

# HOW TO HELP KIDS KEEP CALM



Experiencing frustration, disappointment, fear and jealousy is challenging, even as adults. So how can we help our tamariki understand and manage strong emotions?

## BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

Most of what our tamariki learn about emotions comes from us. How we respond to our own worries, stress and frustrations will influence how our kids learn to deal with everyday challenges.

By showing you feel different emotions and can bounce back, you'll help them learn to respond to small problems with optimism, calmness and confidence

## WHEN EMOTIONS RUN HIGH

Children experience BIG emotions, just like we do. When emotions run high, helping them feel safe can really help. Holding them, talking in a calm voice or encouraging them to take nice deep breaths can help.

Once they're settled, distracting younger children can be a good technique, and praising older kids for calming down really helps.

## A CALM SPACE

Find a place where your child feels relaxed and at peace. This is their 'calm space' – a place they can go when they're upset to practice their tummy breathing, colour in or look at books. You could also create a [sensory kete](#) from Sparklers at Home to help them calm down.

## BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Our children are learning how to adjust their behaviour in almost every situation. Ensure you do lots to help them feel good about who they are and show that you love them unconditionally. Praise specific behaviour. E.g. rather than just "good girl!" try "I love the way you tidied up."

## CELEBRATE CALM MOMENTS

Give your tamariki attention when they're behaving the way you LOVE (calm, content, engrossed in play, sharing, being kind). The best reward (and reinforcement) is your time and attention. Even 10 minutes of play with you a day will make a huge difference... promise!



## PLAY DETECTIVE

For children, behaviour is a key means of communication. Sometimes we have to play detective to figure out what their behaviour is really 'saying'.

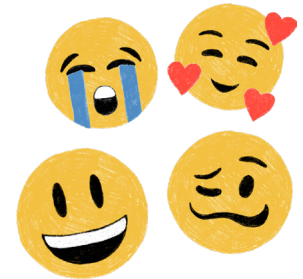
- **Context:** Have a think about your whānau over the past six months. Children watch us very carefully and pick up on tension. If there's a clue here, look for ways to reduce stress, alleviate fears or improve things.



- **Relationships:** Think about your child's key relationships – with you, other carers, their friends. How are you/they getting along? If you think an issue, schedule some fun time with your child, or oversee a few playdates.
- **Beyond home:** If you can, spend some time at their day-care, kindy or school to see how things are going. If they're struggling, call on the support of their teacher.

## UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS

- **Use faces:** With young tamariki, use books or play games such as [The Faces Game](#) or [Game Face](#) on Sparklers at Home. This way they'll be better able to tell you how they're feeling. Visit [allright.org.nz/sparklers/face-game/](http://allright.org.nz/sparklers/face-game/) for a free print out.
- **Link to emotions:** Help your child 'name' the feelings they're experiencing. E.g. 'Oh your tower fell over! You look a bit sad about that!' or "Wow, you did it all yourself! You must be proud."
- **Notice emotions:** When you read books and watch movies, help identify characters' emotions. E.g. 'She seems nervous about the big race.'



## TEACH CALMING TECHNIQUES

Trying to teach children the techniques below in the heat of the moment would be like trying to teach an angry bear to play the clarinet! It just won't work. So when your child is calm, try a few of the below.

- **Find what works:** Talk about what helps you can do down and suggest things they could try when they're next upset.
- **Tummy breathing:** See Sparklers at Home or [Tummy Breathing activity](#) and/or watch [Hikitia te Hā](#). Let them know they can do this anytime they're upset or want to feel calm.

## MID-MELTDOWN!

Practice the previous techniques alongside your tamariki in calm moments, then gently remind them to try one when they are next upset. Praise their efforts, even if they don't quite pull it off. It'll get easier and more effective.

## EMBRACE ROUTINE

When children can anticipate what is coming next, it creates a sense of control and calm. We have two printer-friendly routine charts you can download and use and use; [one for kids aged 3-8](#), and the other for [over eights and teens](#).

## PRAISE EFFORT

Boost tenacity by encouraging their attempts to try something (e.g. new skills, interests, chores, homework, etc). If they get frustrated or say: “I can’t do it!” reassure them: “You can’t do it YET but with practice you will, just like when you learned to [insert a success they’ve had here]. Remember how you tried over and over, then you got it? This is the same.”

## WHAT ABOUT AGREESION?

Like most aspects of development, each child is different when it comes to aggressive behaviour. ‘Big reactors’ will rely more heavily on their actions to communicate feelings. Here are some things you can do to help.

- **Be patient:** Early on, emotions will trump thinking skills, even if kids ‘know’ the rules. It can help to remember that empathy and self-control come with age.
- **Lead the way:** This one can be a major challenge, as aggressive acts can be hurtful and infuriating! But when you can, react minimally. A calm response will get better results than a red-hot one, helping you diffuse the situation and ‘model’ how they should behave when they’re upset. Kids love to copy us!
- **Be consistent:** If a child hits out or emotions run too high, simply say: “I need you to calm” and sit with them in their calm space. Avoid negotiating, and calmly repeat this whenever they need to calm down.
- **Identify triggers:** Aggressive acts can emerge when kids are tired, hungry, overwhelmed, or overstimulated and unsure where to focus their energy. They can also come from feeling insecure or undervalued. Ask yourself: When is your tamariki most likely to ‘act out’?
- **Think prevention:** Use what you know to plan ahead. You may be able to stop aggressive behaviour before it starts, or you’ll be ready to be calm but firm.

---

We’d like to thank Clare Tatterson, Developmental Psychologist and Dr Dean Sutherland, Department of Communication Specialist for their help creating this resource.

For more ways to support your kids to keep calm, head to [sparklers.org.nz/parenting](https://sparklers.org.nz/parenting)