**Tools to Help You Stay Calm with Your Difficult Child**What’s one of the keys to avoiding constant fights with your child? Believe it or not, it’s the same skill that will help you through any crisis situation—your ability to remain calm. When your child is upset, anxious or angry, keeping your cool is half the battle. It’s a way for you to put out the fire by throwing water on the flames, rather than fan it by adding more fuel from your own emotional tank. The important thing to remember is that all emotions are acceptable, but all behaviors are not. When we don’t accept our own emotions, we act them out with our kids and our family members in unhealthy ways.

[**Is your child disrespectful? How to stay calm.**](http://www.thecalmparent.com/?utm_medium=relatedlinks&utm_source=eparticle&dsource=ep&utm_campaign=318) I understand that staying calm when dealing with kids is much, much easier said than done—especially when you have a child who acts out. Knowing you should be calm doesn’t necessarily translate into being able to do it. We know the right thing to do, but in the midst of the battle our emotional brain gets stirred up and we lose sight of our logical brain. When our brain becomes overloaded with emotion, “reactivity” begins. Reactivity can come in the form of yelling, screaming, and shutting down, none of which will help you deal with any kids, let alone difficult ones. As we all know, parenting is a very emotional experience. Our kids and our interactions with them can trigger our own feelings of helplessness, frustration, confusion, hurt, disappointment, and rage, to name a few. These feelings can quickly stir us up or leave us feeling overwhelmed. We are each vulnerable to different situations, and each “trigger” we have requires us to face ourselves, our limitations, our shame, our fears, our childhood insecurities, and the less-than-perfect qualities we’d prefer to keep tucked away.

[**How to manage inappropriate child behavior.**](http://www.thetotaltransformation.com/?utm_medium=relatedlinks&utm_source=eparticle&dsource=ep&utm_campaign=318) Our children, just by being kids, can trigger painful emotions in us. Our reaction to these emotions can cause us to make poor parenting decisions. At those moments when we are trying to protect ourselves, we don’t necessarily have our children’s best interests in mind. When stirred up, we often do not speak kindly or calmly to them—and we often regret it later. Guilt follows. The important thing to remember is that all emotions are acceptable, but all behaviors are not. When we don’t accept our own emotions, we act them out with our kids and our family members in unhealthy ways. When our feelings control us, rather than us being able to control them, we have a much harder time helping our kids mature and deal with their life. The key is to remain calm and not respond with a knee-jerk reaction when your child pushes your buttons.

**Here are some ways to be a calm parent when dealing with your kids.**

**Change your perspective.** If you can think differently, you will be less angry at your child. Our kids can make us annoyed, mad, frustrated—sometimes on a daily basis. But remember that most of the time they are acting their age. Our annoyance is understandable but it isn’t about them, it’s about us. It is about our patience, tolerance (or lack of it), attitude and outlook. When your child swears at you, it’s hard to keep this in perspective—your first thought is to feel angry, disappointed and blaming of his behavior. And, don’t get me wrong, he should be made to face consequences. But in the back of your mind, remember—your child is doing this because he’s a kid. Your job is to guide him by making sure he takes responsibility and makes amends.

The developmental task of teens is to experiment with new roles and relationships. It’s scary and frustrating for us, but this is what is natural for their development. Breaking rules and testing limits helps kids to learn the laws of sowing and reaping. It helps them learn from their own experiences. This is natural and normal. Our job is to guide them to better behavior by offering them natural consequences, not to blame them for their behavior.

[**How to manage any situation with your child without losing your cool.**](http://www.thecalmparent.com/?utm_medium=relatedlinks&utm_source=eparticle&dsource=ep&utm_campaign=318) I am suggesting that you try not to be mad at them for their developmentally-appropriate actions—even if those actions are annoying or disappointing. Your frustration may be about your own lack of patience which is a problem that is yours to figure out, not theirs. Finding ways of being less angry at our kids is important. If we take responsibility for our own feelings and actions, they will be more likely to be able to do the same. Processing, soothing, anticipating and understanding our own feelings is our job. If we blame our kids for our feelings and reactions, they will learn to blame others for their actions and will not learn how to take responsibility for themselves.

**Identify your feelings**. When you are about to let off steam, pause and identify your feelings. Is it irritation, frustration, hurt that’s bothering you? Name it; identify it as your own. Say to yourself, “When I see my kid doing X, Y or Z, I feel \_\_\_\_ because I \_\_\_\_.” For example, “When I see my kid not helping around the house, I feel furious because I feel ineffective as a parent. I’m scared he will never be responsible and guilty that I have not done my job.” Then ask yourself what you need to work through within yourself and what proper feedback you need to give to your child. In other words, be a responsible parent by processing what belongs to and then decide what guidance you need to give to your child. In this scenario you might say to yourself, “I need to think about how I can improve my effectiveness as a parent or else I need to accept that I have done all that I can. I have to deal with my anxiety about my child’s future and find ways to resolve my own guilt.”

[**Real ways to parent more effectively.**](http://www.thetotaltransformation.com/?utm_medium=relatedlinks&utm_source=eparticle&dsource=ep&utm_campaign=318) If we acknowledge and accept our own feelings, we can start doing the work of soothing them, understanding them, changing them, processing them and releasing them. Our painful feelings will not spill onto others. It requires us to be mature enough to embrace the feelings that we keep trying to hide. It is our job as parents to identify our underlying feelings of fear, inadequacy or shame—or whatever feelings you keep hoping won’t get triggered. When they do get triggered, notice how tempting it is to blame those that trigger them. Remember, our kids trigger feelings already within us—they don’t cause the feeling.  It’s our responsibility to work out our own feelings rather than to blame them on our kids.

**Pause, breathe, think**. Model for your child how to deal with difficult feelings. Say to her, “I’m frustrated right now, so I’m going to take a few deep breaths, calm myself down and figure out how to best deal with this situation. We can talk later.” When you feel red-hot inside, that’s your internal signal to take some deep breaths and think how to best and most effectively deal with the situation. Not only are you calming yourself down, but you are teaching your kids how to do the same. These tools of pausing, breathing and thinking are effective for a good reason. When you are physically or emotionally threatened, your adrenaline rises. You might be emotionally threatened when your child won’t listen to you and you don’t know what to do. The body reads this as a threat and prepares for “fight or flight” by draining the energy from your brain and putting it into your muscles. This is why we all end up saying things we later regret—and why it is necessary to use the calming tools of pausing, breathing and thinking. Without them, you won’t be able to solve the problems you are confronted with effectively because you won’t have access to the part of the brain that can make good decisions.

**Let go of worry and focus on what’s good.** Understand that worrying about your child is a negative act. Worrying also makes your child anxious because he comes to believe that there is something within him to be worried about. He becomes more nervous. Yet how do you *not* worry about a difficult kid who is making poor choices all the time? Our imagination runs wild with images of all the worst possible outcomes happening. But it’s important to realize that the more you worry and have negative images floating around in your brain, the more a neural pathway is formed, making worry easier and easier. So you worry more, not less. Therefore, try to fill your imagination with positive outcomes, rather than negative ones. After all, you don’t know the outcome anyway. Imagining things turning out positively will help you feel less stressed. When you are less stressed, your brain functions better, you feel better and you have more of a chance of guiding your child more effectively. Positive thinking can inadvertently cause a positive outcome. And finally, feeling anger (or any reactivity) is detrimental to warm, close interactions. Repeated negative interactions over time can destroy good relationships. Calm is contagious in a family. If you learn how to be calm, you will create a calm family. You will also be showing your children how to calm down in any given situation—an important life skill for everyone to master.