

## HANDOUT

# Managing a Toddler Meltdown The MindMovers Way!



As part of life, children are constantly exposed to new events and experiences. Things change and they aren't always able to have or experience what they want, when they want it. Young children may be frightened, frustrated or upset by these new experiences and express their distress in a number of ways such as crying, withdrawing, irritability or clingy behaviour. These behaviours can be interrupted as meltdowns or tantrums.

When parents and carers respond in a caring way, for example:

- With a calm tone of voice.
- Use touch: holding, rocking and gentle touch.

Children learn they can feel comfortable and that the environment is safe again. They learn others will be available to help them notice and understand their emotions and behaviours and provide comfort when needed. Parents and carers need to act like an 'emotion coach' and with their help, children can start to begin to learn how to regulate their own feelings and behaviours. Being able to manage feelings and behaviours is what we call self-regulation (the ability to regulate emotions, physical sensations, behaviours and thoughts).

Emotion and self-regulation is not just about expressing emotions in a socially appropriate manner.

### **It is a three-phase process that involves:**

1. Learning to identify emotions.
2. Learning to identify what triggers those emotions.
3. Learning how to manage those emotions by themselves.

When we teach kids about their emotions, how to manage them and that all emotions that arise are valid, we help them view what they experience as normal and manageable. This creates resilience and healthy emotion management skills. When children can master the ability to self-regulate it aids their ability to learn and grow.

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**"Toddlers can be hard to manage on a regular day, when we then add emotions and meltdowns into the mix, it can make for a very stressful day."  
- Jaimie Bloch**



When a child is having an emotional response to a specific situation, for example their toy isn't doing what they want it to do, their anxiety response (Fight or Flight) can be triggered. Anxiety is the physiological and physical manifestation of fear and danger in the brain. It is our warning alarm of protection and is a biological function that we need to help keep ourselves safe. This alarm can become faulty and go off when it shouldn't. Humans are the only mammals on the planet that can set this biological fear system off by just a thought, so it's no wonder toddlers can easily feel anxious. Once this system has been triggered, a human's ability to use logic and reasoning skills goes offline. This is an important evolutionary hormonal response that occurs in the brain to enable our ability to have quick instincts when there is real danger. In the modern-day world, there is not much danger in our everyday environment. Therefore, when our emotions are triggered this primitive system occurs anyway, even when there is no real danger. This happens more frequently in younger children and adolescents as they experience more perceived stress.

Toddlerhood is a time where there are lots of milestones and challenges. Welcoming a new baby into the family, toilet training and overwhelming schedules can cause stress in these littlies. The key to supporting your toddler is teaching them skills to manage their own emotions and help them learn to turn their internal danger alarm off.



### HOW TO MANAGE TODDLER ANXIETY



<b>KEEP CALM</b>	→	This may be difficult to do when you have a screaming toddler but research shows that toddlers are extremely aligned to parent emotions.
<b>EMOTION COACH, VALIDATE &amp; ACCEPT EMOTIONS</b>	→	Once you are feeling calm, it is important to connect and accept your child's emotion. It is simply noticing and naming the emotion and validating that it is there.
<b>WATCH FOR MELTDOWN CUES &amp; USE CALMING STRATEGIES</b>	→	When you notice the beginning of a meltdown, implement any co-soothing or coping strategies. This could be playing their favourite song or placing your hand on their heart and helping them engage in deep breathing.

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