



8 Must-know Strategies

for Coping in Tough Parenting Situations

by Marni Parsons



Marni Parsons
a coach for parents



Introduction

If you are a parent who frequently feels ill equipped to cope with tough parenting situations you've come to the right place for help! As parents we're all confronted with challenging situations with our children. Over the years my work with parents and personal experience have given me a great understanding of how frustrating being a parent can be.

Maybe you can relate to one or more of the following situations; you have a child who runs away from you in a crowded public place thinking it is great fun, or your child refuses to get in their car seat in the mall parking lot while another car holds up traffic waiting for your parking place, or your child has a complete melt down in the middle of the toy store because you are not about to buy him what he wants, or the preteen who screams at the top of her lungs that she hates you because she can't have a sleep over on a school night? You get the picture—these tough parenting situations happen every day, and there isn't a parent immune to them.

I have some good news for you! I believe that by practicing extreme self-care and personal awareness, acquiring some effective communication tools, a little planning and a whole lot of consistency you can handle tough situations with grace and ease. And, guess what, you might even eliminate many of them all together! Doesn't that sound great? Well, keep reading because I have listed for you 8 strategies for coping with almost any parenting challenge you will encounter. Some of these will be things you may have heard before and some may be new to you. The key to creating peace and harmony in your home, which I will repeat over and over, is treating each other with dignity and respect and being consistent. A little patience with yourself and others will go a long way too.



Strategy #1: Take care of yourself first!

Sounds counter-intuitive, but how can you possibly take care of your children and the others who rely on you if you aren't taking care of yourself?

Can you relate to being in the grocery store piling your cart high with snack foods and things you didn't intend to buy because you are starving? As parents we are typically good at making sure our kids are fed, bathed and rested, but not so good at doing it for ourselves. I want to encourage you to take a look at what you do in your own life that feeds your soul and energizes you, so that you can be the great parent I know you want to be. I want to challenge you to take time for yourself each day to do something just for you. In the beginning this might just be a few minutes with a cup of good coffee and a book or magazine. Make a date with yourself every week, and be committed to it. Is there a hobby or interest that you've wanted to pursue, a new class you want to take, friends you want to spend time with? Look within yourself and decide what you need more of in your life, and go for it. You will not be disappointed by the paradox of self-care. Within a couple of weeks you will see the benefits of recharging your batteries and the effect that it has on your ability to be patient and more effective when things get difficult.



Strategy #2: Set clear, reasonable limits, boundaries and expectations.

Children need to know what they can expect in order to have some power and control over their behavior. Limits and boundaries actually make them feel more secure and safe. Setting appropriate limits can be tricky, because if you have too many it can be overwhelming and cause some children to rebel and constantly push the outer edges of the envelope for space and freedom. Limits also help children to learn to self-regulate which is a skill they need to function in school and beyond.

A good guideline is to set limits around health and safety. Consider the health and safety of the child, others and property. Keep in mind that as the child grows and matures these limits and boundaries will expand and change too. The key to being certain that your limits are adhered to is consistency. If you aren't consistent with upholding your limits, then how can you expect your child to consistently follow them? Like wise, as parents we need to be willing to follow the same rules and limits we have for our kids. We can't very well ask them to

keep their room clean if ours looks like a cyclone hit it.

Setting clear expectations is also important for children. Children do not have the years of social experience to know what behavior is acceptable and what is not. You will never go wrong preparing your children for what they can expect, and what behavior is expected of them when embarking on an activity. If you are taking your child to the store and you don't plan to buy anything other than what is on your list, let them know, "Today we are only buying what's on our shopping list." Then when they ask you for the ice cream that isn't on your list you can simply say, "Remember, we're only getting what's on the list today. What if we put ice cream on our list for next week?" By including the child in the decision making process you let them know that they are valuable and contributing members of the family, and you are teaching them important life skills.



Strategy #3: Validate the Feelings and Emotions your child is experiencing.

So, you've set clear limits and still you experience a tough situation. Now what do you do? Most parents want to resort to trying to talk their child out of what they are feeling. It is difficult for us to see our children upset or unhappy, and therefore our first instinct is to fix it, or worse yet, tell our child that they are over reacting and to simply get over it. What I have found that works wonders and allows a child to feel accepted and understood is to simply validate what they're going through. Affirm their feelings and emotions in an authentic and loving way.

Let's say you're in the middle of the checkout line at the grocery store and your child insists on buying a candy bar. You've already told them prior to going into the store that you were only getting what was on the list, and the candy bar is not on the list. Patiently remind them in a respectful tone, "Honey, remember we're only getting what's on the list." Your child's rebuttal: "But, Mommy, I really want a candy bar." Your reply to this is simple and delivered with an authentic

understanding of what it feels like to really want a candy bar, “You really want a candy bar right now. I can hear how much you want one. It’s hard to want something so badly, isn’t it?” And now the hard part – you must stop talking to your child about the candy bar. Depending on the age of your child, you might try to distract them with something else in the cart that you are buying, or ask for help putting the groceries on the conveyor belt. But don’t think that you are going to win the candy bar argument if you keep having the conversation. When we react to our children’s big feelings we can become frustrated with the situation. We expect that when we explain our adult reasoning behind our decisions it will make sense to our children, but let’s face it – we all remember a time when our parents’ decisions sounded completely ridiculous. You cannot expect agreement when making an unpopular decision.



Strategy #4: Stay Calm, be Patient and keep your Cool.

In keeping with the candy bar theme, let's assume you have done everything right up to this point. You are well rested, fed, feeling good about yourself, and you've validated your son/daughters BIG feelings about how it feels to want something so badly. You may have even shared with them a story about when you really wanted something and just couldn't have it right then, and how you handled it. Now you must stay calm and be patient. Do not react to your child's desire, which manifests as a tantrum. By keeping your emotional distance or if possible even leaving the room during the tantrum, you are no longer a participating audience member for your child; and quite frankly, who wants to have a complete meltdown if no one is there to watch?

Explain to your child that you can see how very upset he/she is, and then let them know you are going into the next room, and when they are feeling better they can come and get you. Or you can ask your child if they would like to be held. "Would you like a hug?" Keeping your cool keeps the focus off of you and lets it remain about the candy bar and the greater lesson: that we can't always have what we want when we want it. In simple terms, we are teaching our child to delay gratification.



Strategy #5: Wait out the Storm.

Waiting out the storm with an upset child can often seem to be more than we can handle. It is in our parenting gene to take care of our little ones. It makes us uncomfortable on many levels to see them sad, angry or frustrated – especially when we can't fix it for them. Our expectations of our child and ourselves are often questioned. However, when we remain focused on the teachable moment and in control of our own reaction, we let the child know that we are the adults in the situation. We are there to support them and help them to grow and learn.

It is important to understand that we cannot talk sense into anyone who is really upset. In this case you may have a hysterical child. Because of the way the brain works, it is simply impossible to reason with someone who is very upset. All you can do is be really patient until your child calms down, and then you can move forward. Many parents find that leaving their child alone for a few minutes works well, while others find that sitting quietly next to their child or holding them is more calming for them. You can experiment with this to find what works the best for your child.



Strategy #6: Decide what the Inherent lesson is in the situation.

Every struggle that a child and parent go through has an inherent lesson or teachable moment. Finding or seeing that lesson can be challenging at times, because the emotion of the moment often blinds us from clarity. If you are able to keep your cool and wait out the storm, you can reflect on the opportunity you have to teach your child a new skill or valuable lesson about life. For very young children the lesson is often about how to best handle big emotions and disappointments. For older children lessons can include morals and give you an opportunity to discuss issues with more global perspective. Only you and your child know what they are ready to learn. Personally I find that while I'm waiting out the storm I can think about what life lesson my child might be ready to learn. If I spend some time focusing on myself and how I am reacting, then my child has more time to go through what they need to without my interference.



Strategy #7: Let natural consequences teach.

Natural consequences are your child's greatest teacher, but I find that in my work with parents it is often difficult for parents to allow for their children to learn from experience. Natural consequences are the actual results of making a choice. Human beings are experiential learners, and children will learn more from experience than from being talked at. Let's say you ask your child to grab their jacket before leaving for school, and they tell you they don't need their jacket because they aren't cold. Most parents at this point will go to exhausting lengths to beg, bribe, bargain or even threaten their child to get the jacket. This wears the parent out, leaving them feeling dejected, frustrated and ineffective. However, if we allow our child to make a choice and live with the consequences, we are respecting their ability to make age-appropriate decisions and learn age-appropriate consequences. When you pick up your child from school and they tell you how cold they were, you can validate how difficult that must have been for them. Do not go into the "I told you so" speech as that will only cause resentment! The next day when you remind them to get their jacket you can say, "I'm remembering that you were cold yesterday; you might want to take your jacket today." This is delivered with dignity and respect, not in a condescending, "I told you so" manner.



Strategy #8: Always treat your child with Dignity and Respect.

This seems to go without saying, but in a world of adults who are exhausted, stressed out, burning the candle at both ends and working two shifts, our children often receive the short end of the stick. We are short-fused and this comes across in our interactions with our kids. We overreact, we yell, we threaten, we say things we know we shouldn't, and then we feel bad for our kids and about our parenting. Guilt sets in, and guilt is not a good place to parent from. Our expectations are often not developmentally appropriate, and we can't understand why we have to tell our child something a dozen times before they hear us. Accepting that children need reminders and often some help and support to complete a task will go a long way in keeping your fuse from being lit. I often need to take a deep breath and count to ten when I know my child needs more than I feel I can give. I can then be the parent I want to be and deliver my message with dignity and respect for who they are and what they need.

Dignity and respect are shared with children through tone of voice, unconditional love and immense understanding and compassion for what it takes to grow up in this society. When parents resort to shaming or labeling in an attempt to change a child's behavior, the child's self-esteem suffers. Children do not have the ability to separate who they are from the label of the behavior. If what I did was "naughty", then I must be naughty.



Conclusion .

The common thread between all of the families I have had the privilege and honor to work with is that they have a desire to raise their children to be happy adults. The key to raising happy adults is to treat them with dignity and respect, practice extreme self-care and consistently practice good parenting strategies.

It is my sincere and greatest wish that you become the parent your child deserves, and that you go to bed each and every night proud of the parent you are. I hope you have learned a few new things by reading this e-booklet. I hope you will continue to check back into to my Web site regularly for more tips and strategies to help you become the best parent you can possibly be. Remember that you are the expert about your child and family. You hold in your heart a grand dream of the family you desire, and of the child/ren you want to raise. Therefore, in the words of American author Henry David Thoreau, “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams and live the life you’ve imagined.”

Wishing you all the best,
Marni Parsons



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Marni Parsons
a coach for parents