



# Managing Meltdowns

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**Temper tantrums**

**vs.**

**Sensory meltdowns**

# Temper Tantrums

- Outburst when trying to get something he/she wants or needs
- Shorter in duration
- Often stops when not getting attention or when they get what they want
- May resume when he/she noticing that they have regained your attention
- You can distract them out of it by something else
- The child has some level of control over his/her behavior

# Sensory Meltdown

- A intense reaction to a situation when feeling overwhelmed or over aroused.
- Tends to be longer in duration.
- Triggers that 'fight, flight or fright' response.
- The behavior is usually beyond the child's control.
- It often doesn't stop even if the child gets what they want. They often don't know what they want.

# Where to begin

- Observe your child
  - What makes them happy? What do they seek out?
  - What do they avoid?
  - What are his/her triggers-environment? Sensitivity?
  - Is hunger a factor?
  - Is fatigue a factor?
- Determine your child's strengths and weaknesses
- Understand your own strengths and weaknesses
- Meet your child where they are at
  - Consider your child's emotional developmental level
  - This may be different than their age or cognition
- Look at ways to promote success rather than trying to fit them into a 'mold'

# Build a foundation for success

- Modify activities or outings to match your child's abilities.
- Provide clear expectations
- Provide just enough support to be successful- builds self esteem
  - Just right challenge
- Keep supports and supervision in place until the child masters skills and is successful
- Gradually fade out supports, supervision and incentives

# Getting started

- Prevention strategies (before)
- Intervention strategies (during)
- Recovery strategies (after)
  
- With all tasks:
  - observe our child to identify what they need,
  - set up/initiate strategies to help them be successful, and
  - then, wean yourself out to allow them to start to regulate themselves

# Prevention-Environment

- Limit distractions (quiet time-turn TV and video games off; calm music on; create a space for 'escape'-fort)
- Provide organizational structures (daily routine, picture schedule or calendar, timer)
- Reduce the social complexity of an activity or event (limit number of people and duration at party or play date)
- Change the social mix (focus on time with peers that are a good fit, at parties have a 'get out' option)



# Prevention-Task

- Shorten the task (take turns with steps)
- Build in frequent breaks with longer tasks
- Give the child something to look forward to when the task is done (First...then)
- Give details (checklist or picture of task when complete or timeframe)
- Create a schedule (list or pictures)
- Build in choices
- Make the task more fun

# Prevention-Interaction

- Planning ahead
  - Involve your child in the planning process
    - “What do we need to do first?”
    - “Then what?”
  - Use activities that they want to do as a starting point/ending point
  - Rehearse what may happen and how to handle it
    - Role play at home
  - Use other cues
    - Visual cues/make eye contact when giving directions
    - Social stories
    - Lists-check off as you move through the task or activity
    - Have the child repeat back directions/plan

# Prevention-Interaction

- During the activity
  - Coaching for the rehearsed behavior
    - Remember what we talked about
  - Check your list or schedule
  - Be available to monitor the situation to better understand triggers and other factors that affect your child's success

# Prevention-Sensory Regulation

- Opportunities for calm, organizing input before
  - Calm music
  - Decreased visual stimulation
  - Soothing tactile input
  - Deep pressure touch-massage, vibration
  - Rhythmical, linear rocking or swinging
  - Proprioception-jumping, bouncing, marching
  - Sucking/blowing activities
  - Soothing scents

# Prevention-Sensory Regulation

- Organizing input should be
  - Movement-slow and rhythmical
  - Touch-firm and consistent pressure
  - Sound-consistent entrancing movement
- Your voice tone should be
  - Calm
  - Soothing
- Transition songs

# Intervention strategies

- Recognize signs of escalation-acknowledge, classify level
- Leave the environment
- Find a calming space: tent or cubbie
- Deep pressure input: squeezes, weighed animals/blanket/backpack, rollups
- Movement input (vestibular): rocking chair, swing, sit and spin, bike
- Proprioceptive input: jumping on a trampoline, push/pull/hanging on a pull up bar, marching, crawling, putty, crunchy/chew snack, gum

# Intervention strategies

- Tactile bin: rice, beans, sand, shaving cream
- Auditory:
  - Use a calm, clear voice (sometimes whispers)
  - Use least amount of words necessary
  - Calm music: open air or headphones
- Visual
  - Turn down the lights
  - Turn off the TV/video games
  - Get down to eye level
- Take a deep breath and give them time

# Recovery strategies

- Plan for how to re-engage your child without reigniting the meltdown
- Give time to recover
  - Your child may feel embarrassed or sad
  - He/she may be physically exhausted
- Figure out the right time to review things after you are both calm.
  - Be brief and factual (leave out accusations)
    - What happened
    - What worked or didn't
    - What could be done differently next time
  - Confirm understanding of what you talked about
- Regroup together/cuddle



# Important Skills to Build to help your child manage meltdowns

- Response inhibition
- Emotional Control
- Time management
- Flexibility
- Learn how to feed their own sensory needs

# Building Response Inhibition

- Delay gratification by using waiting periods
  - Set a timer
  - Use First/then
- Earning things (sticker chart or saving allowance)
- Understanding of consequences (share or put away)
- Review situations in advance (long line at water park; taking turns on the slide)
- Practice during role play
- Be present to help with cues for success
- Offer input opportunities before the task to help them to be calm

# Improving Emotional Control

- Regulate the environment
- Discuss expectations and what to do if overwhelmed
- Coping strategies (signal when you need a break)
- Simple self statement to talk self through a challenge
- Read stories about characters who exhibit the behavior that you want you child to learn (Librarians can help)
- Provide calming sensory input before challenges
- Allow for sensory breaks during challenges

# Instilling time management

- Try to maintain a daily routine
- Talk about how long it takes to do things
  - Plan a weekend activity (vacation or a play date with friend)
    - What do you want to do?
    - How long will each activity take?
- Use calendars and schedules and include your child
- Use a timer to know how much time is left for the task
- Review use of time

# Encouraging Flexibility

- Environmental modification
  - Reducing novelty of the situation-limit change
  - Keep to schedules and routine when possible
  - Provide advance warning for what is to come next
  - Give a self statement for handling a situation
  - Reduce the complexity of the task
  - Allow for choices within situations/tasks

# Encouraging Flexibility

- **Expanding Flexibility**
  - Offer max support initially and then fade
  - Use of social stories
  - Use of choices
  - Coping strategies – becoming more aware of self and having a way to defuse
  - Independently seeking out ways to appropriately meet your sensory needs

# Feeding the Sensory needs for Success

- Sensory diets –input throughout the day
- Keep the beaker full
- What are they seeking?-providing opportunities to meet the need appropriately throughout the day
- What are they avoiding?-providing opportunities to engage in that input in a nonthreatening way.

# Resources

- The Out of Sync Child by Carol Kranowitz
- The Out of Sync Child has Fun by Carol Kranowitz
- The Incredible 5-point scale by Buron and Curtis
- How Does Your Engine Run? by Williams and Shellenberger. Therapy Works, Inc.
- Are you in the zone? By Timothy Kowalski
- <http://www.spdfoundation.net>



# Thank you

- General questions
- If you have specific questions, you can call to schedule a 10-15 minute consultation with me.