

Meltdowns Happen: Calming Down and Finding Comfort

Toddlers may feel upset when in new or uncomfortable situations, or when they need help. Help your child learn that:

- Adults are there to help
- He can use words to express needs and emotions
- Sometimes things are scary or challenging, but he will be okay

Ideas to try with your child:

- **Model calm behavior.** Keep calm yourself. Give ideas on how to fix the problem and assure him that he will be okay.
- **Redirect his attention.** Try a soothing activity such as reading a book together. Say, “I can see you’re really upset. Let’s draw a picture to show how mad you are.”
- **Let him tell you about it.** Stay with him while he is upset. Listen to him tell you how he feels, and offer comfort and encouragement.
- **Offer words to express emotions.** Kids need more words than happy or sad. Describe feelings with words like “frustrated,” “anxious” or “upset.”

If your child is struggling:

- Offer choices to help him feel in control. “Do you want to finish the puzzle, or go outside?”
- Plan for success. If grocery shopping is a challenge, go when the child feels rested and have a snack or toy in your bag to help him stay entertained.
- Set limits but offer alternatives. “Throwing blocks is not safe. You may throw these soft balls into the basket instead.”

Going further:

- Prepare him for upcoming changes, for example, “We are leaving the park in five minutes.” When it is time to go, count down from ten, and have a race to the car.
- Books to help with emotions: [Peaceful Piggy Meditation](#) by Kerry MacLean, [When Sophie gets Angry – Really Really Angry](#) by Molly Bang, or [Steps and Stones](#) by Gail Silver. Simplify the stories by reading fewer words if needed.

The WA State Department of Early Learning and the Richland School District believes that parents, families, and caregivers are young children’s best teachers. This resource guide, part of *Strong Foundations for School: Resource Guides for Parents of Young Children*, highlights a key developmental skill for **children Ages 16 to 36 months** that parents can help improve at home.

Adapted from *WA State Early Learning and Development Guidelines, 2012*: “Seek the comfort of adults significant to him/her when in new or uncomfortable situations, or needing help, or feeling strong emotions.” About Me and My Family and Culture, Ages 16 to 36 months, pg. 43.

