“Why is Jonny not listening to me? I’m just trying to help!”

I was asked this question by a parent I was working with. When her three-year-old son Jonny became frustrated, he would yell and throw items across the room. This mom would try and talk to Jonny, but he would look the other way, like he was ignoring her! Mom became frustrated that this scene was happing a few times a week, so she came to me for help. She wanted to know how to prevent little Jonny from having these meltdowns.

Have you ever felt this way as you watch your child throw a tantrum? You are not alone! According to Robert Plutchick, professor emeritus at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, more than 90 different emotions have been identified! Wow! Children, like adults, have to learn how to deal with this GIGANTIC range of emotions. When you watch your child instantly transform from a happy child to an angry child (in a matter if seconds), it isn’t because they are unstable monsters. These little beings don’t know how to process the emotions they are experiencing.

There are 3 stages in resolving a conflict. Unfortunately, humans aren’t born with these skills. They are taught to us through life experiences, social expectations and loads of patience! Back to the original question… “How do you help your child learn how to problem-solve without throwing a tantrum?”

**The 3 Steps to DeCoding Tantrums:**

**Step 1)** **Process Emotions** - Feelings are intense! Young children haven’t experienced all of the different emotions that you have, nor have they had the practice to develop self-control. When they feel their body start to “fume” they immediately react. Reactions don’t involve thinking about WHY they feel the way they feel. This is why you see young children throwing objects (that they are frustrated with), hitting the toddler sitting next to them (because they are in their space) or kicking at mom when she is trying to hard to get her to sit still in the car seat (even though the child doesn’t want to go anywhere).

What do you do in this situation? The initial reaction I hear from mom’s are: “I try to talk to them, to encourage them to stop.” Sadly, this approach doesn’t work often. Your child is so upset that they don’t hear a word that you are saying. They aren’t ignoring you on purpose, they really are engulfed in their feelings, not sure what to do next.

So what is the answer? Your child needs time to calm down. Let’s view this situation from an adult’s point of view. Let’s pretend that last week at the office, your boss came in and told you that you have to start numbering all the documents you print by hand. Yes… by hand! Instead of using the auto fill page numbers on the computer. Although there is good reasoning behind this decision (not all reports are completed in the order they are in on the computer) – this will take hours (many more hours) in your workday to complete. HOURS!!! You don’t have time for that!!!!!

So what do you do? Adults seek out calming sensory activities when we feel stressed or upset - such as sipping coffee, chewing gum, going on a walk/run, putting on fragrant hand lotion or smelling essential oils. Take a deep breath in, and chug forward cause hey… it’s your boss and you will just have to figure it out. Maybe, once you are calm and thinking clearly, you are able to come up with a simple solution that will make everyone happy.

How did you learn to calm down without yelling back, scream at your supervisor or throw the pen (you now have to number all the pages with) across the room? Throughout your life, you learned what techniques help you calm down.

What is that go-to technique that you use?

Little Johnny, from the story above, hasn’t learned these techniques yet. Instead, he is throwing that pen across the room saying “no way”! How are we, as parents and educators, supposed to teach young children how to find their own “Soothing Strategy?”

I have been working with young children for over 15 years, and have learned that talking to children while they are “fuming” just doesn’t work. Children need time to calm down and process their emotions. Soothing Sammy is here to help!

I created the set “Soothing Sammy” to help all young children learn safe and effective calming strategies. Sammy is this sweet Golden Retriever who teaches children a variety of sensory strategies they can use to calm down. When the children become upset, they visit Sammy at his house who lends them some items that helps them calm down. In the story “Soothing Sammy” these items include: a scent to smell, a snack to crunch, a ball to squeeze and more! This teaches children practical self-soothing/calm-down techniques.

The Sammy set includes a Golden Retriever stuffed animal (plush toy) that children build their own Sammy dog house for (out of the box that the Sammy Set is delivered in). Parents learn how to identify what their child could use to calm down, adding those objects to Sammy’s house. When your child gets upset, they visit Sammy’s house and use the items to calm down.

Once children are calm, they can continue to problem solve:

**Step 2) Communicate feelings.** Once Children are calm, an adult can ask them how they are feeling and why they are upset. Your child should now be able to communicate what is bothering them.

**Step 3) Problem-solve** . Once you and your child have identified why they are upset, you can help them solve the problem. Talk your child through what happened, what caused them to become upset and how you can fix it together. Including your child in this conversation creates an opportunity for them to remember solutions to their problem, so they can implement it next time the situation occurs.

The Soothing Sammy set comes with an 80 page parent guide, guiding parents through these questions and offering positive parenting solutions to a variety of common situations (such as eating out in restaurants, going on long car rides, going shopping, sharing with siblings, leaving the park, waiting in a long line, etc).

The children's book, along with Sammy the plush dog and parent guide was created to support stress-free parenting. When parents have a plan, they are more confident, able to stay positive and learn how/why their little angels are acting the way they are.

About the Author – Jeana Kinne, MA is an Early Childhood Developmental Specialist. She has worked as a parent educator, Preschool Director and Early Intervention Specialist with children with special needs. She loves working with families, providing them with solutions to common parenting concerns, resulting in stress-free parenting! Follow her blog to learn more parenting tips and strategies that support parents navigating through some of the most difficult and puzzling aspects of parenting at www.jdeducational.com