

Surviving Your Scariest Parenting Moments

You know the feeling.

Perhaps you lose sight of your son when you turn around for one moment in the grocery store parking lot. Maybe the fire alarm goes off in the middle of the night. Or it might be that you pick up your phone to hear your teenager say, “Mom – I have to tell you something you’re not going to like.” Your stomach lurches. Your blood runs cold. Something is very, very wrong.

Parenthood has its terrifying moments. As much as you may try, you can’t watch every move your child makes or anticipate every family crisis. It’s simply not possible, no matter how great of a caregiver you are.

What you can do is prepare yourself for how you will respond when THAT moment happens. Here are a few tips:

Breathe.

As cliché as it sounds, taking a deep breath will help you both physically and emotionally when you’re frightened or overwhelmed. When your brain senses danger, you often lose skills needed to make logical decisions. It tells your body “RUN! FIGHT! or STOP EVERYTHING!” This is because your brain is working to keep you safe by trying to get you out of a dangerous situation as soon as possible. This reaction is your brain working the way it’s supposed to. But as a parent, you need to be thinking clearly and rationally to keep your kids safe. Consciously taking



a deep breath or two will help your brain do a “reset” by sending it a message to calm down. Try to breathe in through your nose for a four-second count, and breathe out through your nose for the same amount of time. This controlled breathing causes your brain to slow down, so that you can decide what your best next step is in a tough situation.

Have a Plan.

Preparing for an emergency doesn’t mean you’re asking for one to happen. It means you’re giving yourself and your family tools to use if necessary.

Keep the contact information for your family doctor, poison control, and 911 clearly posted in your home. Even if you have these numbers in your phone, this will help if another family member or babysitter is in charge when a crisis occurs.

now what? Keep Going.

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Decide ahead of time which caregiver will stay home with other children if one child has to make a quick emergency room visit. Have safety rules in your home that everyone knows, and practice as a family how you will respond to severe weather, a fire in the house, or unwanted physical touch from someone.

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Don't Play the Blame Game.

When something terrible happens, we tend to look for someone at fault. Often, we blame ourselves. (If only I hadn't...) Even if the situation was out of our control.

Other times, we get angry and point a finger at the people around us – the significant other who wasn't watching or the child who made a dangerous mistake.

But when something scary happens, finding someone to blame isn't helpful. It might release tension in the moment to yell or point out the person who is most wrong, but this won't solve the problem. It won't take back what happened, and it can cause more emotional hurt to deal with later on.

Your energy is better spent focusing on coping with the situation at hand. When we feel awful, connecting is a better coping tool than blaming. Think about what it is you need from others (A hug? A listening ear? Help figuring out what to do next?) Then ask for what you need from a spouse, friend, or other adult family member. Not only is this more helpful for you than finding someone to blame, it models appropriate reactions to big feelings for your children. Don't forget to help your kids identify and talk about how they are feeling after a scary moment, too.

Later on, when everything is stable and you feel calm, you can take the time to talk about making safer or healthier choices with your kids, spouse, or someone else involved.

No matter how careful you are, being a parent means facing scary situations.

Accidents, illness, and tragedy happen to all of us.

While things are smooth-going, make a plan for what to do when something big goes wrong. Then when those unexpected, tough moments do occur, take a deep breath, rely on your plan, and try to respond with connection instead of pointing a finger.

And when you go to replay the terrifying situations in your mind once they're over, remember that you're doing the very best you can to keep your kids safe, healthy, and happy – and that's all you or anyone else can ask.



Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 10/29/17. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

- 1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
- 2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
- 3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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