

Toddler Upset –

Ten Tips on How to Calm Your Child:

1. Stay emotionally connected to your child

When she's upset, she's trying to let you know she needs your support. At times when your child is most challenging, it is when she most probably most needs your love and support.

At these times the young child is emotionally overwhelmed and needs your support to calm her down.

2. Choose to be calm

Get down to her eye level and make eye contact (if she will) with a 'soft gaze'. Your toddler physically can't calm herself down when she's upset – she can't "self-regulate". Her immature nervous system relies on an adult to calm her. So, if you choose to calm yourself, it will help to calm her. Your soft gaze will do far more to calm her than any amount of 'reasoning' words.

3. Remember her behavior is about her – your response is about you

There's already one immature person having a meltdown. Your job is to remain the calm, collected adult who, rather than reacting, chooses to respond helpfully.

4. Focus on your breathing

When you steady your breathing, you steady your thoughts. Remind yourself this is your young child who is distressed and needing support.

If you have a key phrase that reminds you of the sort of parent you choose to be, say this to yourself: for example: 'calm', 'being the adult', 'reassure'.

Your steady breathing will also help to steady your child's breathing.

5. Send a 'CONNECT' message through your tone of voice/ body language and your facial expression

Your child senses your motivation far more strongly than she can hear the words you are using. (When you most want to say 'Listen to me' is when she's emotionally flooded and it's impossible for her to listen! In upset times your child's brain can't make sense of your words. First, she needs to connect with you.

She will learn how to deal with stressful times by what you model.

6. Focus on seeing the situation through her eyes, rather than trying to explain yours

See life from her perspective.

Reflect the same words/ energy / simple phrases that she does.

Focus your attention on connecting with her. It's helpful to imagine ahead of time, before an upset, how you might respond in a similar scenario. Here's how I would choose to respond:

Child: 'I want the toy.'

Mother: 'You want the toy.'

Child: 'I want it!'

Mother: 'You really want it.'

7. Don't give her what she's demanding – just acknowledge what she wants

Just because she "wants" the toy, doesn't mean she has to have it. But you can still acknowledge her experience. (Think of when you say something like, "I'd love that Porsche." Just because you express the wish, doesn't mean you need it explained to you why you can't have it!) What anyone of us wants is for someone to acknowledge our experience. So, you can empathetically respond, "You'd love that toy" – but it doesn't; mean you have to buy it!

8. If she uses attacking words, like 'Silly Mummy' reflect the emotion below her words

For example, you might respond, 'You're cross with me.'

9. Give words for your child's emotions

When we acknowledge emotions, over time your child will learn to 'name, claim and tame' her emotions. As we model this, our children will be more able to use reason to deal with emotional upsets – to 'find words (left brain activation) for strong feelings (right brain activation) instead of moving into primitive discharge of these feelings. (as in tantrum).'

10. It's okay for your child to cry

Don't try to stop the tears, just be compassionately present and ready to connect when your child is ready to do so. when we cry when we're upset, the tears are chemically different to the tears we cry when we're peeling an onion. Our 'upset tears' contain stress hormones. So, having a 'good cry' / 'crying it all out' makes sense.

