

Managing overwhelming frustration and anxiety in the new normal



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- Hope is necessary to cope with anxiety and social distancing restrictions
 - What can we control: Social distancing, hand washing and properly worn masks work.
 - Antivirals and vaccine will come
- Hope also leads to better outcomes with challenging behavior in kids!

First help caretakers have the right attitude

Understand
why students
misbehave

Manage
your own
emotions
as a
provider

De-escalate
crises with
your kids

Set up
prevention
plans for
any repeat
problems

How Hope Impacts Caregivers

- Allows us to see difficult behavior as solvable
- Hope!
 - Temporary not stable
 - Specific behavior not a character flaw
- Is my client/child doing this on purpose? Does not matter if it's a repeat problem.
 - Define problem as a gap between the demands placed on individuals and their coping skills
 - Therapy is: How to learn a better way to cope

Discipline versus Educating

- Discipline, rules and consequences can be a first step (especially for well regulated folks)
- But when it does not work (especially for dysregulated folks):
 - Continue in an escalating power struggle?
 - Or ask why is it happening so we can prevent the problem rather than simply react to it.
 - Prevention is: Alter demands, teach better ways to cope

Biology of Fear and Frustration

- Low Frustration Tolerance
 - Limbic system: Controls emotions and fight, flight or freeze response
 - Forebrain: Reasoning and planning
 - Dr. Banner before he becomes the Hulk
 - Limbic system can hijack the rest of the brain
 - Prevent rage and distract when in rage.



Crisis Management of the Hulk

- Don't threaten further at that moment
 - Non-verbal skills to increase safety.
 - Listen, agree, apologize when necessary
 - Collaborate: Ask "what do you want? Lets find the right way to get that."
 - When logic is gone: Distract
 - Novel items
 - Special interests
 - Sensory activities
 - Make a plan for next time



Prevention plans

- Explore why it happens: Interview, observe & and keep a journal to find triggers
- No More Meltdowns Book/App
- Develop a good prevention plan
 - Modify triggers
 - Increase ability to cope with trigger (skill training)

Typical Triggers

- Internal issues: hunger, tiredness, illness
- Sensory issues: noise, light, touch, over-stimulation, boredom
- Lack of structure
- Challenging or new work, feared situations
- Having to wait, not get what one wants, disappointments
- Threats to self-esteem: losing, mistakes, criticism
- Unmet wishes for attention: ignored, want others to laugh

Components of a Behavior Plan

see www.apbs.org

1. Change the triggers: sensory/biological, structure, task demands
2. Teach skills to deal with triggers:
3. Reward new skills
4. Loss system if not already frustrated

Explaining



- ASA picture story: https://theautismeducator.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Corona-Virus-Free-Printable-Updated-2-The-Autism-Educator.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0R3o7TJ8qgoZ3_0aE_ZnFDn8X0qYfscz3BubizlhuQT3n8Rsqj7U581eCq
- Give the facts: extremely contagious and can make a small percentage of people very sick.
- To avoid getting and spreading it we need to distance ourselves from others in public and wear masks. Stay away from large crowds.



- If we must go out in public, take protective measures: Wash hands, avoid touching surfaces, stay at least 6 feet away from others. Cover mouth/nose.

Fall Out

- Anxiety: Will I get it? Will my loved ones? What will happen to us?



- Frustration over restrictions to avoid going out, seeing some people in person, cancelled activities, etc.



Anxiety Management

- Educate about alarm reaction in anxiety as it can be confused with virus symptoms. Anxiety causing shortness of breath and tight feeling. "False Alarms."
- Think like a scientist to combat worry
 - Overestimating probability? Masking works!
 - Overestimating severity? Look at risks by age
- Exercise: 30+ min a day of aerobic exercise
- Meditation, quieting the anxious mind. News free times.
 - www.fragrantheart.com, music (weightless), special interests and hobbies. What's your meditation?
- Medications: can be temporary



Think like a scientist cue card

Feared situation	Anxious thought	Realistic Outcome
Going outside	I will get COVID.	If I stay 6 feet away and wear a mask outside the risk is extremely low.
Having COVID symptoms	If I do get COVID I will die.	Probability of death or hospitalization for most of us is extremely low, especially for younger folks without any comorbid conditions like diabetes or heart disease.

Handling Staying at Home

- Emphasize the Heroic act of staying away
- Tap in to who/what they care about. If you want "them" to be around you need to keep them safe.
- Give alternatives. For example, you can video chat, do hobbies, order food, go outside away from others.
- Guardians need patience to deal with children's grief process: denial, anger, sadness, before acceptance.
- When logic fails, distract! Turn on favorite show, start doing a preferred activity, favorite song etc.



Establishing Structure at Home

- Visual schedules involving mix of learning/school activities and preferred activities. (See ASA, Autism Speaks websites for those with autism.)
- What was normal life like?
 - School work: Not full day
 - Social life: can still do through video chats and outside at a distance. Games can be played online and through zoom
 - Exercise: especially outside in nice weather at a distance from others
 - Home comfort and safety: take time to make meals, play and be together without demands



Work tasks

- Use preferred activities as reward for less preferred ones. Math before free play.
- Modify demands:
 - Reduce time overall and for each task
 - Make it fun: Multi sensory like cooking for math lesson, or treasure hunt for reading words, or script writing/slide presentation for writing
 - Model it. Help before they become the Hulk!
 - 80/20 rule: Start with tasks they can do easily
- Teach key coping skill: “Trying When Its Hard” (Not dumb if cannot do it. Growth Mindset: learn over time through effort and willingness to ask for help)



Doing Home Work



Carol Dweck’s Mindsets

Mindset	Preferred task difficulty	Response to Mistakes	Acceptance of help	Learning outcomes
Fixed	Easy	Lose motivation	Avoid	Lower
Growth	Hard	Stay motivated	Welcome	Higher

Demands for Work

Teach “Trying When It’s Hard” (i.e. Growth Mindset)

- Try a little
- Ask to watch first or ask for help
- Take a break and try again
- Negotiate how much

Trying When Its Hard from Jed Baker YouTube Channel

TCI FILM SCHOOL
PRODUCTIONS



Transition Back To School (James Ball workbook, 2020)

- Establish Routines in Advance/Simulate a Typical Day
 - Schedule, mask and social distancing, motivational system, sensory breaks
- Picture/video lessons for mask wearing and social distancing paired with reinforcement
 - <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/patients/coronavirus-information/videos-for-kids-parents>
- Video sessions with anticipated teachers and “safety” person. Calendar countdown of return
- Gradual return with fun activities to motivate



Waiting, Accepting No, Stopping Fun

1. Change the triggers
 - Use a visual timer and shorten wait time
 - Create a visual schedule. Use a “to do” box
 - Videotape perseverative routine
 - Highlight reward for waiting/accepting no & prime ahead
2. Teach skills (invisible payoff)
 - Waiting: get some later
 - Accepting no: get something else later
 - Stopping on time: get to go back later

Video Accepting No



Waiting, Accepting No, Stopping Fun

3. Reward system
 - Points for waiting, accepting no and stopping on time
 - Disappointment poster
4. Natural loss systems:
 - Can't stop, can't do it again

Self-esteem: Mistakes, Losing, Teasing

1. Change the triggers
 - Offer choice: let them win or not see mistakes
 - Stack the deck: with activities that they do well (80/20)
 - Prime ahead
 - Protect from teasing
2. Teach skills (invisible payoff)
 - Mistakes help us learn
 - Win the invisible game: friendship/self-control
 - Teasing: check it out 1st, stop, ignore, report

ABC NEWS



Self-esteem: Mistakes, Losing, Teasing

3. Reward system:
 - Rewards for handling imperfection are greater than rewards for winning or doing work right.
4. Avoid loss systems when frustrated

Unmet Needs for Attention

1. Change the triggers
 - Schedule attention: special time
 - Use a timer and red/green cards
 - Provide an appropriate outlet: theatre, presentation
2. Teach “Positive Ways to Get Attention”
 - How to get adult attention
 - How to get peer attention: Public versus private topics
 - Rules of comedy: Can’t make fun of vulnerable, use slapstick, random thoughts, and self-deprecation

Public/Private

Public	Private
Past: How was ____?	Avoid sensitive topics:
Future: What are you going to do ____?	Sex, Violence, Race, Religion, Politics
Present: What are you ____?	Avoid insults
Common/other interest: Did you ____?	Avoid curses

Unmet Needs for Attention

3. Reward system:
 - Rewards for appropriate topics
4. Loss systems:
 - Response cost



Sensory Needs: Self-Stimulation

1. Change the triggers
 - Alter sensory environment
 - For boredom, reduce wait time and engage
 - Modify frustrating work
2. Teach skills
 - Alternative ways/times to self-stim
 - How to be a self-advocate for better environment

Sensory Needs: Self-Stimulation

3. Reward system
 - Reward new ways to self-stim
4. Loss systems:
 - Maybe response cost

Unexpected Triggers: Self-Calming

1. Prepare for unexpected
 - Collaborate on ways to distract and soothe in preparation for the unexpected upsets. Create a relaxation folder.
 - Establish a safe person
2. Teach skills
 - Self-talk: "All problems can be solved if you can wait and talk to the right person."
 - Draw or write the thing that distracts/soothes you.

Unexpected Triggers: Self-Calming

3. Reward system:
 - for using calming strategies
4. Natural loss systems:
 - outbursts will limit continued participation in certain events.

In Closing

Can we tolerate our
own discomfort
long enough to . . .

Can we enjoy what
we do?

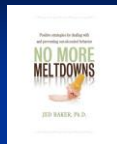
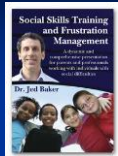
Think

Rather than react
out of fear or anger

Resources

Challenging behavior
Now at the APP Store

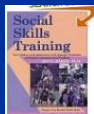
DVD



Music CD



Social Skills Books



Elementary Level

Middle, High School and
Beyond

More Resources

- No More Victims: Protecting Those with Autism from Cyber Bullying, Internet Predators & Scams (Baker, 2013)
- Overcoming Anxiety in Children and Teens (Baker, 2015)
- School Shadow Guidelines (Liau & Baker 2015)

