

Staying calm and neutral

When kids who have experienced trauma are Heating Up and Boiling, your ability to stay calm is one of the best ways to help them do the same.

Staying neutral helps you listen to kids and learn what does or doesn't work to help them. When kids are included in this learning process, your response strategies will be more effective. Remember, you may not always agree with how kids feel, but their feelings are valid. By acknowledging these feelings and helping kids to manage them, you're supporting their ability to regulate by themselves.

Here are helpful hints for staying neutral when kids are upset.

Before you approach them:

- Breathe. Take three deep breaths. Inhale through your nose, slowly and deeply, all of the way down to your belly. Hold it, then slowly exhale through your mouth. This will help calm and centre your nervous system
- Be positive. Remind yourself of a success you've had. Think about the people who care about you, or tell yourself something positive - for example: "I can handle this." "There isn't anything we can't work through." "This behaviour is not about me."

When you approach:

- Be as open and easy going as possible. Ensure your body language and tone of voice are calm and neutral, even if you're not feeling that way
- Voice your concern. Using a gentle voice, say something like: "I can see by your face that you are really angry. Can you tell me what's happening?" Or, "Sarah, you look sad. What's upset you?"
- Get down to their level. Be attentive and listen closely.
- Find ways to let them know you are listening. If they're angry, for example, say something like, "I can tell that this is really important to you and you feel angry." Continue to find other ways to tell them you understand what they are feeling. Say, for example, "I hear you really want to be with your friends and they're important to you. But you have an assignment due tomorrow."
- Problem solve. Whenever possible, support your kids to identify solutions that work for both of you. For example: "Can I help you come up with options we're both happy with?" Or, "How can I help you feel better - would you rather sit and watch TV with me or listen to some music?"

