

Losing Your Temper with Your Child? 8 Steps to Help You Stay in Control

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Our kids have the uncanny ability to get under our skin and bring out the very worst in us. I can lose my temper and yell at my kids in a way that I would never do with a child who was not my own. Indeed, we often treat our loved ones the worst.

Here's the truth: feeling angry is a fact of life and we can't stop that. But, we can take steps to control how we react to our anger. We can get angry without losing our temper, and when we can do that, our parenting becomes much more effective.

In other words, we will do a better job of getting our kids to behave appropriately if we can control our tempers. And, in the process, we will feel better too.

Below are 8 steps you can begin to take today that will help you remain calm and parent effectively when anger overcomes you. You and your child will be better for it.

1. Recognize Your Triggers as a Parent

Understanding our triggers as a parent is the first step in ensuring that we don't lose our tempers and begin screaming at our kids.

As the mother of a teenager who also has ADD and has a hard time controlling his impulses, I know that what triggers me is his bad attitude. Therefore, when his bad attitude kicks in and he starts spewing negativity, I need to take a step back and focus on how I'm feeling at that moment.

In my case, my neck tenses, my cheeks feel flushed, and, having a hot temper myself, I can almost taste the words readying themselves to roll off my tongue in response.

Some of your triggers might include your toddler saying "No!" for the umpteenth time that day. Or perhaps when your middle school daughter rolls her eyes at you or your high school son doesn't do his chores again.

By recognizing my emotional triggers as well as the physical sensations in my body that are associated with them, I am better equipped to say to myself:

"Okay, I recognize this feeling and it always leads to me losing my temper. Stop it. Take some time to calm down."

This is called [positive self-talk](#) and it's very effective. The calm and in-control part of your brain is telling the temper part of your brain to cool it.

When you can recognize what frustrates you the most, you are on the path to stopping your temper from boiling over.

Know that we can all learn to be calmer. Think about it, we tell our kids that they need to learn to calm down and not overreact. We can do the same for ourselves.

There are many times when I stop mid-sentence, sit down, and use deep breathing to calm myself. This makes my teenagers nuts—they think I'm crazy when I do this—but it works.

If you are about to lose your temper, consider counting backward, towards calmness, until you are in a different place. Begin with a number that's higher than your stress level. For some people, this can be 100, which equates to about two minutes. For others, 30 might be sufficient. Whatever number you choose, this exercise buys you time before doing or saying something you might regret.

Again, these techniques might seem silly if you have not tried them, but they really work. There is something about counting and deep breathing that uses a different part of the brain and gives the irritated part a chance to settle down.

2. Walk Away From Arguments With Your Child

When you find you are about to lose it, walk away from your child. Not only does this prevent you from starting down the wrong path, but it also models for your child an appropriate response when they are feeling overwhelmed themselves.

For older kids, feel free to say:

"You know, I'm not ready to talk to you about this right now so I'm going to be alone for a few moments until I can calm down."

3. Find New Ways to Communicate With Your Child

Too often, parents fall into bad communication patterns that we may have learned from our parents when we were growing up. These can include giving our kids the silent treatment, withdrawing from the family, giving overly harsh punishments in the heat of the moment, yelling, making snide or sarcastic remarks, swearing, and name-calling.

It's very easy to fall into this pattern, especially when you have a toddler screaming at you or a teenager swearing and getting in your face.

But again, it's important to remember that you are modeling how to deal with anger and frustration for your child. And keep in mind that you are not just modeling for their childhood and adolescence, but for their adulthood as well.

This is not to say that you can't express anger, disappointment, or frustration with your child. Often, we need our kids to know we aren't happy, but we have to find ways to express our feelings appropriately.

Healthy communication relies on both you and your child being calm, so do not approach them if they are still raging at you or you are still too angry to talk.

For both young children as well as adolescents, keep your comments brief and to the point. Here are some examples:

"I don't appreciate it when I come home from work and you haven't done any of your chores. Please do them now."

"I don't like it when you take your brother's toys and make him cry. The consequence for that is that your train now is in time-out for 20 minutes, while you practice better behavior."

"You know the rule in our house is completing homework before television. No more TV for the night."

When you are finished, move on to something else. Don't dwell on what just happened.

4. Let Go of Parenting Guilt

For most parents, the worst part about losing our temper is how we feel afterward. Losing our tempers with our kids can lead to significant parenting guilt. And we can't turn the clock back and undo what we have just done.

Parenting guilt itself can lead us to parent ineffectively in the future. Parents who harbor guilt often have difficulty holding their kids accountable in the future.

It is important to realize that all parents do things that they regret. After all, we're only human. So, give yourself a break and don't let your guilt about past actions keep you from parenting effectively in the future.

5. Choose Your Battles With Your Child

Too often, our tantrums are born out of feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. Therefore, it's important to not put yourself in a position of feeling chronically overwhelmed by getting upset over every little annoying thing your child does.

One way to combat this is to think hard about what is most important. Enforce and address what you can for now and let go of the rest.

For younger kids, there are a lot of daily behaviors that can be frustrating. We all know that kids this age are messy, noisy, and have meltdowns.

For middle school and high school kids, the issues may be moodiness, irresponsible behavior, or backtalk.

Pinpoint what your family values are and decide what to tackle. Is it important that your child completes chores, has a semi-clean room, and is respectful? If so, then make it clear what your expectations are and don't worry about the other issues for now.

The goal here is that the occasional mess, eye roll, and the moodiness just won't matter as much.

6. Apologize to Your Child When Necessary

One of the greatest gifts you can give your child is knowing when to admit you've done something wrong and to apologize. Some parents struggle with this, thinking that if they do this they are giving up their power or showing weakness.

But ask yourself what it is you want to teach and model to your child about grown-up relationships. Surely we want to teach our kids the importance of an apology when they've wronged someone. There's nothing more powerful than a parent admitting their faults and offering a sincere apology.

7. Get Parenting Support

Pick trusted friends or family members who will support you through your parenting years. Find like-minded parents who you feel safe confiding in when you've exploded and feel ashamed or guilty. Make sure you nurture these relationships so you have a sounding board (and can return the favor) when you are at your wits' end.

Important: do not divulge your worst parenting moments to other parents or family members who are judgmental or who express shock or dismay at your momentary lapse in parenting judgment. These people will only make you feel worse about yourself and will suck the energy out of you.

8. Be Kind to Yourself

Lastly, practice self-care by being kind and forgiving towards yourself. Parents are harder on themselves than any other group of individuals I know of. This is born out of intense feelings of love and concern for our kids, as well as the desire to get it all right all the time.

But there's no such thing as a perfect parent who does it all right, all the time. Most of us are lucky if we can get through the day being a "good enough" parent.

Whether you lose your temper once or twenty times, just acknowledge to yourself that you've made a mistake and commit to doing better in the future. Know that you aren't perfect. Know that you may lose your temper again. But also know that you are just human, and you can improve.

So, forgive yourself for past indiscretions and move forward with the goal that you will start each day aiming to try your best.

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