

When They Have Meltdowns

**Ever wonder which version of your child will get in your car at pick-up?
Say the same thing you've always said and your child turns into a
screaming banshee out of a horror film?**

**Actually FEEL tension in your body when you know it's time to see you
child, or better yet, help them with homework?**

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you are not alone. Your darling child is still in there, they're just having a meltdown. They've flipped their lid. They're having an out of body experience. And they are impossible to deal with. Here are some things that might happen in your house when said lid has flipped:

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- You may hear "No one understands me!" or "I hate my life!" or "Leave me alone!" or "I hate you/my friends/school/this house/ fill in the blank!"
- You may hear doors slammed, loud music, or wailing and gnashing of teeth
- There may be uncontrollable crying, screaming, lamenting, or nonsensical talk flying from your beloved's mouth with a forked tongue
- They might start a fight with a sibling
- They might get physically violent and smash things, put holes in walls, throw objects, or damage property
- You may find yourself wondering if their head will spin and vomit will spew from their mouth

Unfortunately this is not uncommon. Here's why: Emotional regulation is one of the executive functions that doesn't work at full capacity in some people with ADHD. Imagine you have a shallow bucket of water in front of you and from the moment you wake up in the morning, every time you receive negative feedback of any kind, a ping pong ball is thrown at you and you have to keep each ball submerged under the water.

At home, before 8:00am:

- "Hurry up! You always make us late!"
- "Seriously? How many times do I have to tell you to get your...?"
- "GET. OUT. OF. BED."
- "Is your brain attached to your body?"

Then at school:

- "Why didn't you bring your book? I told you to do that yesterday."
- "Pay attention. Are you listening?"
- "You are so annoying, stop talking!"

- "Dude, bring your own lunch money, I'm tired of covering for you." Is it getting harder and harder to keep all those ping pong balls under the water? You only have 10 fingers, remember?

Now you're home. Finally. And you have everything submerged...the ping pong balls, your feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, frustration, and confusion. At any minute, you could lose your grip and all the ping pong balls go flying up and it's all over. You have tried SO HARD ALL DAY LONG TO KEEP IT TOGETHER UNTIL YOU CAN'T ANYMORE. So your mom or your dad or your sibling does one inconsequential thing, and you are done.

And the ping pong balls go flying everywhere

This is what is happening to your child. They lose control of their emotions and everything comes out. It comes out at you, and not at school, because they know you love them and won't turn them away. (aren't you the lucky one?)

This is a critical point for you though.

Here is what you can do in the moment:

- Identify their emotion and tell them. "It looks like you had a really hard day." "You are really mad!" "It sounds like today was rough!"
- Give them space to cool down and offer them time alone to decompress
- Provide affirmation you still love them. "I know you're upset. Let's talk when you're feeling better." "It's going to be okay."

Here is what you should NEVER do:

- Raise your voice
- Try to use REASON OR LOGIC. They are not using the part of their brain that does this, and nothing you say or do can make them right now.
- Use shame or judgement
- Punish or threaten to take things away
- Get too close/hit/slap

Here is what you can do after time has passed and they are calmer:

- Remind them what feeling you saw and ask what happened today
- Listen to what they say. Don't offer advice or tell them what to do. Don't interrupt.
- Ask them how you can help

- Talk about ways to manage their feelings next time to avoid the outburst again

I can help parents and kids through this with a toolbox of coping mechanisms created just for this type of problem. If you or your child feel out of control or like your relationship is suffering because of it, call or email me. I've got you.

Peace.

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