways that that we may regret and that may model harmful relationship skills
- When we are with our children, our brains sense and reflect each other's emotions. When we are agitated, it affects our children's brains. When they are agitated, it affects ours.



The best - and sometimes only - way to help children remain calm and use the thinking part of their brains is for us to be able to calm our own brains. We all have the ability to calm our brains sometimes, but most of us have to learn skills we can bring to challenging moments with our children. When we blow it with our children, we can feel remorse and worry that we harm them. But we can give ourselves another chance to do it better

next time. We would do that for our best friends, why not offer it to ourselves? Repairing a difficult moment goes a long way; it lets us off the hook and promotes our children learning an important relationship skill.

Here are some behaviors parents display when they don't know how to calm their brains:

- Saying too many words that overwhelm children
- Talking negatively about the child to others in the child's presence
- Speaking harshly, shaming, yelling or threatening
- Aggressively touching, grabbing, shoving or hitting
- Withdrawing love from the child

If these parent behaviors happen often, they are likely to affect children, including – reduced ability to calm self; stronger stress responses; impulsivity; reduced self-worth, courage and curiosity; increased worry and aggression, difficulty concentrating, emotional distancing, or other social problems.

Parents who know how to manage their upset emotions tend to have children who can manage their emotions. Everyone has upsetting emotions. Many of us grew up with parents who did not know how to manage their own emotions and did not teach us how to do that. Our children will benefit when we learn to master brain calming practices. This works best when we choose one or two approaches and practice them for a few minutes every day so that we can use them when we are under pressure. Some of these strategies include simple breathing techniques, creating soothing mental images, or movements designed to calm the brain and body. Once we find the practice that works for us, we can help our children find brain calming practices that work for them.

Learn and practice brain calming strategies. See "Brain Calming Practices" parent handout.

Progress not perfection.

Give yourself and your child permission to Begin Again.

