

When to hug and when to hold space

A parent's guide for navigating big feelings



Emotion Coaching

- Name the feeling:
"You felt disappointed."
- Validate it:
"It's okay to feel that way."
- Emotion coach:
"Next time, let's take deep breaths or try again."

Gentle wording

Don't say:

"Stop crying," or
"It's okay, don't be upset."

Say instead:

"I can see you're angry. I'm here when you're ready."



What 'holding space' means

Holding space: calm presence + emotional safety without stepping in to fix the situation. Allowing your child to feel their feelings: safely & with you there.



Spot the feeling

Sad tears

- Real tears
- Slumped shoulders
- Moves closer for comfort

What to do:

Give a hug or closeness.

Give a hug

Hold space

Angry energy

- Tense body
- Tears start later
- Pushes away or shouts

What to do:

Hold space.

Building resilience

Next time your child is upset without crying straight away: Pause, take a breath and hold space before you comfort and coach them in processing their feelings. This helps build resilience.

Holding
Space

Emotion
Coaching

Build
Resilience

Connect
Again