



Tips for helping your child with their emotions and behaviour

In an uncertain world, it is completely normal for adults and children to feel anxious and worried when they don't know what is going to happen next. And, when we feel anxious we tend to behave differently. For kids, this is likely to mean more anger, more frustration, more boredom and more outbursts. During highly stressful times, family life can be challenging. Whilst we might have an idealistic view of our children, sitting quietly doing homework or playing happily with their brothers and sisters, the reality is often different. It can look like bored children climbing the walls, parental frustration – and plenty of arguments thrown in for good measure!

That's why we've created our tips for supporting your child to manage their own emotions and behaviour – meaning everyone can co-exist a little more easily.

1. Look after number one!

When you're on an aeroplane, the flight attendant instructs you - that in an emergency situation - you must fit your own oxygen mask BEFORE fitting masks onto your children. In other words: you have to be okay, so you can help your kids be okay. There's tonnes of research showing that if you aren't in control of your own emotions (self-regulation), it's impossible to help your child with their emotions (coregulation). So in times of crisis, it's not selfish to make sure you're okay. Eat well, sleep well... and breathe!

✓ Action #1: Take care of yourself, so you can keep supporting your kids



2. Routine

Humans are creatures of habit. Many of us need an element of predictability and routine – and this goes double for children! For example, when you go to the supermarket, I bet you tend to travel there the same way each time - and navigate the store in the same way too? Probably buying around 85% of the same items every week? Yep! We all do it. We enjoy familiarity and we like to know what's going to happen - that makes us feel safe. Imagine how your stress levels would be if you arrived at your supermarket to find every aisle had been reordered and you could no longer find the items you always buy? Kids are the same - they need to know that every day, some things stay the same. Then they can relax and not have to think too hard about it.

✓ Action #2: Make sure your child's day has an element of routine to it.

3. Be active

Our bodies are designed to move. When we move, especially when we exercise, our bodies produce a series of 'feel good' hormones called endorphins. We also produce dopamine, which helps us regulate our emotions. Children particularly need to exercise every day. In fact, the World Health Organisation recommends at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. So be creative! Use the space you have to make up games for getting moving. It can be as simple as timing how quickly each family member can run up and down stairs 5 times, a pillow fight, or the plank challenge! There are loads of mini-workouts for kids, teens and adults online – so try a few different ones until you hit upon one that suits your family. Exercise together, or alternatively allocate each family member an exercise slot every day (actually write down the time to make it happen!) And remember: Be each other's supporters - encourage each person in your family to complete their daily



burst of activity. If you can, get outside too. Fresh air and being outside are great ways to ease family tensions.

✓ Action #3: Engage your child in physical activity every day. It doesn't matter what it is - pick something that works for them.

4. Have family time – but also create space

Being cooped up together like chickens is bound to get on everyone's nerves sooner or later. Try to strike a balance between doing fun stuff together such as playing games or watching a movie, but also set rules which enable every family member to have some time on their own each day too. If kids are sharing a bedroom, it might be helpful to timetable some alone time for each child if they want or need it.

✓ Action #4: Agree as a family that you need time together and time apart

5. Balance screen time with other activities

This is a hard one! For many kids and adults the temptation of social media or gaming is hard to resist and becomes a huge time sink. Whilst there's nothing wrong with relaxing the rules around screen time if you need to get work done at home, the guidelines are that it's best for everything to be in moderation. Without parental guidance, some kids would happily be glued to their screen 24/7 and that's bad because it means that they are missing out on so many other vital elements of daily life, including practicing social interaction and real world skills that will set them up to be successful and happy adults.

Action #5: Ensure your kids aren't enjoying screen time to the exclusion of everything else



6. Set (and stick to) boundaries

Just like at school, it's important that when the adults say something is going to happen... it happens. This teaches children that the boundaries don't move – and in time, they learn to manage their emotions and behaviour for themselves. If you aren't consistent, your kids won't know where they stand – and this can lead to arguments, tantrums and your child feeling that the world is 'unfair'. Having rules and following them through can be tough - but it is vital to maintain healthy, happy families. And try to avoid getting into power battles with your kids... decide on your family rules then stick to them - every time!

✓ Action #6: Set family rules and stick to them consistently

7. Coach your child through strong emotions

Kids (like adults) can become overwhelmed by strong feelings, especially when they don't know what these feelings are, where they come from and how to manage them. When your child gets upset or angry, the best response is to coach them through handling that emotion (rather than reacting with strong emotions of your own). Teach your children how to identify, name and cope with their stress responses. For instance, there's research to show that having a wide emotional vocabulary - and being able to find the right label for an emotion you're experiencing in the moment - reduces its intensity. Help your child understand that once they know what's happening in their brains and bodies, they can control their responses.

✓ Action #7: When your child experiences a strong emotion, move into 'coaching' mode



8. Learn a new skill

If you're spending time supporting your child at home, give that time a purpose. Ask each member of the family to pick a skill and work on learning how to do it. It could be something crafty like learning to crochet, something musical like learning to play an instrument or something technical like learning how to code. Important: Don't pick on your kids behalf. Let them choose a skill - and then help them get online and search for step-by-step tutorials. Learning a new skill gives us a sense of achievement which is vital to boost mental health.

✓ Action #8: Help your child pick and develop a new skill

9. Be a great role model

Kids see and hear everything we say. And what's worse... they're also watching every little thing we do as well! During stressful times, if your kids think you appear calm and in control, they'll feel safe and more able to manage their emotions. So be aware of what you say and do in front of your children at all times. Remember: monkey see, monkey do! If you respond to incidents by shouting, it's likely your kids will do the same. If you practice kindness, patience and a caring approach towards others, your kids will learn that too.

✓ Action #9: Respond to events in a way that you'd like your child to copy