



# FAMILY TIMES



FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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## The Five S's: Staying Calm and Centered by Carol Lozier, MSW

Information from *Fostering Families Today*  
<http://www.adoptinfo.net/bondingarticle1.html>

We live in a society where fighting is acceptable. It's shown on television and in movies as the "reality" of typical family life. While it's healthy to disagree or debate, verbal fighting such as yelling, screaming, cursing, threatening, belittling, name calling and criticizing, is not. Some people are not aware of other options unless they have healthy role models who handle conflict in a calm manner. Verbal fighting is hurtful and little by little, it tears down people and relationships; besides, there are healthy ways to handle conflict and remain calm.

Children with early loss present with a myriad of symptoms

from shutting down behaviors such as avoidance, refusing to talk and emotionless interactions to acting out behaviors such as resistance, defiance, temper tantrums and aggressiveness, as illustrated by the following comments:

"I hear a lot about adopted kids who have anger management problems, but my child is the opposite — he shuts down and simply refuses to discuss his feelings. How should we deal with a child who won't open up?"

"Our granddaughter came to our home last year after the police arrested her

mother for the fourth time. When my granddaughter is angry she hits, bites, kicks and scratches. Time outs or spankings don't work. Any suggestions how we can help her realize hurting someone else isn't appropriate?"

Whether your child shuts down or acts out, daily interactions can, over time, become disheartening. As a parent, you reflect on everything you have tried to get your child to behave appropriately — begging, pleading, explaining, taking time-outs or even spanking. Walking away from

many incidents, you might scratch your head and think, What went wrong? In review, a key factor for parents to consider is: What was the energy between my child and myself? If you answer anything besides, a sense of calm, please continue reading. And for those who recall being calm, I applaud you!

Monkey See, Monkey Do According to scientists, people share social behavior, like the old adage, "Monkey see, monkey do." Special cells or neurons in the brain, called "mirror neurons," gives us the ability to experience the same actions and feelings of the people we are observing. Dr. Dan Siegel, author of "Parenting from the In-

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side Out” explains on page 65 of his book, “When we perceive another’s emotions, automatically, unconsciously, that state is created inside us. For example, we may begin to cry when we see someone else crying. We learn how someone is feeling by putting ourselves ‘in the other person’s shoes.’” Siegel says, “The behavior must have an intention behind it. Waving hands in a random way in front of a subject does not activate a mirror neuron.”

While it is challenging to remain calm, parents can remind themselves of the concept of mirror neurons to aid them in their endeavor. So, if a parent yells, curses and angrily paces the floor, the child’s brain will follow and he or she will behave in a similar fashion. On the flip side, if a parent remains calm, the child’s brain will follow with calm feelings, actions and behavior.

When a child is in an agitated state, he or she is solely focused on the anger and blames others for his or her feelings and behavior. However, when a child is calm he or she is freed from internal conflict,

enabling him or her to relax and explore feelings and needs.

**THE FIVE S’s:** Discovering and Maintaining Calm The Five S’s are five suggestions to help parents find and maintain a state of calm with their children.

1. **Slow your body.** As emotions rise, our breathing becomes shallow and our body prepares for stress: fight, flight or freeze. This readiness occurs without our conscious input as our body’s stress response has a mind of its own! A simple but effective way to slow down your body’s response and relax is to focus on your breathing.

2. **In-Sync.** When a parent and child are in-sync they move together, emotionally and physically; they understand one another through verbal and non-verbal communication. This flowing interaction promotes a relaxed, fully accepting atmosphere for

the child. Improve your in-sync communication with your child through reflective listening. In reflective listening, the listener mirrors back comments stated by the speaker. Mirroring the comments confirms the listener has correctly heard and understood the speaker’s message.

For example, 8-year-old Hayley seems sad when she comes home from school. Her mom, Katie, questions her mood. Hayley says, “Mrs. Horner put me in the seat next to her desk because I was talking but I wanted to sit with my friends.” A reflective listening response is: “Oh, you’re sad because your seat was moved next to Mrs. Horner.”

**TIP:** Practice being in-sync with your child. During intimate and important times, mirror your child’s body language, mannerisms and comments. Hint: Try to summarize his or her statement and not just copy it as many kids find that to be annoying!

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**3. Soft face, soft voice.** Be aware of your face and voice, create softness and relaxation. Look at your soft face in the mirror — this is your game face! Just like an athlete's game face generates a winning environment, maintaining a soft face leads to a relaxed environment where you and your child can strengthen your connection.

TIP: When a child's voice begins to escalate, our tendency is to raise our voice too.

(Remember mirror neurons?) Instead, as your child's voice begins to raise, lower yours. In a troubled moment, whisper instead of following your urge to yell. You may be surprised when your child follows suit and whispers back.

Try this exercise: Show your facial expression in a mirror while recalling strong, negative emotion. What do you look like? If someone glanced at you with the same expression, how would you feel? Would you feel relaxed and open, or upset and shut down? Imagine your child's reaction to your expression. Now, make a soft face and ask yourself the same questions. How do your answers differ and which expression do you want to

choose?

**4. Self-Care.** Parents have to be in first-rate shape for the sport of parenting, making self-care a necessity. Proper self-care includes: healthy boundaries, fun activities, adequate sleep, relaxation and spiritual refueling. Yes, this sounds like unobtainable time but it is key to preserving yourself.

**5. Strength.** Emotional strength consists of faith, loving with an open heart, and taking charge of your thoughts and feelings. Strength floats us through life's daily challenges, allows us to understand and accept our children, and provides the courage we need to keep our hearts emotionally available.

**Let's look at each component of strength:**

**1. Faith.** As parents walk through their child-rearing journey, they may have times when they feel desperate and ask, "Will I fall into a dark abyss or will I stay safe on solid ground?" When parents have faith — a belief that something

greater guides you, illuminates your way, and helps you no matter the circumstance — they are able to remain sane, calm and emotionally open in each moment.

**2. Love with an open heart.** Parents who love with an open heart are emotionally available to their children. They address potentially upsetting topics with an ever present awareness that their child may overreact, but they courageously approach them anyway.

**3. Be in charge of your thoughts and feelings.** Is it easier to stay positive with your child when your thoughts and mood are negative or positive? Of course, most of us would answer: positive. An even bigger question is: How will you maintain positive mood and thoughts? Developing a positive frame of mind is a lifelong process and not something to be perfected, but practiced.

Find additional information and support on the website at [www.forever-families.com](http://www.forever-families.com).



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**Ivan** is a funny, pleasant, and spontaneous child who loves to ride his bike, camp and go ATV riding. He does well with making and maintaining friends within his age group and does well with adults. Ivan would do best with a family that can be patient, sensitive, has a lot of energy and is active. He would thrive best in a home that is highly structured and has clear and consistent expectations. He responds well to a nurturing family and would enjoy having siblings in his new home.

If you are interested in Ivan please call 1-888-655-5500, Or email [adoptionspecialist@kvc.org](mailto:adoptionspecialist@kvc.org).