

What is Frustration?



Frustration happens when what we want or expect isn't what actually happens. It's a feeling even adults have — often more than once a day! We don't stop getting frustrated as we get older. We all feel some form of frustration at every stage in life.

But frustration isn't all bad. Frustration can help kids solve problems and be creative. It can motivate them to learn new things. Think about how frustrated your child was before they learned to walk! That feeling pushed them to keep on trying.

Children who get easily frustrated tend to get very upset the minute something doesn't go their way. They have a hard time waiting for attention or help and may give up quickly when faced with a challenge. This is normal!

Frustrated kids may:

- Avoid doing something.
- Whine or complain.
- Argue or cry.
- Give up or become demanding.

The great news is that children are able to learn how to handle frustration over time. **It is our job to teach them strategies to deal with this feeling. We don't have to fix the frustration for them.** We can teach them what to do when they experience it.



When your child is frustrated:

- **Name their feelings.** Help your child feel heard *in the moment*. For example: “Puzzles are hard! It makes you so mad when the bear won’t fit in the space.” Or, “It can be SO hard to wait your turn.”
- **Share your own struggles.** Tell a story about a time you felt frustrated and how you handled it. Children need to hear that adults get frustrated, too.
- **Break down the challenge.** Suggest or show ways to solve the problem. One good idea is to break the challenge into parts: “Why don’t you try putting your thumb in your mitten first? Then we’ll work on the other fingers.”
- **Stay calm and offer help.** If they are too frustrated, you can make a suggestion: “I know you feel frustrated when we have to wait in line. But we need groceries. How about we look for something red on the shelf while we wait?”
- **Let your child know it’s okay to take a break.** Offer them a chance to step away when they are really overwhelmed: “Would you like to go outside with me for some fresh air? Then we can come back inside and try again.”
- **Be a role model.** When you are struggling with your own frustration, show how to stay calm. Say, “Wow, this is really hard! I can’t find my car keys, and I’m so frustrated. I’m going to take a deep breath and then look again. Can you help me look too?”
- **Use humor.** For example, you can yell at the block that has fallen: “You silly block! You just won’t stay on the tower! Well, we’re not giving up!”

We learn a lot by coping with frustration. It helps our children build important skills, like persistence and creativity.

Have more questions?

Talk to your child’s healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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