

## How to Deal With a Child Who Acts Out

See things positively: A kid acting out can be a "teachable moment."

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Are your child's fits giving you fits? Are you one of the many parents who wishes you had Super Nanny on speed dial? Despite the love we have for the children in our lives, they can test even the most patient among us. So how can we find our way to "compassionate coping" when children push our buttons?

### See the situation through the eyes of the child

Try not to take the child's behavior personally. Take a breath to get some emotional distance. When infants cry, we know often times they're sending us an important message that they're hungry, tired or need to be changed.

Similarly, recognize when the older child is sending you an important message with their behavior. The child who constantly asks you "why" for three days straight is trying to communicate something to you. Put on your detective's trench coat ask yourself what could he be wanting from me right now?

No need to stay stuck in your own head. Assume the child wants your attention and your time if for no other reason that it's important to him or her. Think "what message is the child sending me" versus "how many days can I ground him?"

### Acknowledge it's not 'all about you'

You getting frustrated by a child's irritating behaviors is to be expected, but don't make it about you even if your child is doing his or her darndest to do exactly that. After all, a rite of passage for kids is not playing Pin the Tail On The Donkey, but a game involving a different barnyard friend: namely How to Get My Parent's Goat.

As a matter of fact, I believe it's written somewhere that it's actually the child's job to at least make a valiant effort five or ten times during their childhood to drive you absolutely batty. For many children it's what they do best.

But remember, at the root of this it's typically not about you. The child is most likely learning things like independence, testing limits and establishing boundaries. Go right to that place of knowing this is the case, and you'll find that your response will be one full of love and compassion rather than recreating some unresolved childhood episode in gym when you were picked last for the kickball game.

### Smile when your buttons are pushed

Remember you're the parent. You are in charge. Choose to smile when Johnny or Mary is undertaking an age-appropriate attempt to turn your hair prematurely grey. You'll change the whole tenor of the interaction with the child and have an entirely constructive take on the situation.

### "Yes I can!"

Have every confidence that children pushing their limits with you is something you can manage very capably. Children look to you for guidance on how to be. Show them a cool head if your anger is coming up.

Finally, don't deny you're feeling angry—to yourself or even to the child. But show the child how a cooler head can prevail. Despite these frustrating moments when children are asserting their independence with adults, make no mistake: They are hungry to learn from us how to think and troubleshoot interpersonal conflicts. Their own "acting out" with us can be a perfect teachable moment for you and the child in your life.

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