

10 Tips to Help Your High Achiever Manage Emotions presented by Christine Chambers, Med, OTR/L

Sarah Rintamaki (CFK):

I'd like to introduce Chris Chambers. She is a pediatric occupational therapist and the owner of Abilities First in Fairview Park, Rocky River.

Christine Chambers:

We moved to Rocky River in June.

Sarah Rintamaki:

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Thank you, Chris.

Christine Chambers:

Thanks. Thank you, Sarah. Well, I am really excited to be here to talk on this topic. I think that this is one of those groupings of kiddos that is sort of missed or is kind of that silent struggle. And so, I feel like this is a really great topic.

I did want to tell you just a little bit about myself. I have been a pediatric OT for 31 years. I've worked in a variety of areas. I worked in a residential facility. I don't know if anyone's heard of the Hattie Larlham Foundation in Portage County. I worked there with these beautiful, wonderful kiddos, but very multiply involved, not able to move, not able to talk, but really gave us all -- everything in the eyes and their engagement. I worked at the Cleveland Clinic and inpatient acute care. So, when kids came in and they were really sick. So, I saw that part, too.

I worked for the county board of MRDD for about 13 years, and I did in-home. So, I really had an interesting perspective there. I went from being in outpatient and giving everybody, like 50 strategies, do all these things with your kid. And then I went to people's houses and went, well, that was silly. Let's do one thing and let's try to that for the next week.

So that was really great. And then based on need in the community, I opened Abilities First. It'll be 15 years in June. We just moved last June to a spot in Rocky River, which is all on the first floor, which is great. We used to be on the fifth floor. Elevator wouldn't work, all those kinds of things.

I'm also a working mom of two. My kiddos are older. I have a son who's 25 and a daughter who is 18. And they both are amazing and wonderful but came with their own set of challenges and struggles as well. And I have a wonderful husband that's been very patient with me over the years.

So, I wanted to get a little tiny bit of information on you guys just so I have an idea of age ranges of the child you're here thinking about or have questions. So how many are in the under three? Like they've got an under three-year-old kiddo? Okay.

[02:13]

How about in that three to five range? Okay. And then five to eight? A lot in that range. And then like the eight to eleven? Awesome. And then anyone in that preteen-tweens -- going up into there? Okay. Awesome.

All right. So, Lauren, some of those are just perfect. So, the one thing I did ask everybody to do is on their piece of paper, put a one word while you're here. What just made you sign up? What just made you sign up -- drew, you here? And I want to make this very interactive tonight. So, I'm hoping you guys will be willing to share. I'm going to share mine. There we go. So, my one word was "hope."

"Hope" that I'm able to share some of my knowledge and experience with you, hope that you're able to leave with a couple new tools in your tool bags to use at home with your children, and then hope that we will be able to help all those kids out there that are struggling with this, raise some awareness so that there's an understanding of maybe what's underlying, maybe how we can approach differently. So those are mine. Would anybody be willing to share this? I was going to have you write it really big so you could just raise it up. But I can't see it from here. So, if somebody would be willing to share strategies.

Audience:

Strategies.

Christine Chambers:

Strategies. Excellent. Anyone else?

Audience:

Calm.

Christine Chambers:

Calm. I like it.

Audience:

Peace.

Christine Chambers:

Peace. We're all looking for a little of that.

Audience:

Coping.

Christine Chambers:

Coping. Awesome. Anyone else want to share?

Audience:

Skills

Christine Chambers:

Skills

Audience:

Triggers.

Christine Chambers:

Triggers. Yes. All right. All great words.

[03:57]

So just something to keep in mind as you're going through. Am I hitting this? And are there any questions that you want to ask so that we get to your goal for coming here? Okay. First thing I want to talk about is Myth Busters. I used to watch Myth Busters with a science show, but this is a little different, but the same idea.

So, these are some myths that are out there. One being that all skills develop at the same pace. They don't think about little, little ones, you know? Either they get in a gross motor mode and they're walking, walking, walking. But they're really not sitting and playing with things. They're just moving or vice versa. Maybe they're a more sedentary, sit-down kind of kiddo and they walk later.

So same thing happens with cognition, emotional regulation, social skills. Right? They don't develop at the same time. So, you can have a child take off on cognition. They know their letters by two, they're reading by three or four. They're doing amazing things. But that doesn't mean all those other skills are going at that same pace. So I think that's really important to keep in mind. And even as they get older, it's still not always at the same pace. So, we just need to kind of look at -- all right -- so what is emerging or going further, faster and what is going slower and be patient with that. So I think that's just something that you always want to kind of keep thinking about.

Right on, piggyback, with that is strengths and weaknesses. If I look at skills development, that a lot of times we look out for school, for IEPs, for IFSPs -- these are some of the typical ones, not all of us are going to have gross motor as one of our strengths. I don't. I'm not the most coordinated person, so I wouldn't put that as my strength. I might put social or, I don't know, maybe fine motor, although my writing is not good either. So we need to keep in mind that we all have strengths. We all have areas we're working on. So I'm sure if you look at this list, you can kind of pick out what those two are my strengths or those two are my weaknesses. So keep that in mind as we're going through, but also when you're looking at your child's skill set.

All right, another myth. If they understand it, then they can apply it. Not necessarily, especially with our really smart kiddos. I can tell you all the zones of regulation. I can tell you all the emotions that go with each one. I could probably even tell you three tools for each one if I'm having a hard time. But when I'm in the moment, I can't necessarily use them. So those don't always go together.

[06:37]

And so that's where we have to make the bridge. But just having an understanding of just because I can spit that all out, because I've had people say, well, they know they do, but using it is different. So,

inconsistencies. I think this is one of the biggest things that I hear about. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. Why can they do it this time? And they can't do it that time? Maybe it's just because they don't want to.

Maybe. But maybe it's because that particular day, what I call my sensory bucket is overflowing. I'm at the top of what I can handle. I actually brought my sensory bucket. So I'm at the top of what I can handle. I'm up here and you give me one more request -- strategy to use whatever -- and I'm done.

Maybe I don't like my hair brushed. And you were brushing my hair really a lot this morning to get snarls out. And then I didn't like my oatmeal this morning. It was lumpy. It wasn't the way I like it. And then I got to school and something was due and I forgot. And so the next thing that goes in there, it goes over. So we definitely see inconsistencies. But sometimes it's because of other things going on. So we want to look at that big picture as well.

At the end, I have a whole list of resources, and one of the resources is Ross Green, and he wrote this really great book, and we're going to do a book club on it in the fall. But one of the things he talks about is that if you could do it, you would, right? If kids could do it, they would. So, looking at if they can't do it, what is that underlying issue? So instead of thinking about, well, why can't you do it? Think of that underlying reason of what is going on.

And then the last one is talking about anger or frustration or anxiety as bad emotions. They're not bad emotions. They're valid emotions. We all have them. We all need to express them. That's okay. It's more what we do with them, but we do want to process them and acknowledge them. I see you're mad, I'm mad. I get mad every day. It's okay to be mad, but what we do with them so just those are the quickie on Myth Busters.

[08:54]

Okay, there we go. All right, so how do we find the underlying root? I try to think of it as those roots under the ground that you would see with a tree or these are real obvious ones. When we're looking at that behavior, that situation, the struggle that they're having.

We need to figure out what's the underlying root and I always like to differentiate root and trigger. So, triggers are when we're looking at what happened right before, what was that thing that happened right before and that's important to know and that's part of our data collection. But beyond that, what's under that root? Because like I said, sometimes it doesn't seem to be the same trigger because maybe there's a different underlying root, there's an anxiety, there is a sensory, there's something else underlying and then it just pops up when my bucket is full. So, kind of looking at both. Kind of being able to determine what happened just before, but what else is going on?

I always tell people you need to kind of put on a pair of sunglasses. Think of the anger or the meltdown as this really bright sun, and it's right in your eyes and it's blinding you and it's annoying and it's bothering -- you know, it's upsetting. But you put on these rose-colored sunglasses, and immediately you can now see in that same environment, and you can see it completely different. Everything is a different color, whether they're the yellowy ones -- and it just gives you a different perspective.

So, I always ask -- whether I'm working with teachers or parents or when I'm parenting myself -- try to step back, put on the rose color glasses, and go, "okay, what else is going on?" What else is going on here?

Sensory sensitivity and arousal. I'm not sure how much you guys have heard about sensory issues. I could do a whole -- and have -- a whole talk on sensory issues. But just to hit like a quick two-second thing on sensory, we have eight different sensory systems. And for some of us, certain systems are real sensitive. Some people are sensitive to sounds, bright lights, certain kinds of clothing, tastes, smells. Some people cannot go into those candle shops or those lotion shops, all those different kinds of things.

[11:19]

Those are things that if you have a sensitivity, it's going to fill your bucket faster. So if you have a sensitivity to sound and the room is really busy, your bucket's getting scoops every five to ten minutes, you're in there, right? And it's filling up and your stress level and your arousal level is going up. So that is something that when we're looking at what is the underlying root or what is part of the trigger, we're looking at what's going on with their sensory systems. And you know your kids -- are they the ones that they don't want their hair washed in the bathtub? They're very sensitive to their head. They only wear certain clothes or you have to cut all the tags out. All of those are one more piece to that puzzle of what's going on. And they definitely are part of the strategy that we want to use for your child to help them get through it.

Anxiety, fear of the unknown. A lot of kids worry about things that might happen. Well, this might happen if I go there. This might happen if I go there. One of the programs that I like, "Mind Ninja" -- they talk about our brain is not necessarily designed to keep us happy. It's supposed to keep us safe. It's our protective mechanism. So it's constantly thinking of the next thing that might come up that I have to address. Boy, does that describe a lot of my kids. When she said that, I was like, wow, yeah, that's really true.

So a lot of times they're worrying about things they don't need to. So how do we get them past that piece? And then kind of those self-expectations and that worry of not doing it right or failure -- especially with my really bright kids -- whether they're in an accelerated or not. But my above average kids, they know what a "B" looks like and when they don't write it right, they're so frustrated. Another kid writes a "B" like this and they're like "done!" But if you know what it looks like, if you want it to look that way, and it doesn't look that way, rip the paper, break the pencil -- amongst a variety of other things.

But I think being really above average, that is frustrating. And you're afraid to say the wrong answer, have the wrong answer. There's already a feeling of, "I should know that!" Nobody knows everything, but there is that underlying feeling. So looking at which of these type of things could be your child -- could be underlying some of the other things that are going on.

Is there some sensory stuff? Is there some anxiety stuff, fear about what might be happening? Is there a really harsh self-expectation and a fear of failing in front of others? Those are things. And then we want to target those areas and help bring those up in addition to trying to bring the meltdowns down.

[14:05]

So, one first start for that is to self-assess. A lot of kids -- a lot of us even -- don't do the best at self-assessing. It's an executive function skill. It's that ability to really realize what you were doing and how you handled something. But it's also a little bit bigger than that. It's really about "what do I do with this after I've found out?" So, I have to look at what's going on. "How did I handle that?" And then, "what am I going to do about that?"

So there's some great programs out there. I'm not sure if you've heard of some of these. Again, I could do an entire talk on any one of these, but these are great programs. The amazing thing about the Internet, any one of these, you could find a YouTube video on a nice five-minute presentation on great information. I'm going to give you, like my snippet on how I've used them real quick.

So, Zones of Regulation -- really nice program, uses colors, uses faces. I even equate that with my bucket. So blue is kind of, "I'm tired, I'm sad, I'm bored, I'm hurt. I'm in that blue area." What do I do about how I'm feeling there?

Green is, "I'm feeling pretty good. I'm ready. I'm alert. I'm ready to go. I can sit and pay attention. I can interact with everybody. I'm feeling good."

Yellow is, "I'm starting to get a little bit annoyed, a little bit frustrated, a little nervous. Maybe I got confused, something the teacher presented, but I'm not out of control. But I'm feeling it. It's bubbling, it's boiling." And for me on here, I put caution tape. This is your caution zone. The next thing that comes up is going to put me over, and it could be my pencil. It broke. That's how close we're getting in that one.

And then the red zone is, "I'm feeling out of control." There might be yelling or hitting. There might be silliest behavior, too. I have a few kids that when they get really upset, they go into this real super giggly, silly mode and you can't get them to focus.

And so what we try to do is help the kids to try to figure out what zone are you in. And then we actually have, like, a tool, and it's color coded, and you can pick two or three tools that help you to get calm within this state. It's not going to take you out of the state instantly, but it's going to say, "okay, I'm in yellow. But what I can do in yellow is I can go get a sip of water or take a deep breath." I'm still in yellow. I still feel a little anxious or frustrated, but I can manage myself in the yellow. Same with red. I'm still feeling really upset, but I can manage myself. So it's identifying and then making a toolbox.

[16:59]

So it's a great program. I also have some kids that will do characters they don't want to just do the colors they want to do. I have one could do it all in different Minecraft characters. Great. Whatever makes sense to you. That's awesome. So this is a nice, easy one. Tons of stuff, free stuff online. You can get even printouts and on YouTube. So this is a great one to explore.

And I will tell you, with any of the programs, I really encourage parents, teachers, therapists to use that as well and to talk it out loud. If I'm starting to feel frustrated with you, I might say, "I'm in the yellow, and I'm going to go walk into the family room and take two deep breaths. I'll be back." And I do when I come back. Boy, that really scared my kids. They were like, "oh, my God, what is she going to do?" But it was like I needed a minute to regroup, and I was able to model because I think sometimes kids watch us

try to be in control all day, and they think, "oh, well, they don't feel this." I'm like, "oh, I feel all those colors every single day." So it's good for us to show them that we do.

This is another version of this. This is a five point scale. Again, a lot of times kids will assign different characters. I'm not sure how well you can see it, but this particular one actually has Pooh characters. So the one that's too wild and out of control is Tigger. And the one that says, "I'm okay, I can do my work," is Pooh bear. And then Eeyore, "I'm too tired. I can't do it." And then Owls in the middle on a two and Piglet's sort of in that four because Piglet is a little nervous and fidgety and stuff like that. So what I like about this book is they actually have different pages that have -- so this page is right out of the five point scale book, there's a page that has Star Wars planets. "I'm on this planet. I'm on that planet." I had another kid who do a Minecraft on this one lot of Minecraft. So again, something that the kids can tie into and then be able to say, "oh, well, I'm feeling like Tigger. I'm bouncing all over the place and I'm not in control right now."

"You're right. Let's go jump on the trampoline or let's go do something." So that's another good one.

[19:15]

Another one that I use. This is with my older kiddos, but this is called Interception. This is one of the eight sensory awareness. A lot of our kids do not have good internal awareness. "How are things going on in there?" They can't even localize to where something, "I don't know, my belly hurts," but they can't localize to it. Some kids take a little bit longer to go to the bathroom regularly because they're just not paying attention to, "oh, I have that urgency or, oh, I'm hungry." They don't tell you you're hungry until - my kids were classic at that --they wouldn't tell me they're hungry until they were almost melting down. And I'm like, "you're hungry." And they'd eat and they were fine.

You know, it was like -- but they didn't say they were hungry. So this is a great way of just sort of tuning into certain part of your body. And what I usually do when I work with the kids is we pick two areas that they're going to turn into and they're going to think about those.

"Do your muscles get tight when you get upset? What's your breathing like? What's your stomach feeling like? Is it all tight and in knots? How about your head? Is it cloudy and fuzzy?" And so we try to identify those. And so for some kids, I'll have them do what we call body check, check in every little bit. "How are you feeling? Do I feel a little sluggish or I feel a little bit..."

"Ok, let's do..." --and we've already identified two things you can do for that. And so they just kind of do that check in. And for some kids, that like anatomy and like to think about the brain and the heart and the lungs and all that kind of stuff, this is just right down their alley. A lot of times we'll even do things so that they realize you have control over some of these things.

We will go and we will kind of take your heart rate and respiratory rate and then run up and down the hallway twice. And then take it again. And then sit and take some deep breaths and take it again. And they can see, "oh, I can make my heart rate go up, but I can also make my heart rate come back down." A lot of times, just knowing you can control some of those physiological things right there gives your child a better sense of control. And, like, "I can do that. I can take control of that." So this is a very helpful one, especially for some of my older kids.

[21:26]

This one the Unthinkables and the Thinkables. And I do have sheets. I'll put them out. You can Google this. This is the Super Flex guys. They are superheroes, and the Unthinkables are those parts of your brain that cause you to do something. They're the villains. So, Rock Brain. I make people get stuck on their own ideas. So, if you have somebody that's always stuck on their own idea and they're not listening to, oh, your Rock Brain is pushing you in that direction.

So you need to get Rex Flexinator to come out and help you out. And so it's really cute. I've had some kids -- I had one student, third grade, and we'd done zones, and we came into the speech room, and she happened to have these on the wall and -- super smart, kiddo, but just really struggling. And he just started reading the whole chart, and he goes, "that's me, that's me, that's me."

And I'm like, "okay, we're going to do this." And he did. He could really identify with some of these characters. I feel like that. "Energy hair. I give people too much energy. Yes, I always have too much energy." Okay, so now we need to do the meditation mat and do one of his exercises. So kind of a fun way, a little silly superhero way to look at it. So just a variety of strategies that if you feel like there's one that your child like, wow, they really like superheroes. Oh, they'd be into the body or those kinds of things, something that you could approach them with.

I always encourage parents to go online, read a little bit about it, and then share it with your child and go, what do you think about this? Is there anybody in here that sounds familiar?

The next strategy, we need to interrupt that negative spiral that tends to get started. You know, that spiral where it says, "I can't do it, I'm not good at it. I don't want to, so I'm not going to do it." And so then we don't get better at it. And so the next time it comes up, and for me, I'll just say writing, because I work on writing so much. "Well, I can't write neat, so I don't want to write that." Well, the less you write, the worse you get at writing, it doesn't progress. We need to get the spiral going the other way. So looking at what are strategies that we can stop this spiral?

One of the strategies I try to look at is everybody has strengths. We talked about that in the beginning. So what is your strength? And sitting down with your child and saying, "what is your strength? What is your superpower? You have one."

And I don't think we talk about that enough. We're always very aware of the things we're personally, even very self-critical often. But you have these amazing gifts. So what is your superpower? What do you bring to the table? How do you help others? How do you help yourself? And so focusing on that and bringing that spiral back in the other direction.

There's another thing that the Mind Ninja talks about, and I love this. Another good quote that they had was "negative thought begins another negative thought becomes another negative thought." So again, that spiral activity or idea, they talk about a "thought catcher." As soon as that first negative thought comes in, their theory is within 20 seconds, there will be a buddy negative thought. And I thought about that, and I really do think that's true, because if you start to like "this outfit makes me look fat. Yeah, I don't like coming." It just starts down a spiral.

[25:05]

So their idea is, as soon as you get that negative thought, “catch it,” and then you need to “turn it.” So as soon as the first one comes in -- and they actually talk about turning it in terms of the fact that your brain is always looking for that next problem that it has to solve -- so they say something like, “thank you, bad thought for trying to keep me safe, but I don't need you anymore. I'm good, I got this.” Or, “I don't like this, but I can handle it. So I'm good.”

And so trying to have an interrupter right there. As soon as that first negative thought comes in. Again, I feel like this is something that you need to model out loud if you are thinking something negative, and they go, “wait a minute, I don't need that. I got it.” And you just keep doing that as you're walking through the house, because it's very hard to go to somebody and say, they have this negative thought, and you go, “no, stop what you're thinking. Think something else.” It has to come from inside. And kids really do imitate us so much. They really do watch us. They listen to us.

I remember when my kids were little, I would hear my little goofy sayings, come back at me. I was like, “oh my God, I say that all the time.” And so they really do, even if they don't want to. So by you saying that out loud, by you catching your negative thought and turning it and say, “wait a minute, I'm good, I got this.” Or, “I can handle this without that. I'm a bit scared, but I can do it.” Telling them that. I mean, when are we not scared to do something new?

Like, you know what, I did that this past weekend because I went skiing with my family and I haven't skied in a really long time. And the rest of them are much more athletic than I am. And I have a hard time going down the hill. Fell a few times. And I said to my daughter -- because she's got some things she's working on too. And I'm like, “okay, I'm really scared. I'm really kind of nervous. But I got this.” And so every time we say that, it reassures them they can do it as well.

I love this one and this is such a nice easy one. It's more just making it part of a habit. But again, it talks about that mind shift. Start the day positive -- end the day positive. If you start your day and it's sunny and you go, “oh my gosh, it's sunny outside. How nice.” It just starts at different. Than “I'm tired, I want to go to school.” And again, it's one of those ones where you would start saying that you would be that person saying it, and they would then start modeling it. You could do it as a family and then end the day on the best thing that happened today. It could be the best thing that happened is “I got a cookie at lunch.” Whatever it is, it doesn't have to be big. It doesn't have to be anything but the best thing so that they can remember one good thing.

I find that I tend to remember the negative things. I can do stuff all day, do probably a lot of really great things. And I forgot one thing or I messed up one thing. And when I go home and my family asks, how was your day? I'm like, “oh my God, I forgot to do the thing.” But I don't mention the other things I did which were perfectly great or even if they were just fine. So we do tend to think about that.

I don't know if you guys have seen the movie. I mean, it's old -- Pretty Woman -- but she says the “bad things are easier to believe” and it's true. Those negative things are easier to believe. So something as simple as starting the day with a positive thought and ending the day with a positive thought, just something to think about.

I also like the fact that we're trying to work on self-compassion versus criticism instead of talking about the things that I didn't do well. And there's going to be things that I don't do well every single day. But talking about the things that I did and having some compassion for myself.

Another thing, and this came out of -- trying to think if it came out of -- think it came out of Mind Ninja as well. But looking in the mirror at yourself and saying, "I love you." It's a little awkward. I tried it and I was like, "that feels a little --" But what an important thing to do to look at your own reflection and say "I love you," or they were even saying they're like, if you're not ready to say I love you, "I like you, I like me, I'm learning to love me." Because sometimes if we're really hard on ourselves, we're not feeling that right away. An easy way to do that. If you're in the bathroom anyway with them and they're brushing their teeth and stuff like that, you can just say it into the mirror to them and to yourself and they can say it back to you and to themselves. So just a way to start the day positive or end the day positive.

[29:53]

Sensory. I talked a little bit about that -- filling your bucket, emptying your bucket, looking at those sensory systems and trying to decide A) are they seeking some information? We've got some kids that move, move, move, jump, jump, jump, jump, jump. So they clearly need some input and then we've got other kids that are getting overdone by input and they need to have a way to calm down or empty their bucket. We call that emptying the bucket a "sensory diet."

Sensory diet meaning getting a little taste -- like you would for a diet. They talk about having your meal, then your snack, then a meal, then your snack. Same idea. Having little doses of this information.

Moving, run, jump, crash, do some sort of obstacle course which is real regulating. Grab a puzzle piece, climb over something, climb under something, come back around. Doing that through the end of the puzzle is really helpful. It could be a basketball and make a hoop and come back. Doing silly stuff like listening to music, singing, dancing, marching.

Finding a quiet space. Some kids need a little quiet space. If your kids have ever set up a little cubby or a little quiet space, they're telling you they need a little quiet space. So finding that space and decorating it, making them have this really amazing space.

Doing something with art, some sort of art made of draw, color, paint, read, playing with your dog or your cat, petting your animals and stuff like that can be really calming. Anything that has to do with suck, swallow or breathe, that is the first thing we come out needing to work on to regulate as infants. Suck, swallow, breathe, get that going. And then we calm -- and we still need that. Blowing bubbles in water, blowing bubbles from a bubble wand, just taking deep breaths.

I have a fun Tic Tac Toe game where I have all the little X's and O's on squares and you use a straw and you suck it up and then you move it onto the thing and you blow it down. Just doing something like that. If you notice, they're kind of getting towards yellow. "Let's play Tic Tac Toe. Let's get out the whistles and the blowers. Let's blow some bubbles." It's really hard to still be angry when you're blowing bubbles.

Snacks or drinks. A nice smoothie through a straw. I've also done applesauce through a straw, put a little swirl of applesauce on a plate, and they suck that up. Same with yogurt. Great for after school. A lot of kids come home from school and they're here. They've had it. That's a great snack. And it's fun and silly. You can put a little sprinkle in it. Crunchy, snack, chewy, snack. Any of those things can take everything

down a notch before you even address homework or what else has to happen. So just looking at those kind of things

And then tactile stuff, if they like tactile stuff, but like digging in sand, or they have those little Zen garden things, playing in water. A lot of kids like to play, go outside and play in the leaves. Rice bins are great. I even as an adult, like a rice bin because of what I do. I have rice bins in our office, but it's kind of soothing to just dig through. It just feels good. There's stress balls, squeeze balls, or just big hugs. Big bear hugs, big squeezes, especially right after school, because that's a tough time for everybody. And at least in my house, it used to be a really busy time. It felt like we were just running.

So if we've kind of helped them to assess themselves, the next thing we need to help them do is assess the problem. How big is the problem? Zones of regulation has the "how big is your problem?" Mind Ninja has a "how bad is it really?" They say on a scale of one to 100, but one to ten, and then even thinking farther, like, will this still matter tomorrow? Will this still matter next week?

[33:47]

The size of the problem kind of looks like this the worksheet. What I typically try to do is have kids map out, and I always have them start with a huge problem. "What's a huge problem? Your house is on fire. That's a huge problem."

Let's put that in a five. "Okay, what's a little problem? I dropped my pencil on the floor," and then we kind of fill in from there. And again, we're doing this at a time when they're happy and calm, and we can go through that, and we're just sort of putting things in categories

And then we talk about so what kind of a reaction do you need with a huge problem? "Your house is on fire. You better haul out, and your heart is going to be racing." We can go back to, like, if it's a little problem, you pick it up, you put it on the desk, you're fine. And we try to fill in a bunch of things from there and give them an idea of, well, it wasn't that big a problem. And then we can go back to that positive self-talk piece and say, "well, it's a four. I can handle a four" or "it's a three."

So, in the moment, once you've kind of played that game, and you've taken them through some of that. In the moment, you can be like, "so how big is this? Well, it's a three. Okay, well, you've handled three before. I can handle a three. Let's go. I'll help you through this. Right?"

Another strategy, having that predictability, and for them to know what the consequences are. That is probably one of the most challenging things, but it's so important. Setting a consistent structure. I find that even in my sessions, kids will walk in to -- we have some big motor rooms and there's all this fun stuff, and they'll walk in there and they see all the stuff they want to do, and they already start a mindset about it, "okay, I'm going to do this." They're not saying anything, but they've already worked this up in their mind, and I picked something else.

There goes the explosion. So I try to set the stage as we're going in. "Here's, four things we can do" -- with picture cards. These are kids that are eight and ten, and they're verbal, but I got picture cards, but they can see them. And I'm like, "here's four things we can do, which things you want to do first?" And I let them decide what they want to do first, and then we kind of put them in order then, okay, then we're going to do this, and we're going to do this, so they know what's coming

For certain kids. I even refine that more. Like say we're going to do the obstacle course. "Okay. Do you want to do it five times or eight times?" I let them pick. But then that's what we do. Because they're going to keep going a thousand times, because they're like, "well, this is what I'm doing for the next hour."

I'm like, "no, this is what we're doing for ten minutes." So if we just set the stage right away, going in, "how long do you want to swing on the swing? Three minutes? Five minutes? Great."

[36:27]

So now they think they have completely decided on the session. They've already made all the choices, but we have a nice structure. Sometimes I still get a one more minute or this or that. Usually I'll go, "well, let's see how we do with the other things. If we have a minute at the end, we'll come back to it," and I try to stay with the structure

Reviewing the schedule, even for the morning. A lot of kids will tell me, like, "I want to know what I'm doing." So just letting them know we have the whole schedule down. "What are we doing later in the day? What are we doing tomorrow?" Giving them that schedule.

"What's the morning look like?" Depending on the age of the child and how much they can take, and either writing it down and erasing it off, "we're going to eat breakfast and wash up, and then we're going to go here, and then we have to leave by this time." And so, giving them that sort of schedule, either with pictures or with written dry erase boards are perfect for that because you can just erase it right off

Giving them an idea of what the consequence is -- that one is so important. So that way you can kind of take the consequence off of you and put it on them. "You can eat your breakfast before the timer goes off or before whatever the issue going on there, and we can get out the door and we'll have time for the park" or "if it takes a half hour, we won't have time for the park and we'll just go straight to whatever school or whatever your choice," and then walk away.

Don't keep talking about it. Just sort of walk away Stop making eye contact, right? And they can make that choice. And it's not always going to work and there's going to be a time they didn't get it and you're going to go, "sorry, we don't have time. Next time you can make a different choice." And then move on with that. You do that a couple of times, especially with our really bright kids. They know, A) that you mean it, and B) they know that they could have made a different choice.

And I try not to unless they're doing something really negative. I try not to say it was a bad choice. I just say you made that choice. You wanted to eat breakfast longer, that's fine. But we don't have time now, so that's a really important one.

Now we can do all the great strategies and sometimes we still get that. So there's still those moments. So in the moment, what do we do? What are those things that we can do in the moment? One of the things and I've worked with different speech pathologists – and one of the things we always talk about is "less is more."

Try not to say anything. As adults, whether we're the parent, the therapist, the teacher, we're like trying to make it happen. And we're like, "hey..." we're just talking, talking, talking. If you see it going off – just stop. "When you're ready, I'll talk to you. When you're calm, we can do this." And then try to kind of move yourself away.

The more you're there, they draw you back into it, especially if it's a little conflict going between the two of you. They want this. You're saying, "no, I'm sorry, we already set the limit," or whatever. Try to move yourself away and actually, kind of decrease eye contact.

I do think of kids in terms of when they go into their real meltdown, sort of like this cat. You're not going to make eye contact with the cat when he's doing that. You're going to be like, "okay, you're good." And then busy yourself. As soon as they see you're a little bit busy. "I'm just putting dishes away, but I can see out of my periphery you're kicking and screaming it's fine. I'm putting dishes away." It keeps us calmer and it gives them a moment.

The other thing that when I worked for the county, I had this opportunity to work – co-treat with speech therapists all the time. And they're like, "Chris, you talk too much and you talk too fast." So they trained me for several years in a row.

Make a comment. You know, when you're calm, count 10 seconds. 10 seconds is a long time of quiet. It's really weird, but I've gotten in the habit of 1002, 1003 all the way to ten before I give another directive, before I say something else. They said, "when children are upset, when any of us are upset, if somebody keeps talking, it's like that Peanuts thing. That's all they're hearing."

You wait 10 seconds. There's this lull, there's this uncomfortable silence. And then they're like, well, wait a minute. And it kind of shocks them sometimes too. And then you can say, "when you're calm, we can talk." Okay, I'm going to keep doing the dishes, and so just sort of taking it down a notch that way.

Sometimes you need to just change the environment, dim the lights, put on some smooth music, or if there's sound, get rid of the sounds. I've even done a scoop and go. When my kids were little, my son was more the one who would sometimes have these big emotional outbursts. I would just scoop and go, and we'd go to a new room, and I'd sit him on the floor where there was nothing that he could kick, bang, or whatever. And we'd wait. Sometimes just going to a new room just sort of shocked them out of it, too.

Also having a calm space to go. Some kids really like having that cubby space, a little tent area, or a bean bag chair -- that kind of thing. So knowing they can go to their calm space and "I'm not going to talk to you when you're in there, you can stay in there until you feel calm, and that's your space." That's kind of a nice thing. Sometimes it's their room, but sometimes it's not. Sometimes they just have this cute little cubby area in the corner of the family room.

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So when it's done, the explosions happened. We're out of the moment. One of the biggest things is waiting long enough until they're calm to review what happened. I think a lot of times as adults, we want to talk about it right away. And I think of myself, if I've had kind of a big explosion, and maybe I have said something that I don't feel good about, "I really don't want to talk about it right away. I'm not really feeling it." So wait until they've calmed down. For some kids, you have to wait a little while, and

you can't really review much of it for a while because it starts right back up. If they are calm and you're feeling like you can review it, sit down next to them. I get so much more out of my kids, even my own personal kids, when I'm sitting next to them, not facing them, not making that eye contact, not saying, "what are you doing?" Next to them.

I get a ton in the car with my adult kids now, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We sit at the dinner and say, well, a little bit, we're in the car and we just started chatting. Or I used to get a lot out of them when they were little, when I would tuck them in and you turn the lights out. And you'd lay next to them and I'd ask them all day, "how was your day? How was your day?" "Fine." And then this big thing comes out and you're like, "okay." So sit next to them on the couch.

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Bring a cold drink, something for them to drink, something with a lid, just in case they toss it. But bring something to drink. Don't hand it to them. Just sort of set it on the table. If they want it, they'll take it.

Wait for them to start initiating some eye contact before you do. So you're sitting next to them and you're waiting for them to be, you know, if they want to snuggle in and just snuggle, just snuggle. But sort of give them that time to kind of come. And then when you do talk about it, this is the hardest thing I feel like for me as a parent, focus on what they could do differently next time. They know what they did wrong most of the time. They really do know that they chucked a chair, they yelled whatever. They know.

Next time. "What could you do different?" You can talk about what zone they were in. You can help them with that. Maybe. But then what could you do differently? Thinking about, "well, how would you want to feel? What do you hope will happen next time? And what can you do to make that happen?" So really focusing on the next time.

This one is so huge. Celebrate the successes all throughout the day. Again, thinking about turning that feeling of negativity. Maybe they had a hard day at school. Maybe they then came home and did something. There's a spiral of negativity. Anything that's positive. Celebrate those successes.

For you guys. You're here. You jump through whatever Hoops you have to jump through to be here, to try to learn something new. Celebrate that success. You're here as resources for each other. Somebody next to you might have a suggestion as well. Celebrate that success. Every little piece that they do. "Wow, great job."

It's not going to be perfect. We're not looking for perfection. We're looking for progress. Same with yourselves. When you try one of these strategies, you're not looking for perfection, and it might not come out perfect. You might not get exactly the response you were hoping for, but look for progress. Celebrate that success. Like, "I tried that. I did a positive moment in the morning. It was okay, but I did it."

And let's keep doing that and see if the ball is going in the right direction. Let's get that positive spiral for you, for your child. That's so important. And it's so encouraging, when somebody says something, they noticed this little thing that you did different, like, "oh, thanks." It's just a feel good.

And you know what will be interesting is they will start modeling back to you. Some of the kiddos that I work with, they'll be going across and we're writing on the chalkboard. I always write with them, so I'll write with them. "Nice job, Miss Chris." "Well, thank you." We all want a little nice job. So try to celebrate those successes.

Some additional support strategies that you can use with all of those strategies. And I think I talked about it a little bit, but try to discuss and practice those strategies during calm, happy times. Make sure you have a lot of rehearsal of whatever strategy you pick during fun times. Make it fun, make it silly, and then use it during one of those challenging times. That just makes it so much easier on you and on them.

Model the strategies for them throughout the day. Pick one and just go with it and go, "I'm going to just talk about this. I'm going to talk about my zone all day for the next few weeks."

[47:24]

Take turns with your child. The floor is a mess and they need to clean up. Start it out by saying, "okay, well, what do you want to clean up first, the blocks or the trucks? You pick one. Whatever you don't want to pick up, I'll do." "That's weird. Okay." And all of a sudden, they're like, "yeah, well, I'm picking up the truck, you pick up the block." "Great." And you just pick up the blocks. And then all of a sudden there's more things being picked up.

Again, like I said earlier, try to embed choices. Give them a choice of two things. Really, as kids, they don't get a lot of choices. We sort of determine their schedule, determine their routine, and that's what we're supposed to do. I mean, "do you want the blue fork or the red fork? Do you want the yellow cup or the green cup?" I mean, little stuff. "Which shirt do you want to wear today?" We picked out our own outfit, probably most of us, I don't know. But they don't always get that.

We lay it out for them. Have them make a lot of choices. Most of our kids, especially our really bright kids, they want to be in control. They want to make some choices. Give them all these controlled choices. They think they made a ton of choices. All you did was give them a whole bunch of controlled choices. Feels good.

And this is something that I am trying so hard this year is make time, take time for a joyful moment in your day. Our days have been so stressful. These last two years of COVID have been so stressful. I think sometimes I forgot to have joy. Like, I'm running through the day and I'm stressed about this. And my bucket during COVID was here so much. And I think it is for the kids, and there's so much uncertainty. So it could be five minutes. Go outside and take a walk. Do something with them.

Do something for you for five minutes. Just a joyful minute. Maybe it's go in the other room and close the door for five minutes. Have a candle or something. And encourage them by showing them that example. Like, I need five minutes. Just give me five minutes. You'll be teaching them to take a five-minute joyful moment. My kids are adults, and I'm watching them be super stressed and running all over. And I'm thinking, "oh my gosh, that's what I showed them is normal life."

And so I'm really trying to take these joyful minutes, and I'm trying to include them even though they're 18 and 25. Like, "let's go do this. Let's do this." And it's like, we could let a little of this go because if our bucket is less full when that one scoop comes in, that stressful scoop, we're only at yellow, we're not at red. We're not overflowing. So try to find that piece.

These are -- and they'll be on the slides that you'll get copies of -- these are the different resources. The Zones of Regulation, the Thinkables and Unthinkables, Mind Ninja, "The Explosive Child" by Ross Green. Carol Kranowitz wrote two great books. She wrote several, actually. There's two that are readily available in the library, but just really good for sensory, "The Out of Sync Child." And then "The Out of Sync Child Has Fun."

There's another "Are You in the Zone?" That's a little different zone. And then there's this GoZen, which is really another app.

I love their -- and I couldn't get a picture of it, but they have this beautiful anger iceberg. It's awesome. And think about an iceberg. You see the top, and then there's the water, and you don't see all the underlying. So it's the same idea as the roots, but a little bit different. But it might be something to pull up and go over with your child. Like, "this is what we're seeing, what's in here, what's underneath that we don't see until we're already bumping into it?" The iceberg looks like it's that far away, but I'm bumping into the iceberg here underneath the water. So they have some really great stuff, too.

And like I said, with today's technology, YouTube video on any of these things. Nice five-minute introduction just to give you some information, tons of free downloads.

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We just want our kids to be happy and successful. And I think when we work together and we try some of these strategies, it can definitely happen. What I would encourage you to do is maybe pick one strategy that you want to try. Maybe it's the positive beginning and the end of the day and just say for the next week I'm going to do that one strategy or maybe you want to pick one that you want to look up.

So for the next week I'm going to do this positive in and out and I'm going to look up one. Or maybe we're going to say, "I love you" in the mirror each day or just something simple. Start with one. And then just model it and embed it in your day. And then if you want to add something -- but just see how that turns. A lot of times I think as adults we're like, "I try all these different things" It's too much for anybody. And then we end up giving up on it after a week or two. So think about a strategy or two you feel like you could use.