

Transform Transition Meltdown to Calm-down: Seven Support Strategies for Children with ASD



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Participant Outcomes - The 3-Part Autism Webinar series...



- ✓ Understanding the underlying factors that contribute to the transition-related problem behaviors.
- ✓ Pursuing flexible approaches in responding to the needs of children with ASD and others with behavioral challenges.
- ✓ Provide student and context-specific environmental, structural, instructional, and social supports to decrease tantrum triggers and increase skill-building learning opportunities.
- ✓ Cultivate children's self-regulation and cognitive flexibility skills for longer-term outcomes.
- ✓ Create a safe steps action plan working collaboratively as a team inclusive of family to follow during severe meltdowns.

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Participant Poll -1

Are you serving as...

- A. Special education teacher?
- B. Administrator?
- C. Speech pathologist?
- D. Occupational Therapist?
- E. Physical Therapist?
- F. Behavior Therapist/Counselor/Social Worker?
- G. Paraeducator?
- H. Parent?
- I. Other?

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Step 1: Understanding Tantrum Triggers

What precipitates the tantrums and meltdowns in children with ASD?

- Changes in routines, activities, materials, environments or personnel can trigger tantrums.**
 - Introduces ambiguity and reduces predictability.
 - Too-long a wait time between ending an activity and beginning another.
 - **Transitions** (arrival, dismissal, going to or coming in from recess, etc.)
- Have a need for "sameness" and lack behavioral flexibility.**
 - May engage in aggressive or oppositional behaviors.
 - May get anxious and stressed due to their need for sameness.
Behaviors may quickly shift into aggressive or oppositional with little or no prior warning, leading to "**meltdown**".
- New personnel, new situation, new setting** (Anxiety and stress, fear of the unfamiliar)
- Asked to stop an activity and move to another activity** (circle-time to center-time, computer to group instruction, unpredictability, stress & anxiety due to not being sure of what to expect in the next activity)
- Poor executive function skills** (attention difficulties, difficulty with filtering out distractions)

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7-Part Supports to Address Problem Behaviors

- ❑ Transform challenging moments into skill-building learning opportunities with supports.



✓ **1. Environmental Support** Advance Preparation & Alerts

Stress & Anxiety Reduction

Consistent Teaching,
Routines, Picture/Object
Cues & Schedules

✓ **2. Structural and Visual Support**

❖ **3. Instructional Support**

Task Flexibility and Adaptations

Emotional and Social Competence

4. Social Support

5. Calming Support

Calming and Self-management Tools

Impulse Control and Cognitive Flexibility

6. Executive Function Support

7. Crisis Support

Professional Teaming
& Partnering with Family

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3. Instructional Support (continued)

Classroom Scenarios – Absence of Structure, Instruction and Active Student Engagement

Brain Break in an elementary classroom: 6 students with significant disabilities were present.



- Teacher informed that “Students were on a “Brain Break”.
- One student in an enclosure monitored by 2 paras for “aggressive behavior”; A couple of students playing with toys individually; Another lying on the mat rolling around and one wandering around.
- No instructional delivery or active learner engagement observed for 25 minutes until time for lunch.

Fun Friday in a high school self-contained classroom for students with significant disabilities

- Half the day dedicated as **Fun Friday** with students expected to watch movies for a couple of hours.
- Absence of any planned, structured instructional activity.
- One student was throwing a ball—a foil wrapped ball—as he moved around the classroom; Some students wandering around the room aimlessly; One student sitting under the desk; etc.

- ✓ **Brain Breaks and Fun Fridays bring chaos and aggravate problem behaviors.**
- ✓ **High expectations, structure, predictability, consistency in following instructional routines are a “Must” to avert problem behaviors (Pursue structured teaching, individual folder activities, group game/arts).**
- ✓ **Students with ASD get confused when there are uncertainties how and when things happen.**

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Step 4: Instructional Support - Paraeducator Role A Delicate Dance!

Paraeducator support must be carefully choreographed. Paras usually spend significant amount of time in close proximity to students they support - play a critical role in preventing tantrums and help to advance student's behavior, academic, and social outcomes.

Re-teach Skills: academic and functional objectives

Ensure consistent use of personalized adaptations

Make effective use of prompts and cues

Minimize intrusive support & maximize discreet support

Enable and advancing student self-dependence

Have positive perceptions of students

Have high expectations for students and pursue them intensively.

Monitoring and close supervision of students (Zone monitoring)



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You have really learned how to..."



"You have worked so hard..."



"You are a real problem solver for..."



"You've really grown up because you..."



"WOW!! What a fabulous job you've done of..."



"It really pleases me when you..."

Use Positive and Encouraging Statements to Build Your Student's Self-concept.



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Step 4: Social Support

Facilitating Group Interactions and Friendship Skills



Build Emotional Competence.



Students with ASD experience difficulties in...



Reading Body Language

Following Rules of Conversation

Grasping Hidden Meaning of Words

Appropriate Group Interaction Skills



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Step 4: Social Support

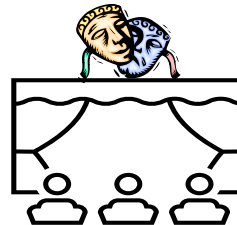
Facilitating Group Interactions and Friendship Skills

Provide social skills interventions and training to teach appropriate social and communication behaviors.

- Teach how to get and sustain attention of a peer or adult.
- Provide specific verbal cues.
- Practice with a script paired with visuals or role-play a typical situation, in multiple settings.
- Provide positive feedback and attention for engaging in appropriate social interactions or play with peers.

Use:

- Social narratives – visually represented stories
- Social stories
- Video modeling
- Role-play and drama.



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Student-specific Supports

Amina reaches across and touches other children and (occasionally scratches them). The other children get scared.

Sophia grabs toys/blocks from her peers seated near her. When the paraeducator tries to stop her, she tries to pinch/bite.



Teach how to use fidget toys to gain sensory input. Watch student, remind with picture "Hands to self", redirect to use fidget toys.



Teach Personal Space

- Teach both Amina and Sophia how to maintain "Personal Space" – two feet between her and the adult who is working with her peers or nearby.
- Draw a boundary around the desk with duct tape or masking tape to show how to stay in personal space.
- Take a photo of personal space – with arms outstretched in front and clasped together. Show her the photo.
- Model it with gestures to train on how to use personal space.



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Student-specific Supports

- **Strengthen emotional competence:** Teach about feelings and how others feel – frightened, scared, hurt, sad – paired with visuals and roleplay.



- **Social Narrative:**

Use a **scripted story**/social narrative for Amina and Sophia to learn how the other children feel – frightened – when she reaches across and touches them or when they grab items or scratch them.



- The story should guide her to understand and learn why she needs to stay in her space and keep her hands to herself.
- Use video modeling to strengthen friendship skills.



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Step 5: Calming Support and Self-management Tools

- ❑ Create a toolkit with calming and self-monitoring tools to reduce student aggression, to help calm down and gain self-regulation. The focus is gaining longer term outcomes.

Teach **mindfulness-based breathing practices** for self-management of anger and aggression.



Teach self-monitoring with the aid of 'Color-coded Calming Cards'.

Use **Mindful Movement (Yoga)** to help relax, reduce stress and anxiety and calm down.



Calming and Self-regulation Supports



Teach young children to control anger, frustration and disappointment using the '**Turtle Technique**'. (Joseph & Strain, 2010)

Offer **Musical Intervention** to lower anxiety associated with transition and bring predictability to routines.

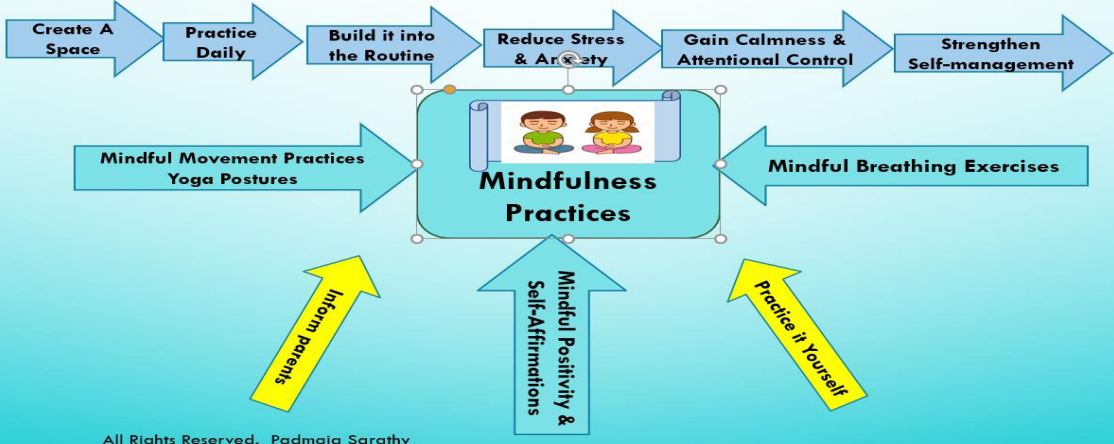


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Step 5: Coaching Self-regulation Decreasing Emotional Reactivity and Cultivating Calmness

TEACH: HOW-TO CALM DOWN AND DEVELOP SELF-REGULATION



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Music as a Calming Tool

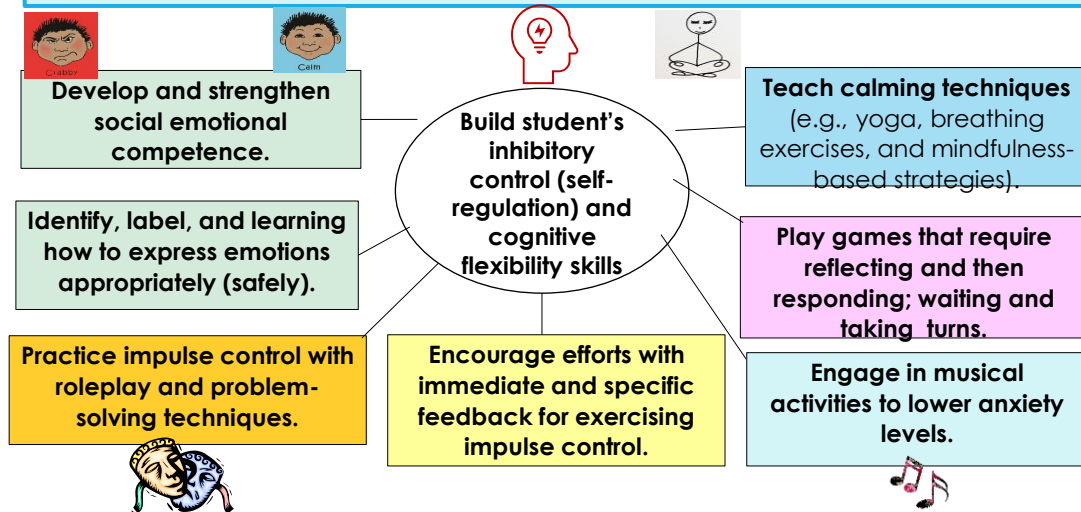
- **Music, when consistently used, is effective in helping children with autism (Kaplan and Steel, 2005) in rendering multiple benefits (Zimmerman, 2006).**
- **Some of the positive academic, social and behavioral outcomes noted are:**
 - Brings predictability to the routines. Increases ability to independently complete routine.
 - Helps to lower anxiety and frustration.
 - Increases focus and helps them engage in play.
 - increases interactions with peers.
- **Use music as a preventive measure to transform transition tantrums to calm-down (Magical Musical Transitions by Law and Sarathy, 2009)**
 - Time for 'Center-Time' song to invite children to center activities.
 - Insert your own words: Names or Actions (Open Track)
 - Make up your own songlets. (Law and Sarathy, 2009)



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Step 6: Executive Function Development

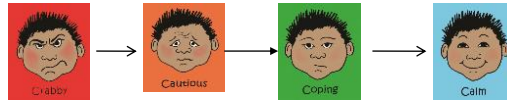
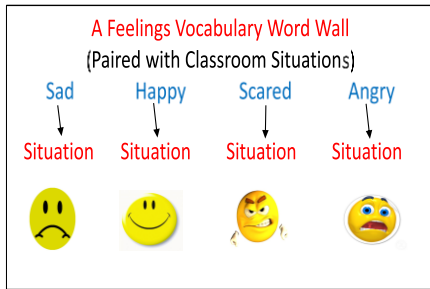


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Step 6: Impulse Control and Cognitive Flexibility Development Shaping Executive Function Skills

- ❑ Build inhibitory control with intentional and intensive instructional practices. Strengthen social-emotional competence with teaching children to identify, label and how to express feelings safely.



- ❑ Teach self-regulation and self-monitoring with the aid of 'Color Coded Calming Cards'.

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Incorporate Role-play, Drama, Dance and Music

- Use stories, drama and role play story characters to help with self-control, problem-solving, anger- management and to calm down.

- Dramatize the story. Help learner to use problem-solving strategies.

- Play the 'Charades' game.

- Get children to take turns roleplaying emotions and their peers make a guess.



- Sing songs featuring feeling words.

- Make up your own version of "If you are happy and you know it, clap your hands" substituting with other feelings words.

- Use movement activities

- Do the Freeze Dance.
- Play Musical Chairs with a twist



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Movement and Mindfulness Activities

- **Infuse physical activity as part of the daily routine.**

- Incorporate movement activities.
 - Findings of a study indicate physical activities help children to have better self-control (van der Niet et al. 2014).



- **Integrate yoga exercise and mindfulness-based practices into the daily routine.**

- Evidence emerging on the benefits of incorporating yoga exercises as part of your daily routine (Erwin et al. 2015)
- Using Super Brain Yoga



- **Practice breathing exercises for calming down and to increase focus.**

- Model for the children how to take deep mindful breaths - how to breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth (Sarathy, 2017, 2020).

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2 - Poll- New Initiatives

What do you plan to initiate to reduce tantrum behaviors? Check all that apply.

- A. Provide advance warning of changes to routine aided with visuals.
- B. Teach social/behavioral skills using video modeling intervention.
- C. Teach how to maintain personal space.
- D. Use role-play to teach problem-solving skills.
- E. Adjusting task demands and materials to match student-specific needs.
- F. Ensure 'Team Time' for collaborative planning to address transition meltdowns.

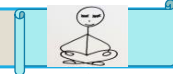
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Student Scenario - Inhibitory Control Issues

David, a 6-year-old kindergartner, **is physically aggressive towards others**. When a peer accidentally bumps into him or plays with an item that he wants (e.g., a book or a toy or the swing), he gets angry.

He will hit, push and pinch the children and grab the items from them, including snacks during snack time.



- Teach David to **get in touch with his emotions**, label them and to act on them with restraint and composure.
 - Help him **understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior** in social interactions with peers and adults.
 - Coach him to use the **Turtle Technique** to problem solve.
 - **Use social narratives** – using visually represented stories to describe social situations and socially appropriate responses or behaviors (Wragge, 2011).
- Get him to **move to the calming space** on his own to calm down when agitated.
- Guide him to self-regulate his behavior through regular practice of mindfulness practices.

(Adapted from Sarathy, 2017)

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Student and Context-specific Application

Sanjay, an 8-year-old with ASD, gets terrified during a fire or tornado drills. He starts screaming and it is difficult to calm him down.

Transition out of the classroom and return during a fire drill or get him to move to safety –under the table– during a tornado drill are big challenges.



Prepare Sanjay in advance for a fire drill with photos and objects related to fire safety.



Teach everyone about the fire drill rules and the sequence of actions and remind Sanjay:
quiet mouth, lining up to go outside, waiting outside, and returning back to the classroom.

Show a video about the fire drill rules and the sequence of action steps that follow in response to a fire drill to familiarize Sanjay & others.

Practice (Have Sanjay) for the fire drill: Point to the fire truck photo and talk about the siren, etc. Have a set of visuals in a ring. Hang it in a visible/accessible location.



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Step 7: Crisis Support

The Three Stages of the Meltdown (as note by Brenda Smyth Myles, 2008)

Rumble → **Rage** → **Meltdown followed by Recovery**

Be Proactive rather than Reactive.

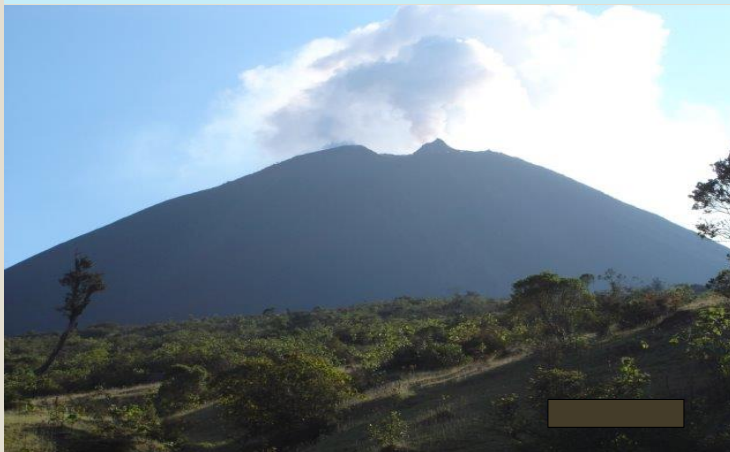
- Prevent a crisis. Intervene before a meltdown occurs. Have proactive measures in place.
- Prepare a step-by-step action plan for what to do prior to, during, and after a crisis/ meltdown.
- Develop a collaborative team action plan. Enlist the assistance of other staff (prearranged) to help.
- Provide support to learner during meltdown and crisis.

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Rumble Stage

The beginning stage of the meltdown when preventive strategies can be most effective.



- Identify Triggers.
- Monitor closely.
- Ensure environmental modifications
- Advance preparation - visual support, breaks, alerts, etc.
- Use Cue Cards to remind of appropriate behaviors.
- Provide a safe space.
- Provide choice, feedback & praise.
- Use positive reinforcement.

(Sarathy, 2021)

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RAGE

At this stage, the student may become totally out of control.



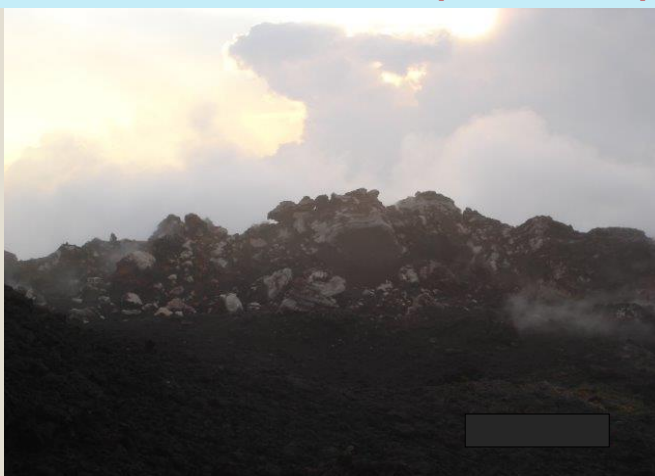
- Be reflective and not be reactive in your response.
- Show empathy.
- Provide assurances.
- Maintain calmness.
- Minimize talking to the student.
- Do not take it personally or react angrily.
- Have a crisis plan.
- Get team's help.
- Maintain safety.

(Sarathy, 2021)

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The Meltdown Followed by a Recovery

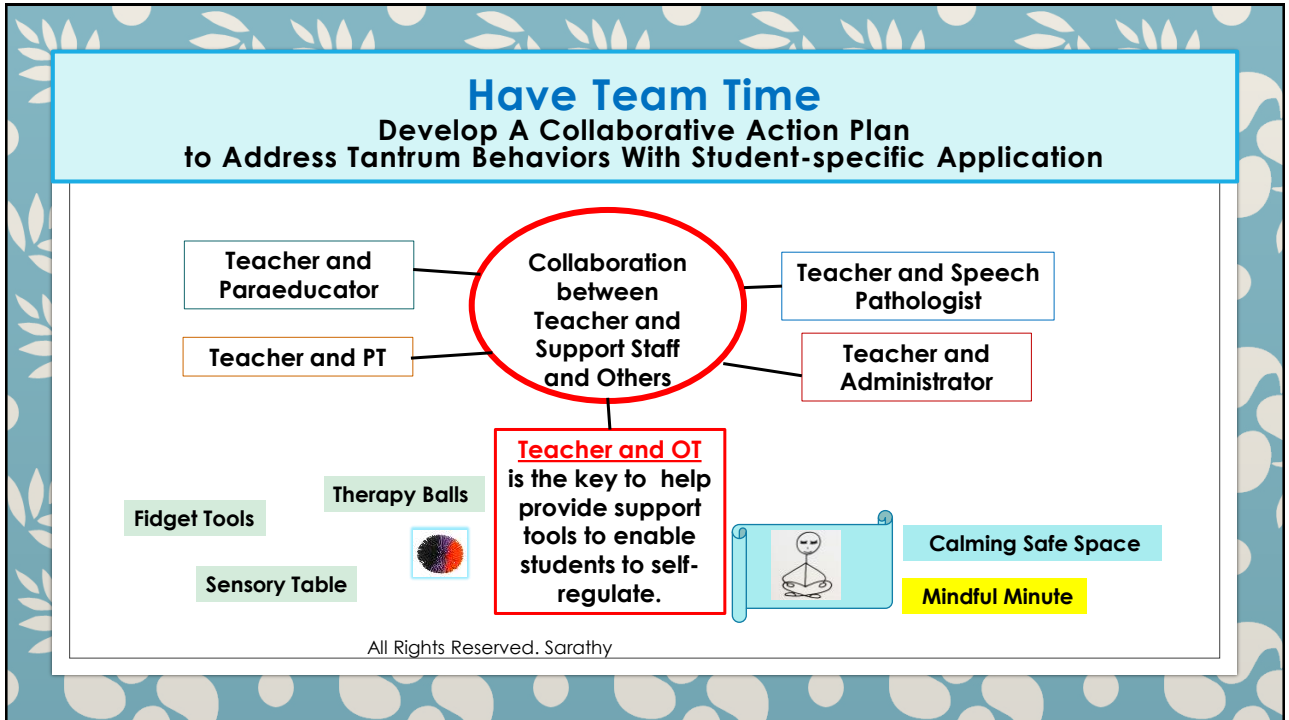


- Involve student in a highly motivating task.
- Provide reassurance.
- Provide strong positive reinforcement.
- Gradually, get the student back into the routine.
- Once the student has recovered, support the student with relaxation and calming techniques.
- Do monitor and document each incident immediately following the crisis.
- Debrief with the team after each incident.

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Step 7: Crisis Support

Engage - Family Partnership and Involvement

- Collaborate regularly with families. Share resources with family.**
 - An important component of the student's educational programming.
 - Various strategies used at school can be applied at home and in the community.
 - Students benefit from the consistency and intensity of strategies enhancing their growth and learning.
- Parent-Child Scenarios and Problem Situations:**
Parent concerns regarding child's tantrums and meltdowns while at the grocery store or mall or restaurant, etc.
- Greater reduction in challenging behaviors occur with teacher-parent paired interventions.**

A mini photo Album

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Proactive Intervention Checklist for Students With ASD

- ✓ Does the classroom environment **offer structure and predictability** to reduce anxiety and stress levels?
- ✓ Is the **physical environment** in the classroom designed to prevent a sensory overload?
- ✓ Is there **instructional flexibility** to accommodate for the social, communication and academic needs of students?
- ✓ Are **appropriate supports** –Visual cues & schedules, Work system, Social Narratives, Video modeling– provided to increase students' active participation?
- ✓ Are students **prepared in advance** for transitions between: Activities Settings and Personnel?
- ✓ Do the staff try to stay ahead of the meltdown by watching for precursor behaviors?
- ✓ Do staff provide an escape strategy for the student to calm down (student is reminded or know how to use **safe space**) if he/she appears to be approaching a meltdown (e.g., making sounds, swinging legs, clenching fists, etc.)?
- ✓ Do the staff **coach the student in self-calming strategies** to reduce stress and anxiety of students:
 - Music? Physical exercise? Turtle Technique Yoga therapy? Mindfulness Techniques?
- ✓ Are there **pre-established de-escalation procedures** and steps in place to respond to severe meltdowns?

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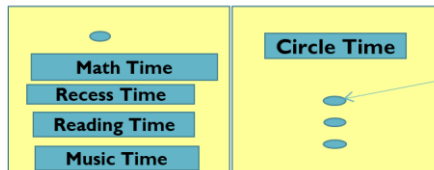
(Sarathy, 2021)

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Let us work to enhance the quality of life for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders by personalizing supports. Let us name strengths, honor preferences, and celebrate achievements, big or small.



Activities to do Activities done



Pursue Preventive Strategies Ahead of the Meltdown.

Teach New Skills.

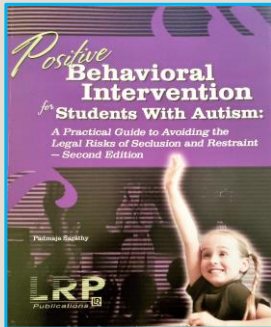
Reflect and Respond to Challenging Behaviors.

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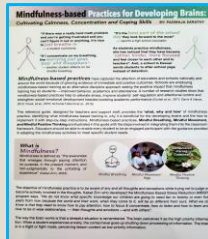
This webinar draws information from the following books and mini-guides:



Second Edition, 2021
LRP Publications
<https://www.shoplrp.com/>



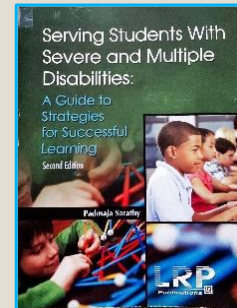
Autism Guide, 2015
National Professional Resources
www.NPR,inc.com



Mindfulness Guide, 2020
<https://ed311.com/>



Behavior Guide, 2019
<https://ed311.com/>



An Updated Edition, 2021
LRP Publications
<https://www.shoplrp.com/>

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Resources

- **Autism Internet Modules** (www.autisminternetmodules.org) Provides a variety of modules that offer valuable information to educators and families to support individuals with autism spectrum disorders.
- **The Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM modules)** (<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules>) Provide information on planning for, using, and monitoring evidence-based practices with learners with autism from birth to 22 years of age.
- Butler 2019 (July 10, 2019), **How Safe Is the Schoolhouse? An Analysis of State Seclusion and Restraint Laws and Policies** jessica@jnba.net, <http://www.autcom.org/pdf/HowSafeSchoolhouse.pdf>
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Resources

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- Richards, J. S. & Cohen, J. S. (2019 - 2020). The Quiet Rooms, Retrieved on April 22, 2020 from: <https://www.propublica.org/article/illinois-school-restraints> (December 20, 2019 report) and <https://www.propublica.org/article/illinois-lawmakers-letter-nationwide-ban-isolated-timeouts-students> (January 15, 2020 report).
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- Sarathy, P. (Updated Second Edition, 2021). **Serving Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities: A Guide to Strategies for Successful learning**. LRP Publications. (<https://www.shoplrp.com/>)
- Sarathy, P. & Lipsett, A.B. (2019). **P.R.E.V.E.N.T. Problem Behaviors: Seven Contemplative Discipline Steps**. Education 311, Austin: TX. (<https://ed311.com/>)

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Resources

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THANK YOU.

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Future Webinars:

June 22nd, 2022 - 11:00 AM: Art Experiences Integrated with Academic and Functional Outcomes for Learners with Significant Needs

October 19th, 2022 - 11:00 AM: Bolstering Family Involvement with Tools and Techniques to Advance Learners with Significant Disabilities