

SOURCE LINES

Parents:

Keep your therMOMeters *and* therDADeters in check!

Parenting can be stressful. It can bring out a range of powerful feelings that are not always positive. Trying to deal with a child who is whiney, demanding and unreasonable can make us feel helpless and angry, especially if we ourselves are feeling tired and over-burdened. As frustrations escalate, tempers can flare up and we can find ourselves embroiled in the heat of yelling, screaming or even hitting at our children. It certainly was not how we planned to behave and definitely not the way we want to see ourselves in the role of parent. Living in a home that is frequently in a high negative emotional state is exhausting and demoralizing. Trying to re-adjust the emotional temperature of the family home can be challenging.

If you want to keep the physical temperature in your home at a comfortable temperature, you need only to set the thermostat and the heating or cooling system is automatically regulated. Unfortunately the emotional temperature of the home cannot be set as easily, it requires attention and monitoring. Keeping an even 'temperature' can be difficult when tired and hungry family members are reuniting at the end of the day. Parents have likely been battling rush hour traffic, perhaps having to have stopped for last minute groceries, and may have little energy left in reserve. Instead of 'winding down' for the evening, things are gearing up with dinner needing to be made, laundry needing to be done, and of course, getting kids to do their homework.

It is not surprising then to find that tempers are short and evening time can end up in screaming matches and tears. We often miss those first warning signs of

tension and stress. Take a moment to think about how your body experiences stress and anger. Some people begin to first feel anger in their muscles as they become tense. Some people feel their face flush and their heart beat faster. Others yet describe a sensation of becoming so focused on the issue that is making them angry that everything else becomes blurry.



thermometer

These physical sensations are a sign that anger has taken over your body and you are now producing the stress hormones known as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones are what gives us the capacity to 'fight or flight' in situations of danger. Research tells us

however, that exposure to prolonged or chronic stress can take a toll on our physical and psychological health. Increased risks for heart attacks, strokes, compromised immune systems, gastrointestinal difficulties are some of the ill effects that are related to stress in adults. In the case of children, prolonged exposure to the stress hormones actually alters the brain development so those areas involved in anxiety and fear response become hyper sensitized.

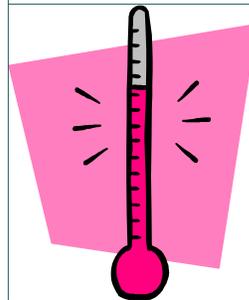
What can Parents do to keep a healthy and even 'emotional temperature' in the home?

1. **Time in.** Take the time to 'notice' and 'be' with your child when they are 'being good'. You are the most important 'audience' your child can have on his journey to developing

a good sense of self. All too frequently we will leave kids alone when they are being quiet, but quickly become engaged with them when they misbehave. The more time you spend paying attention to their good behaviour, the less time you will have to spend dealing with bad behaviour.

2. **Don't TIP (Take It Personally)** when your child misbehaves. Your child's misbehaviour is not always a reflection of you as a parent. All children test limits and try our patience at times.
3. **Realistic expectations:** Are you expecting too much of yourself as a working parent? Can housework wait? Can children skip their bath for one night?
4. **Is it a 'BIG THING' or a 'little thing'?** Choose your parenting battles. Your child's coat left on the floor or some 'attitude' in the voice is a 'little thing'. Having your child swear or hit you would be an example of a 'BIG THING' that requires your discipline. Learn how to ignore some of the 'little things'.
5. **Untwist your thinking.** Sometimes we see our child's misbehaviour as a sign that his or her future will be doomed if we don't correct it immediately. A child's occasional rude behaviour or lying does not fortune tell a future of unemployment, crime or jail! If you can challenge the way you think about things, you can change the way you feel.

6. **Self-Awareness.** Be aware of how 'anger' sneaks up on you physically. Look out for the tell tale signs of muscles tensing, heart beating faster, etc. Once you know the anger monster has a hold of you, you can find ways of turning the 'temperature' down.
7. **Self Care.** Learn relaxation strategies like deep breathing or meditation that will help you lower your blood pressure and calm your nerves. Soak in a warm bath. Go for a walk. Take time for yourself.
8. **Keep your TherMOMeters and Ther-DADeters in check.** Remember that buried in the word thermometer is the word



MOM (and DAD in ther-dadeter). Normal pressures of work and home responsibilities can squeeze you incredibly. Sometimes you might be struggling with other stressors as well, such as financial difficulties, marital problems, health concerns

therdadeter

or eldercare responsibilities that make it very difficult to manage an even temperature in your home. If you would like to speak to one of our counsellors about ways to 'lower the temperature' please don't hesitate to call us at **SOURCE LINE.**

"Those who trim themselves to suit everybody will soon whittle themselves away."

Charles M. Schwab

"The voice of conscience is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it; but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it."

Germaine De Stael

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