



Hi, welcome back! In this video, I'm going to teach you how to avoid reacting to your child in ways that make life more difficult. The key here is to Stay Calm.

I know that this is one of those strategies that sounds simple but is hard to implement. I tell parents that I work with that things can be simple but not necessarily easy, and I know that 'stay calm' fits in that category. It's a really simple thing to do and a simple concept to understand but it can be challenging to implement.

One of the things I'm going to do today is teach you why this is such an important strategy. Then, hopefully, you will be able to practice that until you get really good at staying calm. And you're going to see amazing benefits with your kids. So you must be able to stay calm.

Number one, your ability as parents to stay calm is a requirement for anything else to work with your child. I really do mean that. You can pick any strategy, treatment plan, protocol, treatment program, etc. and if you, as the parents, have not mastered the ability to stay emotionally and physically calm when your child is getting upset or facing challenges or having difficulty coping, you're not going to see the maximum benefits you can for any of those programs. It's really that essential.

I want you to be aware of your own physical and emotional responses to your child. What is happening to you both physically in your body and emotionally in your mind when your child is having difficulty with something? When your child is getting frustrated and saying, "I just can't do it", or when your child is saying, "no I'm not going to do it". Or how about when your child is having a full blown temper tantrum, screaming and kicking on the floor.

What happens to you, as the parent, physically in your body, emotionally, cognitively in your mind when that's going on? Well if you're like a lot of parents who I see at the beginning of treatment, they aren't even consciously aware of what their reactions are to that. But I can see and watch them getting very, very wrapped up in the emotional behavior that their child is exhibiting. And this is very problematic because for parents to be effective guides to their children, they have to remain in control of the situation.

Now that doesn't mean that you're constantly trying to control what your child is doing. The thing is we can never really control what another person does; we can only control

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what we do. But when parents can stay in control of their own bodies, emotions and their own thought processes when their child is having these issues, it goes a long way to helping resolve these issues much more quickly and effectively.

Here is the thing - children respond to the distress and stress of those around them. I've worked with some very, very severely impaired individuals. And it doesn't matter how severely impaired they are, they still pick up on the stress and the distress they feel coming from the adults and the other people around them. All kids do that. You can really try to act like you're really feeling calm and in control, but the kid knows that you're coming from a place of anxiety and stress and "oh I really don't know what to do here".

It's very, very important that you're able to create a tone and a vibe when working with your child, whether it's working on something very specific or it's just a day-to-day process of life, that sends the message that "I'm in control and I have things handled". Whatever comes up in the context of us being together it's going to be okay. I'm going to be able to manage it and handle it. And that goes a long way in helping reduce the child's sense of stress and anxiety about what's happening. Especially if the child starts to lose control, they have to be able to know the parent has things covered.

The other reason that this is so important is that children need a model for how to appropriately cope with and respond to situations that are happening. If a child's typical response is to totally lose it, to avoid the situation, to resist or run, have a tantrum, or flat out refuse to do something - that's their coping mechanism they have at that point in their development.

But they need us as a parent to model for them good appropriate ways manage those kinds of things. Now we can't do that when we're getting all emotionally worked up about what's happening. So when our child starts to become resistive or gets dysregulated, if our heart is starting to beat faster, and we can feel our blood pressure rising, and our face is getting hot, and we start talking faster and not making a whole lot of sense, and thoughts going through our mind of oh I don't know what to do it's happening again.



If that's what is happening to us, we are not going to respond to that child's resistance in ways that will be productive. And what we're modeling for the child then is when these situations come up, getting all worked up and anxious and stressed, then getting angry and upset about it is the appropriate way to respond and we know it's not. Kids need us to be a model to stay calm, cool and collected when these things are happening.

I have an interesting story to share with you about a family I met a couple of years ago. Their son was 8 years old at the time and I believe he had been diagnosed at that point with Asperger's Syndrome and some other learning disability issues. He was really getting angry and upset because his mom had asked him to clean up some things in his room. He started to do what he always does, which is escalate and elevate arguing and yelling it's not fair and you can fill in the blanks. And he started to escalate more and more, so then mom starts to get anxious and upset and worked up about it. She starts to escalate and escalate, and now they're both yelling and arguing. And mom is trying to rationalize with him and the whole thing is going downhill.

All of a sudden the boy stopped and said to his mom, "Oh great now no one is driving the bus!" I thought wow what a great way to think about that. Here they are both totally out of control and both going round and round and not getting anywhere and this is totally unproductive and nobody is in control of what is happening here. And the son recognized it.

I think about that a lot when I talk with parents about the importance of kids perceiving us as adults being in control. Even though they act like they want to control everything, the reality of it is when they are at their most upset and dysregulated is when they most need us to be calm and in control of the situation because that helps them to pull it together.

So when nobody is driving the bus and we're all headed in the wrong direction it's completely ineffective. Learning to stay calm is so critical to make sure you can stay in control of the situation. Here are some tips on how to stay calm:

The first one is a simple and common one, which is breathe deeply. When we start getting upset, stressed out or feeling incompetent about what to do because our child



is engaging in inappropriate behavior or resisting us or not listening to what we're saying, we tend to get anxious and start breathing very shallow. We don't get enough oxygen in and that shallow breathing sends a message to our brain, 'oh we're getting ready for a fight or flight situation'. That's not conducive to staying calm and in control.

When you take the time to breathe deeply it does a couple of things. Number one, it causes us to physically slow down and relax and take an extra moment of what we want to do. It also sends a message to our brain that okay we're going to stay calm and in control. It gets us the oxygen we need to be able to think clearly about how we want to handle this. Breathing deeply is a really important strategy.

The second is to remind yourself that you are in control. Now this may sound kind of silly, but the reality is that when kids start acting out and having challenges and issues that come up, very often our brain is sending our subconscious messages that this is out of control. I don't know what to do about this. This is going to be just like last time. You don't know how to handle this.

You need to send conscious messages to yourself saying, 'I'm in control'. I can handle whatever is going to happen and I can help this to work out. You have to remind yourself about that because remember the child is out of control at that point and so someone needs to be in control of the situation and it needs to be you.

I also want to encourage you to think about moving slowly. Very often when we are in a situation with our child, especially in public where they may not be coping with something so well, we have this tendency to rush and dart and feel that we have to do something right away. Obviously that's the case if your child is in a situation that can create danger for them. Then absolutely you have to move quickly and get them out of danger.

But a lot of things that come up in day to day life don't require an immediate response. You can allow yourself to take a couple of extra seconds and move a little more slowly to take action. What you're doing there is, one you're helping yourself remain calm by not screaming and darting around. You're also sending a message to the child that you're going to thoughtfully consider what the next steps should be. You're not going to



take any quick action that you might regret later and just the act of moving slowly helps to slow down your thought process as well.

The next one is to think about something positive. This can be very counterintuitive in the moment when you're so upset about what's happening with the child. But try to think of either a place you associate positive memories with or think about a time earlier in the day when you had a positive interaction with a child. Think about something that brings positive emotion up in you and that will help counteract the stress and negative emotion that comes up for you when your child is behaving inappropriately.

Those are some tips on how to stay calm, and hopefully you understand why it is so important to stay calm.

Coming up in the next video, I'm going to show you what to do when what you're doing isn't working. Check your email in two days for the next video, and I'll see you there.

My Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole". The script is fluid and cursive.

Nicole Beurkens, PhD  
Founder and Director  
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