

# INSIGHTS

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## Helping kids manage their BIG emotions

If we want our children to handle **BIG** emotions we need to rein in our emotions too. We want our children to mimic our response when they experience problems or difficulties at school.

There are lots of things that happen that can upset our children. Losing a race, experiencing some rejection or not having their best friend in their class at school **can be upsetting**, but **not catastrophic**. Kids can sometimes make these issues seem **bigger** than they are and their emotional response doesn't match the situation.

They also know the **buttons** to press with parents, and we can easily escalate our response to match our child's. Suddenly, *"this is the worst thing ever"* that a child talks about can seem like *"the worst thing ever"* in our eyes too. Our behaviour starts to mimic our child's behaviour.

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**Start by changing your own thinking.** Rather than thinking "here we go again. My child won't be able to cope" replace these thoughts with "I'd better stay calm. My child needs me to model calm." This will help you rein in your own emotional response.

Then go through these steps:

**Process:** Ask your child good questions to get the full story. Use your senses and your intuition to check out what's happening. Think about what may have happened to lead to the situation. Kids are faulty observers and often present one side of a situation. Think about the full story yourself.

**Reflect:** It's really important to give yourself time to think when children and young people talk about their problems. *Is this so bad? Will things be better tomorrow? Has this happened in the past? Has your child been able to handle such challenges before? Is this an issue that I need to resolve?* Try to see the bigger picture.

**Respond:** Children's concerns need to be taken seriously, but sometimes some **TLC** (Tender Loving Care in the form of a big hug) is sufficient and very reassuring. At other times, some ideas about coping or handling the situation may be useful, but this can occur over time. Avoid feeling that you have to 'fix' the problem for your child. And don't panic if you don't know what to do. Sometimes things work themselves out, or a solution will appear over time.

Kids of all ages have a tendency to catastrophise when life throws them curve balls. Nothing wrong with that, to a point. But it really helps if the **significant adults** in their lives (that is, parents) can model calm, reflective behaviour when kids come to them with their emotions out of control.

It's not easy staying calm when kids' emotions run high, but if you want your kids to calm down and think, then **you need to go first**.



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