

# Cycle of Nurture

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Consequences are the result of choices. Sometimes the consequence for a choice might come in the form of an emotional reaction such as crying, anger, sadness, or other strong emotion. When this happens with your child, remember that there is no such thing as a “wrong” feeling. What might be less helpful is how your child chooses to *respond* to such feelings. While we can’t always choose how we feel, we are always free to choose how we respond to those feelings. By choosing wisely we minimize negative consequences for ourselves and for others. One way of minimizing negative consequences is through the *Cycle of Nurture*. When using this cycle, you teach your child to respond to unpleasant feelings in ways that don’t lead to unpleasant consequences.

There are three major parts of *Cycle of Nurture*:

1. *Tension Deferred*

- a. Child (or parent) recognizes emotional reactions are building
- b. Coping skills (mindful breathing) are engaged
- c. There is appropriate communication
- d. Parent supports child but does not enable the behavior
- e. Tension subsides

2. *Mutual Support*

- a. Child calmly discusses the trigger with parent
- b. Child takes responsibility for their own emotional state
- c. Child explains what triggered the emotional incident so that parent can be supportive without enabling or taking blame or responsibility for child’s behavior and choices

3. *Soothing*

- a. Child and parent engage in emotionally positive activities to de-fuse (like taking a walk outside or engaging in a mindful breathing exercise)
- b. Parent thanks child for participation
- c. Child engages in self-soothing behaviors with the guidance of the parent

If your child tends to have negative emotional reactions when you enforce negative consequences, try using this *Cycle of Nurture* exercise. Start by deferring tension. Don’t take responsibility for your child’s emotional state by monitoring them for an emotional reaction. Teach them to monitor their own emotions. Even if you think you see such a reaction building, don’t comment on it. Instead, tell your child to come to you whenever an emotional reaction is building. This teaches your child to take primary responsibility for managing their own emotions. If you’re always trying to manage your child’s emotional states, they never learn to do it for themselves. Not only that, but there is nothing more invalidating than being told you’re about to have an emotional reaction when you really weren’t. So leave it up to your child to tell you when you need to use the *Cycle of Nurture*.

Next, go over the mindful breathing exercise to help your child calm and self-soothe. If necessary, communicate with your child by talking to them about what the problem might be. Again, let them tell you, don’t tell them. Understand the problem from your child’s point of view and communicate this understanding.

Support your child but don’t enable the behavior by arguing or trying to set limits unless absolutely necessary. Stay in the moment with the feeling and with your child.

When your child is ready, discuss the problem from your child’s point of view. If she’s not ready to discuss it yet, that’s okay too. The quickest way to get a child *not* to tell you how they’re feeling at a time like this is to *ask* them how they’re feeling! Let your child modulate her own emotional responses in her own time and in her own way.

When your child begins to show signs of calming, suggest (but don’t insist on) a calming activity like taking a walk outside or engaging in a favorite activity. Once you’ve gotten to this phase, thank your child for

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participating in the Cycle of Nurture exercise with you, and de-fuse further by finding some self-soothing activities for your child to do.

Repeat this as often as necessary and encourage your child's participation by creating an accepting, non-judgmental environment for the exercise.

You can facilitate the process by having your child answer the questions below. Do the worksheet together when your child is not in crisis so that you'll already have it handy when your child is in crisis. Don't try to do it when your child is "having a melt-down;" because at that point your child's fight or flight response is overriding their ability for rational thought. Wait until your child tells you he is able to calm down and focus on the questions.

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## Tension Deferred

What are some signs that your child's emotional reactions are building? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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What are some coping skills your child might use when having an emotional reaction? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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What are some ways you could help your child when they're having an emotional reaction? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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## Mutual Support

What are some common emotional triggers for your child and how might you deal with them together? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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What are some ways your child could learn to take responsibility for their own emotional states? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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## Soothing

What are some emotionally positive, de-fusing and self-soothing activities you could engage in with your child? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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What are some emotionally positive, de-fusing and self-soothing activities your child could engage in by themselves? Ask them to name a few and list them below.

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Once you've completed this worksheet with your child, remember to keep it handy should you need it. And don't forget to practice the Attitude of Gratitude by thanking your child for participating in the activity once you're done!