

FREE RESOURCE

5 Questions to Ask When Your Child Is Upset

Turn a difficult moment into a powerful connection opportunity

“The right question at the right moment can completely change the emotional temperature of your home.” — Dr. Sandra Munoz, PsyD

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Why These Questions Work

When a child is upset, our instinct is often to fix, correct, or explain. But what children need most in those moments is to feel **heard and understood**. These five questions help you do exactly that — while also building your child’s emotional vocabulary and self-awareness over time.

1

“Can you tell me what happened?”

- Invites them to share without judgment
- Signals that you’re interested, not angry
- Helps them organize their experience into words

Tip: Stay quiet after you ask. Give them space to find the words.

2

“Where do you feel it in your body?”

- Connects emotion to physical sensation
- Builds body awareness and emotional literacy
- Helps them identify feelings before they escalate

Tip: Point to your own chest or stomach to help them understand.

3

“What do you need right now?”

- Gives them agency and a sense of control
- Teaches them to recognize and communicate needs
- Reduces power struggles by making them a partner

Tip: Offer two choices if they’re stuck: ‘Do you need a hug or some space?’

4

“What would make this feel a little better?”

- Shifts focus from problem to solution gently
- Builds problem-solving skills naturally
- Doesn’t minimize the feeling — just opens a door forward

Tip: Accept any answer, even if it’s ‘nothing.’ That’s okay too.

5

“What can I do to help you?”

- Reinforces that you’re on their team
- Models asking for help — a skill many adults struggle with
- Deepens trust and connection in hard moments

Tip: Sometimes they’ll say ‘just be here.’ That is enough.

A Note From Dr. Sandra

You don’t have to use all five questions every time. Even one — asked with genuine curiosity and a calm voice — can transform a meltdown into a moment of real connection. Print this, put it on your fridge, and reach for it when things get hard.

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