



Parenting

### 10 Things to Say Instead of 'Stop Crying'



As a parent, you deal with a LOT of feelings on a daily basis. Right? And sometimes, it can all get to be just a little bit much! When you've had what seems like hours of multiple people crying at you, the temptation to make it stop is high!



We've all said it, or at least thought it. 'Stop crying! Just stop!'

Or maybe you heard it as a child?

"Don't be silly"  
"Shh, everyone is looking at you"  
"Stop that noise, right now!"  
"Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about!"

But what if I told you that every time you dismiss or minimise your child's feelings, you actually make your job **harder**. You very rarely succeed at making them stop anyway, and it's more likely that they will need *more* support from you in the future rather than less. If you don't hear the message they are trying to send you, the messenger just gets louder and louder until you do. Children are looking for empathy and understanding. If they don't get it, they'll keep trying.

**Crying is ok.** It's a very healthy and necessary way for children to express their feelings, and we don't need to make them stop. By telling them to 'stop crying' we send the message that their feelings are not important, not valid, silly, and annoying. If we want our children to learn how to regulate their emotions, and to trust us with their problems and feelings, then we cannot be dismissive of them when they try to do this!



**Crying is always appropriate.** Whatever your child is upset about is valid. It might seem trivial to you, but a child does not have an adult perspective on the world. Oftentimes people struggle most with allowing children to express their feelings in public, thinking that it is not an appropriate setting and worrying about other's reactions or judgement. But let's not teach them they need to quiet their feelings for others. They will eventually learn our unspoken social rules. One day they will know how to deal with their feelings and express them at times that adults consider 'appropriate', but the way we support the development of emotional regulation is by empathy and understanding, not silencing.

"Listen earnestly to anything your children want to tell you, no matter what. If you don't listen eagerly to the little stuff when they are little, they won't tell you the big stuff when they are big, because to them all of it has always been big stuff."

— Catherine M. Wallace



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Sometimes, even when you know that you shouldn't tell your child to stop crying, it's hard to know what to say instead! You might feel like you need to **do** something, but aren't sure exactly what. As a child if you were often required to silence your feelings for others, these situations can be incredibly uncomfortable. Having grown accustomed to pushing your own feelings aside, the experience of a child fully expressing their sadness, anger, disappointment, or any other negative emotion can be quite triggering. The good news is, practice makes perfect, and it can actually be quite healing for yourself to be able to support your child through their own emotions.

So, what **can** you say? Here's some suggestions!

You could also just say nothing! Sometimes no words are needed and physical comfort or presence is enough.

## What NOT to do When Your Child is Crying

**Don't distract.** When you distract your child from their feelings, you miss a chance to connect and help them learn the emotional regulation skills they will need in the future. You also send the message that their feelings are unimportant, or too much for you to handle. Children need to know that you are capable of dealing with their emotions so that they feel safe and capable too. It's also a pretty disrespectful way to respond. Imagine opening up to a friend or partner only for them to say 'ooh but look at my new puppy!' or something totally irrelevant. You would likely feel shut down, disrespected, embarrassed, and be unlikely to confide in them in the future.

**Don't punish.** Punishment and rewards are not a part of **respectful parenting**. Never punish, threaten, shame, blame, or judge a child for their feelings!

**No but's.** When you're empathising with your child's feelings, refrain from following it up with a 'but'. E.g. "You're sad because you really wanted another piece of cake, but you can't have one". 'But' kind of invalidates everything that comes before it. It tries to explain away or fix the feelings. There's no need to do that. Empathising is enough.

**Ask too many questions.** When your child is full of huge overwhelming feelings, they don't have the ability to provide answers to lots of questions. Empathise first, ask questions later.

**Say 'it's ok'.** People are well meaning when they say 'it's ok', 'you're fine', 'shh', but the thing is, your child is not fine right now. They don't feel fine, so even though you're trying to be reassuring, it can come across as minimising their feelings. A simple 'it's ok to cry' is a better option.

**Have a time limit.** Don't use empathy as a technique to ultimately stop the crying. That's not the goal! The aim is to help your child feel heard, understood, validated, and supported. That might take a while, especially if their feelings have been dismissed in the past. There might be a lot to get out! Don't try empathy for 5 minutes and then declare it 'doesn't work' because your child is still crying. Empathy is not a technique for control, but a way of meeting your child where they are and supporting them.

Next time your child is struggling with an overwhelming feeling, have some of the above phrases memorised and meet them with empathy and understanding. Because they deserve it. Feelings aren't something to be avoided, but opportunities for connection.

