

MISSION: CONTROL!

A BIG FEELINGS ADVENTURE!



Parent Power Pack

"Sharing Your Calm"

By

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When I share my calm with the children I work with, I see them shift from feeling threatened (because they lost a game or because they were asked to write a sentence, for example) to being ready to solve the problem, usually within minutes. The key is to acknowledge the words and feelings they express by being emotionally generous, extending grace, being present, and creating safety and connection.

As a pediatric occupational therapist, I model this for the parents with whom I work. They consistently report success when they implement this approach. They make comments such as, "I've never seen my child react that way before," or "That felt better for both of us."

Do you see the mom in *Mission: CONTROL! A Big Feelings Adventure!* doing this? Look at her body language. Notice the words she chooses to use. Pay attention to how she's listening and acknowledging. Imagine her tone of voice when she shares her calm with her son.

Knowing that you may be busy, preoccupied, stressed, short on sleep, physically and emotionally fatigued, taking care of others, trying to get out the door, managing other children, taking calls, and so much more, you might be saying, "This sounds like a lot of work and I'm exhausted!"

While I don't have a magic bullet, what I've learned from my experience with families is that the starting place is *self-care*. Like they say on airplanes, put your own mask

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on first so that you can be in a good position to help those around you. This applies here too.

Filling your cup (or at least keeping it from being empty), will likely require some strategic thinking and creativity. Start small. Make the experience meaningful. Incorporate “me” time into your day. If adding time for yourself seems impossible right now, give yourself permission to say “no” to something that doesn't serve you, and “yes” to what gives you life.

Here are a few ideas you might try:

Change the Scene

Spend time in nature.

Move from indoors to outdoors or vice versa.

Move to a different room and engage in a different activity.

Get Grounded

Sweep.

Clean.

Organize.

Engage in a routine.

Help someone.

Get Creative

Play music.

Read.

Do art or crafts.

Journal.

Read.

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Connect

Call a friend.

Spend time with a pet (in real life or virtually).

Look at photo albums of your child.

Spend time with your inner-self (meditation, mindfulness, connect with your faith).

Say kind things to yourself, e.g. with affirmations or mindset messages.

Play a game with someone.

Get Physical

Exercise.

Garden.

In order to have a sense of calm to share with your child during challenging moments, finding ways to nurture yourself is essential. In the story, Joseph's mom models sharing her calm so that Joseph can work through his feelings and ultimately turn off the TV.

Don't you wonder what self-care strategies she uses?

In the middle of the story, when Joseph felt threatened by his mom asking him to turn off the TV, he had a big reaction. That's because the thinking part of his brain was hijacked by the emotional part of his brain. The part of his brain that can regulate, problem-solve, think, and learn was trumped by the part that is responsible for survival. Not unlike Joseph, the same thing can happen to parents when they are the target of their child's big reaction.

To avoid responding emotionally, a parent, with herculean effort, can use self-talk to detach and control how he or she reacts. For example, *This is not an emergency; my*

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child needs my help to feel safe or My child is not in control and is having a difficult time. He or she needs me to be in control and wait patiently for the feelings to pass. Having the inner resources to get out of your head and into your heart in these challenging moments partly comes from taking care of yourself.

The importance of being your child's safe space is dramatically played out in Joseph's imagination: The Green HypnoZoids are the chemicals that flood Joseph's brain. They control him emotionally and prevent him from doing what's expected. They are positioned to continue controlling him but, because Joseph's mom is calm and able to lovingly give him a message of safety, the chemicals begin to lose power. He gains a little traction with his thinking brain and with all the will power he can muster, sends Gretchen for help.

Ultimately, The Green HypnoZoids are defeated when Gretchen fully powers up the willpower switch and they slink from the scene. At this point, Joseph is able to shut down his imagination and gain control of himself again.

The next time your child has difficulty doing what's expected, what can you do to be his or her safe space?

At the end of the story, once Joseph was back in control, he could begin to think about what was expected of him. His mom narrated what happened, without judgment or shame, acknowledging what she observed— his angry, disappointed, and conflicted feelings and aggressive behavior. She pointed out that his challenging feelings didn't stay forever and were actually changed into more positive feelings.

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Organizing the sequence of events, ascribing words to the feelings, teaching him that he can count on the feelings to pass, and that his body will calm all helped Joseph process what happened.

With this emotional support, Joseph can start thinking about solving the problem without being influenced by his Big Feelings. With his thinking brain back in control, Joseph calls upon memories of other times when he was able to do what was expected. When he needed help, a loving adult supported him with a playful solution.

Once snuggled in bed, his mom could help Joseph understand more about the incident on an advanced level. She notes several contrasts in order to further reinforce that feelings are not permanent, do not define you, are accepted, and change. This message helped Joseph feel connected with his mom, which gave him the courage to believe he could meet his mom's expectations. Feeling good about himself and the affirmation and encouragement of his mom, the scene ends with Joseph imagining himself being successful the next day. *Sweet dreams, Joseph!*

We all want our children to dream sweetly. What messages would build confidence, self-esteem, and willingness to do what's expected in your child? Practicing these messages with your child will build connection, confidence, and space to grow for each of you.

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Resources:

The Secret to Clara's Calm by Tamara Levitt

Calm (an app)

Possible self-care strategies:

<https://adoretheparenting.com/101-self-care-ideas-for-busy-moms/>

Here are some ideas to get you started thinking about your self-care plan:

Observations about yourself (and what do you make of that?)

What do you notice about yourself today?

What motivated you to keep on going?

Do you see a difference in you/your child when you have taken time for yourself versus when you have not?

If you tried something out of your comfort zone today, how did you make that happen?

Was there someone who helped you today?

Was there someone you helped today?

What did you learn today?

What successes did you have today?

Did you feel stuck today on anything? What was it and what caused you to feel stuck?

What did you put a lot of effort into today?

Was there something new that you tried today?

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Observations about your child (and what do you/your child make of that?)

What do you notice about your child today?

What motivated your child to keep on going?

What did your child learn today?

What successes did your child have today?

Did your child feel stuck today on anything? What was it and what caused your child to feel stuck?

What did your child put a lot of effort into today?

Was there something new that your child tried today?

Observations about goals

What worked that you can plan to do again?

What is not working that you plan to change?

Please share your experiences with other families online.

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