

Does your child's behavior upset you? How to respond;

To teach your child how to handle emotional responses and gain the skill of mindfulness, or empathy, there are some specific steps to follow.

A- Attunement: this means you get down on their level and reflect their emotional state back to them, with your words, your tone, and your facial expression, until they achieve a state of

B- Balance, and then

C-Coherence: you prompt them and guide them in telling a story about what happened and how they felt that makes sense to them.

When you can't make sense of something traumatic that has happened, you tend to stay stuck in the past and with those unwanted feelings. For example, when adults have gone through a divorce and can't make sense of what happened, they tend to stay stuck trying to understand what happened and why their ex-spouse behaved the way they did. The same can happen when children don't understand the motivations of a bully.

You have likely already noticed that if you say "That's nothing to be mad (upset, cry) about," when you are dismissive of their emotional state, they often escalate their expressions to help you in hopes you will show that you "get it."

Another strategy you can employ to be proactive in developing your child's emotional awareness, control, and empathy, or perspective-taking ability, is to process the day with them. You can review the day with them, talk about the things they did, especially about how they felt and ask them how they think others felt about the events and situations.

Lastly, as you around others on the playground, in the grocery store, etc., you can ask them to make predictions about others' plans and emotional states by reading the context cues and body language. For example, you might be at the grocery store watching an elderly woman pointing at her receipt and gesturing towards the cashier. Maybe she is disagreeing with the charges? At the playground the swings might be all occupied and perhaps a youngster is shaking his fists and crying in proximity to and towards a child swinging and yelling "No!" Could this mean the child on the ground wants a turn and is angry because the swinging child isn't sharing?

Next, it is also important that you remain aware of your own emotional reactions. Basically, you have two modes of processing here. On the high road, you remain flexible and are able to consider multiple options in how you respond to their behavior. On the low road, you have been triggered and your emotional response compromises your thinking so that YOU become inflexible and far less likely to resolve the matter without disconnecting in your relationship with your child, leaving them alone when

they need you most. The way you respond in these trying moments impacts the type of attachment style your child develops and creates a pattern they will repeat into adulthood. You are better off to state that you are too mad at the moment and remove yourself until you're back on the high road again than to use your anger to control, manipulate, and hurt. Wait until you have balance before going back and processing the situation with your child to reach coherence and a solution.

For children to learn to trust others and form successful relationships in the future, they need a caregiver who is predictable and predictably available. Caregivers who "check out" or who are sometimes calm in a crisis and other times they blow up at the child can effect the way a child maps out their relationships in the future.

A child's security of attachment to parents is connected to parents' understanding of their own early-life experiences. When the parent lacks self-understanding, an ability to make sense of their own early experiences, history is likely to repeat itself, and negative patterns of interactions pass down through generations.

## Attachment styles

Category	Parental Interactive Pattern
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Secure- Parent is emotionally available, perceptive, and responsive	
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Insecure-avoidant- Parent is unavailable, imprecise, unresponsive, and rejecting	
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Insecure-anxious/ambivalent- Inconsistently available, perceptive, and responsive, intrusive	
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Insecure-disorganized- Parent is frightened, frightening, disorienting, alarming	
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As adults, the

Securely attached as a child is secure, free, autonomous

Avoidantly attached is dismissing

Ambivalently attached is preoccupied or entangled

Disorganizedly attached is disorganized, has unresolved trauma or loss



## Shame

Toxic ruptures occur when a caregiver loses emotional control and screams, name-calls, or threatens the child. Adults with leftover or unresolved issues are especially at-risk for this type of interaction. At the heart of this is shame, for both the child and adult. This can result in rage or shame, feeling deflated, and withdrawal or aggression. Repeated ruptures of this type can result in the child developing rigid defenses to accepting any form of correction or criticism, and the internal belief that they are somehow defective.

I got some of these ideas from an excellent resource, "Parenting From The Inside Out," a book about raising children and being a good parent based on behavioral research and neuroscience. It's a bit of a tough read, but the rewards can be lifelong. I had been reading a chapter in this book written to help parents notice more closely how they react to their children and emotions, and here's a true story about what I learned.

I had been building a crystal radio kit with my eight year old son, Jack. It was a Saturday and several games found their way to the kitchen table where we were working. As dinner time approached I asked the kids to clear the table, which they did.

The next day, Sunday, I had this nagging thought that the germanium diode that makes the radio work may have been lost in the shuffle. I checked the box and sure enough, it wasn't there. I looked over the table and the floor, which I had vacuumed the night before (and so, no doubt, had the dogs, who have been known to eat power rangers and paper clips).

I started to tell Jack about the missing piece, and noticed a tightening in my stomach as I did so. I realized I was about to lecture Jack about putting things away carefully. It would have been something like "Jack, how many times do I have to tell you, you don't pay attention and the parts get lost and everything is ruined!" Jack is sweet and sensitive, and would have readily accepted the guilt and felt bad. Really, any of many things could have happened with the crystal diode, a tiny little piece. It occurred to me it would be unfair to lay the blame on him and make him feel bad.

Then the voice in my head turned on me, and I began to think that if I were more attentive and organized, bad things like this wouldn't happen. Then I would have felt bad and inadequate. So instead of my first two emotional and inflexible reactions, I had a better idea. I opened my arms to give Jack a hug, and said "Jack, I will be sad if we can't find the diode and we don't get to finish what we were working on, I really wanted to see it work with you." Jack hugged me back and said, "Me too, Daddy."

On Monday I emailed the company the radio kit came from, Slinky, describing what happened and asking if I could buy the missing part. They sent me a brand new kit for free. How's that for serendipity?