

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

AUGUST 2023 EDITION



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Photo by: Michael Schoenfeld
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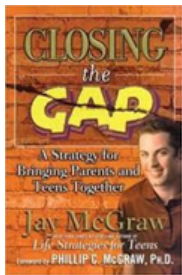
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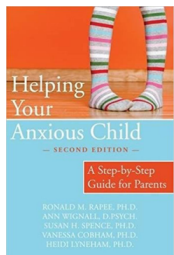
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Closing the Gap

Jay McGraw

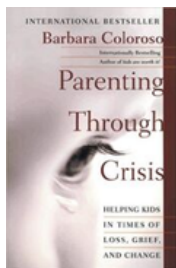
In this groundbreaking work, Jay introduces a new plan for both teens and their parents to work through the issues that divide them and, in the process, rediscover the love that initially defined their relationship. Jay works from both sides - sharing the perspectives of parent and teen as the former struggles for control, the latter for independence. He explains to parents how their teenagers wish to be treated, cared for, and even disciplined, and he shows teens how gaining power can come only from earning respect.



Helping Your Anxious Child 2nd edition

Ronald Rapee PhD, Ann Wignall D. Psych, Susan Spence PhD, Heidi Lyneham PhD, Vanessa Cobham PhD

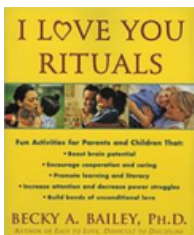
Helping Your Anxious Child has been expanded and updated to include the latest research and techniques for managing child anxiety. The book offers proven effective skills based in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to aid you in helping your child overcome intense fears and worries. You'll also find out how to relieve your child's anxious feelings while parenting with compassion.



Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief and Change

Barbara Coloroso

In this companion to her bestselling *Kids are Worth It!*, parenting educator Barbara Coloroso shows how parents can help children find a way through grief and sorrow during the difficult times of death, illness, divorce, and other upheavals. She offers concrete, compassionate ideas for supporting children as they navigate the emotional ups and downs that accompany loss, assisting them in developing their own constructive ways of responding to what life hands them.



I Love You Rituals

Becky A. Bailey PhD

I Love You Rituals offers more than seventy delightful rhymes and games that send the message of unconditional love and enhance children's social, emotional, and school success. Winner of a 1999 Parent's Guide Children's Media Award, these positive nursery rhymes, interactive finger plays, soothing games, and physically active can be played with children from infancy through age eight.



ON THE COVER, AARIAH

Aariah has a kind heart! Her favorite way to use her kindness is by caring for animals, and she previously volunteered at a dog shelter. Aariah delights in playing soccer and going for a swim. Like others her age, makeup is a process she enjoys figuring out. Seeing the shenanigans that Stitch gets into with his pal Lilo is probably why Aariah finds his character so endearing. A social girl, she is said to be articulate and open to talking; she does well with adults. Aariah appreciates a tidy room and likes dark grey and yellow best. When asked about her favorite dish, there was plenty to choose from: All Mexican food, anything spicy, raspberries, strawberries, Takis, gum, blue raspberry Slurpees, but never squash. While still nailing down the specifics, Aariah is eager to get a job to earn money.

This intelligent tenth grader is a social butterfly. Aariah is excited about her ceramics class!

Aariah would do best in a family with two moms or two dads residing in an urban area. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For families outside of Utah, only those families who have a completed home study are encouraged to inquire.

AUGUST 2023 EDITION

Kathy Searle, Editor

Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

To submit articles or for a subscription, call 801-265-0444 or email kathy.searle@raisethefuture.org. This publication is funded by the State of Utah, Division of Child and Family Services. Raise the Future prepares and prints the newsletter and the Division of Child and Family Services mails the publication. The mailing list is kept confidential. One can be removed from the mailing list by emailing amyers@utah.gov.

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Teaching Your Child How To Be Mad

Rather than teaching them to suppress or bottle their emotions, we can empower our children to move through them in healthy ways.

BY: ASHLEY PATEK, GENERATION MINDFUL, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

I remember from an early age that being mad got me sent to my room. Nose to the corner, trying to “think about what I had done” without even fully understanding what it was that I felt, let alone why I did what I did. I’m not sure that I ever really figured it out either, but what I did learn fairly quickly was that being mad, frustrated, or even sad, was not safe. Those big feelings that led to big behaviors got me a big dose of all-by-myself, feeling like I was a bad kid.

I adapted the way our bodies are designed: for survival. The parts of me that got love and attention, I grew and grew like breathing life into a balloon. The parts of me that got me aloneness, I suppressed, hid, denied, or shamed.

Fast forward thirty years and I am now face-to-face with my own child, throwing big emotions because he feels mad about the cookie I wouldn’t give him. My alarm system is buzzing and I want to shut his emotions down because everything inside of me is yelling, “This isn’t safe!”

But here’s the really kooky thing. As much as the child parts of me want to run and hide, the adult parts want to stay and be with my son to give him what I needed way back then when I was mad about not having a cookie before dinner.

Every single emotion we feel is useful ... valid ... informative ... powerful. Yep, even the dark, scary, unpleasant ones that I hid from for most of my formative years. I didn’t want my son to feel like he had to hide, and I didn’t want him to feel like he was bad for having a hard time.

Soak in this next part:

It’s not about teaching our children not to be mad, sad, or frustrated. It’s about teaching them how to be mad, sad, and frustrated. Rather than teaching them to suppress or bottle their emotions, we can empower our children to move through them in healthy ways. This is a pretty tricky thing for those of us who were never taught safe emotional expression and regulation. When I first started, I felt like I was tiptoeing around landmines, scared that doing or saying the “wrong” thing would lead to an explosion ... him, me, or both. The process of wiring feelings and regulation circuits is a daily lived experience, not a one-time checklist or perfect script. In fact, we are going to slip up. Our triggers are going to be bigger than us sometimes. And we are going to pitfall into old patterns. But this parenting gig is an endurance race and we don’t need to do it perfectly and we don’t need to do it alone.

I know what you’re thinking ... Where is my list that teaches HOW to be mad?

I am getting there. But know, it won’t happen overnight. In fact, the part of the brain wired for regulation, problem-solving, impulse control, and all those other big skills associated with navigating life isn’t fully developed until our twenties! This means that our children learn through the love and relationship we give them during both the easy, fun moments and the tricky, unpleasant, tough moments. It is in a series of small daily rituals and connection that drowns out aloneness that lets our kids know: Hey I see you having this really unpleasant, scary emotion. Your emotions are not contagious. I can handle your feelings. I am here and we will ride this out together.

5 Steps To Teaching A Child How To Be Mad

1. Notice And Validate

When my child's feelings are turned up to 11, my first stop is validating his experience. This helps your child feel seen and heard, which can increase feelings of safety and connection and help them shift from reactivity to regulation. I may say something like:

- It seems like something doesn't feel good to you.
- I see that this feels hard. You are safe. I am here.
- You didn't want that to happen.
- You really want that cookie, huh?
- What you're showing/telling me is that you feel mad/frustrated/sad.

2. Set Boundaries

It is important to validate all emotions and to set loving limits around some behaviors, especially the ones that are destructive or harmful to your child or others. When you set firm, clear, and respectful boundaries, it creates predictability, structure, and safety, affirming to your child that while all emotions are allowed, there are loving limits around how we express them.

I may say something like:

- It's okay to be mad. It's not okay to hit.
- I know you don't want to hurt me. I will keep us safe.
- I won't let you throw things at your sister. Let's find a new way.
- My job is to keep everyone safe. Right now that looks like ...
 - helping you to your room so we can work through this together.
 - stepping behind this cushion to keep my body protected.
 - giving the toy a break until we calm our bodies.

3. Redirect

Each child has their own meltdown language - their nervous system's way of releasing emotional tension from their body. Some kids may withdraw and tell you to go away, and others may hit, kick, scream, or destroy. Instead of making these needs wrong, we can redirect the behaviors, helping our kids channel their feelings in healthy ways.

This table illustrates some redirection ideas:

| Behavior to Adjust | Redirection Tactic |
|--------------------|---|
| BITING | Chewelry jewelry, wooden toys, frozen carrots |
| HITTING | Offer a deep hug, crash in a crash pad, wall push-ups, or bear walks |
| SPITTING | Spitting games into the toilet, tub, or cup (use cereal as a spitting target) |
| DESTRUCTION | Tear paper, pop bubble wrap with their feet, snap dry noodles |

The point is to notice your child's meltdown patterns and find new outlets for them. Introduce these strategies and practice them during regulated moments so that they can better access them during dysregulated experiences.

4. Affirm Your Love

It is important that children know that while they are feeling bad, they are not bad.

I may say something like:

- You're a good kid having a hard time and I'm here with you.
- I can handle your big emotions. It is safe to let them out.
- This won't last forever, and I will stay with you while it's hard.

There are also times when saying less is more, especially when our kids are deeply in their reactive brainstem. During these moments, I communicate safety with my body by getting low or creating a safe distance, letting them know I see them and am here with them.

5. Process What Happened

Once my child is through the heat of the moment and is receptive, I revisit what happened via a Time-In. This may happen directly after the meltdown or maybe later in the day or before bed.

I know, I know ... Why in the world would I want to rehash a hard moment with my child? This is how they will process and integrate their lived experience and create circuits from their lower survival brain to their higher learning brain. As the circuits are formed and reinforced, it becomes easier for our children to access them when they need them.

During a Time-In, I may focus on:

- What happened
- How they felt
- How the other person involved felt/How I felt
- Calming strategies for next time they feel mad, frustrated, jealous, overwhelmed, disappointed, etc.
- Repair/make amends if applicable

To help me with this process, I use feelings posters and SnuggleBuddies plush toys. Being mad is an important human emotion. When it is suppressed, our kids grow into adults who don't know how to feel, are scared to feel, suppress, or explode. When we teach skills for all emotional states, our children grow into adults who feel and regulate. Every emotion is part of the human experience. And they are all sacred.



What is Complex Trauma?

BY: HANNAH SHELDON-DEAN, CHILD MIND INSTITUTE, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

When people think of trauma, they often imagine a specific, distinct experience — a frightening accident, a natural disaster, or an experience of violence. And it's true that going through any very upsetting or life-threatening experience (or watching a loved one do so) can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health challenges.

But trauma experts increasingly recognize that there's another form of trauma that involves prolonged, repeated experiences and symptoms that often look different from PTSD. This is most commonly known as complex trauma.

Children who have gone through complex trauma often experience profound challenges as a result, and their symptoms are frequently misunderstood. Knowing the signs of complex trauma and understanding how it affects kids can go a long way toward getting them the support they need.

What is complex trauma?

Complex trauma isn't a diagnosis, but rather a concept that describes how chronic upsetting and dangerous experiences impact people, especially children.

"It's a more fundamental change," says Jamie Howard, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and the director of the Trauma and Resilience Service at the Child Mind Institute. "A typical trauma might really shake up your schema of how the world works. With complex trauma, it affects how the schema is developed in the first place."

Complex trauma generally stems from chronic, interpersonal negative experiences such as abuse, neglect, or violence in the child's home or community. Because parents or caregivers are often the ones harming the child in situations like these, the child doesn't have the chance to develop a sense of safety and trust in adults. That disruption of the child's core sense of attachment to caregivers is a key element of complex trauma.

"Any kind of trauma can disrupt trust," Dr. Howard says. "But with complex trauma, you don't necessarily develop an ability to trust people in general."

The evidence base for complex trauma is growing, with research indicating that children who have been through trauma that is ongoing and interpersonal in nature tend to have more intense symptoms and behavioral challenges than those who have experienced other forms of trauma. Is complex trauma a disorder?

The development of the concept of complex trauma began several decades ago, when clinicians working with people who had experienced ongoing traumatic events (such as survivors of child abuse) noticed that these people's symptoms were often more varied than the symptoms of PTSD. This distinct set of symptoms became known as "complex PTSD" (CPTSD) and later evolved into a proposed diagnosis termed "developmental trauma disorder" (DTD).

The ideas of complex trauma and DTD developed in large part through the work of the clinician and author Bessel van der Kolk, MD. DTD is not included as a distinct disorder in the most recent diagnostic manual that clinicians use, the DSM-5. But some of the updated PTSD symptoms in the DMS-5 were influenced by the research of Dr. van der Kolk and his colleagues.

What does complex trauma look like?

To some extent, the symptoms of complex trauma overlap with the symptoms of PTSD. For instance, kids who have experienced complex trauma may experience flashbacks, nightmares, and feelings of emotional numbness.

But with complex trauma, the symptoms are more pervasive. Kids' behavior can look completely unpredictable. "Their lives have been so chaotic that they haven't found a coherent way to organize the world," says Dr. Howard. "And so they look physically and emotionally disorganized and dysregulated. They're not sitting still, they're moving around, they're sort of jumpy. They're a little bit like a live wire."

Children who have experienced complex trauma frequently meet the criteria for a range of different DSM-5 disorders, but there is currently no one diagnosis that captures their typical symptom profile.

However, experts agree that the following symptoms are generally associated with complex trauma:

- Challenges with attachment and relationships
- Difficulty regulating emotions and behavior
- Challenges related to attention span and other cognitive abilities
- Dissociation from reality
- Low self-esteem
- An overall negative outlook on the world

Dr. Howard notes that being in loud, chaotic environments can quickly get overstimulating for kids who have been through complex trauma. "This is when kids start to look like they have ADHD," she says. "Or they might look like they have a severe mental health disorder because their ability to regulate their physiological responses and make sense of the environment is so compromised." Complex trauma is also known to interfere with learning and frequently leads to challenges with behavior and focus at school.

What causes complex trauma?

There's no definitive list of the kinds of experiences that can lead to complex trauma. That said, experts generally agree that the events underlying complex trauma usually meet the following criteria:

- They are severely negative, such as abuse, neglect, or violence.
- They take place over an extended period of time.
- They affect the child's ability to relate to others and build trusting relationships with caregivers and other authority figures.

"Complex trauma doesn't have to be physical abuse, but the reason attachment is so affected is because it usually is perpetrated by, or not able to be stopped by, a child's primary caregiver," Dr. Howard says. "And that's what makes it so fundamentally disruptive: the primary caregiver isn't able to provide consistency and safety to the child."



Dr. Howard notes that this kind of disruption can also occur when a parent isn't the one causing the trauma. For instance, kids who are exposed to a lot of community violence might develop complex trauma because their caregivers aren't able to protect them from those dangers, no matter how much they want to.

There isn't yet conclusive evidence about whether certain populations of children are more likely to experience complex trauma. But, says Dr. Howard, "usually this happens in the context of low resources and environments that are stressful overall," which means that children in low-income families may be at greater risk.

Treating complex trauma

Complex trauma can be challenging to treat because, unlike the kind of traumatic event that is typical of PTSD, chronic traumatic experiences may be ongoing even as the child is getting treatment. And most of the research behind evidence-based treatments for trauma symptoms in children is focused on PTSD.

That said, it's still very important for kids dealing with complex trauma to get treatment. The leading treatment for PTSD in children is called trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), and there is a growing body of research about adapting it for use with complex trauma.

There is also a treatment model known as the ARC Framework that is designed specifically for children who have experienced complex trauma. ARC stands for attachment, self-regulation, and competency, and it focuses on the following goals:

- **Attachment:** Fostering strong connections between kids and their caregivers and creating a safe, supportive environment in which the family can recover from trauma.
- **Self-regulation:** Helping kids learn to identify, express, and manage their emotions.
- **Competency:** Supporting kids' self-esteem and sense of competence, as well as key developmental tasks like executive functions and social skills.

Dr. Howard notes that building a child's secure attachment to trusted adults is at the core of any treatment for complex trauma. "Trauma treatment doesn't involve the abusive parent if there is one," she says. "To develop an attachment, you need someone who's going to be relatively consistently responsive." This might be another biological parent, a foster parent, a grandparent, or any other reliable caregiver. "What kids need is to form an ability to trust people in this world, to be able to predict how people will respond to them, and have it be appropriate and healthy."

Dr. Howard also points out that when kids don't already have a trustworthy adult in their lives, forming a strong relationship with a trained professional like a therapist or social worker can be another way to rebuild their sense of attachment.

How to support kids who have experienced complex trauma

For a child who's dealing with complex trauma, any reliable support from a caring adult can make a big difference. If you're an educator, clinician, or other consistent presence in a child's life, there are ways you can help them even if you're not involved in their formal treatment.

"The first thing is to always take a benign interpretation," says Dr. Howard. "Sometimes we infer adult thinking, we apply it to kids. But these kids aren't trying to push your buttons. They're having a physiological response."

It's helpful to stay as calm as possible and to take steps to avoid retraumatizing the child. "You have to be a little more thoughtful in how you approach them," Dr. Howard advises. "Don't get too physically close to them because they're going to think you're going to hurt them." She also recommends keeping your tone of voice neutral, even if you do need to set a boundary or establish a consequence for the child's behavior. "If you snap at a child who hasn't been traumatized, it's not going to totally rattle them," she said. "But if you start to raise your voice and look angry at a child who's been multiply traumatized, they don't know what's going to happen. It's like they might duck and cover."

Overall, says Dr. Howard, it's important to try to remember why kids who have been through complex trauma behave in ways that can look confusing and frustrating. "They're doing this because the world is hard to make sense of, and so they're reactive. It's best met with calm, consistent respect to help them to overcome what they've been through."





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Meltdowns After School- Strategies to Help

BY JESSICA HILL, COTA/L, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

The school year has begun. Your child wakes up early, spends most of the day in class with their peers - listening and sitting, learning and writing, socially engaging, keeping their cool - and then comes home.

Cue - meltdown.

Why does your child have a total meltdown as soon as they get home from school? Why can't they engage and tell you about their day? Why can't they seem to focus and follow instructions for tasks around the house? Why are they so grumpy and moody?

AFTER-SCHOOL RESTRAINT COLLAPSE

Have you heard of this term before? After-school restraint collapse is everything just described above - when your child has been at school all day and they come home, they completely meltdown (throughout this article, 'after-school restraint collapse' and 'after school meltdown' will be used interchangeably). They struggle emotionally. They can't seem to keep it all together, because they just spent the entire day keeping it all together. This is seen more often in young children, but older children can experience it as well!

Think about how you feel after a long, stressful day at work. You come home and simply want to relax and unwind. You're exhausted. You need some quiet time away from people. You need something to eat and drink. Maybe you even need to get some extra movement in - a nice walk outside - because you've been sitting at a desk all day. Or maybe you need to listen to some calming, classical music because you've been talking to people all day.

The same goes for your child. School is busy. There is a LOT of sensory input that your child has to filter through throughout the day:

- Visually navigating the school; visually navigating the playground; completing a variety of visual school-related tasks (reading, writing, etc.)
- Filtering out the noise in the classroom (fans, talking, pencil sharpener, etc.); filtering out the noise in the gym and/or playground and lunchroom (that's a LOT of noise!); following auditory directions from their teacher (auditory input)
- Tolerating clothing and peers touching them (tactile input)
- Moving safely through their environment (vestibular and proprioceptive input)
- Eating lunch (gustatory and olfactory input; interoception)
- Identifying and managing emotions and basic needs - using the bathroom, drinking enough water, etc. (interoception)

For all children, it is a lot of work to manage all of that sensory input. For a child who struggles to process sensory input (perhaps a child with Sensory Processing Disorder), it will be even more difficult! Which means the meltdown after school may be even more intense!

Keep in mind - after-school restraint collapse is different than a tantrum. While a tantrum is an attention-seeking behavior or a behavior due to not getting what the child wants, after-school restraint collapse is not within the child's control.

During a tantrum, the child is in control and can change their actions based on the attention they receive from the tantrum. During an after-school meltdown, the child does not have full control over their behavior and their emotions. Therefore, the strategies for a tantrum and the strategies for an after-school meltdown should be different!

Let's dive into some ideas and strategies for you to try if your child is struggling after school!

SENSORY DIETS

First and foremost, you need to know your child's sensory needs. Are they a sensory seeker or a sensory avoider? Or are they somewhere in the middle?

Once you know your child's sensory preferences/needs, you can create a personalized sensory diet. A sensory diet is a series of personalized sensory activities and strategies that is used during certain times of the day to help the child feel calm and focused. Sensory diets are a great tool to incorporate into the after-school routine to help your child decompress after a long school day.

The after-school sensory diet should start with a sensory activity that your child enjoys. If they enjoy jumping and crashing, incorporate it. If you know and understand your child's sensory needs, you will know what to include into the sensory diet!

The after-school sensory diet should also include sensory activities that help your child feel calm and regulated. This might be playing outside, reading a book, or even eating a snack.

Every sensory diet is different and unique to the child it's designed for. Sensory diets will also change over time as the child's sensory needs change. Be willing to experiment, try new ideas, modify to fit your child's mood, and stay consistent. Additionally, teach your child how to identify their sensory needs and sensory diet strategies - this will help improve overall independence and help your child learn how to advocate for themselves!

SENSORY DIET ACTIVITIES FOR AFTER SCHOOL

The first sensory activity you want your child to participate in is an activity that meets their sensory needs; while also making sure that their basic needs are met - water and a snack! If your child is a sensory seeker, provide jumping and running and crashing activities. If your child is more of a sensory avoider, provide more calming activities that they prefer, such as reading or listening to soft music. Here's a quick list of some sensory diet activities you can try with your child:

- Get outside to run, jump, or climb
- Somersaults
- Log rolling
- Animal walks
- Listen to music
- Play a metronome game - clap on the beat of the metronome
- Make a calm-down bottle with water, oil, and glitter
- Diffuse essential oils
- Make an essential oil scrunchy-bracelet for your child to wear
- A crunchy snack
- A chewy snack
- Blow up a balloon and play balloon volleyball
- Messy play - sensory bin, shaving cream, etc.

CONSISTENT MORNING AND AFTERNOON ROUTINES

Let's take a look at the morning routine - is it chaotic and rushed? Or is it calm and fun? Is it a little bit of both? Ultimately, providing your child with a calm, fun morning routine will help them start their school day on the right track. This increases the chances that they will not only have a productive day at school but also that they will feel more at ease after school.

Additionally take a look at the afternoon, after school routine. Is it busy and rushed? Or is it calm and relaxing? If your child is melting down after school, attempt to provide a calm, relaxing afternoon routine. Use natural lighting in the house versus artificial lighting. Attempt to get outside in nature versus getting on the screen. Diffuse some calming essential oils. Play soft calming music.

While not every morning or afternoon will always be calm, happy, and relaxed, you can have a goal to achieve those types of mornings and afternoons MOST of the time in order to help your child start and end their day on a calm note.



CALM DOWN/COZY CORNER

Have you heard of this before? A calm-down corner; a cozy corner; or a sensory corner. They all refer to the same thing – a space that is designed to be calm, comforting, and sensory-friendly for the child to relax in. A cozy corner is the perfect place for your child to decompress and “get away” from the craziness of the school day. In fact, it may be the ideal place for your child to be in immediately after getting home!

Some ideas to use for your calm-down/cozy sensory corner:

- Have your child help build it! It’s for them, so they should participate if possible!
- Use a space that is off to the side, in a corner, or a quiet space in the house.
- Use a pop-up tent or some type of covering to decrease the visual stimuli.
- Add calming sensory tools that your child enjoys using, such as weighted items and noise-canceling headphones (those are just two examples!).
- Add calming visual input such as a lava lamp (if safe), a calm-down bottle, or twinkle lights.
- Add fidgets - fidgets for hands and fidgets for mouths!
- Add preferred activities such as books, puzzles, or other non-screen-related activities.

Once the calm down corner is created, create a plan with your child on when and how to use it. Discuss the benefits of the corner: it’s a good place to relax, decompress if you’re stressed, and to take a break. Incorporate it into the daily after-school routine. Plan on how long your child will spend in the corner. Place boundaries so that the corner does not get used to “get away” from activities - instead, it should be a tool that your child uses to help feel calm and decompress when stressed so that they can then return to daily activities.

FOOD AND DRINK

Take a look at the food and drinks your child is consuming throughout the day. Oftentimes if your child is not eating enough during the day, or if they are dehydrated, it can contribute to meltdowns after school. Their basic needs have not been met, causing them to have difficulty with emotional regulation. The term “hangry” comes to mind!

Having an after-school snack can make a world of difference! What types of foods does your child enjoy? Crunchy foods, resistive foods, foods with lots of flavor – all great options due to the sensory components and the proprioceptive input they provide.

Additionally, be sure your child is hydrated! This can be done with water - but make it more motivating by using fun cups or water bottles and fun, twisty straws! Try adding frozen fruit to the water. Smoothies are also a great option for hydration and nutrition!

LESS TALKING

When you pick your child up from school, or when they return home from school, do you immediately engage them in conversation? Do you immediately ask them about their day? If so, you're not alone! This is very common - as parents, we're curious about our child's day and want to know as many details as possible! But sometimes, your child might need a quiet moment after school. Instead of immediately launching into your questions about their day, allow your child some quiet time. Let them lead the conversation - wait for them to talk and then follow their lead. If they don't want to talk right away, wait until later in the evening. Dinner time might be ideal to engage in conversation about how the day went. This doesn't mean don't say anything to your child after school! It just means try to ask fewer questions and listen more. Some ideas of things you can say that might not be overwhelming to your child immediately after school:

- Hi! I'm so happy to see you!
- Welcome home!
- I'm so happy you're home! What do you need right now?

GET OUT IN NATURE

One study from 2021 reported the health benefits of physical activity while out in nature. What exactly does this mean? Getting out in nature means being in open air, away from artificial lights and sounds, and walking on the ground - ideally barefoot! It means listening to the sounds of the wind, the birds, and the trees. It means smelling the grass and the flowers. It means visually taking in the different colors in nature.

If possible, go out in nature with your child after school. This can be a back or front yard - taking your shoes off and walking barefoot in the grass. This can be at a local park - walking, running, and climbing. This can be down at the river or a lake - walking barefoot in the sand and the water. Simply being outside, connected to the ground, can be regulating. Even if it's just for 10 minutes after school!

CO-REGULATION AND MINDFULNESS

Co-regulation refers to our ability, as parents, to help our children feel more calm when they are struggling. If we can be calm and provide a safe space for our children, they are more likely to feel calm. This is, of course, easier said than done! Mindfulness refers to our ability to be aware of our emotions, bodily sensations, and to be present in the moment. In order to co-regulate with our children, we must be mindful of our own feelings and actions.

Because your child watches what you do and learns from what they see, they are very likely to imitate what you do and say. If you yell when you are frustrated, they will yell when they are frustrated. The first step will be to identify your own actions - what do you do when you're upset? Do you use calming strategies that your child can observe and learn from? Do you talk openly about your calming strategies?

When your child is having a meltdown, it's important for you to stay calm and attempt to help co-regulate. Again, easier said than done! However, it is possible! Identify what YOU can do when your child is having a meltdown - can you get down on their level and provide eye contact while you take deep breaths? Can you help provide them with some deep pressure while taking deep breaths? Can you calmly lead them to their calm-down corner and sit calmly with them?

Because every child's meltdown is different, every parent's co-regulation and mindfulness techniques will be different!

EMPATHY AND VALIDATION

Ultimately, it's helpful to provide empathy and validation to your child's emotions. What they are feeling is real. Understanding why they are melting down is the first step to empathy. Then you can provide validation - "I see that you're upset; it's been a really long day!"

Keep in mind that your child wants to do well, and will do well when they can! After empathy and validation, you can provide the tools and the skills necessary to help your child prevent after-school meltdowns - using the ideas listed in this article or finding other strategies that work for your child!



Tired, Mommy?

10 Ways to Avoid Parenting Burnout

BY Kirk Martin, ADDitude

Parenting a child with ADHD is one of the hardest jobs around. Burnout is very real — and common among even great parents! If it ever starts to feel like too much, follow these steps to feel supported, understood and way less stressed.

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Many parents with ADHD write ADDitude and say, "I'm exhausted. I have too much to do and not enough help to handle everything on my plate. No one gets me. What can I do?" Here, [Kirk Martin](#), founder of [Celebrate Calm](#), offers moms and dads a 10-step plan to manage their lives with more energy and support.

PRIORITIZE YOUR SELF CARE

There's only one person in life you can control, and that's you. You must take care of yourself. If you don't make yourself a priority—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—you will become drained and exhausted, and have nothing left to give. If you feel like you're always giving, make an appointment for yourself once a week to do something you enjoy.

SLOW DOWN AND LIVE

We live in a hectic society. Slow down and decide what you can eliminate to make your life less stressful. For example, say no to non-critical homework sometimes. The teachers may be upset, but it will save you stress — and is first-grade homework really linked to success in life?

Another way to slow down: Create traditions, like Pancake Day or a weekly Technology-Free Tuesday. Traditions instill predictability and simplify life.

MOM'S REPORT CARD

For many of our kids, report cards only measure the things they're not doing well. So, make your own report card, where you measure skills that are important to you — like creativity or compassion. Now, when your kid comes home unhappy about her report card, you can pull out your own and show her all the times she showed leadership or good problem-solving. You'll boost her self-esteem and allow her to see herself in a new light.

TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN

Sometimes our kids annoy us. They can be pigheaded or argumentative, and it makes us feel like we're always playing defense. It helps to remember that our kids have great qualities, mixed up with the negative. Whenever you start feeling defensive, list all the things that irritate you about your child. Then flip each one around and ask, "What's the positive side?" If he's stubborn, admire his persistence. If he's argumentative, appreciate his critical thinking skills.

DON'T REVOLVE YOUR LIFE AROUND YOUR KIDS

When we have children with disabilities, we feel like we must take care of them all the time — and feel guilty if we long for a break. But all work and no play makes mom unbalanced and unhappy. Learn to carve out time for yourself. Start by planning a separate dinner after the kids have eaten so you're not preoccupied or stressed.

BE PROACTIVE

Take a proactive stance in helping teachers, friends, or spouses understand what you and your child struggle with and how they can help. When you meet with your son's teacher, share his passions and interests, his strengths, where he struggles, and specific strategies the teacher can use. You'll be giving the teacher an honest view of your son while suggesting tools she can use to support him.

GIVE KIDS TOOLS TO SUCCEED

Do not allow your kids to become victims. They're bright, creative, and full of energy. Don't let them use their ADHD as an excuse — instead, help them use their strengths and think strategically about their difficulties. Does she struggle to sit still through her homework? Brainstorm ways to make it easier, like sitting on an exercise ball, or under a table, or even lying off the sofa upside down!

FIND A FRIEND WHO UNDERSTANDS

Perspective helps! Find a good friend with a child facing similar challenges and agree to babysit for each other when it becomes too much. You'll see that everyone has their own burdens to carry, and you'll appreciate your child's good qualities more and more.

ARM YOURSELF WITH KNOWLEDGE

Research ADHD and different practical strategies to handle it. Yes, your daughter may struggle with focus and attention — it's part of who she is. But you can educate yourself and figure out: What are some tools she can use in class? Are there alternative therapies that might work? If you arm yourself with knowledge, you'll feel less overwhelmed and be the best possible mom you can be to her.

STOP TRYING TO MAKE EVERYONE ELSE HAPPY!

You have to stop trying to make the world around you perfect. You can't do it. Stop trying to make everybody else happy, and focus a bit more on making yourself happy. Give your kids and your spouse a little bit more responsibility so you can step up and say, "It's my job to be content myself and to give you tools to succeed in life, but I'm not responsible for your happiness." Your family will be stronger for it!



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