



How to Stay Calm When Your Child is Having a Meltdown

FIVE MINDFULNESS STRATEGIES TO FIND YOUR OWN CENTER DURING THE STORM

Kate Lynch

It is possible to maintain empathy and harmony in the most challenging moments. I've done it. I don't always succeed but I have done it, so I know it is possible.

I'm a meditation coach and an inclusive yoga teacher. I've been advocating for my autistic son for nearly 10 years and teaching atypical families for 20 years. I specialize in using breath patterns, mindfulness and gentle yoga to build resilience to anxiety. My practice has helped me become more present and patient with my family, and with myself.

How do you stay calm when your child is having a meltdown? Avoiding a child's triggers is ideal, but we all know a meltdown will happen eventually. If you can learn emotional self-regulation and some mindfulness tools, I believe you will be happier and less anxious. You will also be better able to handle the emotional outbursts when they happen. My hope is that the crises won't feel so dire and debilitating.

Your Child's Meltdowns

Can you remember the last time your child had a meltdown? How did you feel? Is it a blur? Did you go numb? Did you freeze, scream, grab, run and hide, or hold your breath?

I've done all of those things and it didn't go well. I have come to realize that when my child has a meltdown, I need to change the one person which I do have control over: myself. I've slowly trained myself to call upon mindfulness and compassion during a meltdown.

Mindfulness means paying attention, on purpose, without judgement. Compassion encompasses mindfulness, as well as caring and an urge to relieve suffering.

Mindfulness and Compassion: The Two Pillars of Awareness

Try the following in order to practice mindfulness and compassion.

First, recognize what is right in front of you, without trying to change anything. Accept what is true in the moment, taking it in without judgement. Detachment doesn't mean complacency. Accepting the truth is a first step towards change. When you see what's happening, you have a chance to shift the dynamic.

Have you ever stared out a window without really seeing the window? Have you had that moment when you focus on the window and notice a smudge or something distorting your view? That moment of focus is something you can't undo. What if you didn't judge the smudge or wipe it away immediately? What if you simply noticed the effect it had on your view? Would you be able to see a little more clearly? That clarity is an example of mindfulness, which isn't for escaping our feelings or shutting out the world. Equanimity happens when we can be with what is, without judgement.

Second, recognize how much you care. The reason that your child's meltdowns are stressful to you is because you care so deeply about him/her. I care about my family and long for harmony. I dare to desire joy and contentment for our atypical family, including for myself. In your moment of recognition, you might place a hand on your heart and remind yourself, "This isn't my fault," or "I am not alone." When we feel common humanity with other parents, we can eradicate shame. Nothing is beyond the reach of our compassion.

Apply Mindfulness Techniques During Challenging Parenting Moments

A regular self-care practice will build neural pathways you can rely on during a crisis. Then, your child can rely on you to help them co-regulate.

Practice mindfulness techniques when things are calm. Then, practice when you feel slightly triggered or annoyed. The next step is to practice after a meltdown when the dust has settled. Finally, the day will come when you can call on simple mindfulness techniques at the peak of your child's meltdown.

Once I had mastered this process, I was surprised by how close I felt to my son in the moment of a meltdown. I had feared that distancing my emotions from him would cause me to feel cut off from him. Surprisingly, that was not the case. I was able to be with him with more tenderness and perspective because I held on to my center. I was fully present.

5 Simple Mindfulness Strategies

I have found the following five mindfulness strategies to be helpful in dealing with meltdowns.

1 Affirmation

Repeat a short phrase that resonates with you and which reminds you of your **parenting values**. For example, "We've got this," "It's not an emergency," or a single word like "Patience" "Kindness" or "Love." Choose your affirmation. Say it out loud. Write it down ahead of time, and put it somewhere you will see it often. Remember what's most important.

2 Move

Ground yourself in your body. Reach up, rock, jump up and down, shake your hands out, hug yourself, rub your shoulders, tap your chest or wiggle your toes. Do **something** to ground yourself in your body.

3 Self-Regulate

Self-regulation is not always easy. Name what you're feeling right now. Notice where you feel it in your body. Then, think of something for which you're grateful. See if that can help you shift your own energy to calm. Remember that you are the adult, and your child relies on you to co-regulate.

4 Self-Compassion

Recognize that this is hard and that the meltdown will be over soon. Remind yourself that you're not alone. Other parents also feel this way. Remember that it isn't your fault. Put a hand on your heart. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to your best friend.

5 Breathe Out Slowly

Paying attention to your breathing can shift your nervous system. Imagine you are fogging up a mirror as you slowly exhale. Take twice as long to exhale as you do to inhale. Put a hand on your belly if it helps you connect to your breathing. If you remember nothing else during your child's meltdown, remember to breathe consciously.

Remember that these are for **you** to practice, not your child. If they are curious and want to try also, that's fine. Please keep the focus on yourself.

Along with these five strategies, consider the following principles to be nonnegotiable.

- **Safety** - Remove everyone from harm's way, including yourself. Stop your child from hurting anyone. Deep down, your child really doesn't want to cause harm. In public, "*walk, don't talk*" to get away from judgment and misunderstanding. Shielding your child from ignorant onlookers might be a higher priority in some communities than in others.
- **Respect** - You and your child are partners in life and can learn from each other. You both matter. Model using a respectful voice. If your child says something rude, remember that he/she may have difficulties communicating in the same way you do. Try not to take what is said personally, especially in the middle of a storm. When an individual is dysregulated, his/her brain cannot process language as well.
- **Trust** - Your child wants to do what's right. With your help, he/she will learn to self-regulate within his/her developmental ability. It can help to know that other families have these challenges too. Trust that, over time, the trend is moving in the right direction.

After the Meltdown: Repair

During a meltdown is **not** the time to teach. **After**, when the dust has settled, you can soothe, touch, take responsibility, apologize and forgive. Then, see what you can **both learn** from the event together. Whatever arises, no matter how challenging, can help us grow.

It might seem easier to not think about what happened until the next meltdown. In the long run, however, talking about what happened can be healing for everyone involved. This doesn't mean assigning blame. We can listen to each other and see what solutions come up. We can model taking responsibility for our part in the situation.

“ Anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone. ”

—Fred Rogers

In my family the meltdowns have reduced in frequency and duration over the years. There have been occasional surges, when our stress levels are high, but I can see a trend of more self-regulation.

Awareness has helped me so much in my parenting. Its components, mindfulness and compassion, help me gain perspective and understanding. I hope that practicing these simple tools will help you find empathy and harmony during your child's meltdowns.



Kate Lynch is a meditation coach and inclusive yoga teacher (Healthy Happy Yoga). She has been teaching and cultivating community since 2002. In her role as Ocean's mama, she continues to learn about advocacy, emotional balance and neurodiversity. Kate specializes in supporting anxious parents of atypical kids with the mindfulness, resilience, and self-care tools that help her get through the day.

Mindful Meltdown Cheat Sheet: <https://healthy-happy-yoga.ck.page>

Please check out Kate's podcast: [Mindfully Parenting Atypical Kids](#)

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