



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



Keeping Your



Staying calm is hard for all parents. We are people, too! We get frustrated when our little ones act up or have a tantrum. But you may have learned already that when adults get angry too, it doesn't help. Then there are two people who are angry and out of control!

What is co-regulation?

When a baby or young child is upset, they **don't know how to calm down on their own**. They don't have the words to express their feelings yet. They can't "self-regulate". They can't soothe themselves. That's where you come in.

Co-regulation is when you help your child calm down

When a baby is crying, you might **hold them close, rock them gently, or sing a soft song**. This is **co-regulation**. Your baby **borrow your calm** until they've developed the ability to calm themselves. You are helping them manage their big feelings. You are sharing your calm, steady heartbeat and voice.

You may need to sit next to a toddler while they cry when they are disappointed or can't have something they want. They may eventually climb into your lap or look for a hug.

You can help your child borrow your calm with simple steps:



Stay close:

Your body is a safe place for them. Sit near them in the room or hold them in your arms.



Use a calm voice:

A soothing, quiet voice helps their nervous system settle down.



Breathe:

Slow down your own breathing. This helps them match their breath to yours.



Notice their feelings:

Say what you see. "That scared you. I am here." or "You are mad that the blocks fell down. That makes sense."

What is a big deal to your child may not seem like a big deal to you. But when you can recognize their feelings and stay calm yourself, it helps them feel heard.



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Key tips to keep your cool

1 Tune in to your feelings: We cannot control our feelings. They are not good or bad. They are what they are. But what you *do* with them matters! Take a deep breath and think about how you want to respond instead of just reacting quickly.

2 Remember your child's age: A 2-year-old having a tantrum over a blue bowl instead of a red one is not trying to be bad — they just can't cope yet. If you understand that their actions are normal for their age, you can respond with kindness and calm.

3 You control your response: Try these steps to keep your calm:

Step 1: Take a deep breath.

You might feel furious, but you know being angry will not help.
A deep breath gives you a moment to get calm.

Step 2: Say you understand.

Tell your child you know they are sad and angry. "I know you are sad and angry that your friend has to go home. It is hard when fun ends." This helps them feel seen.

Step 3: Don't take the bait.

Ignore the angry words like "You are the meanest mommy." If you need to, take a break. Make sure your child is in a safe place or with a safe person, and take a few minutes to calm yourself. Sometimes taking a 3-minute break is a smart parenting decision! It helps you show up like the parent you want to be.

Children don't learn to regulate by being told to "calm down."
They learn by being calmed. By modeling and providing soothing, you are teaching them how to cope. Co-regulation takes practice, but the payoff for you and your child is huge.

Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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