

## Regulating emotions and responding to meltdowns

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This topic focuses on sensory activities that help regulate your kiddos' emotions throughout the day along with strategies for responding to tantrums or sensory meltdowns when they occur.

### Sensory Diet Basics

A sensory diet refers to activities done throughout the day to help a person remain regulated and able to participate in meaningful tasks. For many people, kids and adults, it can feel dysregulating to be at home or 'cooped up' for long periods of time without many outlets.

Participating in some of the following activities periodically throughout the day can help. \*Keep in mind, most sensory activities have either a calming or an alerting effect on the person. Try out the activities and see which way your child seems to respond: increasing energy levels or helping them mellow out a bit.\*

### Heavy Work Ideas

Heavy work, in its simplest definition, refers to movement that requires extra exertion (ex. running uphill requires more energy than running on flat ground). Here are some ideas to help get extra wiggles out throughout the day:

- Wheelbarrow walks
- Have your child push the stroller on a walk around the neighborhood. You can add the diaper bag to the stroller for some added weight!
- Digging in the dirt in the garden
- Climb up a slide



- Move all those cans of food and bottles of water around! Have your child carry cans and bottles to different rooms or move them between two cardboard boxes

- Try to 'push the wall over'

Heavy work is essential for everyone so consider taking breaks (or

recess if you have older kids) and do some physically exerting activities together!

### Sensory Bins

Sensory bins are another great way to keep children entertained and regulated. Take a large Tupperware or a bigger bin/box if you have one readily available and fill with any of the things listed below.

## Meltdowns (*continued*)

Throw in some spoons, cups, tongs, and whatever other 'utensils' you'd like and you will be ready to go!

- Cornstarch and water (2 parts cornstarch to 1 part water = Oobleck)
- Dried beans
- Rice
- Dry (or wet) pasta noodles
- Cotton balls
- Cut up plastic straws
- Water (feel free to add ice cubes, food coloring, really whatever you want)
- Dirt or sand outside in the yard (no need for a bin with this one)

### Tantrum/Meltdown Strategies

Changes to routine (such as social distancing) can sometimes lead to increased tantrums and/or meltdowns. Here are some ideas for responding to both of those situations along with a brief explanation about the difference between the two:

Tantrums are usually goal-oriented (ex. I want the candy bar and I will scream until I get it. If/when I get it, I shall be happy again). Meltdowns are sensory regulation-related (ex. I am feeling so overwhelmed with my change in routine, lots of people being around, not being able to play at the park, and not getting the candy bar that even if you give me the candy, I will still be upset because it is all just too much right now).

Try responding to tantrums by:

1. Validating their feelings and desires (ex. you're sad because you want the candy bar!)
2. Attempt to distract (ex. we will have lunch first – do you want pizza or mac and cheese?)

3. If the tantrum continues, you've offered a couple different distractions, and the child is not a danger to themselves or others, let them continue to be upset for a bit. Avoid giving them what the tantrum started about while they are still in the midst of the tantrum.

Try responding to meltdowns by:

1. Removing the overwhelming stimulus or taking the child out of the situation (ex. take the child to a quiet, dim room)
2. Some children respond better to just having space to calm down while other children prefer to have someone participating in an activity with them (ex. giving them big squeezes, singing lullabies, rocking, etc.) You know your child best so follow their lead.

Once your child has calmed down, suggest a fun, sensory-based activity to help 'reset' such as a heavy work, sensory bin, or meditation option (see end of today's post), or listening to the Facebook Live story being read. If you need additional strategies or help, just let us know!

### Finding the Positive

Try out a guided meditation as a family! There are a lot of free apps for child-focused meditations as well as Youtube videos and scripts that you can find online and read to your child. These activities can even help some children handle tantrums and meltdowns! Here are some links and videos to get you started:

- <https://www.simplepractice.com/blog/anxiety-relaxation-mindfulness-apps-kids/>
- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/lists/meditation-apps-for-kids/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CdPQ7X1MzU>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wsc5Diz5hAI>

\*\*All children activities should occur under parental supervision.