

When You Lose It (And How to Come Back)

A guide for dads who've snapped — and want to stop

BetterDads — Book 7 · For every dad

You yelled at your kid this morning. Or last week. Or three minutes ago.

You watched the look on their face. You felt it land in your own chest. You hated yourself for a second. And then life kept moving — kids needed dressing, you needed to leave, there was no time to sit with what just happened.

You're not a bad dad. You're a normal one.

Almost every father reading this has had a moment where he reacted in a way that doesn't match how he wants to show up. The yelling, the snap, the cold silence, the sentence you'd take back if you could. The fact that it bothers you is the proof that you actually care. Men who don't care don't lie awake at 11pm thinking about it.

But caring isn't the same as fixing. And there's no point pretending the moments don't matter — they do. So this is for the dads who want to do something about it.

Anger isn't the problem.

This is the first reframe.

Anger is information. It tells you something is happening that you don't have capacity for. The problem isn't that you feel it. The problem is what your body does with it before your mind catches up.

When you snap, that's not your character. That's your nervous system. You're tired. Your blood sugar is low. Three things have already gone wrong this morning. And then someone spills milk for the second time, or asks the same question for the fourth time, or pushes a sibling — and your system fires before your brain has a chance to choose a response.

That's not a personality flaw. That's biology. It's also fixable.

The pause.

The single most important skill you can build is a pause between the trigger and the response.

Four seconds. That's the entire ask.

When you feel the heat rise — chest tightens, jaw clenches, voice ready to go — you stop. You take one breath. You walk one step away if you can. Then you choose what to do.

This sounds simple because it is. It also sounds easy because it isn't. The pause goes against millions of years of nervous system wiring. It has to be practiced when the stakes are low so it's available when they're high. The dishwasher running too loud. The kid who took your spot on the couch. Practice the pause there. So when it actually matters, the muscle is built.

Repair.

You will still lose it sometimes. That's not failure. That's being human.

What happens next is what matters. The dad who snaps and then pretends nothing happened teaches his kids that anger is something you bury. The dad who snaps and goes back fifteen minutes later — *"Mate, I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. I was wound up. That wasn't fair. I'm sorry."* — teaches his kids something completely different. He teaches them that men own what they do. That repair is possible. That love survives anger.

Kids don't lose respect for fathers who repair. They lose it for fathers who never do.

The slow work.

The pause and the repair handle the moments. The slow work handles the system underneath.

Most dads don't have a reactivity problem. They have a depleted-system problem with a reactivity symptom. Your nervous system runs on inputs: sleep, movement, food, breath, downtime. When those go missing, your reactive range shrinks. Things that wouldn't have set you off six months ago now do.

You can fix this. Not by becoming a different person. By becoming a less depleted one. Better sleep where you can get it. Some kind of daily movement. Eating more than coffee before lunch. A few minutes of slow breathing before the day starts. None of that is glamorous. All of it works.

The pattern.

Here's the part most men miss.

Your reactivity isn't just teaching your kids about your moods. It's teaching them how a man handles emotion. They are building their internal model of masculinity around the man in front of them. If that man explodes and stuffs it down, they learn that's what men do. If that man notices, owns, repairs — they learn that's what men do.

You don't need to be calm all the time. You need to be conscious enough to break the pattern. So your son doesn't have to white-knuckle his way through his own anger thirty years from now. So your daughter doesn't grow up scanning men for the first sign of a temper.

The cycle ends with the man who looked at it.

The goal.

The goal isn't never losing it. That's not a real target.

The goal is: less often. Recover faster. Repair when you don't.

That's enough. That's actually the whole thing.

This is Book 7 of the BetterDads series. The full series is at betterdads.com.