

Helping your child with their big feelings

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series. Today we will develop our ability to have more empathy and compassion toward our children. I will use an example scenario to help you, but you can think about your own child's upset or problem.

So, let's take a few moments to breathe and to come down into our body and calm the mind. Begin to feel your body breathing in and feel your body breathing out. You are becoming present here and now with your breath.

And you are meeting whatever comes into your awareness now with a gentle and caring attention, breathing with whatever you find.

And once you have a general feeling of more peace and calm in your inner environment, bring to your mind a time when your child was upset or frustrated about something. Picture how they looked - their body language for example - maybe they acted out, were crying or maybe not saying anything, just sulking

Now, leave that there in your mind and notice as you become aware of your body what emotions or feelings are arising within you. Maybe hurt, frustration or anger, especially if it's the third meltdown of the day. Is there anxiety there, or feelings of failure? Maybe some heat or cold are being felt, or a sharpness or edginess. Maybe compassion is there - a deep wish to want to help your child. Just see if anything comes up, and then offer yourself silent empathy: *"how human of me to feel bothered by this,"* or *"how human of me to feel this way when I see my child upset."*

Once some softening has been felt within you, imagine now that you are there with your child and they are upset in this way. How would it feel to use words such as this, towards them:

"I can hear that you are really frustrated or angry or sad about [for example Charlie at school saying you're stupid]" - use your own scenario if you have one here or just feel what it's like to use the example].

Say those words as if you were speaking to your child now. Start with, *"I can hear that you are"* or *"it sounds like you are..."* and name the emotion even if you are just guessing what it might be. You are trying to understand what is alive in them now.

And now rehearse saying something like this to your child: *"It sounds like Charlie's actions did not make you feel safe and part of the group today."* Use this example or your own scenario here if you have one, and rehearse it silently towards your child:

"It sounds like... [add in whatever happened] did not make you feel ... [add in how its left them feeling]"

Take your time, try to identify what needs weren't being met for your child or how the problem might have affected them. In this way you are letting your child know that you

understand their needs in that moment were not being met, or can understand how they felt at that moment.

In doing so, your child will begin to feel really listened to and understood in this way. Imagine how they might respond to that. What might they say back? Perhaps they open up a little bit more. Maybe they stop crying or whining. You can continue to give empathy towards them in this way. It might take a few rounds of these types words until you see a change in their body language, for example, more open and you continue until you feel more of a connection with them.

If someone else was involved in making your child feel this way and if you feel it would help, imagine encouraging your child to use empathy, to try and understand what might have been going on inside for that the person, to make them say such unkind things in the first place.

Saying something like this to your child, like we used in the example: *“I wonder if Charlie was having a bad day today, feeling frustrated himself maybe, and didn’t realise how hurtful those words could be to you.”* Come up with your own sentence, based on the scenario you’re working on, if you have one.

Then finish by saying to them: *“Would you like a cuddle from me?”* or *“Might it make you feel a little better right now if we have a cuddle, or make you your favourite hot chocolate, or put your favourite tv show on?”*

So, all together it might sound something like this:

“I can hear that you are really sad about Charlie calling you stupid today. It sounds like Charlie’s actions did not meet your needs to feel safe and part of the group at school today. I wonder if Charlie was having a bad day himself and he didn’t realise how hurtful those words could be to you. Would you like a little cuddle from me right now?”

Have a go at rehearsing your own empathic and compassionate chat with your child now. Remember, you are just testing these words out. They might not be perfect or right first time. This might be new to you, so just a have try.

Ask yourself how much does it mean to you to take away the suffering of your child right now in this scenario, and feel how this more caring interaction feels to you in both body and mind.

When our children feel understood and listened to, they are more likely to calm down, talk more freely and connect with you, and then we are calmer also.

Try it out for real next time your child is upset, and, again, don’t worry if the words don’t come in the most perfect way: it takes practice and consistency. Feel free to jot down the words that I’ve used to base your conversation on. See how it goes and how you both respond to each other.

Take care ‘til next time.