

Co-Regulating: Parenting with Power

“GOOOOALLLLLL!!! THE WOMEN’S NATIONAL TEAM HAS DONE IT AGAIN!!!” Remember when you saw the winning goal being scored, and you felt like *you* were the one who scored it? Or cringed when you saw someone falling off their bike and immediately felt their pain? As it turns out, we are equipped with mirror neurons in our brain. Researchers have found that when someone observes the experience of another, the same areas of the brain light up as the person having the experience. Simply put, mirror neurons are linked to our ability to connect with other’s experiences and develop empathy. To learn more, [watch this short video](#).

What does this mean for you as a parent?

“Are you telling me I can Jedi-mind-trick my kids?” Well, kind of. You won’t be controlling your child’s behavior, *per se*. However, when we are in better control of ourselves, we mirror the behavior we want to see in our kids. Having a parent who is their rock or “container” for overwhelming experiences helps kids feel safe.

To be the ‘mirror’ you want to be for your child, try this:

- 1 Find what works for you:** When you are in a calm state (perhaps that 5 minutes of bliss before the kids wake up) try out a few breathing techniques. Exhaling longer than you inhale resets the nervous system (the system that responds and makes you feel that hot, prickly sensation right before you yell), making rational thought easier.
- 2 Take 5-10 seconds to check in with yourself:** When you hear “leave me alone!” for the umpteenth time or your child starts screaming because “yes, you do in fact have to wear pants in public” how is your body responding? Is that hot prickly sensation back? Use your previously found breathing skill to calm yourself *before* responding.
- 3 What is your face really saying?:** Something as simple as the expression on your face can ignite fear or comfort/safety in your child. Fear can fuel the tantrum fire, and safety helps put the fire out. So, if you notice your child is continuing to escalate when you’re interacting with them, try changing your facial expression, tone of voice, and body language to be inviting vs. threatening.
- 4 Respond with empathy:** “You are sad because you wanted that toy and she is playing with it first.” The deep breath you took may also help you remember that everyone needs to be left alone at times. Allow your child the space to calm and revisit the topic later.
- 5 Problem solve with your child or teen:** Sometimes tantrums are happening because of a lack of control. Finding a way to share the power with your child gives *you* more power and teaches your kids some skills along the way. “Let’s figure out a way you can play with the toy too!” For your teen, help them express themselves in a constructive way so they can learn how to develop healthy relationships and be an advocate for themselves.

Sometimes, no matter what you try, your child will continue to escalate. Perhaps it is because your child is used to you escalating with them and they are responding based on past experience. Or maybe they are just having a bad day (I can relate!) Rest assured that the more you mirror calm, the more likely your child will calm quicker. They will form memories of the *new you* & will feel safer. When they are calm, you can process with them & help them grow from the experience.