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# MANAGING EXTREME EMOTIONS

## ADVICE FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS FROM A MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT

It's not uncommon for us to experience extreme emotions when we have increased levels of stress. Ever wonder why your child's reaction doesn't match the size of problem (or inconvenience) they're experiencing? A meltdown over spilled milk when your beloved is normally even keeled? There may be something behind this reaction and many things can impact how we respond to stressful events (e.g., lack of sleep, poor nutrition, lack of exercise and self-care). Sometimes our cup is so full with ongoing stress and emotion we overflow easily and sometimes we need some instruction on HOW to respond to different social situations. Talking to a trusted adult about feelings can be very cathartic for children (and adults). As you are supporting your child(ren)/students remember it's important to separate the child from their behavior (you may not approve of the behavior, but still love them as a person). Here are a few talking points you might want to consider when someone comes to you feeling overwhelmed.

### IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT:

- Validate his/her feelings.
- Offer a patient, listening ear to help your child/student process the story how THEY see it without passing judgement. If there is more than one side of the story allow each party to share their version without interruption. Clarifications can be made after the story is told.
- Provide information in a calm way that may help clarify the situation.
- Help your child problem solve independently by asking open-ended questions.
- Monitor your own level of stress and your reaction to problematic situations. Are you modeling positive coping strategies and resilience? Your child is watching and can even sense what you are not saying.
- Demonstrate positive thinking even if you don't buy it 100% yourself. Say your positive thoughts out loud!

### ONCE CALM:

- Help your child to identify the emotions they may be experiencing.
- Ask them to determine the size of their problem (ideally, we'd like for the reaction to match the size of the problem). This may need to be taught and practiced.



Kuypers, L. M. (2011). The Zones of Regulation: A Curriculum Designed to Foster SelfRegulation and Emotional Control. SanJose, CA: Think Social Publishing, Inc.

<https://zonesofregulation.com/index.html>

Think Space: Educating the Heart and the Mind for Success in the Classroom and Beyond

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV1-vnAvsAo>

Helping Traumatized Children Learn (Free downloadable book)

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Helping-Traumatized-Children-Learn.pdf>

