



## Building Confident Parenting and Regulating in the Moment

Many parents and caregivers who have children exhibiting challenging behaviors are already walking on eggshells around their children. When kids are having behavior problems, caregivers are trying as hard as they can to not set off those outbursts. This is all completely understandable but can also be exhausting. Unfortunately, anxiety caregivers feel often feeds into the challenges the kids are facing. When we want our kids to regulate their emotions better, the first emotion we need to regulate is our own. When children with behavior problems pick up on their caregiver's anxiety, they are more likely to keep challenging their caregivers. Luckily, there is a ton you can do as a parent or caregiver to regulate your own anxiety or other challenging emotions! Strategies involving both our mind and body are important for gaining a calm equilibrium to allow us to go into parenting with more confidence.

Before you begin trying to set a limit with your defiant little one, carve out a few minutes ahead of time to use healthy tools to regulate and prepare yourself. Use these coping ideas to get ready for tough parenting moments ahead of time. If you forget to do these things ahead of time you can use some of these same strategies during the moment to regulate yourself as well.

### Physical strategies for caregiver self-soothing:

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing**

This helps with rapid heartbeat and butterflies in the stomach. Start with an exhale to make space for your next breath. Breathe in slowly for about 3 seconds through your nose pulling the air straight down into your stomach. Hold the breath for a second. Breathe out very slowly and audibly through your mouth for about 5 seconds.

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

This involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in our bodies which helps relieve the tension we are holding. Start by squeezing both hands into fists and holding tight for 3 seconds then releasing them and dropping your arms by your sides. Go through the muscles in your arms, stomach, legs and feet. Also make sure to lift your shoulders up to your ears, hold and release. We carry a lot of tension in our upper back and shoulders.

- **Stretching**

Raise your arms above your head, roll your shoulders forward and backward, lean your head side to side. Any stretch that helps you loosen up some of those tight muscles will be helpful.

- **Grounding with Senses**

There are tons of ways to ground using your 5 senses. You can find 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. You can grab a piece of chocolate, a mint, or gum. Then go through each sense before you pop it in your mouth and as you are chewing it. You can count how many things you can find of a certain color. Grounding



keeps you present in the moment. It can also help get your thinking mind back in charge when emotions have taken over.

## **Cognitive strategies for boosting confidence:**

- **Positive Self Talk**

How we talk to ourselves (and our children) matters. Be kind to yourself. If you are thinking negative things about yourself, your child, or your parenting, work on thinking more positive things. Tell yourself you can do this, you are capable, you can handle this, you are a good person and a good caregiver. Remind yourself that it is okay to have your own feelings come up, but that you can handle them.

- **Refocusing**

Focus your thinking on something else. Remind yourself of the goals you have for your child, for yourself or for your parenting. Remind yourself of your strengths and your child's strengths.

- **Imagery**

The great thing about imagining yourself doing something with complete confidence and success is that our nervous system doesn't know the difference between when we are imagining something in our head and truly experiencing it in real life. So, we can literally rewire our nervous system by picturing ourselves doing something exactly the way we want to do it. Picture every detail of being a calm and confident caregiver: what you will say, how you will say it, what your body language and facial expression will look like, and how it will feel.

If you know you are entering a situation that will be hard for your child, check your own thinking and scan your body for anxious symptoms. If you are worried, try to get your own worry under control first. Use a couple of the ideas above. If you believe your child can handle the challenge (whatever "it" is) they will be more likely to be able to! Look for every opportunity to preemptively praise what is going well with your child's emotions and behavior. It will help you both stay calm.

When it comes to defiant child behaviors it is often said that you should handle the problem behaviors right when they occur, however it is also important to tackle discipline calmly. If you start to find yourself dysregulated it is okay to step away and regulate yourself, and then step back into the situation on more even ground. When parents and caregivers take time to regulate in the moment it is great role modeling for your kids. It shows them that you are doing what you hope they will do too!

If your lacking confidence despite some of these ideas, it is also okay to "fake it till you make it" so to speak. Meaning even if you are stressed and worried on the inside, try to exude a calm air of confidence on the outside. Take some deep breaths and talk yourself through it. Try your best to give off a cool, calm, and collected vibe.



It is also important to make sure you have a time and a place to deal with those stressed-out feelings. Rely on your support network, exercise or journal (or any other healthy outlets that work for you) to make sure you are taking care of your own emotions and needs.

Remember to take it easy on yourself. Parenting is hard work under the best circumstances. When you are supporting kids with emotional or behavioral struggles, it requires extra time and attention. Give yourself credit for all the hard work you do every day to keep your kids, yourself, and your family happy and healthy.