



Tips for Managing Extreme Behavior in the Moment

Goal: Calm the situation down right now.

Sometimes children or teens become very upset or out of control. There are always reasons that led up to the outburst but when it is happening, that it is not the time to deal with the reasons. Stay in the moment to keep the situation from getting worse. It is better in the end if neither you nor your child/teen says or does anything that will be hard to take back.

Adults need to stay in control and be in charge of themselves and the situation in a way that lowers the emotions. This can be very hard when children/teens are saying mean things or being very unreasonable. But engaging with your child/teen during an outburst will only make it worse. In the majority of cases the situation will calm down if it is handled with care.

Many of these situations can be avoided by seeing them coming and taking steps to help children/teens calm themselves down before the situation gets out of control. Noticing escalating emotions early on will give you options. You could open a conversation about what is really bothering them. Or try to re-direct the negative behavior towards more positive behavior. Staying calm will help.

When You Need to Get Outside Help:

Calling police may be necessary in very extreme circumstances such as dangerous aggressive behavior toward you or others in the family, threatening with a weapon, or self-harming. But oftentimes there are some simple effective approaches you can take to help diffuse the situation by keeping yourself and your child calm.

Here are some ways to help you stay calm and respond in a supportive manner to your child/teen:

Caregiver Coping: Ways to help stay calm in the moment:

- Stop and take a few deep breaths
- Remove yourself from the situation briefly if necessary. Use the time to calm down so you can think about your best response
- Use positive self-talk. For example: "I can get through this." Or "It's important for everyone that I stay calm".
- Stay in the moment – Focus on what is happening now, not the past or the future.
- Enlist the help/support of a partner when possible to help you stay calm

Helpful ways to respond to your child/teen

- Keep voice at normal or lower volume
- Step back, keep a little distance, some eye contact but not too much
- Don't take the bait. Don't discuss, reason or argue in the moment.
- Listen and reflect back about the feelings you can see. For example, "I can see that you are very upset right now"
- Avoid bringing up past negative behaviors or criticizing your child/teen. This will de-escalate the situation
- Don't threaten your child with consequences; there will be time for giving consequences later, when everyone is more calm
- Offer to talk when the child/teen calms down. Such as, "When you are calmer, I really want to talk about what's going on for you"
- Express support and concern. "You are really having hard time. I would like to help"
- If possible, ask for help from a partner to help you de-escalate the situation