

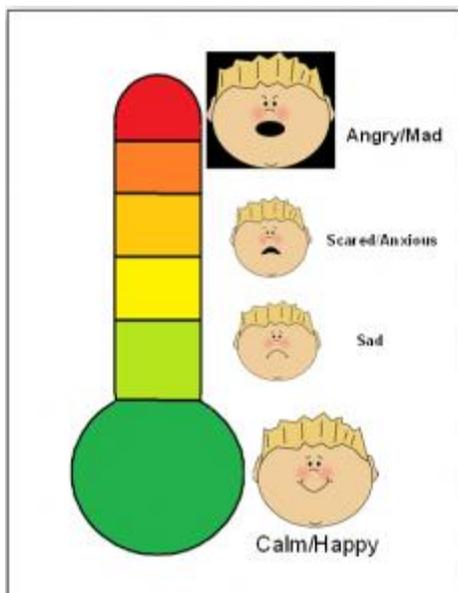
Calming Children with Self-Calming Strategies

Step 1: Don't Give In

- Remain calm, don't show any emotion to your child. If you have to walk away so you can compose yourself, do that. If you need to tag in your spouse to handle the problem because you're too emotional, do that.
- Try to wait the tantrum out for a bit. See if it goes away on its own if you don't give it much attention. Just monitor your child for safety and make sure that your child doesn't put himself in any dangerous situations (like throwing a tantrum in the knife aisle at Bed, Bath, and Beyond). If he does, calmly move him away from danger without making a big deal out of it.
- Remove your child from the situation. Carry him out of the store (if you can do so safely) or back to his room. Try to isolate him from any attention he may get for the tantrum.
- Wait till it passes. Because it will. Eventually, your child will tire and that's when he will need a hug. Be there with his hug when he's ready for it and have faith that the rest of these steps will make these tantrums better. (But again, don't give in to what he wanted, even after the tantrum stops).

Step Two: Identifying Calm Vs. Upset

The first thing you need to do is teach your child the difference between being calm and being upset. You will want to do this with your child when she is calm.



Show your child the thermometer and say “when we are happy and calm, we are down here at the bottom”. Explain to your child that she is calm right now and show her where she is. You can even show her pictures of other children who are calm and happy. Then, tell her that when we are not happy, we are the top of the thermometer. We are upset.

Step Three: Teaching Calming Strategies when Calm

- **The Balloon:** Have your child hold his hands in front of his mouth like holding a small balloon. Tell your child to blow up the balloon. As he blows, he spreads his hands apart to pretend the balloon is getting bigger. Once the balloon is as big as it can get, your child claps his hands together to “pop” the balloon.
- **The Pretzel:** Have your child fold herself into a pretzel and squeeze. Have her wrap her legs together and fold her arms across her chest like she’s hugging herself. When she is as twisted as she can possibly get, have her squeeze hard.
- **Take a Walk:** Have your child take a walk to cool off. Sometimes just walking around a bit can help.
- **The Bunny:** Have your child pretend to be a bunny. He can get down on the ground like a bunny or just sit on his bottom. Have him breathe like a bunny does in short, quick breaths. Don’t let your child do this too long or he might get dizzy but a little bit of shallow breathing can bring his breathing back under his control. Follow this up with some long deep breaths, like hissing like a snake or blowing out candles.
- **Write a Letter:** Have your child “write a letter” about why she’s mad. Get out a piece of paper and a big fat crayon. Have your child scribble violently all over the paper. This should release some tension. If your child is older, you may actually be able to get her to write down why she’s mad. When she’s done, have your child read it to you or just crumple the paper and throw it away. If this strategy works for your child, you can have a calm-down bucket or stash that has paper and a crayon just for such an occasion.
- **Count or Sing the ABCs:** Have your child count as high as he can or sing/say the alphabet. Many times this is enough to bring the breathing back under control to quell the tantrum.
- **Hug a Pillow/Stuffed Animal:** Have your child pick a pillow or stuffed animal to hug. Tell her to squeeze it hard so she can get all of that upset out. She could also tell her stuffed animal why she’s upset.

Step Four: Practice the Calming Strategies When Your Child is Upset

Now that your child knows the strategies, it’s time to put them into action. The next time your child starts to get upset, try to catch it before he gets completely out of control mad. Say “Your body doesn’t look green, let’s get our calming board”. Bring him the calming board and show him where he is on the thermometer. Label his emotion for him by saying “You are upset” or “you are mad”. Then, ask him to pick a calming strategy to try. If you’re lucky, he’ll remember his training and pick a strategy so you can help him through it. If he doesn’t want to pick a strategy, you pick one for him and demonstrate it. Don’t force him to do it with you. Then, wait a minute or two and try that whole process again. Eventually, he should calm down enough to be able to do a strategy. However, the first several times you try this, it may take a while, especially if he’s just now getting used to you not giving in to his tantrums. Just keep trying it every few minutes until he’s ready to do one with you. If you stay calm, that will bring him down even faster. Eventually, your child should be more willing to do this. If you do it consistently with him, he will get to the point where you can say, “You look like you need to calm down, why don’t you go pick a strategy.”