

Ep #41: When Your Kids Push Your Buttons: How to Not Lose Your Cool



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Did you make a resolution to be a calmer parent or maybe stop yelling at your kids in 2025? We're gonna talk all about that. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello, and welcome back to Parenthood Prep, the podcast that prepares you for parenthood. We had a slightly longer holiday hiatus than I was hoping for. We played some great reruns of some really popular episodes, so I hope everybody enjoyed those if you didn't get to listen to them the first time around.

Then I was supposed to be back last week and I had a bad case of strep throat, which is, in fitting with my career, a disease for children. Doctors are always shocked. I get it about once a year and I'm like, I think I have strep. And they're like, meh, adults don't really. Literally a doctor said to me, adults don't really get strep as he was looking at my positive strep test.

So anyway, we are back. My voice is a little sexier than normal. I always think of that Friends episode where Phoebe has a cold and she's doing all like the throaty voiced music, you know, in between all the coughing and the nose blowing.

So the episode that we are going to do today, I've had planned for a while and our production team was like, you know, it's January, everybody wants episodes about resolutions and new year, new me and that kind of stuff. And I was like, well, screw that. Because first of all, I don't think you ever need a new you. I think you're the same you and you just need to get a little happier and have a little more love and compassion for yourself and for others. But also it's January. Who wants a new anything in January?

But I think there's a lot of parenting resolutions that people have. And I want to talk about some of them, one in particular and sort of all the ones that stem from

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that, that I think is really important to really look at how we think about it. And that is yelling at your kids.

A lot of parents, I think moms especially, have this mindset of, I want to stop yelling at my kids. Yelling at my kids makes me a bad parent. I lose my temper. I can't control myself. They don't deserve it. I scream at them and then I feel terrible.

And that means I'm a bad parent. First of all, I think anyone who thinks they are a bad parent is sort of automatically a good parent because it means you care enough about your kids to judge the way that they are being parented. I don't think it's great. If I could wave a magic wand, I would take away all the guilt and shame and questioning that parents have and just have all the good parents know that they are good parents and that they are doing the best they can for their kids.

So you're not a bad parent if you sometimes yell at your kids. I want to talk about not how you can berate yourself or how you can beat yourself up into no longer getting frustrated or no longer yelling at your kids, but how you can think about it in a different way. And in thinking about it in a different way and doing a couple of different things differently in a way that's going to make everyone happier, yourself and your kids included, you're going to do less of the stuff that you don't want to be doing just as a natural effect of these other things that you're going to do instead. If that sounded confusing, it should be, but we're going to get into more details about it.

First of all, let's talk about what is yelling or losing your temper or however you want to think about it. We're going to say yelling as a shorthand for getting frustrated with your children, saying things you don't mean, whatever, you know, no TV for a week, Santa Claus isn't coming to the house next year, you know, whatever.

First, let's pinpoint what exactly are those things that we're doing. So when it's yourself, think to yourself, what are these things that I'm doing that I'm not happy with? Is it that I spoke to my child in a louder voice than I find appropriate, who finds that appropriate? Is it ever okay to yell at your kids? What if your toddler is

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about to step off the sidewalk and run into the street and you yell, stop? Of course they're going to stop and that's yelling and you're doing it and in that situation it's warranted and it's okay. So don't think of it as something that is always a bad thing. Don't think about it even as something that is, you know, a bad thing even when there's no good reason for it. So what is it?

What are we doing? The second thing is to let go of the idea that there is a perfect version of you as a parent, that there is a perfect version of anyone as a parent or that there's a perfect version of anyone full stop. We all want to live in this fantasy world where we go through handling situations beautifully and perfectly. We never get into any bad moods. We never have confrontations or altercations or any kind of negativity.

And as one of my favorite coaches, Karl Lowenthal, says, we have an off-ramp to the human experience. We're not human. You are a human. You are a human parent and sometimes you're going to mess up. Loving yourself even when you've messed up will teach your kids to love themselves even when they mess up, which is such a huge thing you can teach them.

Another huge thing is that it's gonna happen, you're gonna do it, and you need to forgive yourself, and sometimes you need to apologize to your kid. Sometimes they don't deserve it, sometimes they're little shits. But, you know, pretty often, and we're gonna get into some examples, when you've lost your cool and you've yelled, it wasn't necessarily warranted or deserved or it was presented to them in a confusing way.

And when you model that you understand that that was not appropriate behavior and you apologize to your kids, that goes such a long way. Like, hey, I'm really sorry, mommy got frustrated and I expressed it in a way that I don't like and I'm sorry that I startled you or I'm sorry that I scared you. And I'm going to try really hard to not do that again. Now, put your effing shoes on so that we can go to the store. You know what I mean? It's not perfect.

So that leads me into the next thing. You have permission. Here's your permission slip. I'm signing it. I'm handing it to you. To think that being a parent sucks sometimes, to think that kids suck sometimes, and to think that your

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particular kid, while they are the most perfect, wonderful angel in the world, also sucks sometimes. That is okay. And when you tell yourself like, wow, today sucks, this situation sucks, you are supporting yourself through a sucky situation. My kid is not putting his goddamn shoes on and that sucks.

That is automatically going to take some of the wind out of your own sails. You are being a true friend to yourself at that moment. You're having compassion for yourself and you're saying, yeah, this sucks.

What you're not doing is getting mad at yourself for not being the perfect specimen of a Zen creature who accepts everything and loves everything or some kind of perfect Mary Poppins who can get their kids to put their shoes on as fast as possible and you can't do it. Because a lot of times, are you yelling at your kids or are you yelling at yourself or at the image of yourself that you wish you had that is not a real image. It's like one of those perfect model bodies that's actually totally photoshopped.

Those images of these perfect parents who never yell and never get upset with their kids are not true. They're not real. They're put on for television or for social media or whatever. Like those people are yelling at their kids, trust me. Or if they're not, they're doing something else that's even worse or they're shutting down and ignoring their kids.

I mean, I'm from New Jersey, I'm from the New York area. If your mom is not yelling at you like where is she, why is she out of the house because it's what parents do, they yell. And I think I'm focusing more specifically on parents socialized female because A, we're the ones that are taught that this sort of behavior is not okay, being angry is not okay, yelling is not okay and people socialized male are taught that it is perfectly okay to be angry, to yell, to do whatever.

So you may not be thinking, oh, I should stop yelling at my kids because you don't think it's bad or wrong or you're a horrible person for doing it. And that's great. I love that for you. The caveat there is that I don't think it's a great thing to express your anger all the time and have it be the only emotion you feel, but you are allowed to feel angry and think that situations suck sometimes.

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I've said this about newborns. You are allowed to get mad at your baby. Yelling at them isn't going to help, but you can feel that frustration and say, this baby is doing things that are making me not be the person that I want to be. You know, it's not your partner's fault and it's not your own fault and it's not anybody else's fault, it's just that babies suck sometimes. And so when you tell yourself, yes, this sucks, that's going to take the wind out of your sails a lot and it's going to allow you to be a calmer and more rational person.

Wanting to stop yelling or doing something that requires you to change something about yourself is not a great way to set goals. It's mean, it's mean to yourself. You wouldn't tell your kids, okay next year I want you all to be neater and stop fighting and fucking learn how to read already. You might think those things, but you're going to be supportive and encouraging to your kids. You're not going to tell them everything that's wrong with them. Maybe stop fighting because then that's something that they're doing to each other, but you're not going to say to your kids, oh, you know, next year I want you to be smarter, I want you to be taller, those are things that you can't change because they're part of being a human.

And when you try to tell yourself to stop yelling or stop reacting to things, you're telling yourself to stop being a human and become some sort of weird robot. And we don't want that. So we want to set goals to maybe have more compassion for ourselves, love ourselves a little bit more, understand that we are just human beings.

You know, thinking about having a little more patience, like maybe, but that's already sort of telling yourself that your impatience is a problem, and it's not. It's part of being a human. So remembering that kids are little assholes sometimes. They do a lot of frustrating things and you're allowed to feel frustrated about it. However, you can set yourself up for success so that when these things happen that are frustrating you don't lose your mind.

And what that gets into is I think a lot of gentle parenting, which is a concept I love. Not the yelling and screaming at your kids that our parents' generation did, not punishing your kids, not saying, oh, you dropped something on your pants,

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you have to go to timeout, or you threw a toy, you have to go stand in the corner and be punished. Like, those things don't work.

But gentle parenting has kind of a dark side to it, which is that I think people do, you know, gentle parenting, gentle parenting, oh, quiet hands. Oh, we don't do that. Oh, we don't hit our friends. You know, oh, let's check in about how our friend feels about you throwing toys at them. And you're using all of your own emotional energy in these situations to be more calm than you can manage and then the littlest thing happens and you're out of emotional energy, you're out of calm and you lose your mind.

So what I'm going to recommend and what you end up in is this gentle parenting that completely flips on his head and turns into this rage parenting that I want to call like the rage pendulum. Let's call it that, the rage pendulum where you're like, okay, the pendulum's all the way over here. I'm so nice. I'm so nice. But as it's moving more towards the middle, I'm being so gentle. I'm being so loving and being so caring. And then what you're actually being is overly permissive, not setting boundaries, not respecting your own boundaries. And then you get pushed over the edge into rage.

And I have seen this so many times, and it's in myself too, but mostly in parents because you're the ones that are with your kids all the time, teachers and nannies and grandparents and all them. We are not with your kids 24-7 the way you are. So we have more emotional energy for those short periods of time than you have. And that's another thing, forgive yourself if you are freaking out at your kid and somebody that's not around them all the time isn't, because they get to go home and not have to worry about a kid putting his shoes on before you go to Target.

So when you have rules, when you have guidelines, when you have things that you know are important to you, like say, making a big mess. You don't love when there's a huge mess. You want the house to be neat and tidy, but of course, they're kids, so they're going to make some kind of a mess. Don't let them dump everything out, throw things all over the place, take out the Play-Doh, throw it on top of the toy cars.

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Now everything's out and your sensory system is on overload and your desire for neatness is gone and you're maxed out and then you freak out and you start throwing the toys out the window. Who am I talking to? My own mother maybe, maybe who? I don't know. And that is the exact opposite of what you want.

So is that a situation where you're losing your cool, where you're yelling a lot? Let's take it a step back. Let's walk it back three steps. Don't let them take out multiple things at once. If they want to take something out and dump it out, great. Now you're playing with the cars. Okay, now you want to play with the Play-Doh. We're going to clean the cars up and we're going to take the Play-Doh out. Oh, you don't want to? Okay, that's fine. Keep playing with the cars.

You know, have less stuff. I've talked about this in other episodes, you know, simplify, get rid of some of the toys. The point is not specifically what you're doing, but it's finding those triggers and not trying to push yourself past them.

My sister and I used to babysit for this family, so lovely. You know, she's still in touch with them. The boys are in college. It's wild. And the little one was kind of a terror. He was into everything. He was very active. And the mom would be so nice and so permissive and let him do whatever he wanted and let him get away with everything until he hit her limit, and then she would lose her cool.

And one day I was there while she was still home and I watched her let him have whatever he wanted, let him do like three things I probably would have stopped him from doing. And then he spilled his juice, which was totally an accident. He spilled his juice. Kids spill their juice. I spill stuff sometimes too. And she lost her mind because it was the last thing, the last straw, it was the last thing that she could handle. That rage pendulum pushed all the way to rage.

And if she had just not let it get to that point, if she had stopped him from doing any of the things that were increasing the thermometer, I'm full of metaphors today, people.

It's a pendulum, it's a thermometer, you know what I mean, that was building up and up and up. She wouldn't have lost her cool over him spilling. She would have been like, oh, hey, oh man, buddy, that was an accident. Let's get the paper towels, let's clean it up. And she wouldn't have screamed at him for

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something that was a reasonable accident that he did not deserve to be screamed at for.

Some of the other things he was doing earlier, he probably should have been not screamed at, but had a boundary set, been stopped. My sister always tells the story of it was before dinner and he was asking for a popsicle and the mom kept saying, no, no, no, you can't have a popsicle. And he kept asking, you know, we're about to have dinner, you can have a popsicle after dinner. And he kept asking, and then she was like, fine, you can have a popsicle. And she gave him a popsicle. And I guess he ate it. And then she gave him another popsicle.

And all you're doing in that moment is teaching them that they have to keep asking in order to get what they want. If they knew that no popsicle till after dinner actually means no popsicle till after dinner, you would not end up in these situations where you're giving them two popsicles and then you're mad at yourself for crossing your own boundary and quote unquote "giving in".

So now the next thing that happens, you're gonna scream, oh my God, you had two popsicles, what more do you want? Like, that's not the kid's fault. I mean, it is the kid's fault because he was acting kind of like a brat, but you need to know where your limits are and you need to set them way before.

When I was a teacher, we'd make classroom rules, usually do them like with the kids collaboratively or whatever. I would not make the rule the absolute maximum thing that I could handle. I would up it 20% or whatever so that when the rule was inevitably broken or pushed past the limit, it wasn't pushing me to the absolute end of my rope where I was losing my mind.

So setting those boundaries before you lose your mind, being a little bit more of an authoritative parent and saying, no, we don't have popsicles before dinner. No, we're not going to throw the toys. Okay, now you've thrown the toy again. I'm taking the toy. The toy is going into timeout. Whatever your discipline is, don't just give in and give in and let them do whatever and let them do whatever until you reach the end of your rope.

You are allowed to set those boundaries. You are allowed to say, I do not like being interrupted when I am talking to another adult unless it's an emergency.

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The number of times I've been like with a sleep training family or with a newborn family and maybe the older child is three or four, and I'm talking to the parents or the mom, and they're in, Mommy, Mommy, wait, look at this, look at this, Mommy, I want juice, Mommy, look at this. And the mom says, Charlie, it's rude to interrupt. Now what do you want? What is that teaching the kid? What is that teaching him?

It's teaching him that if he interrupts, he's going to get responded to. He's going to get what he wants. But if you said, I'm talking right now, I will respond to you after I'm done talking, and then you continue talking, even if they continue trying to interrupt and you don't give them what they want with or without a reprimand, you are not going to lose your cool. You are going to have a kid who learns that it's not cool to interrupt when you're having a conversation with someone else, or at least that they need to say, excuse me, or whatever your boundary is that you have set.

So when you set those boundaries, you're not going to push that rage pendulum all the way to the other side and flip out and lose your cool. It's still going to happen sometimes. But when the groundhog is there and you're not going from a lovely angel goddess earth mother who just wants to love everybody and let everybody do whatever they want, then you're not also going to flip that on its head and turn into a crazy screaming rage monster because you set those boundaries.

Does that make sense? I'd love to hear more from you about this on Instagram.

We have a post every Monday about the podcast episode. I'd love to hear your thoughts, what you think, if you have any tips or suggestions. How did you start loving yourself more as a parent? How are you showing yourself more compassion in 2025? Tell me all about it. I can't wait to hear.

To be sure you never miss an episode, be sure to subscribe in your favorite podcast app. We'd also love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram @happyfamilyafter, or at our website HappyFamilyAfter.com. On our website, you can also leave us a voicemail with any questions or thoughts you might have, and you can roast your baby. Talk to you soon.

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