

Helping Children Work Through Strong Emotions

Strong feelings are not bad because anger, fear, sadness, and disappointment tell us that something feels hard.

Children need calm support to learn what to do next.

Begin by slowing yourself down. Lower your voice, relax your face, and take one slow breath. A calm adult gives a child something steady to follow.

Name the feeling without arguing about it. You might say, “You look angry because the game ended,” or, “You seem worried about tomorrow.” Naming a feeling does not excuse hurtful behavior.

Set one clear limit: “It is okay to feel angry; it is not okay to hit.” Keep your words short because a long talk can add pressure when a child is upset.

Offer one simple way to calm down. Try slow breathing, a drink of water, a short walk, or sitting in a quiet place.

Stay nearby, but do not force your child to talk at once.

After the feeling has settled, ask what happened and what might help next time. Practice the plan when everyone is calm. If strong outbursts happen often or last a long time, get support. Talk with your child’s doctor or school support team when there is a safety concern.

Did You Know?

- ✓ The American Academy of Pediatrics says emotion coaching begins by noticing, naming, and accepting a child’s feelings before helping with the need.¹
- ✓ The CDC suggests pausing for 10 to 30 seconds before a hard talk so an adult can become calmer.²
- ✓ Harvard researchers explain that emotional control develops over time and is shaped by a child’s experiences and support from caring adults.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. [“Helping Little People Manage Big Feelings.”](#) HealthyChildren.org. Updated November 7, 2024.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [“Tips for Coaching Teens to Recognize and Manage Emotions.”](#) Essentials for Parenting Teens. April 18, 2024.
3. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. [“Children’s Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains.”](#) Working Paper No. 2. April 14, 2004.

Child Calm-Down and Recovery Plan

Use this page to respond calmly, protect safety, and help your child practice one recovery plan after strong feelings begin to settle.

Child's name: _____	Date: _____
Situation: _____	Feeling: _____
1. Slow Down First Lower your voice, relax your face, and take one slow breath before speaking.	
2. Name the Feeling Describe the feeling without arguing about it or excusing hurtful behavior. What I can say: _____	
3. Set One Clear Safety Limit Keep the limit short and specific: "It is okay to feel _____; it is not okay to _____." My limit: _____ What must stop or stay safe: _____	
4. Choose One Calm-Down Tool Offer one simple choice, such as slow breathing, water, a short walk, or a quiet place. Tool we will try: _____	

5. Recover and Plan for Next Time

After everyone is calm, ask what happened and practice one small next step.

What helped: _____

Our next-time plan: _____