

This week's skill:

Managing Frustration



Young children face frustrating situations constantly in their daily lives. They may feel frustrated because:

- they are unable to complete tasks successfully, as they have not mastered the necessary skills, such as doing up buttons, using scissors, kicking a ball, riding a bike;
- they're not allowed to do things and can't understand why;
- they have trouble sharing and waiting to take turns;
- things do not turn out as planned – paintings don't look right, equipment isn't available, puzzles are difficult, plans are changed, for example.

Some children do not handle feelings of frustration well and lack the skills needed to calm themselves down.

Other children have a very strong sense of justice and become frustrated when they think things are unfair.

Frustration is often hard to avoid and can lead to a lot of conflict, anger and tears. Children need help to learn the skill of handling frustration through watching the way adults and other children manage it, and through practice.

What your child learnt this week

The words 'mad', 'annoyed', 'angry' or even 'cross' and 'cranky' may be used by your child to refer to feelings of frustration. The situations discussed in this session related specifically to managing frustration. Four steps for dealing with frustrating situations were introduced:

1. Stop.
2. Take three deep breaths to blow your angry feelings away.
3. Say or think 'I can do it' or another appropriate positive statement, such as 'Keep trying' or 'I'm angry but I'll calm down'.
4. Try again (if appropriate).

Managing frustration enables children to keep trying, to complete tasks and to learn new skills.



Supporting this skill at home

In addition to helping children learn how to manage feelings of frustration, it is also essential to look at ways of preventing unnecessary frustration.

- Set up your child's environment carefully – provide safe play areas so that you don't have to continually say 'no', 'be careful' or 'don't touch that'.
- Avoid making promises that you may not be able to keep, for example going to the park may not be possible in the rain.
- Give children warning of what's coming up next so there are no surprises. 'Daniel, when this show finishes it will be time for bed.'
- Be alert for signs of frustration and help your child label how he or she may be feeling (see also the Parent Information for Session 6). 'The way you're trying to force that puzzle piece in makes me think you're annoyed.'
- Praise children for trying again. 'That tower you built looks great. It was good that you tried again after the first one fell over.'
- Give your child time and support to solve his or her own problems and to come up with his or her own solutions.
- Do not give children things that are too difficult for their age group – avoid giving small Lego to a three-year-old, for example.
- Coach children to learn to do new things – for puzzles, start with corner pieces or pieces of the same colour and for painting, start from the top of the page.
- Model for your child the four steps for dealing with frustration (see previous page). If you think your child is *starting* to get upset tell him or her to stop, take three slow, deep breaths and say something calming. Remember you must be quick, before your child gets too upset to practice the skills.



Going to the park may not be possible in the rain.