



Getting Kids Ready for the Real World

Parent's Guide to Preventing and Managing Rage

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(These topics are addressed more fully in the **Getting Kids Ready for the Real World** classes.)

Why Children Have Meltdowns

- ★ They are fatigued, overwhelmed or over-stimulated.
- ★ A boundary has been set and the child believes that a meltdown will pressure parents to give in.
- ★ They feel inadequate, frustrated or discouraged when they struggle with a task.
- ★ There is entertainment value when the parents become upset.
- ★ They are “wired” with sensitivity to chaos and external stimuli. Examples: bipolar disorder, ADHD, anxiety disorders.

Meltdown and Rage Prevention

- ★ No matter how out of control the child is, remain calm, cool and collected. Looking control yourself will create more triggers for the child and escalate the behavior. It is important to model for the child an appropriate reaction when someone is inappropriate or rageful.
- ★ Work toward an emotional connection with the child so you have the foundation to be firm and set limits when necessary. This means offering affection, giving praise whenever possible.
- ★ When at-risk children are overstimulated, they are more likely to be rageful. Keep chaos and stress to a minimum. This includes noise level, bright light and activity. Video games can be overstimulating to at-risk children.
- ★ Direct excessive energy toward positive activities such as exercise. Doing something physical can help the child expel anger and anxiety.
- ★ Help the child maintain compliance with any medication they may be taking. Watch closely until you are sure the medication is swallowed.
- ★ Know the child's triggers. Help him learn to recognize and defuse them. Distract the child if you see anger building and discuss the situation when he is calm.
- ★ Make sure your child has a regular sleeping schedule. Have him in bed at predictable and regular hours even if he is not sleepy. Allow the child to read quietly, play with a toy, etc. until he falls asleep. (Watching television may be too stimulating for bedtime wind-down.)
- ★ During a state of calm is the best time to discuss behavior and strategies with a challenging child. He will be more rational and receptive to discussion.
- ★ Talk with your child after he is calm and help him identify appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Praise and affirm appropriate behavior while calling his attention to inappropriate behaviors. Whenever possible, discuss in advance what behaviors will result in a consequence.

- ★ Discuss with your child in advance what he needs from you when he is on the verge of a meltdown. Agree on a cue he can give you when he feels on edge and a cue you can give when you see signs that a rageful incident may be imminent.
- ★ Develop a plan together for defusing each trigger behavior or situation that leads to rage. Be specific and behaviorally define each part of the plan. Example: If the child is becoming overstimulated by too much noise and activity, help him find a quiet, peaceful place to calm down.
- ★ Develop a multi-step plan with your child for dealing with rage when it is full blown. At the first signs of a meltdown, begin talking to him calmly about what he can do. When a rageful incident occurs, coach him through these steps.
- ★ Journal/chart your child's rage patterns including triggers and precursors so that you are able to recognize the early warning signs of a meltdown. Discuss these with him or her to help him increase awareness.
- ★ Provide a large punching bag for the child to use to discharge physical energy and anger. Punching a large pillow can serve the same purpose. Invite the child to use the punching bag or pillow rather than direct anger toward others.
- ★ Reward or affirm the child when he deals with a stressful or rage provoking situation appropriately. This helps the child develop confidence that he has the resources and ability to handle difficult situations when they arise.
- ★ Teach and practice deep-breathing techniques where the child takes slow, deliberate, deep breaths. This helps him relax and cool down during stressful situations.

Rage Crisis Management

- ★ Develop a rage incident plan and be ready to implement the plan with little notice. Rage can come out of nowhere and at that point, there is no time to discuss what to do. The plan should be mutually acceptable to both parents so there will be minimal discussion and no argument in front of the child.
- ★ Only one parent should be in charge during a meltdown if possible. The other parent can assume a supportive role. Two parents addressing the child at the same time can be overwhelming and may escalate the rage. If possible, distract or remove the child from the stressor or trigger during a meltdown.
- ★ Make sure the child and others are protected from the child's rage. If necessary, use gentle restraint with younger children until they can regain control and calm down. Decide in advance when and how physical restraint will be used. Restraining the child may initially escalate his behavior. Make sure you can restrain without losing control. Appropriate and therapeutic restraint involves the adult getting behind the child, sitting on the floor with the adult's back against the wall. The parent should put his or her legs over the child's legs, wrap the child's arms and hands around the child's midsection with the parent's arms over the child's hands. Calmly say, "I care about you enough to keep you safe. I will not let you hurt anyone, so I will hold you until this is over." For more information about restraint techniques, ask the nearest college or nursing program about Professional Assault Response Training (PART).
- ★ With older children, have another adult on call for restraint and if necessary, call 911. Determine in advance what behaviors will make it necessary to call 911. Let the police or dispatcher know the child's history/diagnosis and explain why you believe there is imminent danger.

- ★ Be calm no matter what happens. Loss of control is contagious and the bipolar child will pick up on this energy. Yelling or shaming the child will only escalate the rage. Line up a supportive person whom you can call if you begin to lose control.
- ★ Keep communication clear and to the point. Use simple words and short sentences. Avoid negative language containing words like “don’t”, “no” or “stop”. Instead use positive contingencies such as “We’ll talk about this when you are not yelling.” This clearly identifies the behavior and lets the child know when you will reengage. If the child continues to be inappropriate and rageful, calmly repeat the contingency until he ceases the inappropriate behavior. Do not discuss the child’s demands until he is calm.
- ★ Avoid reasoning or arguing with your child when he is raging. In the midst of rage, he is not likely to be capable of rational thought. If possible, direct the child to time-out in a predetermined safe refuge with a positive, calm, non-punitive association until he is able to cool off. When the time-out is over and the child is calmer, help him evaluate what happened. Discuss triggers with the child as well as consequences for inappropriate behavior. Ask the child these questions: What behaviors were appropriate and what were inappropriate? What seemed to be triggers for inappropriate behavior? What was he really wanting when the meltdown occurred? What can be done in the future to avoid a meltdown in similar circumstances?
- ★ If a consequence is appropriate, wait until the rageful episode is over to deliver it. A child will usually not be rational enough during rage to understand the connection between his behavior and the consequence.