

Welcome to the first issue of Your Mental Health and Wellness Newsletter. Current plans are for The Newsletter to be published once per quarter (fall, winter, spring, summer). ASK ME questions will be published here as well as tips for staying healthy and being well.

“ASK ME”

Dear Dr. Schaefer, I am looking for suggestions in helping our 3-year-old with managing frustration. He struggles with quick outbursts often when he is told no, please wait, not right now, or if he is stopped from doing something he wants to do. He will scream, yell, and at times hit or pinch with very intentional purpose to hurt. I have tried giving him 2 choices, acknowledging his feelings, and giving him space to feel. I have tried to redirect with manipulatives like squishy balls (they often get thrown). I have tried to get him to take breaths or do some yoga moves. We have tried going outside. He is not interested in any of these things and they often frustrate him more and he screams "NO NEVER." The only thing that seems to work is letting it ride out. Thankfully it's short lived, sometimes 5 minutes, sometimes 10-15. He is the sweetest kid and I am wondering what else I can do for him to help him learn how to handle his emotions.

Dear Parent of Sweet, Frustrated Toddler,

Thanks for reaching out and ASKing Me. The following are my thoughts on things to consider and a strategy to try.

Things to Consider: Three year olds are learning emotional expression and control. In their development, they require the active support of their parents in learning to navigate and manage big feelings. Helping our toddler to learn emotional control means tolerating tears and recognizing that mad, sad, frustrated are normal human emotions. Kudos to you for helping your child identify his emotions and giving him space to feel. Adults often move quickly to quieting big emotions. Yet, telling our little ones to stop crying or punishing them for being angry denies them the opportunity to feel. That said it is hard to see them so upset. It's hard on the heart, the ears, and if they are striking out – hitting, kicking, pinching, biting – it hurts physically and is unacceptable. If we stop for a moment to think about it: we wouldn't tell an adult friend to stop crying but we also wouldn't allow them to hurt us, so fair enough to draw the line for your child here. You have tried many great approaches: choices, acknowledging feelings, giving space, redirection, distraction...all good strategies. I would offer that it is possible in your endeavors to find the winning strategy; you may have missed the opportunity to identify and practice a strategy.

A Strategy to Try: Design a Calm Down Plan that you feel confident that both you and your spouse can employ 99% of the time. Keep it simple (no lectures, no yelling, no bribes, no shushing). The plan can include some of the strategies you have already used. I am a particular fan of plans that include a place (bedroom, bean bag chair, sensory swing) that the child can be directed to for the purposes of calming down. This is not a time out in the traditional sense but one in which the child goes for a time to collect themselves. Parents can join, if the child wants; but the real design is for the child to learn to self sooth. The child stays in the space until they have calmed down and can be kind. This space should be prepared with a bag of calming tools: books–like Llama Llama Mad at Mama or I'm Feeling Mad (Daniel Tiger)–books you have read together; squishy balls; soft feathers and a straw to blow them around; a blanket to wrap up tight in; music; a harmonica; stuffed animals; spinners and other fidgets... There are many possibilities and these are only suggestions. **Two keys to this plan: 1) explain it to your child when he is calm and 2) use it every time he is being hurtful.**

So, craft a **Calm Down Plan** with his dad, identify a Calm Spot, create a Calm Bag* and then sit down and explain it to your child. It might look something like this: You read him a book about being angry and tell him you have noticed that he can get very angry. Remind him that mad is ok but hurting is not. (Screaming is included here as it hurts the ears.) Let him know that when he gets so mad that he is hurting others he will need to go to his Calm Spot. You might even make a sign that identifies the Calm Spot as his and have him color it. Show him the Calm Bag and how to use some of these things for calming himself. Once you have introduced this to him, use it every time he gets so mad that he is screaming or otherwise being hurtful. Don't tell him he will have to go if he doesn't calm down or that he will have to go if he screams again or hits again. Send him the very first instance of being hurtful. You can walk with him there or send him. If he goes and then comes back out in 10 seconds not screaming, it's a win (He can still be mad just not screaming). If he screams or strikes out again, simply tell him he needs to return to his Calm Spot. *(It is important to note that he does not have to be mad or hurting anyone to go to his Calm Spot. He can go there whenever he wants but must go there when directed.)*

All My Best, Dr. Schaefer

*I would suggest making a Travel Calm Bag – one that stays in the car for such times as might be needed when on outings.

ASK Dr. Schaefer a question @ teresamischaeferphd@gmail.com and include ASK ME in the subject line.

Hotlines for Moms and Dads free, confidential support

- ♥ A new maternal mental health hotline for new and expecting moms battling mental health challenges. Call or text **1-833-9-HELP4MOMS (1-833-943-5746)**
- ♥ **988 | Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**
- ♥ **National Parent Helpline | 1.855. 4A. PARENT (1-855-427-2736)**
- ♥ **800-829-3777 | 24 Hour Parent Support Hotline**
- ♥ **24 Hour Crying Baby Helpline | 866-243-2229**

Mantras for Mommies and Daddies I can only control myself. We're moving on. I'm bringing calm to my home and family. Our relationship is my first priority. I am trying my best. Tomorrow is a new day. I am the right parent for my child. My child is simply a child. I will pause before I react. I am not alone in this. I am my child's safe space. Connect before I correct. I am in charge of being calm no matter how my child behaves. I will not live in reaction to my child. Anxiety is contagious. And so is calm. This too shall pass. Love is almost always the answer. I've got this. Do what you can. Let the rest go. I am exactly who my children need. Crying is communication. I will pause before I react. I do not need to be perfect.

Self-care isn't just okay, it's necessary. What are you doing to take care of YOURSELF? Here are some stretches that will take little time but add great benefit to the body and mind. Try them for a week and see what you think.

1. **Seated Neck Stretches** - Place your right hand under your right thigh. Reach your left hand over to your right ear and gently stretch your head closer to your left shoulder feeling a gentle pull on the right side of your neck or trapezius.
2. **Chest/Shoulder Opener** - Clasp your hands behind your back pulling your palms together and rolling your shoulders down and back. Pulling your clasped hands away from your back, look up at the ceiling.
3. **Seated cat/cow** to loosen up the spine - Place your hands on your knees in a seated neutral spine position. As you inhale arch your back and push your chest out as you look up. As you exhale allow your back to round and your belly button to reach backwards to your spine as your chin falls to your chest. Repeat in coordination with your breath.

CRAFT CORNER



No gluing. No paint. Simple.
Happy Valentine's Day!