

In the Heat of the Moment

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How do you react in the heat of the moment? If you are like most parents when you want your child to stop doing something, there are two types of situations. There are those times when your children are doing something that is just getting on your nerves, and want them to stop. Then there are the situations where they need to stop for safety reasons.

Parents may react or respond to their child's misbehavior. When you are reacting, this is an intense emotional response that is evident in your verbal and physical behavior. Reactions are based on assumptions, the reasons you believe that your child has chosen to do something that he should not be doing. It is common for parents to feel embarrassed and disrespected when their child misbehaves in public.

A response is different than a reaction, it is slower, and allows for there to be a pause. A parent takes the time to consider the situation, the multiple factors that contributed to the misbehavior. There is an interest in the child, what were the circumstances and *why* he did what he did. Responsive parents understand that misbehavior needs to be understood on multiple levels to craft a response that can help their child develop skills for handling challenges.

Children sometimes misbehave, or make poor choices because they are overwhelmed, often for reasons not apparent to adults. Many times, parents are unrealistic about expectations for their children, failing to consider these factors. A child may handle challenges more maturely one day, and less so on another, simply because they are short on sleep, or hungry. A child may have experienced frustrations earlier in the day, and the most recent stress has tipped over coping abilities. Let's face it, this happens to us, too, as adults so

why would we expect our children to be different?

Refusals to cooperate, to do what a parent asks frustrates parents. In these situations, it is important to differentiate between whether your child "can't" or "won't" do something. The "can't" may be about insufficient maturity and unrealistic adult expectations, using an adult reference of "this isn't that difficult." Other times, the child may have done it before, and "can't" do it now, parents sometimes misinterpret this to mean "won't" or as a refusal. The reality is coping abilities are variable, and when parents are not considering all the circumstances, they are at risk of misinterpreting their child's uncooperativeness.

In the heat of the moment can you pause, take a step back, and encourage your child to take the time needed to calm down? Starting from a place of calmness, children and parents can have more productive conversations. This is reassuring for children, knowing that even if they misbehave their parents love continues, and in this they can feel secure. When children feel connected they care about what you think and feel, and are open to learning from their experiences. This is the best life lesson you can offer your children!

- Remind yourself, you are a competent parent.
- Take a time out for yourself, pausing to think, instead of reacting.
- Feel compassion for yourself and your child, we all can get overwhelmed.
- Be flexible with your plans, stop before you or your children get overwhelmed.