How I Stay Calm During Tantrums As A Mom Of Three

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Mom On Purpose with Natalie Bacon

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Welcome to Mom On Purpose, where it's all about helping moms overcome challenges and live their best lives. My hope is by being here, you are more inspired to become the mom you are made to be. I'm Natalie, your host, a wife, boy, mom, dog mama, Chicagoan, and former lawyer turned professionally certified coach. If you're here to grow, I can help. Let's go.

Hello, my beautiful friends. Welcome to the podcast. Today I want to talk with you about my personal experience, staying calm and becoming a calm mom with respect to tantrums and meltdowns and being able to stay calm when my kids, three of them, three boys are upset. This is not something that I was just naturally gifted in, not something I was born with. I'm a first born type, a high achiever who grew up in a home of parents who yelled from time to time.

And I say all of this just so you know that my natural disposition isn't calm, my husband's is, mine is not. And yet, when one of our kids or all of our kids are having a hard time, I am the one who is steady, calm and unbothered, and my husband isn't. It's harder for him. I can see him getting more stressed and his nervous system feeling activated and hands down. It is only because of the tools that I teach. It is only because I have learned the skill of how to be calm, it, the circumstance of my kids having a hard time. So I am starting this podcast off by just sharing with you that you are not alone. You are, you know, the exact mom your kids are supposed to have. If you find yourself feeling frustrated or yelling, that is I think, the norm.

I don't think it's normal for you to just naturally be calm when kids are screaming right? And yet, just because it's normal or common or the way that the brain is wired doesn't mean it's how it has to continue. You absolutely can learn the skill of staying calm, of rewiring your brain and your body to feel calm and connected and grounded when your kids are upset. And I think this is extraordinarily important, not just for your experience, which it is important for your experience because it happens often. Am I right, right? I got three little ones I know. But it's also important for your experience as your kids get older, if you are uncomfortable with

their discomfort, they will pick up on that. And guess what, as human beings, we never graduate from challenges. We never graduate from frustration. So when your kids are adults and they're frustrated, guess who they're coming to.

If you have been the one who felt really open and connected and available to them when you were, when they were frustrated going up, you, they're going to come to you. They're not going to come to you if you know, they know that you're just going to worry or you're going to judge them, or you're going to get frustrated or you're going to yell. And so not only is it going to have a positive impact on your experience now and today and in this season of life because it just feels a lot better to be able to be calm when your kids are upset and dysregulated. But it also definitely has a positive impact on your relationship. You know, hands down for the next several decades as your kids grow. And that is because they will know we're really intuitive, we're really smart. It doesn't matter what your intelligence level is.

All human beings, all healthy human beings are very good at picking up little signs and little cues, and that's a survival mechanism. It was very important for survival to be able to, you know, pay attention to when things were off and pick up on that. So what I'm getting at here is your kids know when you're frustrated. They know when you're upset. They know when you're unhappy. They know when obviously when you're yelling. But even if you don't act it out, if you are, you know, like trying to avoid the tension if you're trying to make it so it goes away, you're sending the message that you are uncomfortable with their negative emotions. And again, when they're 30, they're going to feel frustrated. And if they know mom's uncomfortable with that, they're not coming to mom. So just kind of an added benefit to consider for a reason to do this work.

And it makes sense if you just pause and think about when you are upset or frustrated or having a hard time or just going through a challenge personally, if you think of two different friends, one friend you can call and she listens and she's like, gosh, that stinks. I am so sorry. Tell me more about it. What's happening? I'm with you. Okay? Very inviting, very

connecting. She's on board with what you're saying. She's available, she's respectful and she's there for you. Conversely, if you call a friend and you tell her what's going on and she's judgemental and she tries to fix it for you, and she offers solutions right away, you are going to not want to go to that friend because it's going to feel like you're not being seen. If she's like, oh no, why don't you just try this? Or, I wouldn't do it that way, I would do it this way.

Or have you ever thought about this? Or, I don't see it that way. And that's not to say that you need friends to agree with you all of the time. I just want you to think of this as an example, as an analogy, because I think, you know, when I think of those, you know, two hypothetical friends, of course I want to call the first friend, right? Because I want to feel seen and validated and respected. It's the exact same thing with our kids. So when you are learning the skill of staying calm, the first thing you have to learn is how to validate feelings. And it just means that you're respectful of your kids. It means that you're open. It means that you are available to them. It means that you're acknowledging their experience, their experience is valid. That does not mean it's a yes. It doesn't mean you don't hold boundaries.

That's separate. That's a part of this, but we'll get to that. The first part though, is saying yes to their experience, not yes to what they want. So for example, my second son is o and having a hard time, you know, unsurprisingly, learning how to share and share toys with his older brother. And he will get very upset and have a meltdown even if, you know, the circumstances are what we would call like perfect, right? You know, so he had a really long turn first, and now it's my other son's turn, or whatever the situation may be, you know, nine times outta 10. He is upset about this. And so saying yes to his experience means that I'm in my body and in my mind saying, I see you, I hear you. I get it. This is hard. You wish that you could play with the ice cream toys, the entire time you wish that your brother Robert didn't get a turn.

I see you, I hear you. I'm like validating him, even though I'm not saying that the whole time. I might say some of those things, but it's an energy,

right? I'm thinking, you know, your experience is real right now. That's what validation is, okay? It's saying yes, like your experience is valid. And that's so important because their experience is valid to them. You know, it's very unreasonable to my, to my son. It is very unreasonable that he should ever have to share any toy, ever, right? That's the truth for him. He's two years old. Of course, of course. Okay? His prefrontal cortex is not, you know, developed enough for him to even hold that capacity, and that's okay. Another part of this that I'll get to in a minute is raising expectations of yourself and lowering, them of your kids. This is normal, typical behavior.

It doesn't mean I'm not going to encourage sharing. It doesn't mean that, you know, I'm, you know, just going to like, have it be a, a free for all in my home. Like none of that. It's just a mindset shift. A perspective shift where I say, oh my goodness here, yes to his experience in my body. That's what I'm thinking. Again, go back to the example of calling two different friends when one friend in their body, in their energy is like open and loving and saying yes to your experience versus the friend who's like closed off and you can't even put your finger on it, but she just keeps offering you suggestions on how to fix the thing that you're complaining about. And you're like, no, you're not hearing me. This is horrible I just want to vent. Right? The, the energy in their bodies is very different.

One is open and respectful and validating, and the other is not. And so that's part one is validating feelings. Part two is holding the boundary. It's, it's, it's like, it's very simple, very doable, but it is an art because oftentimes and on default, I think this is what we do just because of that's, you know, maybe how we were raised. We conflate the two. We think that saying yes to the experience and yes to the feelings and yes to the wish means that we're saying yes to getting the thing that they want. And that's not true at all. We can't, of course, I'm using an example of toys where I could, but your parents, you know, half the time, especially when they're little, they want to do things. Well, as my mother's helper, who has, older kids corrected me, said, you know, it's, it's actually the job when they're older too, is the number one job is to keep them safe, right?

It's like, you know, when they're little, you know, it's not just that they want to play with toys, it's that they are, you know, trying to play with bathroom cleaner supplies or run out into the street or when they're older, go to parties that there's no parents at or whatever, right? When you have one of the expectations for yourself to be that you keep your kids safe, that means by definition, you for sure are going to be saying no some of the time. And, you know, you can do that in a positive way where, you know, if they're older, you're explaining to them why it's a no. When they're younger, that may or may not be appropriate. But either way, when you hold a boundary, often it's kind of saying, you know, this is what you can do and this is what I'm not going to, you know, give you permission to do.

Or this is yes, and this is a no, and they're not going to like that, but it's so important for them to see that structure because otherwise they're going to feel like they're in charge. Like they are the captain of the ship, the pilot of the plane. If you're familiar with Dr. Becky and her work, it's like you have to think of yourself as a leader. I really love the example of leading a team at a company because I do think it's important for us to consider our kids' perspectives and input, but just like a good leader at a company, that doesn't mean it's a yes. You know, we've all been micromanaged before and then we've all been led before by really amazing respectful leaders. And the difference isn't in whether they say yes or no, A really respectful, awesome leader who considers your perspective is still going to make a decision.

And it's not always going to be the decision that all the employees want, but you feel seen, you feel heard, you feel respected. They're kind, they're loving. It's the same thing with parenting. And what that means is, is I think there's like the space for being warm hearted and being firm. So I want to be warm and loving and connected to my kids. I want to validate their feelings, their experience is real. And mommy's the leader. Mommy's the captain, mommy's the, you know, pilot of this plane. And so this is my decision, and it's okay. Give your kids space to not like your decision when you don't give your kids space to do that. Said differently when your kids get upset because you say no, and then you make that mean you are a

bad mom, or you're unable to sit with their discomfort and their negative emotions, then you kind of center yourself and make it about you.

And then it creates this weird, unhelpful dynamic in your relationship. And so when you kind of need your kids to like you, in order for you to feel like a good enough mom, you invite, I don't know, people pleasing, and there's like this permissiveness, and I think it creates, even though your kids would never say this, it creates a lack of safety. Like if I'm a kid and I think I'm the pilot of the plane, or I think I am the boss, I'm like, oh my goodness, okay, I am not old enough to do this. You know, and again, they're not going to admit this, they're not going to say this, but there is something about having boundaries, having structure, having rules in a respectful, loving way that, that make your kids feel safe. They're still going to fight, they're still going to be upset. And you increasing your toolkit, your skillset on how to allow space for that while holding boundaries is the work.

I love motherhood. I've been sharing on my Instagram how it's such a growth journey and, and it is because you have to expand your capacity to feel calm, otherwise you're going to be miserable. It's, it's just an invitation. It's like, okay, you know, the game of motherhood, what skills do I need? What ones don't I have, right? Like, I didn't really need the skill of being this calm in chaotic circumstances when I was a single person, right? Because there weren't chaotic circumstances on a daily basis. I didn't have three kids melting down and dogs barking in a home and a business and like all the things. And now that I do, it's like, okay, this container affords me the opportunity to grow. And I think that can be a gift that you give to yourself. So I want you to just think about when you react your worst or when you are the most frustrated, or when you yell or you know what you're doing to avoid those you know, certain situations I think you want to do work on those moments.

So for example, picture bedtime, you are exhausted. You know, your child is melting down because they want the Blue toothbrush, but you threw the Blue toothbrush away and got new toothbrushes and they're really upset and your child throws himself on the floor. You are trying to reason with

him, no, this is a new toothbrush, it's even better. Read your new favorite color. I got this for you. All of those thoughts, even if they're reasonable, are entirely unhelpful. It's the friend who you call and is trying to fix your problem and is not seeing your experience. When your child is dysregulated, your only job is to hold boundaries lovingly and to validate their real, real, real experience. When you think my child knows better, my child shouldn't be reacting like this. All of those thoughts, toxic for meltdowns, of course your child should be melting down.

I just think thoughts like, oh, well I thought we were going to do a fun bedtime routine with the new toothbrush. I guess I was wrong.I guess we're going to do some upsetness and I can quickly just go to those thoughts now because I've practiced them out of the moment. That's key here. You've got to practice your thought work out of the moment. Inside the Mom On Purpose Membership, you get a course that teaches you how to do thought work, to look at your thoughts, to identify your beliefs, to change them so that you can feel calm in the exact circumstances that are your life right now. Because if you don't, what do you do? Lose your patience. Create disconnection or yell. And I always think it's interesting, right? We yell because it works. But what does it mean to work? It means you get compliance from your kids, but what's the cost?

The cost is the relationship. And maybe that's okay once, but over time, even if you repair compounded over time, if you're constantly yelling, you will erode the connection and not relationship. It is very disconnecting. I mean, just imagine if you had a friend or a spouse who was just constantly yelling at you. It's not very fun, it's not very connecting. And so when you yell or lose control and you know your kids are yelling, so like they're having a tantrum and now you are having a tantrum. And I think this kind of stems from just this idea that our kids should listen to us. What does that even mean? My friends, they hear you. If you were like, there is ice cream and a new iPad in the kitchen, they would drop everything and go run. Okay? They can hear you. So what does it even mean to listen, to obey, to control?

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Do you really think your kids are supposed to be controlled by you? I don't. I know that when my kids are teenagers and when my kids are adults, them questioning what other people want them to do is really good, is really helpful. Now, that doesn't mean that it's easy when they're kids, and that doesn't mean that I don't hold boundaries, but I'm not over here thinking they should obey me. They should listen to me because that's not true. And so I just tell myself, I was just coaching a private client on this not that long ago with listening, and we just decided there's no such thing as listening, right? You can just redecide what words mean. You've got to question them. And I know this comes from how you were raised, right? We were all raised with listen to me and you should listen.

And kids not listening, right? It's like a buzz phrase. It's so unhelpful. So when you learn how to stay calm by raising the expectations for yourself and lowering them for your kids, you focus on what you can control. It's so empowering because your kids are supposed to push boundaries. It's developmentally age appropriate and typical. And even if it wasn't, it's what they're doing. So it's the reality. And I want you to have a positive experience of your life. That doesn't mean it's like the most fun. I'm not over here like, yay, my kids are melting down, but I am over here like, okay, I guess we're going to do a tantrum. I love you. You know, my kids are so young that like movement is helpful, getting outside is helpful. I don't mean with tantrums that you just like validate the feelings and you just sit there and stare at them like, okay, are you done yet?

Again, just imagine you're calling your friend and she's validating you. There's movement and flow. It's not that she's just like sitting there saying, okay, you tell me what you're feeling right now. Right? That's very cold and kind of like systematic. You want this to be much more warm and connecting and at the same time you are holding the boundary. I know you really want that toy and it's your brother's turn. I know you wish you could have that toy all of the time. I get it. There are so many things that I want all the time too, you know, and he is flailing and you know, I might be holding him or walking him around. Sometimes we look at trucks, but I really just have thoughts in my mind, like, my child needs to process this frustration.

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One of my favorite, absolute favorite thoughts to remind myself of is, your big feelings don't scare me.

Now, I want to make sure you do not say this to your kids. This is not a thought for your children. This is a thought for you. Because when an alarm goes off, when people are screaming, we retreat, we hide it. It is something to avoid because your brain avoids pain. It's painful to hear dysregulation. So you actually have to train your brain to become open and connected to that discomfort. And it's totally doable. It's not even that big of a deal, right? It's like it, it's just it. It takes intention. So I've expanded my zone of safety. If you want to use regulation speak, it's like my nervous system knows how to stay calm and open and connecting when my kids are melting down 100%. This is doable for you and it comes from you, you know, telling yourself new stories out of the moment, doing the work out of the moment is 80% of the work so that you don't even feel the frustration.

Like when I am armored with thoughts, like your big feelings don't scare me. And I know that for myself, I am equipping myself with the capacity to feel calm regardless of what my kids are doing and that my friend is a superpower. It really is because you know, you can only control what's within your control, which is your thoughts, feelings, and actions. And I'm not suggesting you don't do things out of the moment, but when your child is dysregulated, that is not the time for teaching. That is not the time for explanations or reasoning. That is the time for validating and being present with your kids. And it's the same thing, regardless of if it's at home or in public. I do not get bothered when my kids are melting down in public. It's, I just apply the exact same tools.

So I want you to know that the solution is not to stop the tantrums. It's not to avoid the tantrums. The solution is for you to get better at the skillset of feeling calm when your child is dysregulated. That is the work my friend. This is exactly the work we do inside the Mom On Purpose Membership. It is not uncommon for me to get an email after one month of my clients being inside that membership saying, wow, I have been working on this for years. And just through going through the inner work framework course and

applying it in my life, I have increased my capacity to stay calm and navigate hard moments with my kids. I just cannot tell you how impactful it will be for you and your experience of motherhood, but also on the relationship that you have with your kids. Because again, it's not a big deal if you yell once or twice, right?

We've all been there, but are you yelling nine times outta 10? Are you avoiding negative emotions? Nine times out of 10, are your kids picking up on the fact that my mom is super uncomfortable with my negative emotions or my mom gets easily frustrated, or my mom doesn't know how to fly this plane when, you know, I'm having hard moments compounded over time that has a negative impact on the relationship. Your kids will not feel open and vulnerable and safe to come to you with their challenges, so they'll feel disconnected. It also creates a weird dynamic with respect to love because if you are only really happy and, and kind of, praising them when they have positive emotions, then they get the idea that the love is conditional. My mom is unhappy when I'm upset. And that's just not a message I think you want to send.

And it's not what you mean, but your kids don't experience your love the way that you think about your love. They experience it from your actions and how they're picking up on those cues. So if they're really upset or dysregulated or hitting their sister and you're scolding them and you know, they pick up on how upset you are with them, they will sense that when they do something like, you know, have disrespectful behavior or something like that, their connection with you is jeopardized. The love is conditional. That does not mean that you approve of that, but what you want to do is separate out the love and the connection from the actions. So I frequently tell my kids, I'm like, there is nothing that you could ever do that would make mommy love you any less. I love you exactly how you are. You are a good kid inside.

And I'm separating that out their goodness, their connection with me out from there are acceptable and unacceptable actions that are, you know, okay in our family and not okay. And out of the moment there's teaching

and practicing, but again, I'm having higher expectations of myself as an adult woman than my kids. That alone will change your life, my friends. Alright, you can do this. Come and get coached by me and I will help you, my friends, expand your capacity to feel calm in tantrums and meltdowns, and it will change your life. I will talk with you next week. Take care.

Thank you for being here and listening. Now, head on over to momonpurpose.com/coaching to learn more about the Mom On Purpose Membership, where we take all of this work to the next level.