

"My Kid Has Big Behaviors... Now What?"

A Sanity-Saving, Shame-Reducing, Reality-Accepting Guide for Real Parents in Real Homes

Welcome to the Club of Loud Feelings and Door-Slamming Drama

So your child is having major outbursts. Maybe you're seeing:

- Explosive yelling or defiance
- Hurtful words like *"I hate you"* or *"I wish I was never born"*
- Meltdowns over tiny things, refusal to do basic tasks, wild mood swings
- Or just... behavior that doesn't feel "typical"

And you're asking:

Now what — at home, when you're tiptoeing around moods, dodging emotional grenades, and wondering if you're parenting or barely surviving?

This guide isn't about discipline charts or sticker rewards. It's about **understanding what's driving these behaviors**, how to respond without escalating, and why your child's outbursts often aren't about disrespect — they're about *distress*.

Big Behavior 101: What You're Really Dealing With

Behavior is communication. Every outburst, refusal, meltdown, and "I hate you!" is a message. It may not be *appropriate*, but it is *expressive*.

Underneath the behavior is almost always one of these:

- **Anxiety**
- **Sensory overload**
- **Executive functioning struggles (can't start, switch, or plan tasks)**
- **Rejection sensitivity**
- **Trauma triggers**
- **Shame**

- Depression or emotional dysregulation
- Neurodivergence (ADHD, autism, ODD, DMDD, etc.)

The behavior you see is the *symptom*. The diagnosis is often the *lens* that helps us respond more effectively.

Common Diagnoses That Often Underlie Behavioral Outbursts

Behavior Pattern	Often Linked to...
Extreme outbursts, rage, impulsivity	ADHD, DMDD (Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder), Autism
Defiance, refusal, rigidity	Anxiety, Autism, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)
Meltdowns from correction or rejection	Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), ADHD, Trauma
"I hate you!" / "Nobody loves me!"	Depression, Low self-worth, Emotional dysregulation
Escalating aggression after overstimulation	Sensory Processing Disorder, Autism, Anxiety
Difficulty calming after anger	Mood Disorders, Trauma, Low emotional regulation skills



Hurtful Outbursts (And What You Can Actually Do About Them)

1. "I hate you!"

Try:

- Stay calm (fake it if you have to). "You're really angry right now. I'm here when you're ready."
- Reflect later: "It sounded like your anger got so big, it said something your heart didn't mean."

Remember: Kids *borrow adult words* to express their distress. "I hate you" usually means "*I feel powerless and ashamed and I don't know what else to say.*"

2. "Nobody loves me!" or "I wish I was never born!"

Try:

- Stay steady: "That's a really heavy feeling. You don't have to go through it alone."
- Ask gently: "Are you saying that because you feel sad, angry, or both?"
- Don't dismiss. Validate: "That hurts to feel. I will always love you — no matter how big your feelings get."

Watch for: Repeated hopeless language might indicate **depression or trauma**, and a mental health provider can help.

3. Explosive Meltdowns

Try:

- Lower your voice. Soften your body. Keep your own nervous system regulated.
 - Skip logic mid-meltdown. Offer co-regulation: "Breathe with me. I'm not mad."
 - Afterward, repair. "That got really big. Let's figure out what happened."
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4. Chronic Refusal or Opposition


Try:

- Offer choices (“Do you want to brush teeth now or after your song?”)
 - Use “when–then” phrasing (“When your shoes are on, then we’ll go.”)
 - Avoid power struggles. Defiance is often about **anxiety + control**.
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The Honest Truth About What You’ll Probably Do (And Why You’re Still a Great Parent)


1. Yell

Because the chaos is exhausting and your nervous system has limits.

 *Fix it:* Apologize. “That wasn’t how I want to handle it. Let’s try again.”


2. Threaten Absurd Consequences

“If you keep screaming, we’re not going on vacation. Ever.”

 *Fix it:* Use a redo. “Okay, that wasn’t helpful. What I meant was...”

3. Feel Ashamed

Especially in public. Especially when relatives give *that* look.

 *Fix it:* Repeat this truth: “*My child is dysregulated, not disrespectful. I am parenting, not performing.*”

How to Parent the Child You Have (Not the One Who Always Says “Okay!”)

- Stop measuring parenting success by behavior.
 - Regulation before correction.
 - Connection over compliance.
 - Meltdowns are not manipulation — they’re overwhelm.
 - Be the calm when they can’t be. (Not perfect — just steadier.)
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You're Not Going to Ruin Them

You will have hard days. You’ll say things you regret. You’ll want to hide in the bathroom. And still — **your consistent, compassionate presence is the thing they need most.**

You're helping them build:

- Emotional language
- Self-trust
- Safety
- Resilience

This work is messy. But it's also **miraculous** — you're parenting the *whole child*, not just their behavior.

Extra Tools by Situation

Daily Life

- Use visual routines so they don't rely on memory (which often fails during dysregulation).
- Keep a “calm kit” — sensory tools, fidgets, chewy necklaces, calming music.
- Offer do-overs: “Let's rewind and try that again.”

Emotional Support

- Model emotional vocabulary: “That sounds like frustration + fear.”
- Use a thermometer chart to show rising emotions.
- Praise recovery, not just behavior: “You calmed your body — that's powerful.”

Repairs

- Say: “We had a hard moment. You're not in trouble — let's talk about what happened.”
 - Write notes after big blow-ups. It gives you both time and tenderness.
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Final Note to You, Brave Parent

Big behaviors don't mean bad parenting.

They mean a kid who is still learning skills that don't come easily. And a parent — *you* — who is doing the sacred, exhausting, heart-wrenching work of loving them through it.

They'll remember your steadiness. Your kindness. Your willingness to try again after every rupture.

You're doing better than you think. And your child? They don't need perfection — they need you.

