



## ADHD Parent Series Part 4: ADHD and Emotional Regulation: How can I help my child with BIG feelings?

Harlingen Consolidated Independent  
School District  
May 2, 2024



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### Slidebooks

Check out the helpful information in these slidebooks which cover topics like ADHD and executive functioning.



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 **Four-part parent series**

- February 22: Introduction to ADHD: What is it and what's a parent to do?
- March 21: Non-medication Treatments for ADHD:
- April 25: What Does a Child with ADHD Need to be Successful at School?
- May 2: ADHD and Emotional Regulation: How can I help my child with BIG feelings?

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 ADHD is so much more than just difficulty sitting still.

There is a fundamental weakness in a set of cognitive skills known as the executive functions.

If we ignore those, or if the child is more inattentive, making it easy to fly under the radar, we will miss an opportunity to support them.

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 **Simplified language**

- Controlling impulses 
- Holding words in mind 
- Holding nonverbal stuff in mind 
- Managing emotions and motivation 
- Novel problem solving 

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## Self-Directed Appraisal (emotion / motivation to the self)

- Modifying one's internal state to create new affect (cheering self up, calming self down)
- Manipulating your own emotions to re-fuel your motivation - Intrinsic motivation to achieve a future goal

Said a different way: the ability to manage emotions in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior. Also includes the capacity or drive to follow through on the completion of a goal and not be put off by other demands or competing interest.



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## Inhibition

- Inhibit prepotent response
- Interrupt an ongoing response
- Interference control



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***Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.***

Viktor E. Frankl



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**Self-regulation of affect/motivation/arousal**  
**OR**  
**Emotion/motivation to the self**

- Self-regulation of affect
- Objectivity/social perspective taking
- Self-regulation of motivation
- Self-regulation of arousal in the service of goal-directed action

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*Dr. Cheryl Chase*

**AND BOTH WORKING MEMORIES**



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*Dr. Cheryl Chase*

When dealing with children with emotional challenges, I want you to keep in mind four premises:

(premise – an assertion or proposition which forms the basis for a work or theory).

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Premise #1



Dr. Cheryl Chase, M.Ed. for pre-k to grade 5

all behavior is COMMUNICATION

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Premise #2

“  
Beneath every behavior is a feeling. And beneath every feeling is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behavior, we begin to deal with the cause not the symptom.”

— Ashleigh Warner  
Psychologist

edutrapia

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Premise #3



My child is not giving me a hard time, my child is HAVING a hard time.

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 **Premise #4**

"When *little people* are overwhelmed by *big emotions*, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos."

-L.R. KNOST

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 **Four premises**

- 1) All behavior is communication.....
- 2) of a feeling, beneath which is an unmet need.....
- 3) and the child isn't choosing to behave this way.....
- 4) but how we respond can have a huge impact.

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 **Children never, ever CHOOSE the meltdown, or any anxiety related behaviour, in the same way that YOU would never, ever choose to have a meltdown in front of your family, colleagues or friends! A meltdown is not a choice, it's a byproduct of a brain that isn't coping with something. And that brain needs to be showered in love, compassion and safety. Not punishment, fear or shame.**

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**How we respond makes a huge difference.....**

<u>Proactively</u>	<u>Reactively</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready before something happens</li> <li>• Making things happen</li> <li>• Taking action to control a situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiting for things to unfold before responding</li> <li>• Responding to events after they have happened</li> </ul>

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**Reactive strategies**



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**Co-Regulation**



Fogel and Garvey (2007) describe co-regulation as "a form of coordinated action between participants that involves a continuous mutual adjustment of actions and intentions" (p. 251).

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**Co-regulation**

- An interactive process with an adult that helps a child self-regulate their emotions (e.g., learn to control impulses, organize behaviors, overcome obstacles, and complete activities).
- Its foundation is a protected, warm, and nurturing *relationship*. It starts in infancy with touch and sustained eye to eye contact with soft eyes.
- It involves being fully present with the child's felt experience, which is listening and observing before speaking.
- Providing patience and loving support during a child's time of stress offers the co-regulation a child needs to cope.

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**Co-Regulation Techniques**

TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Label Feelings</b>	Help your child identify big feelings by labeling your child's feelings in a neutral tone of voice. For example, "It seems like that really frustrated you," or "I can see it made you sad when..."
<b>Breathe Together</b>	Calmly take deep breaths so your child can see you practicing self-calming. If it does not make your child more upset, sit next to or hold your child while you breathe deeply so your child can feel the rhythm of breathing.
<b>Body Calming</b>	Slowly and rhythmically rub your child's back, feet, etc., when they are recovered. Connecting like this lets them know that you will be there when they are ready to talk.
<b>Back Stories</b>	Tell your child a story while drawing on the top half of your child's back. For example, draw a circle with rags for the sun, draw triangles for mountains, tap your fingers to walk up the mountain, and brush your hand back forth to make wind. Then, switch places and let your child tell a story on your back.
<b>Music</b>	Sing or play relaxing songs. Model how to sing/dance/play an instrument. Your child will learn to use music as an active calming tool.
<b>Sensory Activities</b>	Creating a soothing environment can reduce distress. Try lowering lights and turning off noisy toys and devices. Weighted blankets or other objects that children can touch or feel can help them focus and calm down. A cold washcloth over the eyes can reduce visual stimulation and calm an overly stressed system.

Thomas, S., Rauch, B., Jendryak, S., Faria, L., Roth, R., Bray, D., & Wiggins, B. (2008). PC-CARE: Course of Traumatic Material. Unpublished Manuscript.

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**Older kids? Same as last slide, and...**

- Lots of neutral listening, empathy, normalizing
- Explain how anxiety comes and goes like a wave
- DON'T BE TOO FAST to move from the hurt. Sit with it.
- AFTER LISTENING and VALIDATING, remind them of past successes or positive experiences
- Journaling, writing your story; Art
- Jot down thoughts/feelings and agree to come back to it
- Mindfulness, breathing, my daughter and I color ☺
- Play with the pet
- Connect with a peer
- Work it out – walk, yoga, lift weights, do a video

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<https://www.edutopia.org/article/role-emotion-co-regulation-discipline>

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**From the DBT literature –  
*when you feel in crisis***

ACCEPTS

- **Activities** – DO SOMETHING – play instrument, walk, color
- **Contribute** – help someone, make a card, bake for someone
- **Comparisons** – Think about others who aren't faring as well
- **Emotions** – Change your feelings. Watch a comedy, get active
- **Pushing Away** – Move your thoughts to something else for now
- **Thoughts** – Replace your thoughts. Do puzzles, write lyrics to a song
- **Sensations** – intensify other sensations – chew ice, listen to loud music, take a cold shower, smell candles/lotion

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**To co-regulate effectively, the adult needs to regulate his or her own emotions before approaching the child.**




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### Control what YOU can, adults.

- Find and stick with routines that bring your comfort
- Examine your expectations
- Self-care and breaks/respice. Meet physical needs.
  - Protect rest, exercise, and diet; careful with alcohol
- Simplify your life/prioritize
- Know thyself – fears, expectations, triggers
- Rely on your spiritual supports
- Check your assumptions
- Get outside



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- Focus on the action and not the person
- Punish the deed not the doer
- Don't pin the child with a label that will be impossible for him/her to erase
- Look the child in the eye (for most kids) and get down to the child's level
- Distract and redirect; ask a question about a high interest area or let the child be the expert/leader, hug, count, etc
- Make sure basic needs are met



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I want to introduce the work of two psychologists:



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### Nowhere To Hide

Jerome J. Schultz, PhD




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"...many of the behaviors that seem negative or bad are actually the self-protective strategies children employ, either consciously or unconsciously, to hide their incompetence."

"....a mind frozen by fear."



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He says the undesired behaviors are just kids "Saving FASE"

F – Fear  
A – Avoidance  
S – Stress  
E – Escape

A cycle kids go through when confronted by tasks that they perceive as beyond their ability to master or control. p134

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### Schultz – Nowhere to Hide

De-stress p155-156

- D – Define
- E – Educate
- S – Speculate
- T – Teach
- R – Reduce Threat
- E – Exercise
- S – Success
- S – Strategize



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### Recommendations to save FASE and DE-STRESS:

- Teach simple techniques to reduce worry – write about thoughts and feelings? Deep breathing and relaxation? Mindfulness?
- Reduce stress at school and at home – talk in a calm voice, no shaming, no timed competition, many more
- Plan ahead – avoid HALT, is lunchtime/recess fun and relaxing?



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- Decrease reliance on reward and punishment systems and go more to a collaborative problem solving approach (more in a minute). Stop removing recess, stop punitive and punishment programs.

- Build emotional credit with the kids, and help them build their own account by finding islands of competence and spending a lot of time there to nourish self-regard – What do successful kids do? 194

- Exercise – but not necessarily competitive sports! Nutrition, hydrate. Take care of that body!



- Focus on process, not outcome

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- Set up expectations ahead of time
- Warn of transitions and changes. Use visual timers!
- Make visual schedules, to-do-lists, etc
- Make time concrete and visual
- Break up future tasks into smaller steps



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*Dr. Cheryl Chase*

Dr. Ross Greene  
LivesInTheBalance.org  
And great stuff on YouTube





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Skills Deficit Model



Children do well if they **CAN**

- Ross W. Greene

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Challenging behavior is just a signal, the fever, the means by which the kid is communicating that he or she is having difficulty meeting an expectation.

— Ross W. Greene —

AL QUOTES

So, what skills might the child be deficient in, and what do I do about it?

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**"challenging behavior occurs when certain demands and expectations exceed a kid's capacity to respond adaptively."**

So, we begin by identifying the lagging skills and unsolved expectations – may need the help of a professional here. Then we identify what problems we want to solve first, and engage in a collaborative problem solving approach – TOGETHER!!

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### The Explosive Child

Greene invites us to consider the lagging skills and unsolved problems:

- Lack of language skills?
- Disorganization?
- Poor sense of time?
- Inability to use hindsight and forethought?
- Poor emotional regulation?
- Lack of cognitive flexibility (Brain lock?)
- Poor social skills?

Children do well if they **CAN**

Ross W. Greene

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Three baskets, or plans.....

A

B

C

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COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

SKILL DEFICITS

DEMANDS OF ENVIRONMENT

UNSOLVED PROBLEMS

PLAN A  
MAKE THEM

PLAN B  
COLLABORATE

PLAN C  
DROP IT

1. EMPATHY  
Fully understand their concerns and their perspective.  
"I've noticed that (observation), what's up?"

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION  
Place your concern on the table.  
"The thing is... (describe your concern)?"

3. INVITATION  
Support them in exploring solutions that are workable and mutually satisfactory.  
"I wonder if there's a way (to address both concerns)?"

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Three Ways to manage the Explosive Child -  
Use Plan A, Plan B or Plan C

Plan A

Plan B

Plan C

Handles a problem by imposing the adult will.  
An explosive outburst occurs when the cognitive demands being placed upon a person, outstrip that person's capacity to respond adaptively  
If a Plan A is thrown at a child who doesn't have a Plan A brain, you place a cognitive demand upon the child that outstrips the child's capacity to respond adaptively. P. 91

Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS). This involves engaging the child in a discussion in which the problem or unmet expectations are resolved in a mutually satisfactory manner

Drop the expectation for now to avoid an explosion. This doesn't mean you 'give in'. It would be giving in if you started with Plan A and then went to Plan C. The idea of using Plan C is to be proactive and to prevent an explosion. If you predict that a particular trigger will lead to an explosion, you are being realistic and can focus on the bigger stuff.  
Using Plan C can lead to stability. You might use Plan C for homework, using good table manners, getting to school on time, swearing. Eventually Plan B will be used for these.

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## Summarize

- Proactive is preferred. Put as much as you can in C for now. Put issues of safety in A. Collaborate on B with an open mind and an open heart.
- Reactive toolbox includes: labeling/normalizing feelings, breathing, body calming, music, journaling, drawing it out, play with pet, exercise, and a good old hug!
- Take care of yourself, because they are looking to us for coregulation and that starts with self-regulation.

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