

Top Tips to Help Kids Manage Frustration

Help Your Child Pay Attention to their Feelings

Sit down with your child and say something like “Everyone feels upset and frustrated sometimes, even grownups. It feels yucky when you feel upset and frustrated and everyone needs help with their feelings. Daddy and I are going to help you. When we think you might be feeling frustrated we’re going to hold up our hands and stay stop so we can help you figure out what to do to help make your big feelings smaller”.

Catch Your Child’s Frustration Early

If you can see that your child is starting to feel frustrated stop what you’re doing and give your child your undivided attention. Ask your child why they’re upset. Try not to interrupt with too many questions, just listen – too many questions can exacerbate your child’s distress

Acknowledge Your Child’s Feelings

Acknowledge your child’s feelings and empathise with their distress – “I see. You’re feeling upset because you want to watch the wiggles but I’ve said no. It’s hard when we can’t have something that we really want”. Remember that while the issue might seem trivial to you, it’s real and upsetting for your child. Dismissing your child’s concerns or responding with logic will only keep them stuck.

Help Your Child Calm Down

The goal is to catch your child’s distress early enough to help them work through it, but if they’re highly distressed it will be impossible to do this. If your child is really distressed say “I think we need a few minutes to cool down so we can think clearly to solve this problem”, then re-direct your child’s attention to a pleasant activity such as drawing, play dough, Lego, etc. Distraction will provide immediate relief from extreme emotion so your child can problem solve more effectively, but it’s not a long-term solution for frustration.

Help Your Child Problem Solve

By encouraging your child to solve their own problems, you help them to build the skills they need to think their way out of any frustrating situation. Pre-school aged children won’t be able to problem solve independently, but modelling the problem solving process and giving your child the power to choose the final solution (from 2-3 suggested solutions) will help to build these skills.

Praise Success

When your child manages to contain their frustration, don’t forget to give them lots of praise and positive feedback. Learning to tolerate frustration is hard work and your praise will keep your child motivated.

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TOP TIPS

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Managing Frustration

Young children can have very big emotions, and frustration can be a tricky emotion to manage, but learning to tolerate it is an important part of your child’s development.

Some kids only lose their cool occasionally, while others have a much harder time staying calm when things don’t get their way. Kids who struggle to stay calm will need more help to learn to manage their tempers.

Frustrated outbursts occur because young children:

- **Have limited insight into their feelings**
- **Can’t express verbally how they feel**
- **Don’t have the necessary skills to regulate their frustration**

Frustrated outbursts will lessen with development, but there are also a number of things you can do to teach your child skills for expressing frustration in a more appropriate way.

Having stronger emotion regulation skills will not only make home life less stressful, it will also help your child to navigate their social world more successfully.

This tips sheet covers basic strategies for helping children to learn to tolerate frustration. If your child’s tantrums persist speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.