



## Helping Your Child Calm Down, 33-72 months

Your child now often lets you know what they need before they get upset. However, they still struggle to calm down when they have big feelings. With your support, your child can learn how to stay calm and focus (self-regulate). These social-emotional skills are important to your child's overall well-being and ability to learn. Preschoolers who can self-regulate find it easier to make friends and adapt to home and school routines. Use the ideas on this tip sheet to help prevent upsets and to teach your child how to stay calm when they do have big feelings.

### Keep in Mind

- All behaviors have meaning. Is your child hungry, tired, sick, bored, or stressed? Do they need attention? Learn your child's rhythms and personality. Aim to prevent upsets.
- You have the biggest influence on your child's behavior. Your child learns how to self-regulate from you. Be kind and respectful with your child, even when you are angry.
- Physical touch is calming for both you and your child. Hug, hold, and touch your child many times a day. Cuddle up and read to your child if they need to calm down.
- Open-ended playtime with friends helps your child learn to self-regulate. Your child learns how to wait (take turns), talk through disagreements, and negotiate while playing.
- Monitor and limit screen time. Screen time can lead to attention and behavior problems. Your child needs to learn to stay calm and focused while engaging in real-life activities with real people.

### Suggestions

- Stick to a consistent daily routine. Consistent routines can decrease struggles. Your child learns that even if they fuss, bedtime is still going to happen the same way, every day. Consistency means there is less need to fuss!
- Develop clear expectations, and be consistent. Your child can learn rules if you stick to them every time.
  - Keep rules simple and positive—the simpler, the better. For example: "Use gentle touch."
  - Explain why a rule is a rule: "We use gentle touch because hitting hurts. We don't hurt each other."
  - Give a positive alternative: "If you need something, tap me gently and use your words to tell me what you want."

(continued)

33-72 months



## Helping Your Child Calm Down, 33-72 months *(continued)*

### SUGGESTIONS *(continued)*

- Teach play skills by playing with your child. Teach your child how to share, trade, and take turns with friends. Teach them how to talk about it when they get frustrated or disappointed during play.
- Give alerts. It's hard for your child to stop an activity they are enjoying. Before you move your child to a new activity, give them an alert so they have a little time to finish up: "In 10 minutes it will be time to clean up and have a snack."
- Provide simple choices. Choices allow your independent child a little control over their day: "Blue shirt or red shirt?" "Crackers or toast?" "Store first or bank?"
- Focus on the positives. Catch your child doing the right thing and praise them: "Good idea!" "Thanks for your help." "I'm proud of you." "High five!" "Thanks for waiting patiently."
- When you ask your child to do a task, use a "first/then" statement. A first/then statement pairs a request with something you know your toddler enjoys: "First pick up your toys [request], and then we'll go to the park [fun]."
- Teach your child a "calm-down plan." Choose a time when your child is calm and talk to them about ways to calm down. Examples of calm-down plans include taking several slow breaths, taking a break, talking it out, asking to be held, and switching to a different activity.
- Read books about big feelings. Ask a librarian for suggestions. Reading books about others' big feelings lets your child know their feelings are okay.
- When your child starts to have a big feeling or tantrum, stay calm and try these ideas:
  - Move your child if they are not in a safe spot. For example, if your child is lying in the middle of a busy grocery store aisle, gently pick them up and move them to a safe place.
  - Help your child calm down. Your child cannot listen to words or think clearly when upset. Say, "I want to help. You need to calm down first." Use the calm-down plan you made.
  - Resist the temptation to bribe. Offering your phone or candy to calm your fussy child does not help them learn how to self-regulate.
- Once your child is calm, talk about feelings and solutions. "You were angry. You and your friend both wanted the toy. What can you do?" "You seem sad. How can I help?"

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child's health care provider.