



Hot Tips for Managing Thoughts, Feelings & Parenting Behaviors: Exploring Parent Depression & Anger and Promoting Coping Cycles

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Scenario: All children at times tantrum, yell, hit, and are oppositional, defiant and irritable. These challenging behaviors may occur because they not being able to do what they want, or are tired or hungry, or have pain, or experience a change in family structure or schedule, or witness family conflict, feel rejected by peers or are lonely. How parents respond to their children's dysregulation can influence children's emotional and social development.

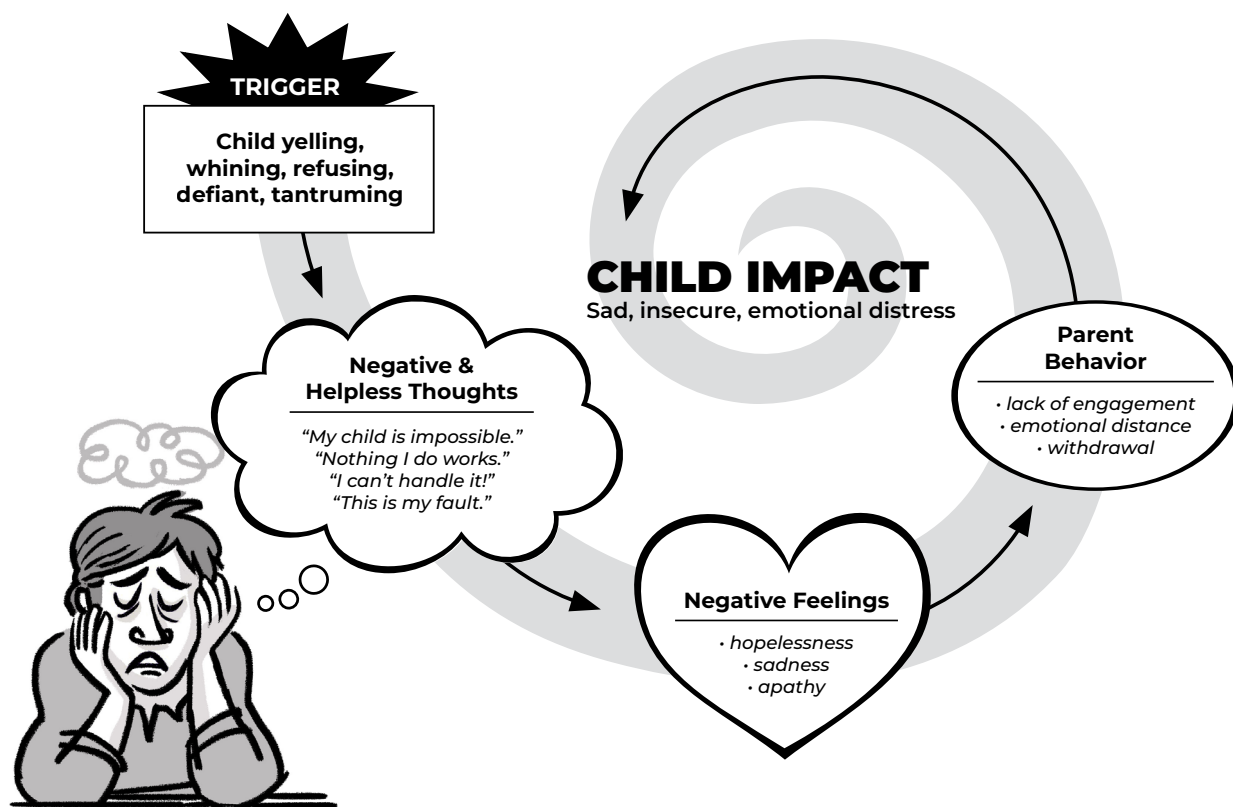
Here's a summary of parent response cycles—how depression, anger, and coping cycles are interconnected. Depending on how parents manage these cycles of emotional responses can either perpetuate negative outcomes or promote emotional resilience in children. Parents recognizing their own cycles of overreaction or avoidance can provide insights into how to break negative cycles and create healthier, more supportive and consistent parenting.

1. Depression Cycle:

- **Parent's Negative & Helpless Thoughts:** Challenging child behaviors such as those described above may cause parents to respond with negative and upsetting thoughts or beliefs about themselves or their children or both. They may think nothing they do can help their child either because they are not confident about their parenting, or they may see their child as incapable of learning. *"I can't manage this. I don't know what to do."*
- **Parent's Upsetting Feelings:** These negative and upsetting thoughts lead to feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, sad, or emotionally drained.
- **Parent's Behaviors:** As a result, the parent may lack the energy or motivation to engage with their child in a positive way. These thoughts and feelings can cause them to withdraw and disengage from parent-child interactions. This might look like reduced parent responsiveness, neglect, or a general emotional distance.

- **Child's Impact:** This parent withdrawal can create a cycle where the child feels neglected, which may increase the child's own feelings of sadness or insecurity. The child sensing the parent's depression may begin to mirror these feelings or struggle with emotional regulation, possibly leading to their own struggles with depression or low self-esteem.

Parent Depression Cycle

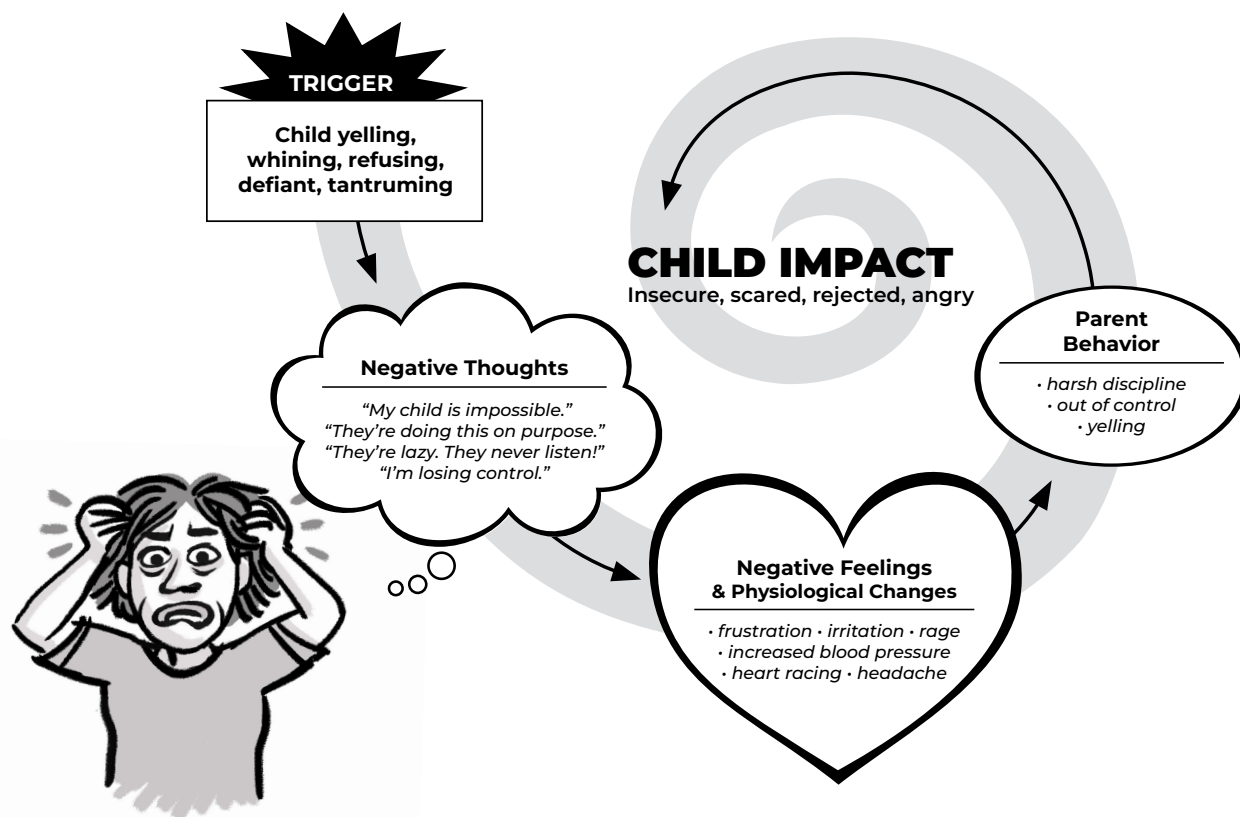


2. Anger Cycle:

- **Parent's Negative Thoughts:** On the other hand, some parents perhaps having unrealistic expectations for their child may respond to the child's challenging behaviors by thinking their child is purposely misbehaving or attacking them, or deliberately not listening. *"She's impossible. A constant challenge."* *"I am losing control."*
- **Parent's Negative Feelings & Physiological Changes:** These angry thoughts lead to feelings of frustration, irritation, stress, or even rage. Research shows this can also lead to physiological changes such as increased blood pressure, rapid heart-beat, headache, and clenched fists.
- **Parent's Behaviors:** The parent's anger may result in harsh discipline, yelling, or punitive behaviors. The anger cycle can escalate if the parent's response is intense or frequent and unaware of how to self-regulate.

- **Child's Impact:** The child may feel scared, confused, or rejected by the parent's angry responses. This can lead to a sense of insecurity, anxiety, or even anger themselves, perpetuating the cycle of conflict and difficulty in managing emotions.

Parent Anger Cycle

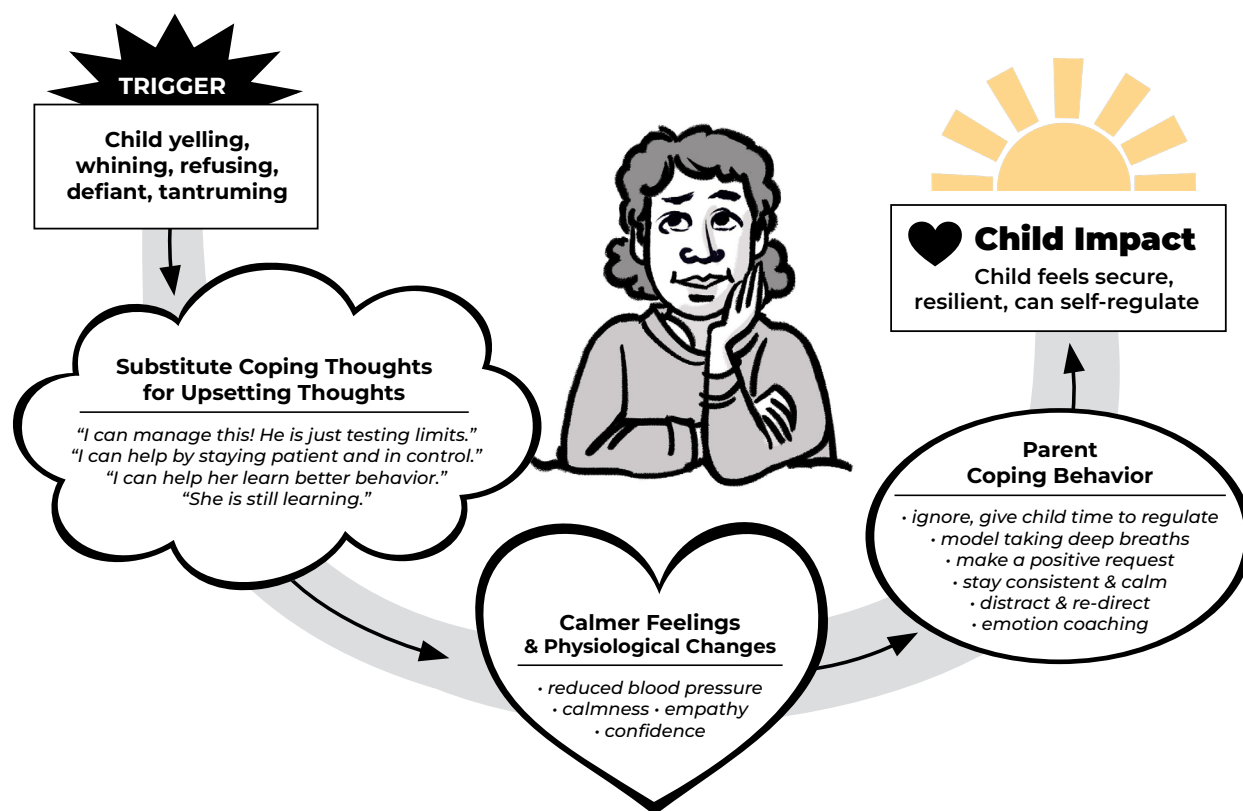


3. Coping Cycle:

- **Parent's Substitution of Positive for Negative Thoughts:** The parent recognizes their non-constructive and upsetting thought patterns and works to stop these negative thoughts and replace them with coping statements. *"I can cope. He is just testing the limits. I can help best by staying patient and in control, this will help him feel safe."* In a healthier coping cycle, the parent has thoughts that reflect problem-solving, patience, understanding and even humor at times. They recognize that children are still learning to self-regulate, and they adjust their expectations.
- **Parent's Feelings:** These more balanced thoughts lead to feelings of calmness, empathy, confidence and less stress. The parent may feel more connected to their child and able to manage challenging situations without becoming overwhelmed. *"I feel calmer and less stressed." "I love her and know what to do to help her."*

- **Parent's Coping Behaviors:** In turn, the parent demonstrates calm, consistent, and supportive parenting behaviors. They might model deep breathing and emotional regulation, ignore the child's challenging behavior and give the child space and time to calm down, provide emotion coaching, distract and redirect and set appropriate boundaries.
- **Child's Impact:** The child feels supported and understood, which promotes emotional regulation and resilience. The child learns how to cope with their own emotions through the example set by the parent, fostering positive behaviors and a sense of security.

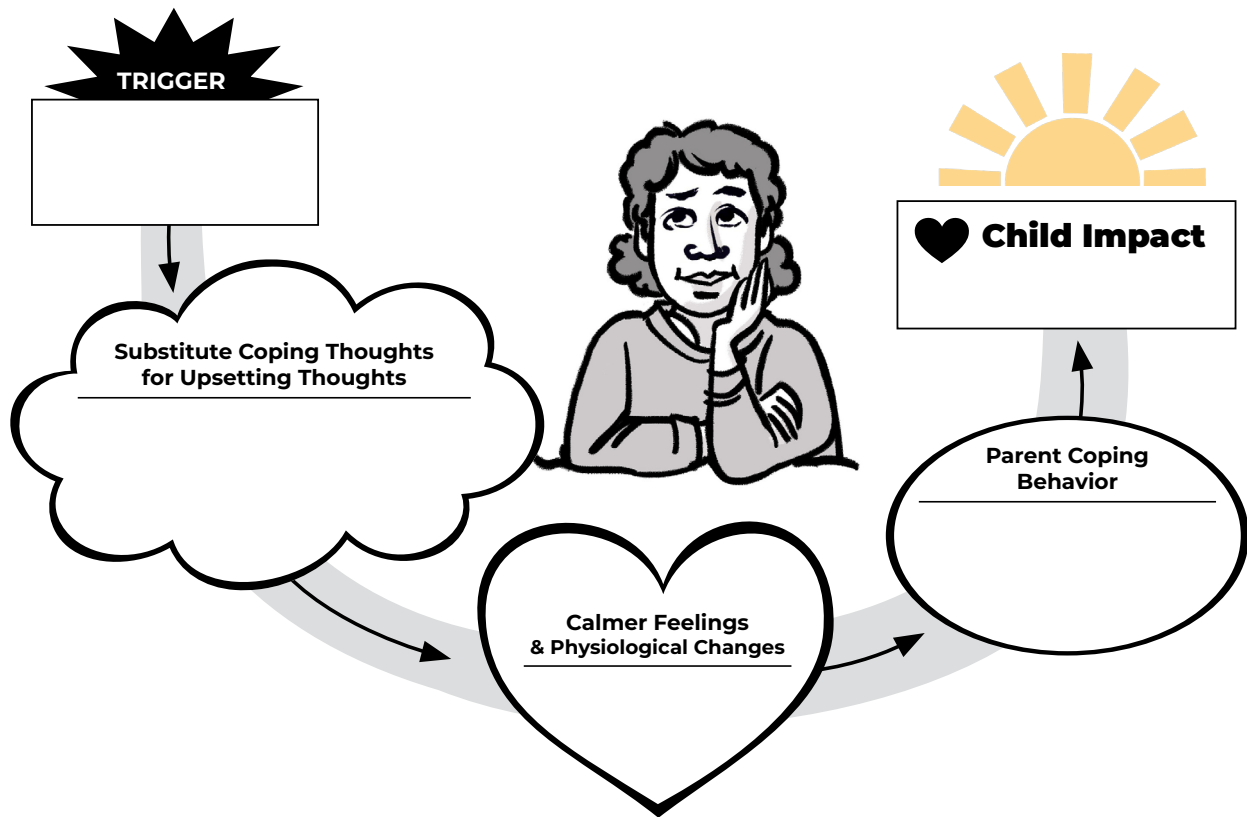
Coping Cycle: Connect Positive Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors



Key Takeaways:

- Negative cycles, like the depression and anger cycles, often lead to withdrawal, harsh discipline, or emotional disengagement, which can negatively impact the child's emotional development.
- In contrast, a coping cycle reflects positive problem-solving, emotional regulation, and supportive behaviors that help children feel secure and better equipped to deal with their own emotions.
- Parents' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected, and cycles of emotional responses can either perpetuate negative outcomes or promote emotional resilience in children, depending on how parents manage these dynamics.

Practice:
Connect Positive Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviors



Understanding these thought and feeling cycles helps parents recognize patterns in their own behavior and provides insight into how they can break negative cycles and create healthier, more supportive parenting interactions for their children. Group leaders use this scenario to help parents build their own constructive and positive thoughts, to feel more confident and less stressed, and to use evidence-based parenting strategies to build their children's trust, sense of security and resilience.