

De-Escalation Strategies

Tantrums happen when a child is trying to get something he or she wants or needs. Meltdowns occur when a child feels overwhelmed by his or her feelings or surroundings. The goal is to prevent tantrums and meltdowns from occurring by staying calm, using visual supports, creating structuring, etc. Behavioral tools are much more effective at preventing these behaviors than de-escalating them. These tools are going to be most effective if you can implement them when your child is starting to show signs of distress. That being said tantrums and meltdowns are part of normal development and are sometimes unavoidable. Below are strategies you can use should a tantrum or meltdown occur.

- Do not try to reason or use logic with your child when your child is in the midst of a tantrum or meltdown. Any speech should focus on reassuring your child that they are safe.
- Avoid placing any demands on your child during this time.
- It is okay to validate your child's feelings, but not their actions.
- If your child is on the floor, get on his/her level when offering comfort. Standing over someone can add to his or her stress.
- Be mindful of personal space. For some children having someone near them to provide physical comfort (e.g. rubbing their back) can be soothing. For other children, being physically close can create more stress.
- Sometimes just being with someone without saying any words can be helpful. Try to minimize the verbal input a child is receiving at this time.
- Help engage them in a calming activity. Model using items that you know your child finds calming (e.g. stress balls, breathing balls, sand timers). You can also model taking slow deep breaths. (Please see next page on creating a coping box/bag)
- Distraction can be a helpful tactic if not used repeatedly. You can distract your child with an item of interest, music, looking out the window, or with humor.
- Stay calm. Be mindful of your own volume, tone, and facial expression.

Coping Tool Box

It is helpful to have several items that your child finds calming in one location. We often recommend storing these items in a shoebox (Coping Box) or a backpack (Coping Bag). This coping box/bag can be used to prevent challenging behaviors or to help de-escalate a situation. You should work with your child's treatment team (occupational therapist, counselor) to help identify items that can be added to this 'tool box.' Here are some items that can be included:

- Noise cancelling headphones or ear plugs



- Liquid Timer



- Stress Balls



- Fidget spinners/ Fidget cubes



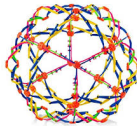
- Chewy Tubes



- Putty



- Breathing Ball



- Snacks

- Items related to favorite topics (pictures of people/places, small toys)