

Behavior Chat: Special Sensory Edition

Presented by Christine Chambers, MEd, OTR/L

Nicole Born-Crow (Connecting for Kids)

So a lot of you are brand new to Connecting for Kids. So we want to start off with introducing who we are and what we do. So Connecting for Kids, we've been around for about 11–12 years now. We provide resources, community, and support for any caregiver with a concern about their child, typically ages birth through 12 years old.

We can help with any kind of concerns, whether it's understanding a diagnosis, behavior challenges, challenges in the family, like divorce. We have resources for a lot of things, and we'd be happy to share some of those, at least online resources, with you after tonight. And our programs are all free for any child, 0–12, Cuyahoga, Lorain, and all of the adjacent counties.

So since a lot of you, I think there was only about five of you who've been to a Behavior Chat before, I'm going to tell you, we're going to talk a little bit through what the typical behavior chats look like. I did send out an email because I know some of you had kiddos who were a little bit older, and so I want to kind of reframe a little bit what these programs typically are about.

So they're geared typically towards children 18–6 years, 18 months to 6 years, with or without a concern. That's important, not 18 years old. In each session, we typically discuss a new tool, a new thing that we're working on, and what parts of our behavior toolkit can help support that.

Again, this program is not meant to be a consult. We may ask a few one-on-one questions, we definitely will. But there are going to be usually questions that can serve the whole group. If you do need one-on-one support, we offer, Ask Us one-on-one sessions. They're free with the staff, and we can help you find resources and support for really any of the things that you might be struggling with.

So our agenda for tonight, we are going to go over at lightning speed. The behavior toolkit, because tonight we're not really focusing on those tools. But I want to at least give you a picture of what you're going to be getting in your email. We're going to be giving everybody a digital, printable version of the toolkit. Some of you already have, like an actual tangible one. If you came to a live program, we're going to go over that. And then Chris is going to talk for about 25, 35 minutes about tantrums versus meltdowns and sensory systems.

So a lot about how sensory ties into some of the behavior issues that you might be dealing with. And then we'll open it up to a general Q&A. We'll alternate between some of the questions that you sent in when you registered, questions that you might be typing in the chat, and then we'll invite some of you, if you want, to raise a hand and actually ask your question verbally.

Didn't announce this before, but the wonderful Alicia is taking attendance, so please make sure to change your screen name to match the name you registered with. That is always very helpful.

I mentioned the behavior toolkits. You will be getting a version emailed to you, along with some other wonderful sensory goodies, usually within the next day or two of the programs.

We'll also be creating a podcast. We haven't created a new Behavior Chat podcast in a really long time, so we will send you a link to all the previously recorded ones. And then in about a week, we'll have this beautiful program edited for you along with the slides, and we'll send those to everyone as well.

I mentioned how you can ask questions, whatever way you feel comfortable. Some people want to ask them verbally. Some of you want to just put them in the chat, and we'll ask them for you. Whatever you feel most comfortable with.

We will have a survey that we would really like you to fill out after the program. Alicia will put it in the chat around 7:50. This is how we get funding to do these wonderful programs. Everything we do at CFK is free, but in order to get all the wonderful grants to do these programs, we need your glowing feedback about how fantastic Chris Chambers is at the end of the program.

And then I already asked you all to think about your goals. If you couldn't think of one, that's okay. We'll ask you at the end of the program to reflect on if you feel like your needs have been met in this program. If not, we'd be happy to chat with you in a one-on-one and figure out how to find your resources.

All right, so now I will commence with going through, at lightning speed, the tools in your toolkit. I'm not going to go into them in depth, but this is just a chance for me to tell you what these things are for. So we will be sending you a digital version of tools to keep data.

Very often, a helpful thing to have is an ABC data sheet, so it is tracking for you what happened before a behavior happened. What was the behavior and what happened after the behavior happened? Did people yell? Did siblings hit? And any notes? So a lot of the times, Ochanya talks about how important it is to keep track of what behaviors are happening and that helps you to actually get to the bottom of them and figure out how to prevent them in the future. So very helpful tool.

There's also digital versions of a lot of visual tools. A lot of kids, even if they're highly verbal, sometimes we as parents talk too much. So sometimes visual versions of what we're asking are the things that actually get the behaviors to stop. So stop signs, wait signs. I think there's an all-done sign that we're going to send you as well.

Tools for transitions. A couple of folks asked some questions about transitions, and these are some fantastic tips that Ochanya came up with to help your child transition better. From using social stories, to

preparing them, to using songs, a lot of this stuff may seem really simple, but it is a really helpful support. You can even take this out and show the child and let them choose which transition tool they want to use.

Tools for emotional regulation, same thing, lots of great ideas that you can actually let your child choose in order to help regulate their nervous system if they're feeling overwhelmed. Chris is going to talk a lot about that tonight.

And then we'll also send a social story about how to calm their body. This is good for sensory, this is good for anger. It's just lots of other great ideas. Social stories are a fantastic tool for young kids to learn to practice all of these things that you might be teaching them.

Tools for reinforcement. So we've had whole programs about things - like visual schedules and reward charts - can be really effective in motivating children positively towards the behavior that you want.

Here is the visual schedule. It comes with both a first-then chart and a schedule. So first-then charts are really great for children who have a developmental disability or who are very young, because it's very simple. First you pick up your plate, then you get a treat. So it's a direct cause and effect, which is very helpful for younger kiddos.

A schedule is a little bit better for some older kiddos, because it's actually them planning out their day for them. That doesn't work for some children. It's too long range for some younger ones. So we give you both, and that is all the tools. So we'll send you the links afterwards. But we have a whole education topic with all of these tools, how to use them on our website, and we'll be sure to send that to you after the program.

So I get to be done talking for a little bit. I'm going to throw it over to Chris Chambers. And Chris, you just tell me when you want me to advance to the next slide, but go ahead and take it away.

Chris Chambers

All right. Awesome. Those are amazing tools, and all of those tools can be used with behavioral and sensory. So you definitely can make good use of those, and I'll try to reflect on them as we go through.

So, as I said earlier, I'm a pediatric occupational therapist. I've been practicing for about 33 years. I've worked in a residential facility with children with complex needs. I've worked in an in-patient acute care hospital setting. I've done in-home early intervention. And then in 2007, I opened an outpatient clinic. I work with birth to 21, anything and everything. But what I will say is most of the kids that come to us are sensory, behavioral. Busy, busy, busy. Run, run, run. Go, go, go.

So throughout my 33 years, this question has always come to me: so is it behavior or is it sensory? What do you think? What I want to try to do is tease it apart a little bit for you. Note that behavior and sensory merge. I mean, they overlap. One flows into the other, but we will try to tease out the pieces so that you

can see... You know what? This situation, it's a little behavioral, but a lot of sensory. So those are the strategies I want to tend towards, or vice versa. There's a little sensory there, but there's a lot of behavioral. We want to have more of the behavioral strategies. It does flow back and forth, but I do think that you can tease out pieces.

What we know is behavior is always telling us something. It's telling us something. It's communicating to us something about the child, what they need, where they're going. So it tells even our own behaviors. It tells us what is most important. Where do you put your time? Where do you go? That's what's really most important to you. You might not even consciously think about it. So, same with your kids. What is most important to them? What do you want or what motivates you? We often use things that motivate the kiddos that we work with, to help as the little carrot, to motivate them down, or the first ten. You know, if they love Mario, I'm going to infuse Mario into all kinds of stuff.

So what motivates them? And then what do they need or seek? Is there some sensory things that they're seeking constantly? What does that tell us? What do they avoid? There is no way I'm touching that. There is no way I'm wearing those clothes. And why? What's that piece underneath? Then the whole sensory regulation piece. What is overwhelming and why? Why are we so overwhelmed? Why are we so overdone? Why were we not this overdone yesterday or this morning? So those pieces, and from all those, what we're looking for is the root, right? What's under that? The behavior is this piece up here, but what's underneath there? Why are we there? So that's really what we'll try to tease out today.

You can go ahead and switch. Perfect. So what I wanted to start with is, there is a difference, a fine line, but a difference between a true temper tantrum and a sensory meltdown. And when you're in the moment with your child, or even when I'm in the moment with somebody else's child, you're trying to tease that out. Like, where are we? So this is where I was talking about. Do I need to use more of a behavioral strategy because it's really a temper tantrum, or do I need to use some sensory strategies because we are in meltdown, we are overloaded?

So go ahead to the next screen. These are very general, but this is your quick and dirty on. What's a temper tantrum? So that temper tantrums tend to be that desire for something, or anger about not getting something, or having to stop doing something. And it's usually shorter in duration. Some kids can hold on pretty strong, and then sometimes it evolves into a meltdown, but it's usually overall shorter in duration.

Quite often, if you watch, it'll either stop when you stop giving attention, or if you just said, "Fine, just, here's the toy." And all of a sudden, it's like this. They're screaming bloody murder. Like their life is ending, and they get the toy, "Oh, thank you." We're pretty sure that was a tempered tantrum. And more behavioral than sensory.

So you want to find out, is it the attention that I'm giving them if I'm looking over to them? I've had it even in my sessions, and also with certainly my own children. You look away and you kind of just like, I'm in the room and I know they're safe, but I'm not going to give them my attention. You kind of hear it slowing down, and you look over, and it just escalates right up. You're like, "Okay, I know where we're at here."

So also, you kind of get a feel of a temper tantrum if you can distract them out of it, with, "Oh, let's put on Bluey," or something like that. And they pop right out of it. This gives us an indication that there is a little bit of a sense of control. They can control their emotion. They're not completely out of control. They're mad or sad or frustrated, but they have a little bit of control.

Switch to the meltdown. When we see that lack of control is when we get into this sensory meltdown. When they're completely overwhelmed or their sensory systems are completely over aroused, and they go into that fight, flight, or fright response.

Your fight response, this is your kicking, biting, pushing, shoving. It can also, with a child that's a little bit older, that's got beautiful verbal skills, it can be some really mean things. I mean, they know what to say to trigger. They know your button, they know the button of their peer. So that's their fight response. I want out of here, and I'm going to make sure that I'm going to get out of here.

Flight is just that. Either they're climbing up. You're like, "I can't be in this situation." And they're literally climbing up your body or hiding behind, or they bolt right out of the room. Then that fright is just that complete sadness, sobbing, hiding under the desk. I'm not coming out. So these are intense visceral responses. They tend to be longer in duration. It takes them longer to calm down out of them. Usually you can kind of see, especially in their eyes, they're out of control. They've left the building. It's one of those situations, even if I gave them the toy, it doesn't stop. In fact, they don't even know what they want anymore. Like, what do you need? They're just so overdone.

So different strategies for that situation. What I wanted to do today is give you a quick overview of the eight senses. I'm not going to teach my semester sensory course at CSU, but I wanted to just give you a touch of it. Some of them are super obvious, and we know about them and we learn about them in kindergarten, but some are a little bit different, like proprioception and interception and stuff like that.

So I want to give you just a little tidbit so that you know what you're looking for. If you start to see, like, "Oh, my child has that," that might be it. Because these sensory systems fill our bucket, and we'll talk about the bucket later. That's where this meltdown or this over arousal comes.

Our senses, the roles are for them to protect us, to protect our body, and to discriminate between different things. This is heavy, this is light, this is soft, this is prickly. So that gives us that information. If we have a sensory system, one of our eight senses that over registers, you tend to be someone who's avoiding that information.

You're going to not want to be near that type of input, that sound, that touch, that group of people that seems to be all bumping into each other, and I don't want to be touched. You tend to be hyper vigilant. You want to make sure that there's no way that the information that you're getting or that's out there is going to get to you. You're going to be very vigilant and often a bit controlling because you want to make

sure that you're not going to have to touch that, you're not going to have to move on that, and you're not going to have to taste that.

Those are the different ways that we kind of know you're probably over registering in that system. You tend to be more sensory defensive. You fly up into fight, flight or fight really quickly. Parents will tell me they go from zero to 180 in seconds. They're just overdone and in a different direction in seconds. Probably some sensory defensive. Interesting piece, as we go through the systems.

Typically, you won't see somebody sensory defensive. In all eight systems, or five of the eight, they can be over registering in one, under registering in another. So it's a give and take. Under registration, these tend to be our seekers. These are the kids that are moving, and they're crashing, and they're climbing up on the cabinets, and they're jumping off of things. They tend to be easily distracted, but they're distracted because they're like, "Oh, I need this, I need that input, I got to crash there."

Hyper vigilant might look a little distracted because they're, "I can't have anything touching me. I can't be over there." So finding those little fine tooth comb for the root. Again, our over registration tend to be pretty frequently moving. Poor awareness of their body, poor awareness that there's other people in the room. They might be plowing right through, poor awareness of the room. They're tripping on toys, they're bumping into the wall. That tends to be the under registration. All right, next one.

So our eight senses. One of the things that you are going to get is this cute little handout that talks about Ali and his eight senses. It's got a cute octopus and kind of gives you a quick reminder of like, "Oh, yeah, it could be this sense." So obviously, for vision, our receptor is our eyes.

As we talk about sensory systems, really what happens is we take input from the environment through the receptor, and it goes from the nerves all the way to the brain. Then the brain tries to figure out, okay, what do I need to do with this? This is information. Is this harmful information? Is this fun information? Do I like this? Do I not like this? Then you get a motor output or behavioral output, so you get some sort of output. So for vision, obviously, we're seeing our environment quite often at a very young age. Kids get an acuity test. Is your vision 20/20?

That's great, and that's really important. But a lot of times what we're looking at for vision as occupational therapists is the visual perceptual skills. Do they have those visual perceptual skills for stacking blocks, for doing Legos, for the visual memory piece of visual perception, for reading and math and spelling? Do they have the ability to do the eye-hand coordination things, for dressing and self-feeding?

Obviously, social interaction is very tied to vision. Are you able to maintain that visual contact, or is it really hard for you? Are you oversensitive, and you can't be looking at somebody's eyes and right in the pupils the whole time? Oversensitivity or over registration of vision is that sensitivity.

You want the lights dim, you want the sunglasses on. I've had kids where they want sunglasses on all the time, or they won't go outside without a hat and sunglasses. They're avoiding eye contact. But they do

tend to notice a lot of details in the room. If the room is real busy, they get really overdone. So that's your over registration kiddo for vision. They miss all the details. They're walking by. They didn't see the street sign or, "Oh, this isn't the boys' bathroom, it's the girls' bathroom. I didn't even see the sign."

They have that decreased ability in their fine motor play, in their self-care, in their writing. It comes out that way. Then they get easily frustrated, right? Those are all the skills that are expected as you go into school, and they're easily frustrated, and their regulation goes up. Auditory. Obviously, the sensory receptor is the ears. We have high frequency sounds, we have low frequency sounds, men's voice versus women's voice, different kinds of music. Some kids, the hand dryers in the bathroom or the toilets flushing, those lower frequency sounds are overwhelming.

It's also an ability to localize to sound. I heard a bird over there. I heard mom over there. Whether you're localizing and distracted or you can't localize, and you're not sure where all those sounds are coming from, and you get overwhelmed. Also, foreground versus background, and this is super important in social situations in school. Can I tune into the person talking to me right near, or am I distracted by the person next to me's erasing? The person on the other side of me scooted their chair and the person behind me just yawned.

Can I still hear the teacher, or can I still hear mom giving me directions in this busy room? This also affects your speech and language, your vocabulary, your phonics. All those parts and pieces are tied to this. The oversensitivity to sound or over registration is that sensitivity to sound. That covering their ears, screaming, getting really easily overdone in a group. It could be visual and auditory, right? A busy group, lots of visuals, lots of sound, could really fill our bucket.

The under registration talks loudly, makes all kinds of silly sounds. Heaven forbid. The child with over registration hearing is sitting next to the child with under registration hearing in the classroom, because that one's talking really loud and the other one's like [inaudible 00:21:46].

Next, touch, big one. I think this is the one most people think of when they think of senses, and they think of sensory defensive. Obviously, skin, all over our body. It's our initial sense for learning about the world as well as for safety and security and snuggling and that emotional piece. It's really an emotional sensor that kind of triggers our ability to interact, that social interaction with everyone.

It also has to do with manipulatives, playing with blocks, using tools, using scissors, pencil, buttons, zippers, all those things. It affects our self beating and our dressing and our writing. If you're over registering, you're picky about clothing. Maybe you wear two items. I will wear this shirt and these pants, or I will wear soft shirts and pants, no jeans, nothing that seems scratchy or firm. It also can be related to bathing. I don't want to take a bath. I don't like to get messy.

If you under register, this person's constantly touching everyone. They're touching you, they're touching the toys, they're touching other people, they're bumping into things, and they tend to be under aware pain

and temperature. They bump into something, it should really hurt. They just move on. Blood's coming out, I don't know. They don't have that safety awareness.

Olfactory. I think this sense gets under looked. Smells can be so calming or so alerting. I mean, you hear about using different scents, but they really can and they can really change our regulation. We tend to typically have some emotional ties to certain smells. Maybe you like vanilla because mom or grandma always made cookies.

Or like for me, my mom is Italian. If I smell like real good homemade pasta sauce and meatballs, it changes. I just feel good. It's like a big hug, just by a smell. If you're over registering smell, then you're sensitive to smell. You don't like the way things smell. You avoid certain foods. You don't want to be around people that have lots of perfumes or lotions. Oftentimes olfactory can be one of the key pieces to a picky eater. If they don't like smells, it smells are noxious.

Think of yourself, if it smells bad, are you going to eat it? Just because it doesn't smell bad to everybody else, but if it smells bad to you, you're not going to eat it. That's a protective sense. Your body's like, "Oh, no, that's not safe." Can often be a piece of picky eater. Then under registration, these are the kids that smell everything. They are smelling every flower, which is lovely, but then they are smelling people, and they are smelling the toys, and often they don't notice strong smells. People would be like, "Oh my God." "No, I don't smell anything."

Taste. Again, this is obviously very related to our picky eaters, but taste can also be calming and alerting. A nice ice-cold lemonade, a nice tart taste can wake you up. A nice warm cup of chamomile tea can be soothing and calming. Again, emotional ties. I eat that spaghetti and meatballs. I'm so happy. We have a lot of emotional ties around food. There's also just a lot of social and cultural things around food, so food is a tricky area.

Our over registration kids, this is where we get our picky eaters or our problem feeders. Picky eaters, meaning I'm a bit picky, and I'm a little limited. But our problem feeders, where we're really getting down to, I have five foods that I will eat and that's it. That becomes even a bigger problem. Picky eater is a problem, but when we get all the way down to problem feeder, definitely sensory pieces to that. Someone who doesn't try new foods, our friends that will eat only one kind of chicken nuggets, and it has to come out of that box, and if it's not that chicken nugget, I don't trust it, and I'm not eating it. Those over registration kiddos can be in there.

Our under registration kiddos, eats pretty much anything, which is great, but they also put a lot of non-food items in their mouth. They often have fingers in their mouth. They're kind of chewing on fingers. They're very messy eaters. They're just going to town, and it's going everywhere. Interception is one that I think a lot of us don't think about, but again, can affect feeding but also affect toileting.

This is our awareness of, "Oh, I feel hungry," or, "I'm thirsty," or, "My heart rate is racing," or, "My breathing is going really fast, I have to go to the bathroom." How soon do I know about that? Is it right

away or am I almost going, and I'm feeling it tactically before I really knew I had to go? As well as your muscle tension.

Your over registration kiddo is that kiddo that's frequently complaining about boo-boos and hurts and health and all those kinds of different things. Whereas your under registration kiddo typically will struggle with toileting. They do not have that sense. Often they will not be aware that they're sick. I mean, I've had it where kids have come in, and they're kind of off balance, and they're just not right and mom takes them into the doctor. They had a double ear infection. A flaring double ear infection.

Nope, weren't pulling on their ears, weren't indicating, so really don't have that good internal sense. Then again, those kids that really don't sense that they're hungry. It's really hard to motivate your picky eaters because they don't feel hungry. Definitely that affects feeding as well. Proprioception and vestibular. Probably the two biggest ones that as OT's we just really jump in on and find so much help because these two systems can really help us regulate.

The proprioceptive, this is in your muscles, tendons, joints, and it gives you that body awareness. All of you are sitting in some position right now. You don't have to look down and go, "Oh, my feet are on the floor or my legs are crossed." You just know that. When you climb on a ladder, you don't have to look at every rung, you know where your foot is. That's your proprioception. It also gives you information on timing of movement, how to throw and catch a ball. How fast is it coming? How fast do you throw it? That exertion of force. When I color, do I break all the crayons? When I'm writing with the pencil, am I constantly breaking the lead? Do I pick up something too fast and too hard, and I spill it?

It gives you that information, and it really helps to regulate the vestibular system in particular, but all of your systems. That heavy work, proprioceptive information actually increases serotonin in our brain, which says, "Whoa, let's slow down and process this. Let's take a break and get more organized." It's a great regulator. Vestibular as well. Vestibular is in the inner ear, so a huge link to auditory because the receptors are right next to each other. This gives you your balance, your spatial awareness.

Where the proprioceptive gave me a sense of my body, the vestibular is giving me a sense of where I am in space, how I'm moving around, what the room is like. Sometimes we'll see kids that aren't sure about their vestibular system running the room, touching the wall. Run, run, run, run, run. I got to touch all. Or I've got a couple of kids, and they're in third and fourth grade at one of the schools I'm at, they have to touch the wall all the way down the hallway. There's tactile pieces to that, and there's other pieces to that. But some of them are literally like, this is how I know where I am in the hallway. Here I go.

It's that vestibular movement. Proprioceptive is your body. Vestibular also gives you information on direction. Am I upright? Am I upside down? Am I moving forward, backwards, right, left? Am I going really fast? Am I going really slow? As you can imagine, if you over register vestibular. This is your people with motion sickness, right? This is people with fear of heights. I get up on something, and I really over register that information, and I don't feel good.

You just don't get that good awareness of body and space in terms of where should I be and how high am I really? They feel so much higher than they are. The under registration person, this is your child that's climbing on everything. You find him on the table, he's climbing on your cabinets. He's all over the place, likes to be high, because the higher I am... Think about it yourself. If you go up on something high, you get kind of this visceral, you get this little feeling of being up. Well, if you don't register very well, you need more of that to just feel regular, you need an extra dose, and they tend to have really poor safety awareness.

They will run off anything. They will jump off anything because they just are not as aware of where they are in space. That's my quick and dirty on the eight senses. Now we're going to talk about what do we do with that, and how does that work? Some of our senses over register or under register, and depending on how that flow goes, how much information goes into your bucket. We all have a sensory bucket. I talk with all my families, all my kids about this. We have this sensory bucket.

You can even go to the next page. All of the sensory input for the day, touch, sound, taste, smell, movement, all of that information dumps into our bucket. If we over register in any one of those areas, you get a super tidal wave of information and your bucket starts to fill. If our bucket is at that nice fill line, we feel good, we're ready to learn, we're ready to pay attention. We feel like, "I could take direction from an adult because I'm not overdone," right? All that sensory information goes in there and starts to fill that bucket.

Then anything that you're stressed about, anything that you're worried about, any additional direction from somebody just keeps filling the bucket until it overflows, and we're feeling completely overdone. I think most of us can look back at a time where you were just like, my bucket is full. I am overdone. I'm worried about my kids. I'm worried about the kids I work with. I'm worried about this, that, or the other, and you can feel it. I'm here and literally, if you say one more thing to me, I'm probably going to explode.

Usually at that point in my house, I excuse myself. We've kind of come up, even though my kids are 20 and 27, we've sort of come up with like, I'm full. I need to take a minute. It's okay, even as an adult, to be like, "I'm full. I need to just step away for a minute." I have taught the kids to say that, I'm full. It's definitely a good strategy to be aware in your own, but then to be able to advocate for yourself and say, you know what, I'm full, and I need a minute, and it's okay.

If we can get kids to do that before. Again when they're younger, it's harder and depending on their verbal skills, but if we can get that before we get the screaming in my face, I'm going to stop talking to them as the adult. I'm going to give them a minute, and maybe we can avoid that part. That's kind of where we start to lay our groundwork.

The next screen. Basically, just like we were talking, we want the just right amount of all of these senses to fill our bucket. Some of them, like we talked about the vestibular and the proprioceptive, can actually have some really nice calming, as well as a scent that you like, as well as some deep pressure from a hug. There's all this great information that we can use to take a scoop out of our bucket. Just like it can fill

it if it's too much, if it's the right amount, it can actually help scoop it out and get us to that nice green level. Go ahead.

However, we all know when we have those days, or our kids have those days where our bucket is full, and we're in the red. I often use zones of regulation. There's a resource for it at the end of the slides, but I often use zones of regulation, which talks about the red zone being the, "I'm overdone, I'm in fight, flight, or fright, I'm mad, I'm sad." Then you start seeing those behaviors of withdrawal or aggression or controlling the environment.

What our job is as caregivers, as therapists, as teachers, as grandmas and grandpas is to, a, try to figure out what is causing their bucket to fill so fast, and b, how do we get them to empty their bucket before we get to this? Where it's red, and I'm overdone, and I'm angry. Because, to be honest, nobody wants to be here. It doesn't feel good to be here. It doesn't feel good as a parent to be the recipient, but it doesn't feel good for the student, the child to be there. They're not happy in that environment, and they feel out of control. How can we give them some more control and you guys some more control?

First thing is it's always easier to empty the bucket before we get to red. If there are ways to prevent getting there or to take a scoop or two out when we're in the yellow. Again, you kind of see where these guys have the zones of regulation colors. The little guy who's yawning, that's actually blue. There's no blue in there, but that's actually the blue zone. I'm tired. I'm bored. I just don't feel like it. Green is that, "I feel good." Yellow is, "I am getting overdone, but I still am in control. I can still hear your voice. I'm still kind of listening to you, mom, but I'm overdone." Then red is that all out aggression and frustration and anger.

Two parts, right? How do I prevent, and then what do I use in the moment? That's what we're going to go into. What can I do to prevent it before we even get there, and then what can we do in the moment? I kind of broke it into, what can you do with the environment? You're seeing it, it's coming. Or you know your child has a difficult time with, "Hey, some friends are coming over," and that can be hard or family is coming over and that can be hard.

What are things that you can do before to prevent? Decreasing some of the distractions, especially if your child gets overdone with sound. Overdone with sound can be, I don't want it, but it can also be that child that gets amped up with sound. Turning the TV or video games off a little bit or putting on calm music.

I will warn you, sometimes our calm music, super slow, super sedate, is not their calm music. They will even say, "Turn it off. I hate it." We need to find something that matches where they're at. They're kind of zoomy and amping up a little bit, but is not super slow and way down here, because this doesn't match. I don't know if you've ever felt that like, "Okay, I'm going to turn on one of my favorite songs." You turn it on, you're like, "I just don't like it. It was the wrong match for where I was at the time."

What you want to figure out is what kind of music can I give them that's regulating and fun. A lot of kids music is very regulating and fun. It's got a constant beat that's very steady, very consistent, and it's

regulating, so it doesn't have to be super slow. A lot of times, marchy kind of things are real regulating. Plus, if you can get a marching, you get that proprioceptive, which we said was a good regulator, so that's a good one.

Also, finding a space for a calm space. This is not a time-out. This is a calm space. Here's your cubby with your favorite things that you get to go to. I like to have a calm space in my house where I can go and close the door and just have a minute.

Providing organizational structure. Some of the things that are in that behavioral plan. Having a daily routine. Don't list everything. But quite often in our sessions, we usually are in two rooms, big motor room for some part of the time at the table, if we're working on feeding or dressing or fine motor, and we will write the three or four things we're going to do in there, so some sort of schedule. Sometimes it's pictures. We have pictures of everything, or sometimes it's just written out, and so that they know.

We use timers, we use first-then. A ton of it. If you're going into a social environment, birthday party, grandma and grandpa's house at Christmas and Thanksgiving, friends' play date. How can you limit the complexity of that event, maybe the number of people, how long you stay? Sometimes kids can be successful for an hour, and then you just need to go, and you can build endurance for that social situation.

But sometimes when you stay too long, and they get overdone, it's really hard to scoop them up and go without them being so overdone. Also looking at the social mix, trying to find those peers that are a good fit, like I was talking about. Sometimes there'll be a peer that is so opposite of your child. Your child is loud and rough, and they want all this play, and there's this other child that's like, "I don't want to be touched, and I don't like them." Maybe they're not the best play date friends right now until you get those systems under control.

Finding somebody that's at that same level and then always having... If you do go to something, having an option. Sometimes families, especially if it's a family situation, you always go to grandma and grandpa's house, having a room in the house, you can go to that they can just have a couple of minutes of calm, and then they can rejoin the party. I have a couple of kids that get really overwhelmed at the beginning.

We've set up something where we come in, we don't really even say hi. We go to that room first, regroup for a minute, maybe I give them some big squeezes, hugs, whatever. When you're ready, you come out and say hi to everybody. Just having that option to use your sensory systems, use your bucket to the best of its abilities.

Next, tasks. Things throughout the day: getting dressed, getting out the door, those type of things. How can you prevent the overflow? If getting shoes on or coat on is this big ordeal, how can you do it? Can you take turns on some of the steps of the task? Can you sing through this task? Can you shorten the

task so that it doesn't become this big frustration? Getting dressed in the morning. I don't know about you, but when my kids were little, it was a big deal. How can we take charge?

For certain tasks that are longer, how do we build in a break? Homework time was always just torture for me and my kids, and so we would put in little breaks. Do this part, take a little break. Get a drink of water, play with the Theraputty. Do this part, take a little break. Using the first-then is huge. Allowing them to know they have choices in the task. When I set up the schedule for our session, usually it's, what's one thing you want to do in here? Then here's the other two things and I alternate it.

Also, looking for ways to make it fun and silly. Trying to make getting dressed a fun and silly thing. I popped it over your head, or how fast can you do this? We did a lot of how fast can you, as well as I had somebody the other day, tell me this really great strategy. Getting dressed in the morning was not fun, and they ended up making it into a little hide and seek game. "Hide and seek, come on, put your [inaudible 00:42:58], put your head around. Hide again. Put your shirt on."

You won't be doing that forever with them, but it's a good way to get into it. Then, once they're calmer about the activity, you can wean some of those out. Yes, it takes a little more time in the beginning, but it can really pay out later. Next one. Preventing that bucket overflow with general sensory regulation. Looking for the activities that are calming and organizing. Calm music, we already talked about decreasing the stimulation.

The other thing, calming and regulating our voice. As they're amping up, can we talk softer, slower? Give them a minute, so they can hear that we're taking a breath. So it's a little softer. I have kids that if I whisper, they'll be getting really amped up, and I'll whisper all of a sudden, then they whisper. Then I whisper. There's a lot more breath going on in the whisper, and it can just take everything down a notch.

Soothing tactile input for our kiddos that do like tactile input, or even our kiddos that don't, what is the touch input you like? Maybe they don't like being touched, but they love rubbing. My son had a stuffed animal that had a satin ear. That thing, boy, we rubbed all the satin off of that, but just that little nice satiny feeling.

Deep pressure, touch, massage, vibration, wiggle, jiggle arms. I take their arms and we wiggle, jiggle. Rhythmical movement, rocking, swinging, those kinds of things. Proprioception, jumping. Sometimes we'll jump our A, B, Cs to get all this out. You can jump on a trampoline. You can jump on the floor, bouncing. Again, marching songs and games. Before you know something stressful is coming or in the middle, "Let's march down to lunch."

Sucking and blowing activities are probably one of my favorite. Blowing bubbles in water through a straw, sucking applesauce or yogurt through a straw. Especially if you know, coming home from school, coming home for daycare is a challenging time. They come home and then they explode on you. Add in some of that, have a cool drink in the car that they're sucking through a straw. Have a snack at home and like, "Hey, let's do applesauce different today. Suck it with a straw."

That slows, that suck swallow breeze slows everything down. All the stressors of the day, all that bucket that got filled while they were at daycare school, we've taken several scoops out. By the time they're done with their snack, they might be at a better place, and you might not get that huge meltdown.

It's fun. Like the older kids, if I think they're starting to get overwhelmed, "Let's play tic-tac-toe." You put little X's and O on pieces of paper, and you suck it up with a straw, and you put it on the tic-tac-toe board. Again, if you tell a kid, take a breath, they usually yell at you and say, I don't want to breathe. If you can, play a silly game, blow bubbles, blow on a pinwheel.

Then soothing scents. Some kids are really lavender, vanilla, light a candle, have some soothing scents. Those can be really preventative. In the moment strategies. We talked about the zones of regulation. We talked about if you're seeing the yellow, you need to move out of the environment. I do a scoop and go sometimes, or we march to the next place. We talked about the calming space, always having an exit strategy, letting the kids know.

If you have a child that gets overwhelmed in the house, when you're overwhelmed, come to me and let me know. We can go to that room. We can go outside. Big squeezes and hugs, weighted blankets or animals. What's great is now you can find those anywhere. Target has them, it's on Amazon. Weighted backpack. Kids that need that extra input, they carry their own backpack in and out of school, and everywhere they go.

The movement input, a rocking chair swing. A sit and spin bike. Proprioceptive, trampoline, push and pull, putty, a squeeze ball, chewy crunchy snack, suck and blow. All of those are proprioceptive. Tactile, I use a lot of rice bins, sand bean bin, shaving cream, those poppet fidgets. Having those available, I hide puzzle pieces in the rice. They have to find them and put them in the puzzle. I hide little guys in the sand.

Auditory, we talked about using this whisper. We talked about first this, then the snack. Call music, they can be on those big headphones or just open air. Transition songs are something. When I worked for the county and I worked with music therapist, they are like gold. Just sing what you want them to do. "Time to put your shoes on, shoes on, shoes on, time to put your shoes on, then we go." I don't have a great voice, but boy, you sing that, and they're just doing it. They don't even know they're doing it. It's great.

Counting to 10 seconds. This I learned from my speech therapy friends when I worked for the county. Counting to 10 seconds after you give them a direction, give them that 10 seconds to process what you said and act. Their mind was on something else, and you gave them a direction and, "Oh wait, she said something. I don't really want to do that." You're still counting. Ten seconds is a long time. If you go one 1,000, two 1,000. It's amazing. About eight, often they're doing it.

Visual, turn the lights down, turn off the TV video. Then once we get through this, if there was some meltdown upset, hopefully it was short, hopefully it's less frequent because you're doing the strategies,

give them time to recover. I think as a parent, the thing that I really struggled with the most is I wanted to jump right in there and talk about it.

Here's what I see that happen. They might be embarrassed or sad about it. They might be tired if they had a big meltdown, or they might not be fully out of yellow. They've calmed, but you start to talk about it, and they go right back up. Give some time and then when you're calm, go over it. No accusations, no whatever. "What happened? What worked? I noticed when you went over in the cozy corner, you calmed down. That was a great strategy." Or, "I noticed when I gave you a big hug. What can we do next time? Let me know you need to go in the cozy corner before you hit me."

Having that conversation. But again, well after. Then take that time to cuddle and hug. Because, boy, mine are 20 and 27, and they're only little for a little while. You do want to enjoy those quiet moments, too.