



## Helping children calm down: 3-8 years

From around 2 years old, children start developing many new emotions. These include strong emotions like frustration, anger, embarrassment, guilt, shame and excitement. These strong emotions can sometimes be overwhelming for children.

Learning to calm down is an important part of learning to understand and manage emotions for children.

Here are 5 steps you can take to help your child calm down from 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 behaviour 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 to the event

The second step is to label the emotion and connect it with the event. This helps your child learn 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 behaviour 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 5 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?'

### **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, or they might have a tantrum.

**Here are 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 furious about this'.
- Get someone to help you if you need it – for example, 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.

While your child is calming down, it's OK to move slightly away from your child, but it's important to stay close enough to watch them and know they're safe.

### **5. Address the behaviour or solve the problem**

Your child needs to calm down before you can help them solve a problem or before you can respond to challenging behaviour. What you do after your child has calmed down will depend on the situation. Here are options:

- 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 other ways your child could have dealt with the problem. For example, 'You could have asked for your toy back instead of hitting'.
- Set some limits. For example, 'I know you were angry, but hitting is never OK. You'll have to miss the party tomorrow'.

***Autistic children who show aggressive behaviour and children with ADHD often need extra support to cope with strong feelings and control their impulses. The professionals working with your child can suggest strategies that might help.***