

CALMING OUR EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY TO OUR CHILDREN

A Guided Meditation for Parents



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This guided meditation can be used by parents to help themselves become less reactive to their children's behavioral challenges, allowing them to be more present with their children. Use this guide to restore regulation and a sense of calm in stressful moments. This loose script can be adapted to meet your needs.



- ▶ **ACTION:** I'd like you to take a piece of paper and write down 4 or 5 of your child's behavioral problems that bother you, frustrate you, or make you the most angry. These are the things that may make you feel exhausted and like you want to give up. Take your time thinking about these.

Give yourself as much time as you need to create the list. If you can't come up with 5, that's okay. If you have more than 5, that's okay too.

- ▶ **ACTION:** Look at the items you listed. Are any of them similar/connected? Draw a shape (square/circle) or highlight in the same color behaviors that seem connected. Is there a common denominator? Is it about disrespecting you, not seeing you as a person? Anything that makes these issues seem like they're part of the same root cause.

If you can't see similarities, look at the items and take some time exploring if some of the behaviors are related. If some of them are related, call them a "cluster". Once the clusters are identified, ask yourself these questions.

- ▶ **ACTION:** Which of the clusters bothers you the most? Let's focus on that. Think of a specific incident where your child did this behavior. Now I want you to think about that incident. Bring it up in your mind, hold it in your mind. Close your eyes if you need to and draw the image up in your head. Take some time to recall how you were feeling.



Whilst visualizing the incident, ask yourself the following two questions.

- ▶ **QUESTION:** (1) What do you say to yourself in the moments that the behavior is happening? What does your inner voice say to yourself at that moment?

A common response here is to say what you think about the child, like “He’s never going to stop; He is doing this on purpose,” etc. If this happens ask yourself the question again, emphasizing What do you say to yourself?

- ▶ **QUESTION:** (2) Put yourself back in that moment, what feeling do you have in your body when you are in that situation? Where does the stress/tensions/tingling/heat reside in your body?

If you struggle to identify the feeling, practice a short body scan to support awareness.

We are looking to see the core issue that you are struggling with from your own history. For example:

- *I’m going to die/He is going to kill me*
- *I want to hurt my child*
- *I feel out of control*
- *I hate my child*
- *I am a bad parent/person*
- *I am a failure*
- *I cannot protect my other children*
- *I’m trapped*
- *It will be this way forever*
- *I will lose everything I love*
- *I’m alone/no one will ever help me*
- *No one cares about me*
- *My needs aren’t important*

Once you have identified your core negative belief, try to remember the first time you felt the same way? Have you been in a similar experience before? When is the first time you can remember a similar feeling or thought?

If you can remember a similar situation from your childhood, there is likely a connection with why the specific behavior in their child is causing you the most distress and hampering your ability to stay regulated. If you can't remember or make a connection, don't push it. It may come at a later time, as there is often a historic reason why one may "lose it" or become dissociated/ineffectual around certain behaviors.

- ▶ **ACTION:** What do you tell yourself about yourself as a parent? What does this mean about you as a parent?

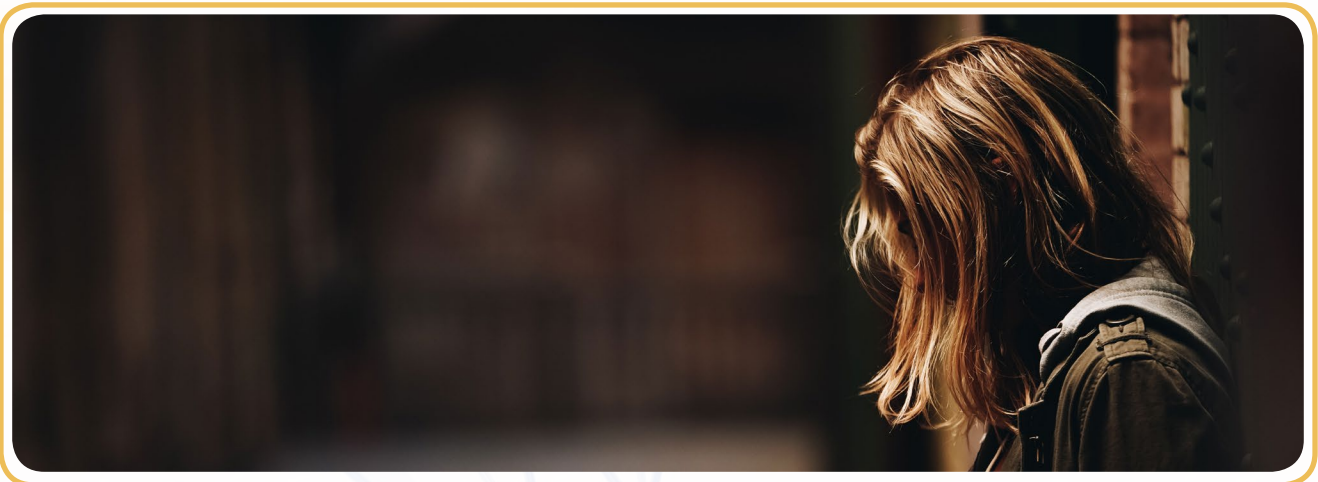
Write the core answers down from the above questions and exercises to create a self statement. For example: "why don't I have what it takes to make this better?"





- **ACTION:** Think of another time now; the first you can remember having a feeling similar to this feeling with your child. A lot of times the things that make us feel the most stressed are things we experienced in our earlier lives that have a similar flavor. They give us the same feeling of being overwhelmed, like we can't cope, or it takes us into strong feelings of anger or withdrawal.

If you have that earlier incident in your mind, the first thing I want you to note is that **the physical symptoms you are experiencing is an autonomic nervous system response and it's Not. Your. Fault.**



When you feel overtaken by powerful negative feelings, overwhelmed or disconnected, or when you feel rage or shame, those are automatic responses in your nervous system. They are not in our control and can feel frightening, so we may respond by checking out or getting angry. But these automatic responses can and will pass. This is not a failure on your part – it is a survival mechanism that served a function at another time in your life. There is nothing wrong with you. You can get back to a better, more present state of mind if you gently ride out the automatic response. You can do that by:

STEP 1

Paying attention to the feeling you have in your body and focusing on it without judgment.

**STEP 2**

Identifying the negative thought that comes into your head and acknowledging it without becoming attached to believing it.

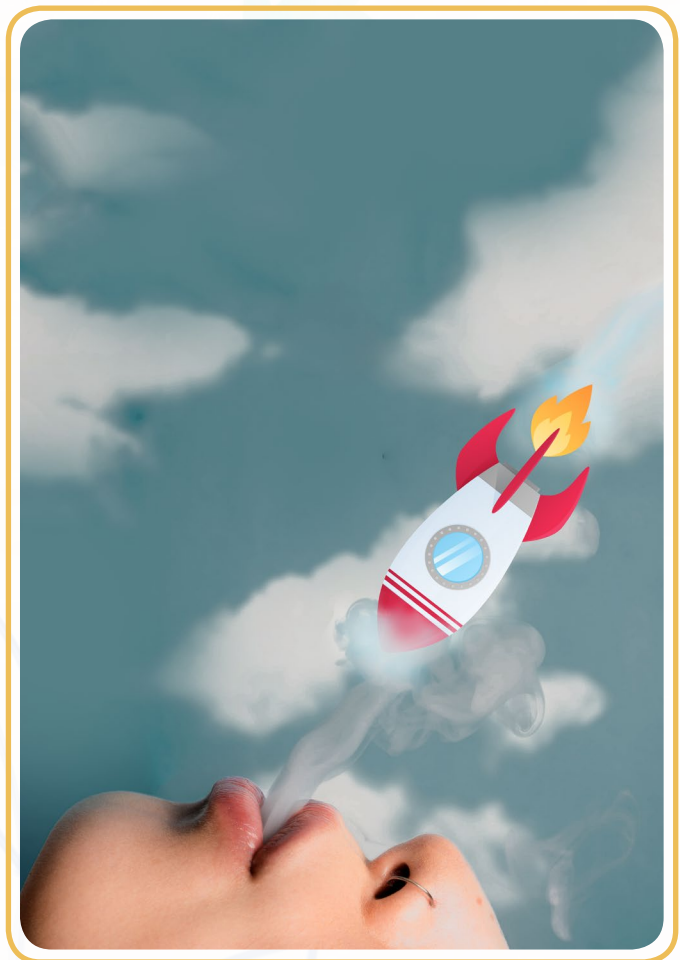
**STEP 3**

Taking 4 belly breaths - inhaling for a count of 7 and exhaling on a count of 8.

► **ACTION:** Are you willing to practice this with me?

Let's walk through the following steps.

- **THERAPIST:** Now we're going to think about an experience you had in the past and try an exercise in extending self compassion through a visualization.
- Close your eyes if you feel safe enough.
 - Conjure up the incident in your head and give me a thumbs up when you are picturing the incident.
 - Tune into your body and focus on the feeling in your body.
 - Now imagine that you are sending a vessel into your body with a message. This vessel is able to travel through your body and settle on the places that are feeling the stress or strain associated with this experience. What is the vessel for you? It might be a capsule, rocket ship, bubble - what works for you?
 - When the vessel arrives at the location in your body, imagine it opening and letting out a message of self-compassion. What is the message of self compassion that this vessel carries? It could be "This is not your fault," "You didn't do this one purpose," Or, "You are not a bad person". "It is your nervous system's way of trying to protect you. Trying to keep you safe."
 - *Guide them to take 3 deep breaths with a 7 / 8 count. 7 count inhale, 8 counts exhale. Do the breathing with them.*
 - Open your eyes.



Process what that was like. Make a note of your experience of the process and how you feel.

- ▶ **SUMMARY:** What we practiced is bringing together the experience of feeling that stress, strain, and tension along with an awareness of your body and how you feel and loving messages of self compassion. Combining those things with this breathing technique teaches your autonomic nervous system that it can move through the strong feelings by using your breath as a tool. We can exercise our mind this way to help pass us through stressful times at home and teach our body to calm down so we can be available to our kids.



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