

RESPONDING TO BIG FEELINGS

Our education partners at Role Models cite five areas to consider when responding to your child's 'big feelings'



When your child has an outburst or emotional meltdown it can be difficult to know how to respond. It can seem like your child is giving you a hard time, but it is perhaps more helpful to remember that they are likely to be having a hard time.

Here are five ideas to consider when responding to your child's big feelings:

1) Thrive moments

When your child is having a meltdown, that moment can easily feel like a 'survive' moment. Instead, try and see it as a 'thrive' moment; use these moments to teach your child about their feelings and take an emotion-coaching approach.

'You sound upset and angry. I get angry too sometimes. How does it feel in your body?' By acknowledging and embracing the moment rather than fearing it you can help your child learn to name and recognise their emotions. It's also a great opportunity to demonstrate that all feelings are ok, even the uncomfortable ones.

2) Empathetic responses

When your child shows a big emotion or has a 'tantrum', try and remember to respond rather than react. When we react straight away we are often triggered by own emotions; responding is when we pause and take time to reflect and understand. If we think about what we crave when we have a big emotion, or we feel disappointed or angry about something, it's very rarely for someone to fix or rationalise our problem. Instead we want our partner or friend to listen, understand and validate our feeling. We can provide this empathetic response to our child 'I know it's hard to come off your game/phone etc when you're having fun', 'I can see this is really hard for you, I'm here to help if you need me'.

3) Staying out of judgement

Parenting expert Janet Lansbury says 'Our perception of our children's behaviour will always dictate our response'. If we are irritated and triggered by our child's outburst it is likely that we will meet it with frustration, anger and exasperation. This isn't always easy to step away from when we live such busy lives but we can aim to stop and breathe to ensure we respond without judgement where possible.

4) Remain assertive

If the ideal is to remain respectful and understanding, how do we also assert boundaries and say no? We can recognise the feeling but still stay firm on our decision. This might sound like: 'It's ok to feel angry, it's not ok to hit your brother' or 'I'm sorry that this doesn't feel fair, I can see you're angry at the decision I've made'.

5) Reasoning won't always work

When your young child is experiencing a big emotion, they are likely to have stress hormones rushing around their body. They are highly unlikely to be able to engage the part of their brain which will enable them to think rationally.

Knowing this, try to take the approach of saying what you see and repeating back what your child expresses to you. 'You feel really cross with me for turning the TV off' or 'You're feeling like you really don't want to go to school today'.

High emotions and tantrums are not a sign of poor parenting. It's important to remember that teens (as well as toddlers and young children) are still developing the part of their brain that allows for measured, rational thinking. We won't always be able to change our child's behaviour, but we can consider the way in which we respond to it. You might be experiencing some big emotions in your household right now having been back at school for a few weeks and as we all feel increasingly tired into the autumn term. Try the ideas above and keep the overall theme in mind of responding rather than reacting; it's an excellent one to be teaching your child to do too.

Louise's recent Instagram Live on this topic can be found [here](#).

This blog post was written by Louise Treherne, Director of Character Education at Role Models. Louise has a degree in Psychology, 12 years experience as a teacher and 5 years as a Senior Deputy Head at a London Prep school. She now works as a Professional Coach and Educational Consultant