

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

March / April 2023

N F A N P A

HOW TO EMPOWER YOUR CHILD TO DEAL WITH SCHOOL ANXIETY

by Nicole Gaven

School anxiety is awful for children and heartwrenching for parents. It's so common, but it doesn't always look the same. Sometimes it will dress itself up as illness (headaches, tummy aches), sometimes as a tantrum or fierce defiance, and sometimes it looks exactly as you would expect.

School Anxiety. **What it's not.**

If I could write this across the sky, I would:

Separation anxiety and school anxiety have absolutely nothing to do with behaviour, defiance or poor parenting. Nothing at all.

Anyone who is tempted to tute, judge, or suggest a toughening up of parents or children, don't. Hush and hold it in. The assumptions on which you've built your high ground are leading you astray. It's likely, anyway, that parents dealing with school anxiety have already tried the tough love thing, even if only out of desperation. It's understandable that they would. They'd try anything – parents are pretty amazing like that.

They are great parents, with great kids. If only being tougher was all it took they all would have done it yesterday and we'd be talking about something easier, like how to catch a unicorn – or something.

Why getting tough won't work.

School anxiety isn't a case of 'won't', it's a case of 'can't'. It's

anxiety. It's a physiological response from a brain that thinks there's danger. Sometimes the anxiety is driven by the fear that something will happen to the absent parent. Sometimes it's not driven by anything in particular. Whether the danger is real or not is irrelevant. Many kids with anxiety would know somewhere inside them that there is nothing to worry about,

but they're being driven by a brain that thinks there's a threat and acts as though it's true.

When this happens, the fight or flight response is triggered and the body is automatically surged with neurochemicals to deal with the threat. That's why anxiety can look like a tantrum (fight) or resistance (flight). It's the physiological, neurochemical response of a brain on high alert. It's hard enough to control your own brain when it's on high alert, let alone someone else's, however much that someone else wants to do the 'right'

thing.

We humans are wired towards keeping ourselves safe above everything else. It's instinctive, automatic, and powerful. This is why tough love, punishment or negotiation just won't work. If you were in quicksand, no amount of any of that would keep you there while you got sucked under. You'd fight for your life at any cost. School is less dramatic than quicksand but to a brain and a body in fight or flight, it feels the same.

When you're dealing with an anxious child, you're dealing



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Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Corinne@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MarApr2023> We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!

1. Fill in blanks. _____ anxiety and _____ anxiety have absolutely nothing to do with behavior, defiance or poor parenting
2. True or False. When it comes to school, your brain can sometimes read it as a threat, even though it isn't.
3. Fill in the blanks. _____ and _____ are linked to the overuse of social media.
4. True or False. A survey of teens found that 80 percent of teens are hiding their online behavior from their parents.
5. Fill in the blanks. According to the CDC, ___ in 4 teen girls and ___ in 10 teen boys self-harm.
6. List five Do's and Don'ts when it comes to adolescent self-harm:
7. Fill in the blanks. Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately ___ in 6 boys and ___ in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18.
8. List 10 things that could help your child be less vulnerable to sexual abuse:
9. True or False. "Tantrums and meltdowns are like fevers—they can be triggered by so many different problems that we can't make them stop until we understand what's triggering them.
10. Fill in the blanks. The first step is understanding the _____ and testing ways the environment can be changed to reduce the incidence of outbursts.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

(Continued from page 1)

with a brain that will fight with warrior daring to keep him or her safe. It's not going to back down because of some tough words or tough consequences.

The good news is that there are powerful ways to turn this around. Let's talk about those.

But first ...

Before we go further, it's important to make sure that the anxiety isn't from bullying, friendship problems or problems with schoolwork that might need their own response. Teachers generally know what's going on so it's always worth having a chat to get a clearer idea of what you're dealing with. In many cases, there are no other issues at all. On paper, everything looks absolutely fine. That's anxiety for you.

Empower them.

Anxiety has a way of making people feel like they have no control. It's inexplicable and feels as though it comes from nowhere. Explaining to your kids how anxiety works will demystify what they're going through and take away some of the punch. It's powerful. Here are some ideas for how to explain it in a way they can understand:

Why does anxiety happen? The words.

Anxiety has a really good reason for being there. Your brain is great at protecting you. It's been practicing for millions of years and is brilliant at it. If it thinks there's something to worry about, it will instantly surge your body with fuel – oxygen, adrenaline, hormones – to make you strong, fast and powerful, kind of like a superhero. This is the fight or flight response and it comes from a part at the back of your brain called the amygdala. This part of your brain is small and shaped like an almond. It's like a fierce (but very kind) warrior and it's there to protect you.

Sometimes your brain gets a little overprotective. That's kind of understandable. You're pretty brilliant at a lot of things and the world needs you. Your brain is in charge of keeping you safe and it takes its job very seriously. It's a relief to know the 'keep me safe' switch in your brain is working. (Phew!)

When it thinks there's a threat, it doesn't stop to think about whether or not the threat is real – it's all action and not a lot of thought. In fact, the part of your brain that is able to think clearly, calm things down and make great decisions about what to do next, is sent 'offline' if the brain senses a threat. That can actually be really handy and is another clever way to keep you safe. If there's a real danger, like an out of control bus screaming towards you, you don't want your brain to keep you in the path while it figures out whether or not to get out of there.

When it comes to school, your brain can sometimes read it as a threat, even though it isn't. That's because school is a bit different to home – there are new people, different things and routines, you're away from your parents, sometimes it's noisy, and sometimes you don't really know what to expect. To a brain whose job it is to protect you, that can feel like a



really big deal.

This is why the bad feelings you feel when you think about going to school can be so powerful. It's your brain telling your body to stay away from school because there could be something dangerous there. It might also be telling you that something could happen to the people you love if you aren't near them. Brains can be very convincing, but they're not always accurate.

Even if you know there's nothing to worry about, your brain won't always listen to that, and it will get your body ready to run for your life or fight for it. We're going to talk about how to deal with this, but first let's talk about what's happening up in that powerpack in your head.

Your brain and anxiety – what you need to know.

When your brain feels really strongly that it has to protect you (and remember, your brain doesn't care if the danger is real or not) the fight or flight part of your brain forces the thinking part of your brain to be quiet so that it can get on and deal with the danger. If your brain had a conversation, it would probably sound something like this:

The Thinking Part: Oh, we have school today. Cool. Let's do it.

The 'Fight or Flight' Part (the Amygdala): Yeah, no. That's not going to happen. You're going to be away from home and you don't really know what's happening today. It could be dangerous, so 'Thinking Part', you need to sit out while I check it out.

Thinking Part: Dude. It's school. There's not going to be anything dangerous. Maybe new or unfamiliar, but not

dangerous. You need to calm down, okay? Chill.

Amygdala: Whoa! You seriously don't get it. If there's something bad – and I'm pretty sure there's a chance of that – then we're going to have to run for it or fight – but fighting can bring its own bag of trouble – so maybe run. Or maybe just stay away. Yep. Let's stay away. I'm trying to save a life here and you're kinda getting in my way.

Thinking Part: For a brain, you're not being very sensible. Think about it. It's school. It's teachers and other kid-sized humans and playgrounds and lunch and things. Nothing at all to worry about.

Amygdala: Gosh, you seriously don't get it. This could be deadly. You're getting my way man. I'm sending you offline for a bit while I check it out. Here have this – some oxygen, some adrenalin, some hormones. It's superhero fuel, but for you it will keep you quiet. Now, go to sleep. I've got this. I'm saving your life. You're welcome.

By now, the amygdala has surged your body with fuel to make you strong, fast and powerful in case you have to fight or flee. Of course, when it comes to school there's nothing to fight or flee but the thinking, good decision-making part of your brain is offline remember.

Why does anxiety feel the way it does?

When there's no need to fight or flee, there's nothing to burn off the superhero fuel that's racing through you, so it builds up. That fuel is perfectly safe, and in the right circumstances can be really helpful, but it can feel bad when it builds up. The feelings and emotions you have when you're anxious, or when it's time to say goodbye are all because of this buildup.

Here are some of the things you'll probably feel and why you'll feel them.

You might feel puffed or breathless. You might also feel the blood rush to your face and it might feel warm.

That's because your brain has told your body to stop using up oxygen on strong deep breaths, and to send it to your muscles so they can use it for energy to fight or run. To make this happen, your brain organises for your breathing to change from normal, strong breaths to fast little breaths. When you think about it, it's a pretty good way to save oxygen, even though it might not feel that great.

Your heart might feel like it's beating out of your chest. It might feel like you're having a heart attack.

This is because your heart is working hard to pump the fuel around your body so it can fight or flee. It's doing a great job, but it can feel a bit scary. It's nothing to worry about. It's just your heart doing exactly what a healthy heart does. You are definitely not having a heart attack. If you were, there would be other symptoms, including a pain in your chest that would be unbearable, not just uncomfortable.

You might feel dizzy or a bit confused.

This happens because there's nothing to fight or flee, so there's nothing to burn the fuel that's surging through your body. As the oxygen builds up, the carbon dioxide drops, making you feel dizzy and confused.

Your arms and legs might feel tense or wobbly.

Your brain is sending fuel to your arms (so they can fight) and to your legs (so they can run away).

You might feel a bit sweaty.

Your body does this to cool itself down. It doesn't want to overheat if it has to fight or flee.

You might feel like bursting into tears or you might feel really angry

This is the handy work of the amygdala – the part of the brain that triggers the fight or flight. It's also involved in emotions. It's in full control and it's working super hard. When it's highly active, you might get emotional or angry at all sorts of things or nothing at all. It's a really normal part of anxiety.

You might feel like you're going to vomit or you might actually vomit. You might get tummy aches or feel as though you have butterflies in your belly. Your mouth might also feel a little bit dry.

Everything that's happening in your body that isn't necessary in that moment for survival will shut down. One of these is your digestive system, which is the part of the body that gets the nutrients from food. That can wait, so it shuts down until the crisis (or what your brain thinks is a crisis – nobody said brains were always sensible!) is over. It's a great way to save energy, but it can make you feel sick. It's feels awful, but it definitely won't hurt you and it's definitely not a sign of anything worse going on inside you.



As you can see, there's a really good reason for every physical symptom. It's your brain doing a great job of what brains are meant to do – keep you alive.

This is why you might feel so strongly you that you can't go to school – because that's what your brain is telling you. It's why it might upset you when people tell you there's nothing to worry about. You kind of already know this, but your brain and your body aren't so convinced – your body is being driven by a brain that thinks it's under threat. This can feel scary,

which is totally understandable.

Here's the thing though: Even though your brain is telling you there's danger, sometimes it might misread the situation. It happens to everyone from time to time but some brains will be a lot quicker to sense threat than others. There's nothing wrong with that. An anxious brain is just as healthy and strong and capable as a non-anxious brain. In fact, it's often even more capable, more creative and more sensitive to what's happening around it.

When your brain is reacting to things that aren't really a threat, what it actually needs is for you to come in and be the boss. Let's talk about how to do that.

1. Your anxiety isn't the enemy, so try not to fight it.

Remember that the amygdala that sets your anxiety in motion is like a fierce warrior that's trying to protect you. Even though it might be causing you trouble, it really doesn't mean to. If it could, it would hug you and walk one step in front of you to keep you safe. It can't do that, so instead it surges you with fuel to keep you strong, fast and powerful whenever it thinks you need it, and sometimes just in case. If you can put the thinking part of your brain (the pre-frontal cortex) back in control, it will stop the fuel surging through you and this will help you to feel better and braver. It really needs your help though because the only way it's going to be let back in control is if the amygdala thinks you're safe. That message needs to come from you.

2. Let your brain know, 'I've got this. You can stop worrying now.'

Luckily, there is a very cool thing your brain can do and it's called the relaxation response. You don't have to believe it works because it's programmed into your brain, like breathing, so it just does. But – it won't work until you flick the switch. The best way to do that is to breathe. Not just any breathing though – strong, deep breaths that come from your belly.

- in through your nose for three,
- pause,
- out through your mouth for three.

(Imagine that you have a hot cocoa in your hands and you're breathing in the delicious smell through your nose for three seconds, then blowing it cool for three seconds.)

When you do this, it's like a gorgeous massage for your amygdala. It totally relaxes it. It tells it that you're okay and that it can chill for a bit. When your amygdala is relaxed, something kind of wonderful happens. Your prefrontal cortex (the 'let's think about this' part of your brain) can take back control. The first thing that it does is to neutralise (get rid of) the fuel (oxygen, hormones, adrenalin). When that happens, the intense physical and emotional things you're feeling all start to settle down. You're back in control. Back to being the boss of your brain. It might not feel completely comfortable straight away, but it will be to a level that you can handle. Very soon after that, you'll feel as strong, brave and as awesome as ever.

3. Get really active for a couple of minutes or go for a walk.

Remember that the fuel surging through you is there to make

you strong, fast and powerful. If you don't burn it up, it will build up, and that's when it feels bad. Walking or exercise will burn the fuel and stop the awful physical things you're feeling. If you can get sweaty for five minutes by running, skipping, jumping – anything – that will really help. Otherwise going for a brisk walk will also be a great thing to do.

4. Feel what's happening outside of yourself.

When you feel anxious, you become really aware of what's happening inside your body. Your brain also continues to worry itself silly by living in the future with a truck load of 'what ifs'. Bring your brain back to the present by turning your attention to what's happening around you. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Touch your arms and feel the touch of your fingers against your skin. Feel your breath coming into you, and then going out. Feel the temperature. Hear the noises around you. You've got the idea.

5. Dear Me, This is what you need to know ...

When you're calm, and the thinking part of your brain is back in control, make a list of things you would like your amygdala to know. Then, use this as a reminder when you're feeling anxious about school. What would you say to someone if you saw them feeling the way you feel when it's time to go to school or say goodbye? These are the things that the thinking part of your brain would say to your amygdala if it was online when you were feeling anxious. Write it down and use it to remind your brain of what it needs to know when it starts to get you into fight or flight mode. Remember, you're the boss. Maybe it will look something like this:

Dear Me,

This is what you need to know ... you are completely okay. You're feeling like this because your brain thinks there's something to be scared of. It's trying to look after you, but it needs you need to be the boss.

You're brave. You're strong. And you're okay. Here's why:

- Your friend(s) are at school and they care about you.
- Your teacher is on your side and would never ever let anything happen to you.
- School is strengthening your brain, so it can be even more amazing.
- Today you're doing these fun things at school ... (even if it's just playing at lunch or eating something delicious – it all counts!).
- You're brave and you can handle school no matter what.
- In fact, you're probably one of the bravest ones there today because you feel really anxious – and you're doing it anyway.
- You only have to get through the next five minutes.

Go me. You're pretty awesome.

Love, Me.

6. Get organised.

Make a list of the things you need to do before you leave home to make your day goes smoothly. That way, you can remind yourself that things are under control, even if they feel like they aren't.

Breakfast eaten. (Gotta be strong).

Teeth brushed.

Uniform on.
 Homework done.
 Lunch packed.
 Shoes on.
 Bag packed.
 Parents (or important adult) hugged.
 ‘See ya later,’ to pets – done.
 ‘See ya later,’ to sibling/s – done.
 Hair – done. Lookin’ fine.
 Good to go.

7. Get some sleep.

When you sleep, your brain gets stronger and sorts out its emotional worries. The more sleep you get, the better.

8. Have something lavender nearby.

Lavender oil calms a stressed out, hectic brain. Spray it around your room or have some ready when you need it by putting lavender oil on a tissue. Have a little smell when you need to feel calmer.

9. Anxiety and courage always exist together.

Anxiety means that you’re doing something brave. It doesn’t matter whether it’s easy for other people or not. We all find different things hard or easy. If you’re anxious, it’s because your brain thinks there’s something to worry about. It responds the same whether you’re about to give a presentation or about to skydive. It doesn’t matter what the thing is that’s making you nervous, an anxious brain is a brave brain, an anxious body is a brave body, and an anxious person is always a brave person.

And finally ...

School anxiety never just swipes at one person. It affects kids, parents, siblings and the teachers who also invest in the children in their care. One of the worst things about anxiety is the way it tends to show up without notice or a good reason. For kids (or anyone) who struggle with anxiety, it can feel like a barrelling – it comes from nowhere, makes no sense and has a mind of its own. The truth is, the mind that anxiety has is theirs, and when they can understand their own power, they



can start to establish themselves firmly as the ‘boss of their brain’. Understanding this will empower them, and will help them to draw on the strength, wisdom and courage that has been in them all along.

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<https://www.heysigmund.com/how-to-deal-with-school-anxiety-no-more-distressing->

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HOW TO KNOW IF YOUR CHILD IS BEING BULLIED

Writer: Jamie Howard, PhD

Clinical Expert: Jamie Howard, PhD

We are all aware that being bullied as a child is not a trivial thing. It not only causes acute suffering, it has been linked to long-term emotional problems, and children who lack strong parental support seem to encounter the most lasting damage.

But we also know that it’s part of growing up to have painful or embarrassing social experiences, and that learning to rebound from these interactions is an important skill for kids to learn.

If our kids complain about bullying, we want to take their complaints very seriously, give them the support and tools to handle it, and intervene on their behalf when needed. But we don’t want to teach them that every negative experience with their peers is a form of bullying.

Kids I’m working with will say, “I was being bullied.” And when they describe what happened, sometimes it was really just teasing. Maybe someone was giving them a hard time and it was difficult to deal with. But not every incident of meanness, rejection or hostility is bullying.

When does teasing or harassment become bullying?

When there’s a power difference: Bullying is done by someone in a position of power—it might be in the form of physical strength, or popularity—and it is directed at someone who is perceived as less powerful.

When there’s intention to cause harm. Bullying can take the form of a physical or verbal attack, making threats, spreading rumors, or excluding someone from a group on purpose. It’s not inadvertent.

When it’s repeated: Bullying behavior is an ongoing pattern of hostile or abusive actions directed at the child who is the target.

When it does cause harm: Behavior becomes bullying when it impairs the well-being or functioning of the child who’s targeted.

If your child reports to you that she has been bullied, my advice is to take it very seriously, because, if nothing else, it really hurt her feelings and she’s struggling with it. You want



Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association



The Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association offers the following free in-service trainings to foster and adoptive parents. RSVP is required! Sign-up today.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NFAPAIIn-Service-2023>

Virtual: Transracial Parenting; We Must Do Better — 2 CEs

Rescheduled to: April 1, 2023 9:00 am—11:00 am (Central Time)

Barb Clark from North American Council on Adoptable Children

How do you parent a child of a different race than you are? Is love enough? We know it's not. It is crucial that foster and adoptive parents are aware of how race impacts children in America, even if a child is only in your home for a few days or a few weeks. Damage can be done unintentionally, so let's roll up our sleeves and dig deep into tough discussions, as that is when we can see the most growth, in times of discomfort.

In-Person: Helping You Support a Child You Are Fostering or Adopting — 6 CEs

9:00 am—4:00 pm (Central Time) A break for lunch

April 22, 2023: North Platte

- **Child Development:** build a basic foundation for understanding child development, so you can better understand and meet the child's needs.
- **Attachment:** discuss strategies to help you build your toolkit to enhance your relationship with the child you foster or adopt.
- **Separation, Grief & Loss:** tools and skills to help the child communicate and understand their loss and grief.
- **Effective Communication:** tools you can use to make your communications more effective, particularly during sensitive conversations with the child you are fostering or have adopted.

Virtual: Attachment and Bonding — 2 CEs

July 29, 2023 9:00 am—11:00 am (Central Time) Kim Stevens from North American Council on Adoptable Children

This session will provide an in-depth examination of attachment and bonding, including topics such as personality characteristics, responding to rejection, and realistic attachment expectations. This session will also offer practical tips and strategies to help strengthen parent-child relationships.

Virtual: GPS for Kids on the Trauma Highway: How to Help them Navigate the World - 2 CEs

September 23, 2023 9:00 am—11:00 am (Central Time)

Barb Clark from North American Council on Adoptable Children

The world is only beginning to grasp the impact trauma has on children and we all know that the process of helping children heal can be slow, frustrating and grossly misunderstood. Our children are assumed to be "bad" kids and the parents are judged as well. Parents hear advise like "this child needs some discipline" or "have you tried taking away their cell phone?" The world does not understand trauma and the behaviors that come from it, or the gaps in social and emotional age which are common with children who have come from hard places. We will explore strategies to give our children and their families tools to navigate a "trauma uniformed" world. Discussion will also focus on how caregivers can participate in building a trauma informed community for their child. We must be the ones to stir the change...it is our responsibility to our children to help their journey be less bumpy. So buckle up...it is time to repave this trauma highway together!

You must register to attend! We will send you the Zoom link to log in or location of in-person training.

Registration closes the day before training.

Questions? Contact the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association at 402-476-2273 or Corinne@nfapa.org

**Facilitated by the Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
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to listen and express empathy without treating her as if she's fragile. You want to model a confident we-can-solve-this-problem attitude.

What you don't want to do is express shock and anger and vow immediately to go to the school, or talk to the child's parents. Tempering your response encourages your child to open up.

Before giving bullying advice, collect the facts

Your first job is to try to get a detailed picture of what happened. It's hard when you're a parent because your stomach flips, your protective impulses kick in, and you just want to punish the kid that's hurt your child's feelings. But it's more effective to be like a reporter: "Okay, who was there? What was going on? What was said, exactly? What did you do? How did you feel?"

You're gathering all the data, the evidence of what happened. The details are important, not for the purpose of invalidating your child's feelings or minimizing what happened—"Well, that doesn't sound like it was really that bad"—but just so that you can tailor your strategies better.

Part of the goal of asking questions is to get a sense of the social hierarchy.

You might say, "Was it a big group of kids? Were lots of kids surrounding him when he said that to you? Is he a really popular kid? What were the other kids doing?" And it also gives you a sense of how embarrassing it might have been.

Strategies on how to handle bullying

Once you've asked your child exactly what happened, here's

LB1173-Reimagine Child and Family Well-Being

LB1173 is a bill that was passed unanimously in the legislature last year, tasks the three branches of government to work together to advance a practice and finance model to transform child and family well-being in Nebraska. There will be a variety of meetings held throughout the state to listen to ideas and hear feedback from stakeholders. For more information regarding LB1173, please visit reimaginewellbeing.ne.gov.

We will keep you updated on information in upcoming issues.



some bullying advice to consider:

Practice assertiveness. That means showing confidence both verbally and nonverbally. Suggest that your child try standing tall and saying, "Don't talk to me like that!" It can help to script some things your child could say and role-play-you do it first, and then let your child try it out.

Find allies. Suggest that your child talk to his friends about ways they might handle it and ways they've handled stuff that's similar. They may have some good ideas and it will make him feel less isolated.

Get involved. Activities that your child is good at, that he enjoys, are very protective. Because if he's doing something he enjoys, and he's thriving, he's not going to care as much. The confidence he feels when he's in his element will carry over to environments in which he's less secure.

Enlist adults. If your child needs an adult advocate, consider contacting a teacher or school administrator. First, try to get your child's permission, telling her, "I really want to call the teacher and ask him to keep an eye on it." If she's adamantly against it, I would keep the option open, saying, "I'm not going to now, and I will tell you before I do." So there's some perception of control. But you're also teaching her a lesson: "Listen, yes it might be embarrassing, but you need to stand up for yourself. And self-advocacy is more important."

Monitor incidents. One incident isn't necessarily bullying, but you want to notice if it's becoming a pattern. Tell your child to let you know if it happens again. You might say, "I want to stay on top of this and make sure we solve it."

Be prepared. It's important to talk about bullying even if it hasn't happened, so that if it does your child is better equipped to recognize it and more comfortable telling you about it.

Form a partnership with the teacher. Let your child's teacher know that you hope she'll touch base with you whenever there's something concerning, and that you hope she doesn't mind if you do the same.

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https://childmind.org/article/how-to-know-if-your-child-is-being-bullied/?fbclid=IwAR0ICP9396SGHBCGF4z0aN72Rtc1N_N1X6ELWJCSYKU6VfKIKrQyB7-Ab1o

OUR TEENS ARE REALLY STRUGGLING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA RIGHT NOW, HERE IS HOW TO HELP

Written by Parenting Teens & Tweens Community

Like most parents of teens who were already struggling with setting a good example for screentime, the pandemic made it so much worse.

I mean, there were days when it was cold and rainy and no one wanted to play one more game. I also felt bad about all the things they missed and hoped that they were maintaining some sort of connection to the outside world.

Now that things are back to normal, I don't want to spend all my time nagging. I hate spending the small amount of time I have with my teens telling them to get off their phones.

There is nothing worse about raising teens than the constant battle of the screen.

During the pandemic, I didn't say a word when I walked past my teens sitting on the couch, faces in their phones hour after hour. There have been times I've let them play video games late into the night, or I've been pretty sure they've almost worn out Netflix. I didn't check on them every time they were in their room for hours, even though I knew they were probably on some sort of device or making a TikTok or scrolling.

And now, as their high school life is busy and full, it's still tough to get them off their phones when they feel like they have "nothing better to do."

But this week, one of my normally "fairly" even-tempered teens has been over-the-top snarky and kinda mean. Another seems to come to tears at every turn. And my third seems suddenly withdrawn and depressed. When I talked to a few friends, I heard a similar theme. A lot of acting out, a lot more anxiety, a lot more tears.

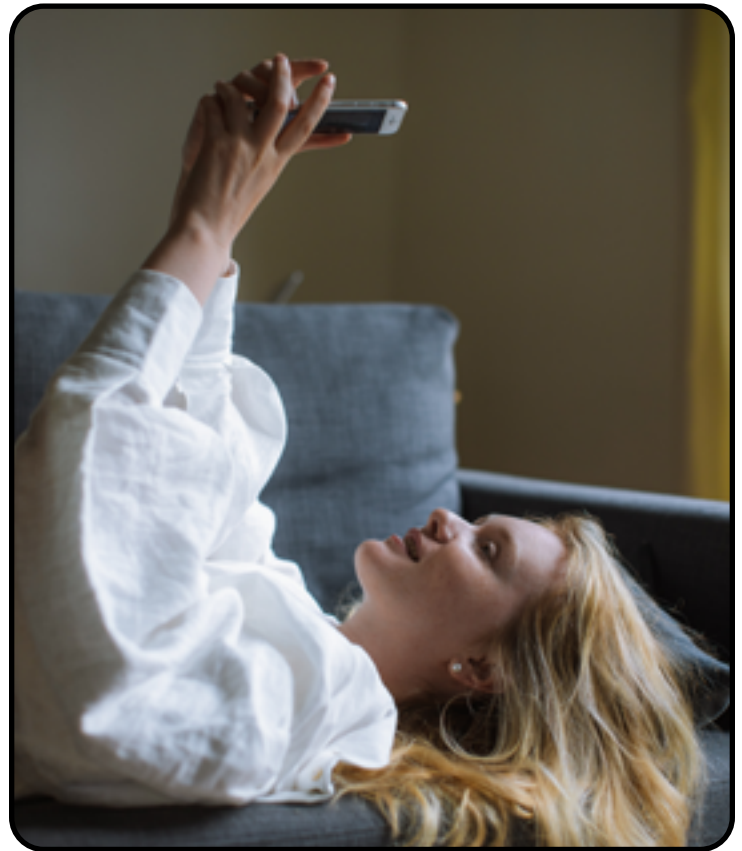
I've been trying to talk to my kids more this week, diverting their attention from their phones, but honestly, it's been tough. Their feelings are valid.

I don't think there's a person out there right now who doesn't feel the heaviness of our world in one way or another. I think we are all worried and uptight and unnerved.

But I also can't let things go on this way and watch them sink farther into the abyss of their phones. When the world seems dark, I don't want them continuing down that lonely rabbit hole. I need them to come up for air and light. I need them to be able to identify when they need to check their behaviors and when we should be talking about their feelings.

More teens are starting to realize the damaging effects social media has on their self-esteem.

The facts are clear. Anxiety and depression are linked to the overuse of social media. It impacts teen's sleep habits. And while the majority of parents believe they know what their child is posting on social media, according to a Pew Research



poll, a survey of teens found that 70 percent of them are hiding their online behavior from their parents.

So, we had a family meeting and had to set new rules (see below), and I was a little surprised when one of my girls admitted she had a major problem putting her phone down. She had gone on Amazon and found a safe that would store her phone for a certain amount of time and wouldn't let her access it until time was up. Another mentioned that there was nothing she wanted to do more than watch videos, so she didn't have to think.

That's a problem.

I've always felt I was more strict with technology than other parents, primarily because it's my business. My job literally is to be on social media all day (and some nights) for my clients.

I know all the dangers, I made all the rules, I did all the monitoring.

But sometimes, we just miss what's sitting right under our noses. And let's be honest, raising teens is hard.

It's never too late to change the tech rules in your home—for your kids and for yourself.

Yesterday we started a slow detox of phone and tech. We talked about active and passive tech usage (active being using your phone to help you cook or do a workout as opposed to passive for just scrolling.)

We turned off phone notifications so their screens wouldn't constantly be flashing as a reminder that they might be missing something. And they can't remain isolated in their bedrooms.

And I've got to walk the walk, too.

That might be the hardest part.

But we have to protect our kids' mental health in these difficult times. We have to watch for signs. We have to stay active—even when, especially when, it's hard.

Be aware of your kids' behavior and when they change. Once



you identify these, it gives you the power to help them address it, which is one of the most important lessons we can impart to our kids.

Just in case you need somewhere to start, here are a few of the rules we implemented:

- Set a 30-minute timer on social media usage and then require a break (you can set time limits in “screen time” under settings)
- No phones after 10 p.m. and don’t let them keep them in their rooms overnight (They can stay up later than 10, they just can’t be on screens)
- Turn off ALL notifications for social media and other apps
- Everyone had to pick one non-screen hobby to do a few times a week.
- One screen at a time (i.e., not watching a show while also

scrolling TikTok)

- Regular check-ins to talk about what they’ve seen on social media or online.
- Try to schedule small outings to encourage them to be off their phones.

Don’t expect them to thank you for it now, but they’ll thank you for it later.

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<https://parentingteensandtwos.com/our-teens-are-really-struggling-with-social-media-right-now-here-is-how-to-help/?fbclid=IwAR0M0kFumBSSlqSD7sZE-c5--dBFv6xAOWgGTwG0lr2EdwbRiz4Sd0feCAA>

HOW TO STEER TEENS AWAY FROM NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

by Ken Ginsburg / Discipline & Monitoring

It doesn’t make you a bad parent if your child experiences trouble. Teens are people. And people make mistakes. They need you to stand by them during both good and challenging times. When your teen strays down a negative path, don’t shame them for making a poor choice or lecture them about their wrongdoing. Instead, tell them you dislike the behavior because it is preventing them from being the person you know they really are. It is highly protective when parents continue to see all that is good and right about their children. We must keep holding them to high expectations and believe they can do better.

Steer Teens Away From Negative Behaviors

Parents can help steer their teens away from negative behaviors by using the “heart-belly-head-hands” approach. The key to this approach is using their strengths as a starting point to help them find another course of action. By building on your teen’s strengths, you cause a ripple effect that diminishes their need to engage in undermining behavior. This strategy allows you to deal with problems while avoiding shame and pushback. It is an approach grounded in respect and helps redirect teens back toward their better selves. You don’t use the words “heart-belly-head-hands.” Rather, this is a memory tool to help you with the flow of your guidance.

Heart-Belly-Head-Hands Approach

The heart contains the depth of your feelings. Share with your teen specific things you love about them, so there is no doubt you care deeply. Ideally, it will be the very strengths you recognize in them that will be the starting point to correct the misstep.

The belly often constricts when you are worried. Who hasn’t experienced butterflies in the stomach when anxious? Explain to your teen why you are concerned. Make it clear you fear their choices may prevent them from reaching their full potential.

NFAPA Support Groups

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Support groups can provide informal mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

- Live Virtual Support Group: Available the first Tuesday at 6:30 pm (MT). Contact Jolie at 308-672-3658 or Tammy at 402-989-2197 for the Zoom link. You must register to attend. In-service training (CE) offered in this support group almost every month.
- Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook: Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT). No CE’s or training. Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.
- Parenting Across Color Lines: For multi-racial families on the fourth Monday of the month at 6:30 pm in-person in Lincoln. No CE’s or training. Contact Felicia at 402-476-2273 to register to attend.

The head solves problems. Tell your teen that you want to work together to find a solution. Remain calm so they can do their best thinking. Let your teen be the expert in their own life.

The hands are there to guide. Ask your teen how you can best support them. Remind them that you aren't going anywhere as you offer wisdom and experience. You may guide them to professional support, but you will always be by their side.

Consider this example for handling a teen's alcohol misuse.

One of the greatest things about you is how deeply you feel. It means you'll have strong and loving relationships in the future. I love that about you. (Heart) I'm worried you are drinking to escape your feelings because they can be overwhelming. I'm concerned that alcohol will take away from the sensitive and caring person you can become. (Belly) Let's work together to come up with a plan to help you manage your feelings. We need to think of other ways to feel better without alcohol. I have thoughts but I want to hear yours as well. (Head) I'm here for you and will always be by your side. You are strong and will get through this. [(Optional dependent on depth of problem, or to assess the depth of the problem) We would both benefit from a professional by our sides.] (Hands)

See the Good in Your Teen

During challenging times, draw on your memories of your child's innate goodness. Your love and steadfast presence will remind them who they are and who they want to be. It will energize them to learn from their mistakes and bounce back.

Remember good parents don't have children without problems. They offer their children what they need to return to their better selves. You are not alone. Reach out to a professional for support if the problem feels too big to handle. Both you and your teen deserve it. Professionals are trained to help families through difficult times. You'll start the process on the right foot because you've taken a strength-based approach. Check out this article for tips on how to prepare teens for professional help.

This article was co-authored by Elyse Salek, MSEd.

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https://parentandteen.com/steer-teens-from-negative-behaviors/?utm_source=th_fb_1_23_23

AS PARENTS OF TEENS, WE MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT SELF-HARM LOOKS LIKE

By Brenda Ferber

Inside this post: I was terrified when my daughter told me she was cutting herself. Here are five dos and don'ts for parents when dealing with adolescent self-harm.

The note was written on pink paper, folded up, and taped

to my bedroom door. On the outside, in my 12-year-old daughter's handwriting, it said, "Respond 2nite!"

I unfolded it and read:

I have to tell you something. Something important. I've needed to tell u 4 a while but I didn't know how u would react. I still don't know but I can't keep this a secret any longer. I'm trusting you. Write back because I will be too chicken if we are face to face. — Faithy

"What the heck?" I said to myself. I had no idea what she was going to tell me. My mind jumped to worst-case scenarios.

Was she being abused? Was she doing drugs? My heart pounded as I wrote back on the bottom of her note,

You can tell me anything. I won't tell a soul. Love, Mom

I tucked it under her door, went back to my room, and waited, my heart threatening to burst out of my chest.

Finally, she wrote back.

Ah! I'm gonna regret this! I can't believe I'm telling u. I'm gonna write it small.

I cut myself.

Nothing prepares a parent for finding out your child self-harms

A swell of sadness rushed through me like my heart was pumping sorrow rather than blood.

I went to my daughter's room, opening the door without even knocking. She was lying in bed, facing away from the door. I curled around her and hugged her tight.

"You're not mad at me?" she asked.

"No. I'm sad for you." Beyond sad, I thought to myself.

She showed me the cuts on her arms, scratches, really. But some were deeper than others.

I held her wrist and spoke softly. "Faithy, if someone else were doing this to you, I would tell them to stop hurting my daughter. So, please, stop hurting my daughter."

What can parents do to address adolescent self-harm?

That was sixteen years ago. Today, Faith is a licensed social worker and therapist. She manages her mental health like a champ, and she and I are closer than ever.

Together, we are working to end the stigma against mental illness, and she has encouraged me to share this story.

With the increase in mental health struggles of adolescents and self-harm recently making national news, parents might wonder what they can do if they discover their child is engaging in self-harm.

According to the CDC, 1 in 4 teen girls and 1 in 10 teen boys self-harm. Cutting (using a sharp object like a razorblade, knife, or scissors to make marks, cuts, or scratches on one's own body) appeals to kids who might not be ready to try drugs and alcohol but who are seeking a simple way to alleviate their emotional pain.

The scary thing is many pre-teens and teens feel like it works. Even scarier, it's highly addictive. And scariest of all, once you start, you have to cut deeper and more often to get that same quick fix. For impulsive teens, it can be devastating.

Five tips if you find out your teen is participating in self-harm activities

So what can parents do? Here are five Do's and Don'ts when it comes to adolescent self-harm:

Don't shame. Do empathize.

As an adult, you may think it's obvious that self-harm is a coping strategy rife with dangerous consequences, and you might believe anyone who engages in that kind of behavior is foolish. But that attitude is tinged with judgment, and the last thing your child needs is shame from you.

Sentences like, "Why on earth would you do something like that?!" or, "This behavior is crazy!" might be running around inside your head, but you'd be wise not to let them out. Doing so will only make your child feel worse about themselves.

Instead, understand that your child is trying hard to cope with life in the best way they know how. Remember what it felt like to be their age. Consider that life is even harder today for teens than it likely was for you. Know that they are learning and growing and may need help navigating their big emotions. Try saying something like, "It seems like you're struggling with some difficult feelings. It's not easy being a teen. I'm here to listen and support you."



Don't punish. Do validate.

It might be confusing and terrifying to see your child has hurt themselves, and your initial instinct may be rooted in fear and the wish to exert control. That might show up as a desire to punish your child by giving them a consequence such as grounding them or taking away their screens.

Although it's natural to want to feel a sense of power when you see your child behaving in a dangerous way, punishing them will work against you both. It will drive a wedge between you and your child, it will make your child feel even worse about themselves, and it will likely force your child to shut down communication and become sneakier about their self-harm practices.

Instead, validate the feelings your child is experiencing. Try saying something like, "It makes sense you're feeling (blank) because of (blank)." Tell them you understand they're hurting and that you're there for them. Tell them you love them.

You might be amazed at how far these simple validating statements will go in terms of letting your child feel seen and understood. When you start with validation, your child sees you as a teammate, not an opponent. Defenses come down, and together, you can work toward healing.

Don't hide. Do seek help.

You may feel embarrassed by your child's self-harming behavior, and that might make you want to brush it under the

rug. You might also worry about people judging you and your child, and that might make you keep the situation to yourself. But ignoring this dangerous behavior will not make it stop. And keeping it a secret will add to the shame that you and your child likely feel.

You may feel alone in dealing with this, but know you are not. Unfortunately, there are thousands of parents dealing with adolescent self-harm.

Instead, seek help. Self-harm is a coping strategy with significant consequences, and you do need to take it seriously. Try enlisting professional help for your child, such as a therapist or counselor. Read up on self-harm so that you understand why your child might be engaging in this behavior. Identify your own feelings about the situation, and talk to a trusted individual to help you process it all. Parenting a teen is not easy, and you deserve support, too.

Don't hover. Do check in.

Once you know your child is self-harming, it's natural to become hyper-vigilant out of fear that your child will cause lasting harm to themselves. That may look like you doing body checks or overreacting to typical teen drama.

This kind of hovering can make your child feel defensive and helpless, and it can cause them to act out even more since they don't feel like you trust them.

Instead, check in with your child on a regular basis. Keep the communication lines open and relaxed.

It can be empowering for your teen to get to play a role in executing a safety plan. You can work with them to remove objects from the home that they could use to hurt themselves. Over time, your teen will see your calm and loving attention as a comfort, and they will be more likely to confide in you if they slip up and self-harm again.

Don't blame yourself. Do keep learning and growing.

When you gave birth to that little bundle of joy, I'm sure you didn't imagine having to parent an angst-filled teen who hurts themselves. It's natural to wonder where you went wrong or how you could have prevented this from happening.

But here's the truth: Your child is a unique individual, separate from you, and it's impossible to keep them from hurting or from occasionally acting out in unhelpful ways. Blaming yourself adds a burden you truly don't need.

Instead, keep learning and growing as a parent. That means exploring how your parenting techniques hurt or help your child and making changes as necessary. That means letting go of stigmas around mental illness. That means staying present and having faith in the future. That means seeing yourself and your child as beautiful, flawed, works-in-progress.

If you or your child are in crisis or you are concerned about suicidal behavior, help is available 24/7 by calling 988 or texting 741-741.

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https://parentingteensandtweens.com/tips-to-deal-with-adolescent-self-harm/?fbclid=IwAR0FI4sm5h9nT7zj18HR5taTapjBhMjganCum8PkFXx-RJdrTTgFuDBH_Cg

10 WAYS TO TEACH CHILDREN TO SPEAK UP ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE

Writer: *Natasha Daniels, LCSW*

Clinical Expert: *Natasha Daniels, LCSW*

We teach our young children all sorts of ways to keep themselves safe. We teach them to watch the hot stove, we teach them to look both ways before they cross the street. But, more often than not, body safety is not taught until much older — until sometimes, it is too late. Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. You want to hear something even scarier? According to the US Department of Justice (nsopw.org) only 10% of perpetrators were strangers to the child and 23% of the perpetrators were children themselves!

These statistics do not surprise me. In my practice I meet children on a weekly basis who have been victims of sexual abuse. Many of them are under five years old. Almost all of them knew their perpetrator and more often than not, it is another kid!

Parents will frequently tell me that they didn't think this could happen to them. That they never leave their children with strangers. That they always keep their children within their eyesight.

Do your children go on play dates? Do they go to daycare or pre-school? Do you have friends or family over to your house? Do they play at the neighbor's house? The fact is, you cannot fully prevent the risk of your child being sexually abused.

The children I have worked with have come from good neighborhoods, and good homes, and go to really good schools. I have worked with children who have been sexually abused on play dates, sleepovers, in the classroom, on the playground, on the school bus, in their playroom and out in their backyard.

Now that I have officially scared you to death, let's walk you back down from that cliff. We have to allow our children to go out into the world and interact with those around them. But we can arm them with knowledge that might save them from being victimized.

Parents do not always talk to their children about body safety early enough. They think kids are too young. It is too scary. But it is never too soon, and it doesn't have to be a scary conversation. Here are things 10 things that could help your child be less vulnerable to sexual abuse:

1. Talk about body parts early

Name body parts and talk about them very early. Use proper names for body parts, or at least teach your child what the actual words are for their body parts. I can't tell you how many young children I have worked with who have called their vagina their "bottom." Feeling comfortable using these words and knowing what they mean can help a child talk clearly if something inappropriate has happened.

2. Teach them that some body parts are private

Tell your child that their private parts are called private because they are not for everyone to see. Explain that mommy and daddy can see them naked, but people outside of the home should only see them with their clothes on. Explain how their doctor can see them without their clothes because mommy and daddy are there with them and the doctor is checking their body.

3. Teach your child body boundaries

Tell your child matter-of-factly that no one should touch their private parts and that no one should ask them to touch somebody else's private parts. Parents will often forget the second part of this sentence. Sexual abuse often begins with the perpetrator asking the child to touch them or someone else.

4. Tell your child that body secrets are not okay

Most perpetrators will tell the child to keep the abuse a secret. This can be done in a friendly way, such as, "I love playing with you, but if you tell anyone else what we played they won't let me come over again." Or it can be a threat: "This is our secret. If you tell anyone I will tell them it was your idea and you will get in big trouble!" Tell your kids that no matter what anyone tells them, body secrets are not okay and they should always tell you if someone tries to make them keep a body secret.

5. Tell your child that no one should take pictures of their private parts

This one is often missed by parents. There is a whole sick world out there of pedophiles who love to take and trade pictures of naked children online. This is an epidemic and it puts your child at risk. Tell your kids that no one should ever take pictures of their private parts.

6. Teach your child how to get out of scary or uncomfortable situations

Some children are uncomfortable with telling people "no"— especially older peers or adults. Tell them that it's okay to tell an adult they have to leave, if something that feels wrong is happening, and help give them words to get out of uncomfortable situations. Tell your child that if someone wants to see or touch private parts they can tell them that they need to leave to go potty.

7. Have a code word your children can use when they feel unsafe or want to be picked up

As children get a little bit older, you can give them a code word that they can use when they are feeling unsafe. This can be used at home, when there are guests in the house or when they are on a play date or a sleepover.

8. Tell your children they will never be in trouble if they tell you a body secret

Children often tell me that they didn't say anything because they thought they would get in trouble, too. This fear is often used by the perpetrator. Tell your child that no matter what happens, when they tell you anything about body safety or body secrets they will NEVER get in trouble.

9. Tell your child that a body touch might tickle or feel good

Many parents and books talk about "good touch and bad

touch,” but this can be confusing because often these touches do not hurt or feel bad. I prefer the term “secret touch,” as it is a more accurate depiction of what might happen.

10. Tell your child that these rules apply even with people they know and even with another child

This is an important point to discuss with your child. When you ask a young child what a “bad guy” looks like they will most likely describe a cartoonish villain. You can say something like, “Mommy and daddy might touch your private parts when we are cleaning you or if you need cream — but no one else should touch you there. Not friends, not aunts or uncles, not teachers or coaches. Even if you like them or think they are in charge, they should still not touch your private parts.”

I am not naïve enough to believe that these discussions will absolutely prevent sexual abuse, but knowledge is a powerful deterrent, especially with young children who are targeted due to their innocence and ignorance in this area.

And one discussion is not enough. Find natural times to reiterate these messages, such as bath time or when they are running around naked. And please share this article with those you love and care about and help me spread the message of body safety!

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https://childmind.org/article/10-ways-to-teach-your-child-the-skills-to-prevent-sexual-abuse/?fbclid=IwAR1rzXxCK3Z0MCVtAy3kQ4GA46wOj9mKHKSsubYsJs18MXSDz6np0_yVHzc

WHY DO KIDS HAVE TANTRUMS AND MELTDOWNS?

Writer: Caroline Miller

Clinical Experts: Steven Dickstein, MD , Vasco Lopes, PsyD

What You'll Learn

What triggers tantrums and meltdowns?

What underlying causes lead to frequent tantrums and meltdowns?

What can parents do when children have tantrums or meltdowns?

It will come as no surprise to parents that the most common problem that brings young children to the attention of a psychologist or psychiatrist is emotional outbursts—tantrums and meltdowns.

Indeed, tantrums and meltdowns are among the biggest challenges of parenting. They're hard to understand, hard to prevent, and even harder to respond to effectively when they're happening. And when they occur with frequency past the age in which they're developmentally expected—those terrible twos—they can become a big problem for the child, not just the beleaguered adults who endure them.

Tantrums vs. meltdowns

Many people make a distinction between tantrums and meltdowns, though neither is a clinical term. “Tantrum” is commonly used to describe milder outbursts, during which a child still retains some measure of control over their behavior. One benchmark many parents use is that a tantrum is likely to subside if no one is paying attention to it. This is opposed to a meltdown, during which a child loses control so completely that the behavior only stops when they wear themselves out and/or the parent is able to calm them down.

Whether mild or severe, tantrums are symptoms that a child is struggling with emotions they can't regulate. Anger, of course, is the No. 1 emotion that causes children to lose their heads and blow up—think of it as the kid version of road rage, says child and adolescent psychiatrist Steven Dickstein, MD. The child feels they deserve or need something that is being deliberately withheld from them—the cookie, the video game, something they covet at the toy store—and is overwhelmed by their frustration and sense of injustice.

But anxiety is another big trigger; it causes kids to freak out, overriding the logic that would enable them to see that their anxiety is out of proportion to the situation.

Underlying causes

When children don't develop emotional regulation as part of normal development, the causes are varied. “The thing is, there's no such thing as tantrum disorder or meltdown disorder,” notes Dr. Dickstein. “Tantrums and meltdowns are like fevers—they can be triggered by so many different problems that we can't make them stop until we understand what's triggering them.

Sometimes the inability to regulate emotions is the result of an underlying problem. Some of the common causes of frequent meltdowns are:

ADHD: In a recent study conducted by Amy Roy, PhD, of Fordham University, more than 75 percent of children who presented with severe temper outbursts also fit the criteria for ADHD. That doesn't necessarily mean they've been diagnosed with ADHD—in fact, the disorder may be overlooked in kids who have a history of aggression. “What people don't understand is that a lack of focus, an inability to complete work and tolerate boredom, among other symptoms, can contribute to the escalation toward the explosive outbursts,” explains Vasco Lopes, PsyD, a clinical psychologist. So you have to get to the underlying cause.”

Anxiety: Anxiety is another major contributor. Even if kids don't have a full-blown anxiety disorder, they may still be overreactive to anxiety-provoking situations and melt down when they are stressed. Kids who have undiagnosed learning disabilities or who have suffered trauma or neglect may react this way when confronted with an uncomfortable or painful situation.

Learning problems: When your child acts out repeatedly in school or during homework time, it's possible that they have an undiagnosed learning disorder. Say they have a lot of trouble with math, and math problems make them very frustrated and irritable. Rather than ask for help, they may

rip up an assignment or start something with another child to create a diversion from their real issues.

Depression and irritability: Depression and irritability also occur in a subset of kids who have severe and frequent temper tantrums. A new disorder called disruptive mood dysregulation disorder, or DMDD, describes kids who have severe outbursts with chronic severe irritability in between. “Kids who are highly irritable are like water at 90 degrees—always on the cusp of boiling,” says Dr. Lopes. “Parents of these kids are always walking on eggshells because they respond to very subtle things, like the slightest thing not going their way.”

Autism: Children on the autism spectrum are also often prone to dramatic meltdowns. These children tend to be rigid—dependent on a consistent routine for their emotional comfort—and any unexpected change can set them off. And they may lack the language and communication skills to express what they want or need.

Sensory processing issues: Sensory processing challenges, often seen in autistic children and teens, as well as many with ADHD, may cause kids to be overwhelmed by stimulation and short-circuit into inconsolable meltdowns.

Skills that may be lacking

Whatever the trigger, most mental health professionals believe that children who have frequent emotional outbursts are lacking certain skills that would help them better handle situations that cause them frustration, anxiety, or anger. They include:

- Impulse control
- Problem solving
- Delaying gratification
- Negotiating
- Communicating wishes and needs to adults
- Knowing what’s appropriate or expected in a given situation
- Self-soothing

A vicious cycle

A good deal of tantrum behavior that parents see as intentional or manipulative is much less voluntary than they realize, Dr. Dickstein notes. But that is not to say that it isn’t learned behavior.

Kids with serious temper problems aren’t consciously calculating throwing tantrums, but they may have learned, through reinforcement from adults, that tantrums get results. “There’s no question that kids who haven’t outgrown tantrums do have lagging skills in emotional regulation,” says Dr. Lopes, “but then I think that weakness is maintained and exacerbated by conditioned learning.”

If a child encounters a problem, doesn’t know how else to handle it, and resorts to tantrums, he may well learn that, over time, this helps him get his way. “It becomes a vicious cycle,” says Dr. Lopes, “because instead of honing and practicing the adaptive skills that kids normally learn to solve problems collaboratively, these kids are learning maladaptive responses when they get frustrated. And by continuing to practice those skills, they are strengthening these behaviors over time and using them in a greater number of situations.”

Parents are primary

Whatever the cause, clinicians stress that in managing outbursts, the first step is understanding the triggers and testing ways the environment can be changed to reduce the incidence of outbursts. And when it comes to looking for ways to adjust a child’s environment, parents are primary.

“We don’t blame parents for tantrums,” Dr. Dickstein says, “because parents are only part of what goes into a child’s behavior patterns, along with temperament and development. But parent behavior is adjustable, so it’s the most powerful tool we have for helping young children.”

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https://childmind.org/article/why-do-kids-have-tantrums-and-meltdowns/?fbclid=IwAR30eq35nWglmmUUThEDq0lodxRpAcuLC-663DsAzdTV1QvO_E1ExZEBXgU

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