

Helping Toddlers Cope With Big Emotions

As a caregiver, you've probably experienced your fair share of hard-to-manage emotional outbursts from your toddler. Whether they're over-tired before bedtime, angry they didn't get their way, or just really excited about something, controlling their big emotions can be a challenge.

Following are some strategies you can use to help your toddler self-regulate during these moments.

Name emotions.

Emotional self-awareness involves identifying what we're feeling when we're feeling it. Teach your toddler the names of core emotions (happy, sad, scared, angry, and excited), and talk through each emotion as your child experiences it. It might sound something like this:

"You are mad! Your sister took your doll and that makes you want to yell."

"We can't go to the park right now, and you are crying because that makes you sad."

"Look at your smile! You are happy that your cousin is coming over to play."

Teach them simple strategies.

During tough times, have a few go-to strategies in your pocket to help your toddler to reset their emotions. Verbalize what they're doing that's not okay, and suggest an alternative. These suggestions could sound like this:

"When you're mad, you can't hit but you can squeeze your ball."

"When you're scared, instead of shutting down you can ask questions."

"When you're excited, you can't interrupt but you can think of what you'll say when it's your turn to talk."

Direct their energy into an appropriate outlet.

If you see that your toddler is overwhelmed, distraction can help them regain their focus and calm down. For example, it might be hard for them to see someone else playing with their toy, so you could sing a song or do a dance together to help them think about something else.

With your support and guidance, your toddler will learn to manage their strong emotions and reactions over the next months and years.