

# Parenting tip: Think “calm”

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One of the biggest traps parents fall into is losing their cool when their children act out. These are times when parents are letting their children’s behavior control them — instead of the other way around.

Is it always possible to stop, reflect and act rationally 100% of the time? No. Does every parent lose their cool from time to time? Yes. Can you try to avoid it? Definitely.

## Calm is contagious

Think about the calmest, most laid back person you know. How does it feel to be around him or her? Do you feel peaceful too? In most cases, the answer is yes.

When parents are able to stay calm — or take a moment to regain their composure in a tough situation — it usually helps kids calm down too. It’s often possible to avoid confrontations by realizing you can control your reactions more readily than you can control your children.

If you need your kids to calm down so you can recover your cool, you’re putting the power to dictate your behavior in their hands.

## Tips for controlling reactions

Keeping or getting back your self-control doesn’t always come easily. But it’s an important skill in a parent’s toolbox. And it teaches children by example, too.

Here are some ways to manage your reactions, even when you think you’re about to blow up:<sup>1</sup>

**1. Take a deep breath.** When you feel things heating up, walk away and give it all a chance to settle. Have a mantra that you

say to yourself like “Stop” or “Slow down.” Or think about how you’ve handled such issues and feelings in the past. Use any trick that works. The idea is to put some time between your kids’ pushing your buttons and your response.

**2. Be prepared.** Recognize triggers in advance. For example, do your kids melt down just before dinner when everyone in the family is tired and hungry? What steps can you take to avoid or minimize the chaos at this time?

If there’s anxiety in the house, do the kids act up? Consider the triggers and experiment with ways to work around predictable difficulties.

**3. Respond... don’t react.** Reactions are reflexes. Responses take thought. As you calm yourself down, you’ll be able to think more clearly and rationally. One method of rational response is to give your children choices — any of which you know will restore or keep the peace.

For example, let’s say it’s grocery shopping day and you’re short on breakfast foods. It can frustrate your kids to ask them, “What would you like for breakfast?” They may ask for something you’re out of. Or they might not know what they want. Instead, give them a choice of things you have in the house: “Would you like cereal, toast or yogurt?”

**4. Keep your perspective.** Parenting is an ongoing challenge and your relationship with your children is a work in progress. There are bound to be tough times. Keep in mind that you’re always modeling behaviors for your kids. Try to act in ways you’d be proud to see your children acting.

<sup>1</sup>[www.empoweringparents.com](http://www.empoweringparents.com)