

## Learn to Control Your Emotions

The first step to getting your emotions under control is realizing that they are there. If you were abused as a child, you may have an especially difficult time getting in touch with your range of emotions. You may have had to deny or repress them as a child, and now they spill out without your control. You may feel like you are “turning into your parent”! Also, sometimes your child reminds you of his/her father/mother, your former partner (who may have physically or emotionally abused you), and you find it hard to feel accepting and supportive of him/her.

Here are some tips to help you control your anger at your child and help you to calm down when you feel out of control. Practice these tips everyday so that they become natural to you.

1. **Use planned ignoring.** Take a few moments to ignore the behavior that is upsetting you, turn you back, pick up a book and start to read it, turn the TV on or the radio on. These simple techniques will distract you and give you a few moments to calm down so that you are better able to respond to the child. Ignoring the child’s behavior is better than lashing out or striking the child. Prepare ahead of time and identify what behaviors you can ignore and what behaviors you can’t ignore. For instance, you can cover your ears and ignore a child’s temper tantrum but you can’t ignore a child if he or she/he does something unsafe such as runs into the street.



2. **Walk away when you feel out of control.** When you are feeling overwhelmed, out of control and like you can’t take it anymore and want to hit you child, walk away and take a few moments for yourself, take a few moments to get yourself under control. Have a safe spot in your house that you can walk to even if it is only for a few moments; sit down and

give yourself time to calm down. Keep your child in eye sight for safety, but have enough distance so that you can calm yourself.

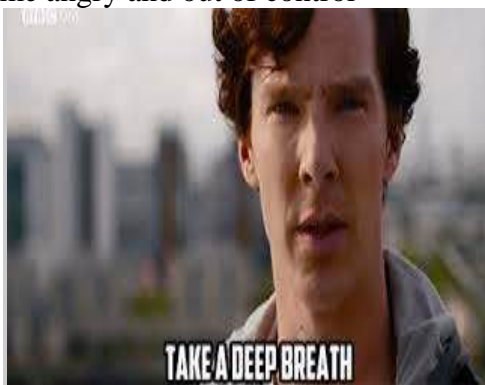
3. **Keep your hands to yourself.** Put your hands in your pockets, sit on your hands, hold your hands together, squeeze a “stress ball” or wrap your arms around yourself until you can calm down.



4. **Call a friend and talk it out.** Call someone who will listen to you and help you to calm down, talk it out, put things in perspective for you. Put this person on your speed dial!



5. **Take a deep Breath.** Breathe deeply in and out through your nose (not your mouth) to calm your body down. Breathing through the nose is a natural relaxation technique. Practice deep breathing through your nose each day so you are prepared for the time when you do become angry and out of control



6. **Count to 10 slowly** and picture the numbers in your mind as you count. Concentrate on picturing the numbers in your mind. As you do this your brain flips the switch from angry to calm.
7. **Fold your hands and repeat out loud a positive “mantra”.** A mantra is a sound, word or phrase that is repeated when praying, meditating or relaxing. Say a “mantra”, say a prayer, hum or sing out a favorite song or say a calming word to yourself over and over again. This will help relax your mind and focus you what you are saying rather than on your anger.



8. **Repeat positive self talk out loud.** Tell yourself that it’s “ok”, tell yourself “I can handle this”, “it’s not personal”, “my child is just finding his/her way through childhood”.
9. **Think of something that calms you.** Think of a favorite memory or a happy place. Take your mind off your anger and wanting to hit or harm the child. Try not to think about your anger or what the child did to get you angry. Thinking about how angry you are at the child only adds fuel to the fire. Picture something that is calming and positive to you, try not to picture yourself hitting or harming the child in anyway. Rehearse and practice thinking about positive and calming thoughts in your mind so that when you do feel angry and out of control, positive thinking comes natural to you.
10. **Get silly.** Do something silly to distract yourself and your child, start to sing and dance around the room, jump up and down and laugh, act like a circus animal. Deal with the consequence later when everyone has cooled off.



11. **Close your eyes tightly to release stress.** Close your eyes tightly and wrinkle up your checks and nose, hold for a few seconds and then release by opening your eyes and relaxing your face. Do this several times feeling the pent up stress being used up as you go through this exercise.



12. **Put a cold ice cube in your hand.** Put a cold wet cloth on the back of your neck or place a rubber band on your wrist and snap it, drink a cold glass of water, put a piece of candy in your mouth. All these things will help take your mind off your anger, change your brain to focusing on your senses and give you the few some time to cool off.
13. **Know your triggers.** Know what sets you “off” and what sets your child off so that you can prepare ahead of time what might “set you and your child off”. For instance, if your child is struggling with bed time maybe make a game out of it or read to the child before bed time, if your child’s messy room bothers you, close the bedroom door so you can’t see it and be triggered by it, tomorrow is another day to deal with it when you are not angry.
14. **Expect that your child is going to push your buttons.** Children are being children when they don’t listen or comply, that’s part of their job in growing into an independent person. They are learning and experimenting. They’re not doing it to get back at you or doing anything to you. Be prepared for when your child does push your buttons and pick and choose what you absolutely have to respond to in order to keep the child safe and what can wait until another time.
15. **Don’t go nose to nose with your child when you’re angry.** Children will engage in power struggles with you to try and get their way. Although it may feel like they’re trying to control you, generally they don’t think of it this way. They probably aren’t even aware they’re testing your power. Take a 10 minute break from each other to calm down, tell yourself that nothing will be solved in the heat of the moment. You’ll be better able to respond to your child when you are calmed down.



16. **Ignore the small stuff.** Don't get wrapped up in everything your child is doing and expect a perfect child. Be prepared and set up to 3-4 expectations with consequences ahead of time so that you and your child will not be overwhelmed and you can feel like a successful parent and your child can feel like a successful kid.

17. **See your child as a child.** Your child is not an adult -- you are the adult. Your child is vulnerable and needs your care and protection. Tell yourself that your child is a human being who has feelings and needs and depends upon you to take care of them, and to help them develop into a happy adult. Show them love and care, show them attention. Don't expect your child to take care of or meet your needs. Find other adults to help with your needs—partner, friends, family members, counselors.



18. **Understand what to expect from your child at each age.** Understanding what is developmentally appropriate for a child at certain ages will help you avoid frustration and anger at normal child behavior and will help you to help them move successfully to each next stage. For example, newborns are not going to sleep through the night without a peep, and toddlers are not going to be able to sit quietly for extended periods of time. Don't set so many rules that a child is not going to be able to follow them. This sets the child up and sets you up for a battle.

19. **Develop new parenting skills.** While learning to control your emotions is critical, you also need a game plan of what you are going to do instead. Start by learning appropriate discipline techniques and how to set clear boundaries for your children. Parenting classes, books, and seminars are a way to get this information. You can also turn to other parents for tips and advice. Learn together as a family so that your children know what to expect and you and your partner are on the same page with parenting.





20. **What is your child reacting to?** Ask yourself what your child is reacting to? Is he/she reacting to being tired, hungry or are they sick? Are they reacting to tension in the house? Are they reacting to your emotional state? Are they frustrated with something or someone? Once you figure this out you can understand their needs and their reactions, empathize with the child and help them to meet their needs.



21. **Take care of yourself and get Rest.** If you are not getting enough rest and support or you're feeling overwhelmed, you are much more likely to succumb to anger. Sleep deprivation, common in parents of young children, adds to moodiness and irritability—exactly what you are trying to avoid.

22. **Hug your child.** Hugs are better than hits. Basically find time to enjoy your child, laugh and bond emotionally with your child, play games with them, color with your child, watch their favorite cartoon with them. Children will work hard to please you so that they can get a hug!



23. **Get professional help.** Breaking the cycle of abuse can be very difficult if the patterns are strongly entrenched. If you can't seem to stop yourself no matter how hard you try, it's time to get help, be it counseling, parenting classes, or other interventions. Your children will thank you for it and you will feel better.

