



How to Help Your Child Recognize and Understand Frustration

Frustration is a common emotion in young children and typically occurs when a child begins to discover the many things they would like to do, but simply cannot do yet. Frustration is a natural and healthy emotion and can provide a positive learning experience for a child. The feelings of frustration that occur when your child has difficulty communicating their needs or completing a task are signs that what they're doing is not working and perhaps they should try something different. You can show your child how to deal with frustration in a way that is useful for them. Most importantly, you must respond to frustration when it first arises before it changes into a more overwhelming feeling such as anger.



Two skills children must learn in order to deal with frustration are:

1. how to ask for help, and
2. knowing when to take a break!

Suggestions for Families

Notice and name when you, your child, or others, are frustrated. Explain that everyone, including adults, feels frustrated sometimes. You might say:

- **About yourself:** “I feel frustrated. I’ve tried three times to fix the vacuum and it is just not working! I am going to take a break. I will come back and try again when I feel calmer.”
- **About your child:** “It looks like you are getting frustrated! I see that you have been trying to build that tower and it keeps falling down! Let’s have a snack and then try again together.”
- **About others:** “That little boy looks frustrated. He can’t climb up the ladder on his own. I wonder if he needs some help?”

Show your child appropriate ways to respond to frustration. You might say to your child, “You can ask Daddy. Say, ‘Help please!’” Knowing when to take a break is also a skill that your child can learn. You can say, “I see you are frustrated. Let’s take a break. First, let’s do five jumping jacks and get some water. Then we can come back and try again!”

Puppets and toys are great tools for role playing situations that your child may be struggling with, such as trying to accomplish a task. “Wow, this train can’t get up the hill. He has tried four times and keeps rolling back down. He looks like he wants to cry. I wonder what he can do?”

Suggestions for Educators

Early learning and care environments are an opportunity for children to explore new concepts and try new skills. As a child attempts to become more independent, they often feel frustrated when they are not able to complete a task by themselves. An educator can help a child identify when they are feeling frustrated and prompt them to ask for help, try a new solution or take a break. For example, “You have been working so hard to fit that piece in the puzzle. You sound frustrated. Would you like some help?” As the child learns new skills to work through their frustration, they will become more confident in their abilities and eager to attempt new activities.

The Bottom Line

Childhood is full of frustrating moments. As young children explore their world they are faced with many challenges. There are numerous things they simply can’t reach, can’t buckle, and can’t climb on their own. From the child’s point of view, parents and other adults are always saying “No” to the activities and objects they want. It is important to help your child learn how to deal with this common experience. As a parent or caregiver, you can help your child learn how to recognize, understand and find solutions to their frustrations. Each time your child can work through frustration, they are learning a very important lifelong skill. Children who learn these skills are less likely to exhibit challenging behaviour and are better able to navigate life’s difficulties with confidence.

