UNDERSTANDING TANTRUM BEHAVIOR IN PWS

WHY IT HAPPENS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

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WHY DO TANTRUMS HAPPEN?

• Differences Brain Development
  • Hypothalamus and other regions
  • May biologically “predispose” behavior challenges related to emotional regulation
RELATED CHALLENGES

- Emotional Regulation
- Rigidity
- Transitions
- Impulsivity
- Low Muscle Tone / Tiredness
YOUR CHILD IS EXPECTED TO SUCCEED IN A SOCIETY THAT IS OFTEN LACKING IN ITS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT AND SUPPORT NEUROLOGICALLY DIVERSE INDIVUALS AND THAT REQUIRES A SPECIFIC SET OF SKILLS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY NOT HAVE.
LET’S THINK ABOUT THIS IN A NEW WAY….

Would you expect a person with no legs and in a wheelchair to climb the stairs?

Or would you help them find a ramp?
CHALLENGE

- Try to think about your child’s behavior in a new way.
- Instead of the behavior challenge being something your child does to be difficult or oppositional, think of behavior as something that your child is struggling with, and needs help to overcome.
- How does this change your perception?
REDUCING TANTRUMS REQUIRES MULTIPLE LEVELS OF ASSISTANCE

1. **Help your child find a ramp!**
   - Prevention
   - Accommodations
   - Support

2. Teach new skills

3. Control the environment
WHAT IS APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS?

- The science of learning and behavior.
- Assumes that behavior is lawful and predictable.
ABA HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND

- How behavior works.
- Why behavior occurs.
- How behavior is affected by the environment.
- How learning takes place.
STEP 1: RULE OUT PAIN

- People with PWS may feel pain differently or less
- Sometimes pain or discomfort shows up as tantrums
- Illness may also show up as tantrums
STEP 2: COMMUNICATION

• This takes two forms:
  • Functional Communication Training
    • Language delay / apraxia
  • Self-Advocacy
    • What do I need / what can I handle today?
STEP 3: TRANSITIONS AND SCHEDULES

Provide a predictable, visual/written schedule

Build in transition time and warnings

Reinforce flexibility / timely transitions
STEP 4: INCREASE MOTIVATION!

If refusals or not wanting to complete tasks is prompting tantrums, make sure your child is motivated!

• “Shape” the behavior
• Use positive reinforcement
BUT WHAT ABOUT INTRINSIC MOTIVATION!
THE WORLD RUNS ON REINFORCEMENT

**World Economy**
- Go to Work
  - Complete Job Tasks
  - Initial Outcome
  - Earn Money
  - Final Outcome
    - You trade your money for activities and tangible items like a car, computer, food, a holiday etc.

**Token Economy**
- Go to School
  - Complete Academic Tasks
  - Initial Outcome
  - Earn Tokens
  - Final Outcome
    - Child trades their tokens for activities and tangible items like games, trips, free-time, sweets etc.
BE SMART WITH YOUR SYSTEM

Vary Reinforcement

Create Habits, then Fade

Remember the ramp!
WHY ISN’T MY REINFORCEMENT SYSTEM WORKING?

- Reinforcers are not strong enough
- Too much “work” required to earn a reinforcer
- Your child doesn’t understand what’s expected of them
- System delivered inconsistently
- Opportunities to earn tokens are too few and far between
- Tokens get taken away arbitrarily 😞
STEP 5: PICK YOUR BATTLES

1. Ask yourself, is this a hard limit, or can I be flexible?
2. Is this important for health/wellbeing?
3. Is this a “help them find a ramp” situation?
STEP 6: AVOID ESCALATING BY REACTING

- Avoid modeling inappropriate behavior (e.g., yelling, arguing).
- Solve the situation without saying anything.
- Avoid getting sucked into arguments that escalate behavior.
- Set a limit without any negative interactions.
POSSIBLY MOST IMPORTANT....

STEP 7: TEACH YOUR CHILD HOW TO CALM DOWN.
CALMING AND TANTRUMS

1. Calm
2. Trigger
3. Agitation
4. Acceleration
5. Peak
6. De-escalation
7. Recovery
TWO TIMES TO INTERVENE

Agitation

Acceleration
AGITATION:

Prevention

- Functional communication
- Counting forwards/backwards
- Breathing
- Hand tracing
- Physical activity (push a wall, stress ball, etc.)
ACCELERATION:

De-escalation:

- Practice emotional regulation in a safe space.
- AKA a calming “break.”
WHY A CALMING BREAK?

• Presents an opportunity to develop self-regulation skills.
• Makes kids proud of calming down.
• Reduces the likelihood of another person escalating the tantrum.
• Provides parents the opportunity to avoid reinforcing the tantrum, while providing a ton of praise for the calming process.
WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE?

1. Preparation
   a) Choose a quiet, neutral location – NOT the time-out spot
   b) Create a safe comfy space to sit in this area
   c) Rehearse the process with your child when calm

2. When a tantrum occurs
   a) Try your prevention strategies first.
   b) If these fail, move onto the calming break.
   c) Repeat, repeat, repeat.
CALMING BREAK STEPS

1. Move your child to the calm down spot.
2. Validate their emotions.
3. Let them know that you are going to give them some space to calm down.
4. Give them a 2–5-minute timer.
5. Wait for them to be calm (no crying, yelling, whining), for 2-5 minutes.
6. **PRAISE! AND THEN PRAISE AGAIN!**
AFTER THE TANTRUM

Avoid re-hashing or discussing the tantrum itself.

Emphasize how proud you are.

Rehearse possible alternatives for the future.
QUESTIONS?
STILL CONFUSED?
EMAIL ME.

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