

UNDERSTANDING TANTRUM BEHAVIOR IN PWS

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WHY IT HAPPENS AND WHAT
TO DO ABOUT IT

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 INDIVIDUALS AND
THAT REQUIRES A **SPECIFIC
SET OF SKILLS** THAT YOU
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
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STEP 2: COMMUNICATION

- This takes two forms:
 - **Functional Communication Training**
 - Language delay / apraxia
 - **Self-Advocacy**
 - What do I need / what can I handle today?
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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
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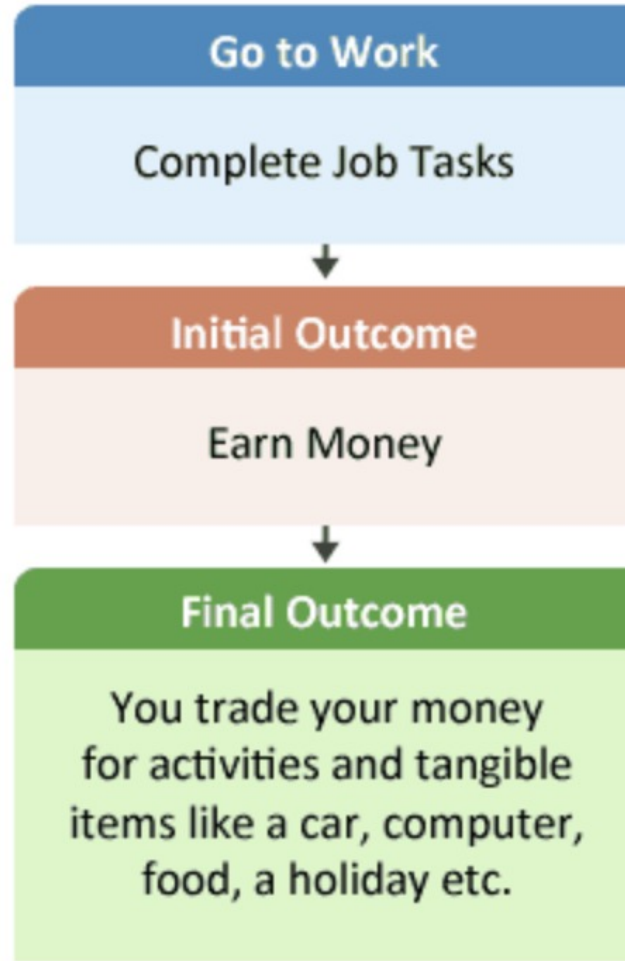




BUT WHAT ABOUT INTRINSIC MOTIVATION!

THE WORLD RUNS ON REINFORCEMENT

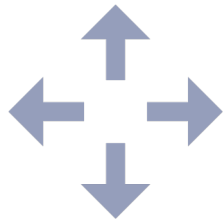
World Economy



Token Economy



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?
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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.



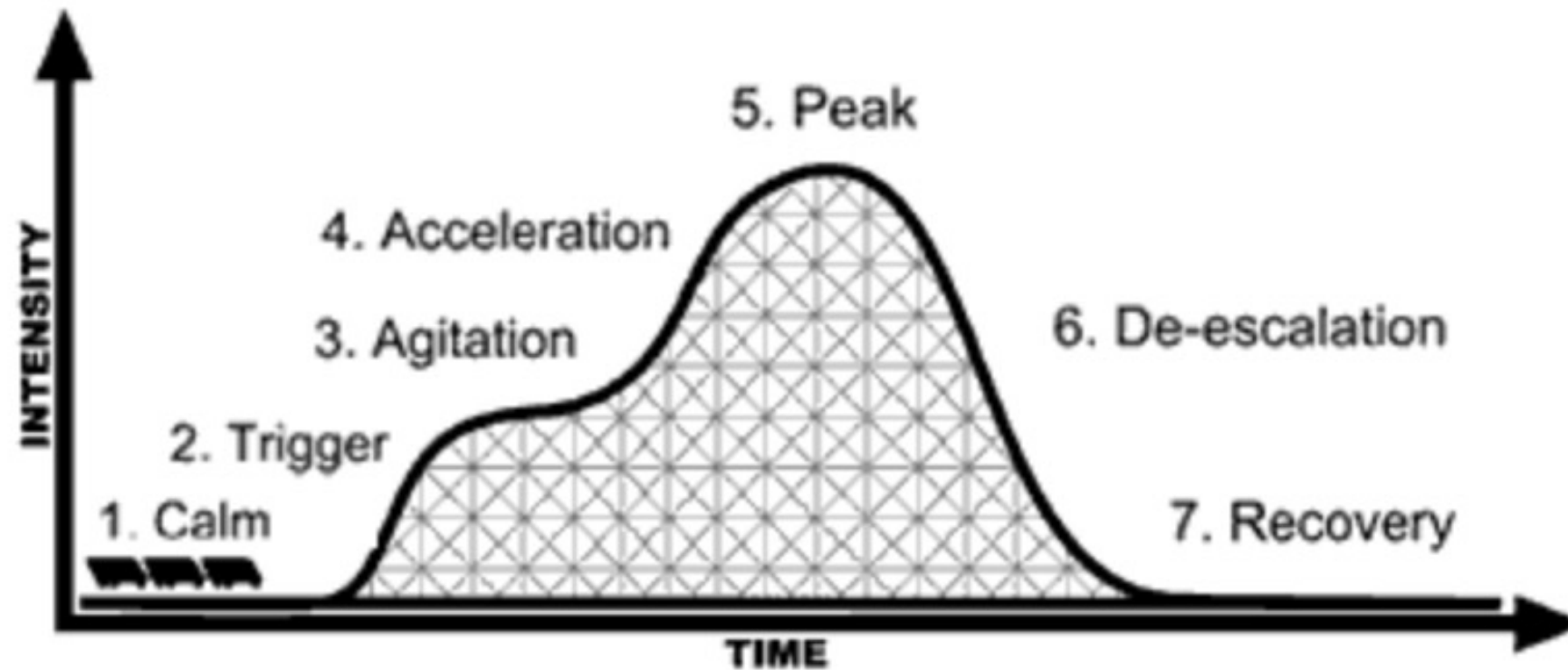
Set a limit without any negative interactions.

POSSIBLY MOST
IMPORTANT....

**STEP 7: TEACH YOUR
CHILD HOW TO CALM
DOWN.**



CALMING AND TANTRUMS



TWO TIMES TO INTERVENE



Agitation



Acceleration

AGITATION:

Prevention

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