

Keeping your cool when it counts

I am often approached by parents who ask about strategies to use when they are at the end of their tether. Mothers in particular seem to find that sometimes – the screaming and shouting all just seem to come out and then often it is regretted. We can't be a perfect parent all the time and there will be occasions when we lose our cool, maybe due to stress, tiredness or many other reasons. It is important to have some strategies to use in these situations so as we are not blaming our children for the way we feel. Children will begin to feel useless and start avoiding situations if they know that Mum is going to shout about it. A classic is when a child damages or loses something. Often parents will shout at their child about how useless and careless they are, and that they don't respect the things they have. Children may then start hiding things that they have broken, or lying about situations so as to avoid Mum or Dad getting angry.

It is important to not blame the child but to talk about it in a calm way. Try not to let your tone of voice change, or facial expressions alter. If you can manage to talk about it in this manner then you are supporting the child to think about solutions to the problem.

When a parent (I am referring to females particularly here as I know what it is like) is going to lose their cool over something silly, then there are several things that you can do. The first and most important step is actually recognising and acknowledging that you are going to get angry. If you can stop yourself from reacting in a manner that may not be appropriate then you are able to use another more appropriate way of dealing with the situation. For example, you discover that your child has lost their shoes at school and it really annoys you because they are only 3 weeks old. You are also feeling tired and this seems like the final straw. When you discover the loss your normal reaction would be to shout and scream, and perhaps even smack and tell them they are useless and can't be responsible for anything. You go away after venting your anger and after a little while feel bad that you screamed and perhaps smacked and left your child feeling upset. Sometimes you don't even go back and apologise because that wouldn't look good (it would be admitting you were wrong). What has the child learnt? When I lose things Mum screams and shouts at me and we both end up not talking for a while. There is no real consequence for losing the shoes and I am more likely to lose the next pair as well.

Here's a different way of dealing with the same situation: You discover that the shoes are missing. You can feel that anger feeling rising up in your body, you walk away until you can get your composure back. You may even tell your child that you are feeling really angry about this and will talk about it soon. A few minutes later, after a few deep breathes and thinking about how you are going to deal with it, you approach your child and talk about how the shoes got lost, what would be a good solution to finding them and coming to an agreement with them about a consequence? This will result in the child feeling that it is okay to tell Mum when I lose something because she will support them to find them and

come up with a solution. Mum feels good as she hasn't screamed and shouted, the child feels less useless.

Anger is a natural emotion and it is important to understand how to deal with it. If you find that you have anger issues then perhaps you need to talk to a professional about it.

This tip was supported by SKIP and the Kindergarten Association. If you would like to discuss it or any other parenting issue please phone Brenda at the Association.