

## **Tune Into Kids - Reduce Tantrums**

**Accepting the emotion and allowing the child to stop and notice that they're having an emotion, is important skill for parents.**

Sometimes we jump in, we want to rescue, we want to make the child feel better, we want to stop a child being angry. But sometimes it's better to help a child to know that you accept the feeling that they have (and that you've still got limits very clearly around their behaviour).

**Parental empathy - or parents being able to notice, label and understand what feeling a child might be having is a very fundamental skill for a parent to have.**

Sometimes it's suggesting, to stop, to accept, to put a label on it. But sometimes it's just to be present. They actually just want you not to reject them and not move away at that time. Sometimes you just stay close at that time with the child, and the child doesn't move away from the emotion, they actually 'attend' to it. When kids feel secure - you're conveying to them, "Yes, this is an acceptable and a really understandable thing to feel" - then the emotion tends to reduce in its intensity.

When a friend says "Oh don't be silly, don't be like that" or "Don't worry, you'll be fine", often those statements don't actually help to resolve your feeling. By saying, for example, "Well, you really do seem to be quite worried about talking to your friends at school", you allow a child to think, "Actually I am feeling that way" and it just reduces the emotion's intensity. ...

**Often our gut reaction is to leave that child alone or suggest that the child not be talked to again until that feeling has passed. We have to be very careful about how we do that, because we may be giving the message that it's not okay to have that feeling.**

We have our own reactions to a child's emotions. These reactions may come from our own past experiences. So it might be, for example, that someone is okay with sadness and able to sit with the child's sadness and then comfort, and just be with the child. But it might be anger - you might have a reaction of "Don't be like that, when you're calmed down I'll talk to you then." Sometimes that might be an appropriate strategy, but at other times it conveys "I'm not okay with you being angry". And that might come from (your) place of "anger is scary", or "anger is uncomfortable" or "anger is getting out of control" or "anger means something really bad about you."

**Isn't anger being out of control?**

I think anger's a wonderful emotion for telling what's really important; for getting a really clear emotion about "this is not okay". For some people, anger is a really energising thing, it's part of passion, it's part of strong feelings. It's the destructive behaviour that can come from anger that I think you might be referring to, more than the feeling. But for some of us, that feeling is really uncomfortable.

**What else could a parent do that shows that they're willing to sit with that angry child or be with that angry child?**

One way is attending to children's emotions early, before emotions really escalate, that's the time that children are more receptive to listening and thinking about what's going on. Whereas when they're in a full tantrum, we know that the limbic system - the part of the brain that just floods us with the emotion - stops the part of our brain, the frontal lobes, from thinking through logically. ... So it's much better to try and attend to a child at that lower level of irritability and anger early. And we know that when parents do that regularly, when the emotion's just a low level intensity, the number of tantrums go down dramatically.

Sometimes when a child is getting very angry, it's sometimes just about saying something like "I can see you're really angry right now" and you're not saying "but you can't do that!" or "but you've got to go and do this!" Often a child hears the "but you can't!" and the first part is being lost.

And at those times it might be that once the emotion's dropped that the child will then come in and say "Yeah, but she scribbled all over my drawing", and then you might say "Yeah, that would be really frustrating too if a lovely drawing I'd done got wrecked by my sister". And then what you can often do is find out what lies behind making them angry, because anger tends to be something that masks a whole lot of other feelings. So a child is feeling jealous, or embarrassed or shy, or anxious and worried about something. .... But if you're responding to the behaviour only, a child doesn't learn about emotions.

One (approach) is to explore the ways your family responded to you, or the ways your parents or siblings were when they were sad, when they were angry, when they were worried, when they were jealous, guilty. What were the feelings that you learned when you were growing up? And we know from research that if you're aware of those things and you're aware of what your experiences were, you're more likely to be able to make changes and break cycles.

It's often easy to emotion coach (when you are) at a lower intensity of emotion. The thing is to do something to manage your own emotion. It might be you've actually just got to breathe, it might be having a drink of water. It might be that you just walk once around the kitchen bench, touch the necklace around your neck or do something to remind yourself to calm down. Because it's that calming thing that will often break the reflex reaction.

Sometimes it's really hard to do, we all make mistakes, all the time, it's just part of being human and showing children that you can make mistakes and you can apologise, is really important learning for children as well.