

Addressing "Big" Feelings for Parents

There is no doubt about it: parenting can be hard. Sometimes, you will feel angry at your child, whether it's because they didn't clean their room like you asked or because they were picking on their sibling or just because you have a lot on your plate and that one more thing is just too much. However big or small the issue may be, there are times when you suddenly are overwhelmed and feel like you are going to burst with frustration and anger.

Here are a few tips on how to address your feelings in the moment:

Take a time out

When you start to feel the anger bubble to the surface, recognize you may need to take a few minutes to allow yourself to calm down before addressing the situation. If you can leave your child unattended safely, simply tell your young child "I am feeling a lot of 'big feelings' right now and need to take a couple minutes to think." Go to another room to compose yourself. Take deep breaths, splash water on your face, relax your shoulders, think about how your child looks to you as a role model. Do whatever you can to get yourself calm, not more worked up. Once you feel ready, you can go talk to your child about what bothered you, but with less anger and more control over your words and actions.



Reflect on why you're mad

After you take yourself out of the frustrating situation, it might be helpful to reflect on why you're mad. Are you really upset at your child for not putting away their shoes, or was this just the last straw at the end of an exhausting day? Is it really your children's bickering or do you feel overwhelmed with parenthood and need some peace and quiet to yourself?

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Perhaps you will realize that your anger at your child was blown out of proportion because of other “big” stressors in your life, such as:

- Lack of time to yourself
- Lack of sleep
- Covid-19 pandemic
- Hormonal imbalance
- Financial strain
- Tension with your partner
- Dealing with criticism from other parents
- Struggles with work/home balance
- Busy schedule in general
- Imbalance in parenting roles
- Health issues
- Worries over child development, etc.

While this list is not exhaustive, these are just a few of the many reasons why life, in general, is complicated. You juggle all sorts of things, not just your kids. Recognizing where your anger truly stemmed from can help you put perspective on what your child did and how you want to proceed with them.

Avoid disciplining while you're angry

At some point, we have all acted rashly when we're mad, perhaps saying something we did not mean or something that we regret later. Even if you have taken a few minutes to calm down or reflect, consider waiting a few more hours to decide how you want to discipline your child. So instead of rushing back after reaching a “calm” and then getting angry again, tell your child that you need to think about what happened and that you will talk about it with them after dinner. The more time you separate from the triggering event, the more perspective you will have and the more likely you will be able to separate your emotions from the disciplining.

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Be careful of your tone

When you do finally talk with your child regarding their behavior, what they need to change, and how they will be disciplined, remember to be mindful of your tone. Using a calm voice will help keep the conversation constructive, and focusing on maintaining it will help you control any lingering frustrations that may resurface.

DO NOT get physical

No matter how angry you feel, do not use physical force as an outlet for your anger. Show your child that even when they may have done something wrong, they are still safe. If you feel an urge, make sure you walk away and allow yourself time to cool down.

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After all is said and done, take time to look at the bigger picture. Reflect back to the root problems of your outburst, the outside factors, or other stress-causing factors in your life and try to see what you can do to be in a better mindset and place for disciplining your kids and dealing with anger. Don't be afraid to reach out to friends and family for support, and talk with your partner to communicate your needs. And, if needed, seek out professional help.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 1.21.21 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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