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“I Can’t Take It Anymore”--How to Manage Conflict

Steps for helping an upset, angry or stressed out child:

1. Slow down (possibly sit down)
2. Breathe (to calm self, to notice how you are feeling)
3. Remind yourself that you are a good parent (“I can handle this”)
4. Put yourself in the child’s shoes...Focus on what is underneath the behavior. What does he/she need from you?
 - a. Support/Help
“Homework is hard...let’s just focus on this part first.”
 - b. Attention
“I’ve been gone all day...let’s find something to do together.”
 - c. Food
“Dinner is late...I am o.k. with you having a banana while I finish getting it ready.”
 - d. Sleep
“I think you are too tired. I’ll write a note to your teacher and tell her we will do your homework tomorrow night.”
 - e. Less stimulation
“You and your brother need some time apart. I want you each to play in your own rooms for a while.”
 - f. More stimulation
“I can see you are bored. Let’s take a break and play a game together.”
 - g. Space
“I know you are mad right now. That’s okay. Sometimes I get mad too.”
 - h. Time
“I think you know what you need to do. I’ll be back in a little bit.”
 - i. Nurture
“I can tell that cut on your knee really hurts. Sit with me and let me hold you.”
 - j. Understanding
“Your friend really hurt your feelings. Can you tell me more about your friend? Sometimes she sounds really nice, but sometimes you fight...”
5. Take action (see above)
 - a. Set boundaries
 - b. Acknowledge feelings
 - c. Take responsibility for your part
6. Reconnect and repair (after any significant conflict)
 - a. Nurture
 - b. Say you’re sorry (when appropriate)
 - c. Play together
 - d. Make sure your child knows “it’s over” and you are happy to be with him/her again

The secret to managing conflicts with our children is to understand their feelings (i.e. put ourselves in their shoes) when they are upset, and then to repair our relationship with them afterwards (i.e. make sure they know we still love them and are not holding a grudge against them).

Children need help from their parents to learn to soothe themselves...to handle their anger and develop *self-regulation* skills. If we can stay calm when they are upset, work to understand their feelings, adjust our own behavior/expectations based on what our children need, and then reconnect with them when they are calm, our children will learn to self-soothe and will be better able to handle life’s stresses.