

Figuring Out Frustration

Everyone gets frustrated, angry, or upset sometimes. Young children are still learning how to handle their emotions, so they may get overly upset or tantrum for a long time. Because frustration is such a common part of life, we want children to learn skills for handling difficult situations on their own. By using some of the tips below, most children will learn better ways to handle difficult emotions. This is important, because it allows them to be more self-reliant and confident.

Things to Avoid When Kids are Upset

- ***Getting upset or excited yourself (set a good example)*** – Children look to their parents to know how to feel and behave. So, while it's natural for you to feel distressed when your child is upset, if you often show how upset you are, it can make the situation worse.
- ***Fixing problems for kids*** – Because we hate to see children upset, it's natural to want to help them when something goes wrong, and many times they really need that help. We also want children to learn how to solve problems on their own, so sometimes it's good to resist the urge to fix everything for them, and instead let them try to work it out on their own.
- ***Distracting from the problem*** – When a child is upset, it's tempting to give them a favorite toy or snack to distract them or help them calm down. This might work in the short-term, but it doesn't help kids learn how to calm themselves down on their own. It's better to wait until the child starts to calm down naturally and then provide them with something they might like. This encourages them to calm more quickly in the future. So, while sometimes distracting from problems can be useful, try not to do it every time.

Tips for Building Frustration Skills

- ***Act calm (even if you don't feel that way)*** – When children see you are calm and confident about a situation, it will help them feel and act that way too.
- ***Be supportive and encouraging*** – Staying calm is important, but you can still provide support and encouragement. A few words that tell your child you understand the frustration or a quick hug for to show support are good. The younger your child is, the more support s/he will need.
- ***Label tough emotions*** – Child are still learning how to identify and express their emotions. This is especially hard for them when they are upset. One way to help them learn this is to label their emotions for them. So instead of asking, "What's wrong?" say, "You're frustrated because that toy isn't working."
- ***Have them try again*** – Once your child has calmed some, it's good to encourage them to re-approach the situation that made them upset. Doing this helps build resilience and persistence. It sends the message that problems are challenges to be overcome, not obstacles to avoid.
- ***Praise improvements*** – Any time your child handle a difficult situation well, make sure you tell them how much you liked it! Improvements could be staying calm when frustrated, calming more quickly after getting upset, or being more persistent trying to tackle a problem. Anything you like and want to see more of should get lots of attention and praise.

- ***Practice, practice, practice*** – Building emotion skills takes time. Dealing with frustrations is difficult even for adults. Using these tips won't make changes overnight, but if you keep at it, they will help your child learn over time.

Please note that resources such as this are intended to offer guidance and suggestions. However, no claim is made that the information provided is appropriate for any specific child or family. Many families will find this information helpful and sufficient for addressing child rearing issues. Others will not. Parents are encouraged to talk with their child's pediatrician or seek help from a mental health professional if needed.

Prepping for Success

To use these tips, it will be easiest if you've thought about what you want to do beforehand. By knowing what situations usually upset your child, how you normally react, and what you'd like to do differently, you'll be better prepared. Filling in the worksheet below will help parents be ready when the time comes to use these skills!

What are some situations that make your child upset?

How do you usually react in these situations?

Using the tips above, what would you like to try and do differently in the future?
