



Cope Out Loud

When we cope well, most of it happens inside our heads. We feel the frustration, take a breath, think through our options, and move on. Our kids usually just see the end result. When we don't cope well, everyone sees that.

So the goal is to make the hidden part more visible. I call this "Cope Out Loud." You narrate what you feel and how you move through a hard moment. Your kids can see and hear how you got from the big feeling to settling yourself to figuring out next steps.

One of my most common frustrations is when someone takes my parking spot or cuts me off in traffic. Anyone in the car knows it right away, usually from my "Ugh!" Then I might say, "That's so frustrating" or "That's not fair." Sometimes it even comes out as "That makes me so mad." I much prefer an "I feel" statement, but keeping it real, that's not always what comes out of our mouths. Then I'll say, "OK, deep breath." Sometimes I need another one. Eventually, I'll say, "I can't do anything about it, so I guess I'll just keep driving."

That's coping out loud in real life. It isn't always polished, and it doesn't always hit every step. It still counts.

Why It Works

Kids learn by watching. We'd like to think we can explain how to do something and they'll just do it, but knowing is different from doing. Seeing someone else do it makes the how much clearer. That's especially true with big feelings.

In the middle of a big emotion, the thinking part of the brain goes offline, so that's not the time for teaching. It's also why telling a kid, or anyone for that matter, to "calm down" doesn't work. If they could, they would! Learning happens in calmer moments, through watching how things are done and practicing. Over time, the words you use in your hard moments could become the words they use. We've all heard kids repeat things we'd rather they didn't say. Here, we get to use that to our advantage.

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How to Cope Out Loud

1. Name the problem and the feeling

"Well, that was unexpected. I'm so frustrated. I was really looking forward to going out tonight."

"Oh, that was embarrassing. My face is getting hot and my heart's pounding."

Naming what you notice in your body also helps kids connect physical cues to emotions, which is often the hardest part for them.

2. Say how you're calming yourself

"I need a minute. Let me take a deep breath."

"I'm going to step away and count to 10. I can't think straight right now."

This is the step kids rarely get to see. It also shows them that taking a pause is a smart move, not a punishment. Even better, use strategies your child might already know, like bubble breathing, rainbow breathing, star breathing, or heart breathing. Need some ideas? [[LINK: breathing strategies post](#)]

3. Brainstorm and problem-solve out loud

"OK, my plan isn't working. What are my options?"

"Ugh. OK. Maybe it's not THAT bad. Let me see."

"Bummer, our plans got cancelled. Maybe we can find another time to hang out."

When you come up with more than one option, kids see what flexibility actually looks like.

4. End with a coping statement

"I don't like it, but I can handle it."

"That was hard, but I got through it."

"Plan A didn't work. Good thing there's a Plan B."

"Not what I wanted, but this will work."

"That threw me off. It took me a minute, but I think I've got a plan."

Don't skip this step. These are the lines we want to stick. Your kids hear you say out loud that something was hard, and that you can handle it. You can even "stack the deck." Use examples and coping statements that echo what you'd love to hear your kids say.

Try it this week: Pick one small frustration, like traffic, a burned dinner, or spilled coffee, and narrate it start to finish. Keep it short. It's not a lecture.

A Few Things That Help

Start small. Everyday annoyances are the best practice because the stakes are low for everyone. It's a lot easier to cope out loud about a long checkout line or when someone cut you off in traffic than a hard phone call.

Keep it real. You don't have to sound perfectly calm. Hearing the frustration when you say, "Ugh, I'm really frustrated right now" is honest, and kids need to see that big feelings are OK and you can work through them.

Cope Out Loud as part of repair. When you get mad and snap at your kid, wait until you've settled, then use the cope out loud to talk about how you felt and what you'll try next time: *"I'm sorry I yelled. I was really frustrated. Next time I'm going to try to take a breath first."* That's repair, and it's great modeling too.

Notice when they try it. When your child tries any of these steps, even awkwardly, point it out. "Thanks for being flexible." "I noticed you slowed down and thought that through." "You were really mad. I'm glad you decided to take a break." What gets noticed tends to grow.

You're going to "lose it" sometimes. You're human. Your kids will see that, but they'll also see what you do next. The good news is they'll likely learn more from watching you work your way through it than from hearing you explain how. Each time you talk through it, you're showing them that big feelings are normal and they're manageable.

Cope Out Loud builds on the Be An EMPATH Method, a way adults can help kids settle big emotions and, ideally, learn something in the process. EMPATH is what you use when your child is struggling. Coping out loud teaches the same skills, using your own everyday moments and frustrations.

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