

Taming Tantrums and Meltdowns: Techniques for Caregivers of Children with Autism



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- The purpose of this presentation is to provide education and general information
- This is not a replacement for participating in therapy with a clinician who can address your child's specific needs
- If your child is engaging in substantial difficult behavior (e.g., aggression, self-injury), I encourage you to seek out treatment with a therapist who specializes in these issues



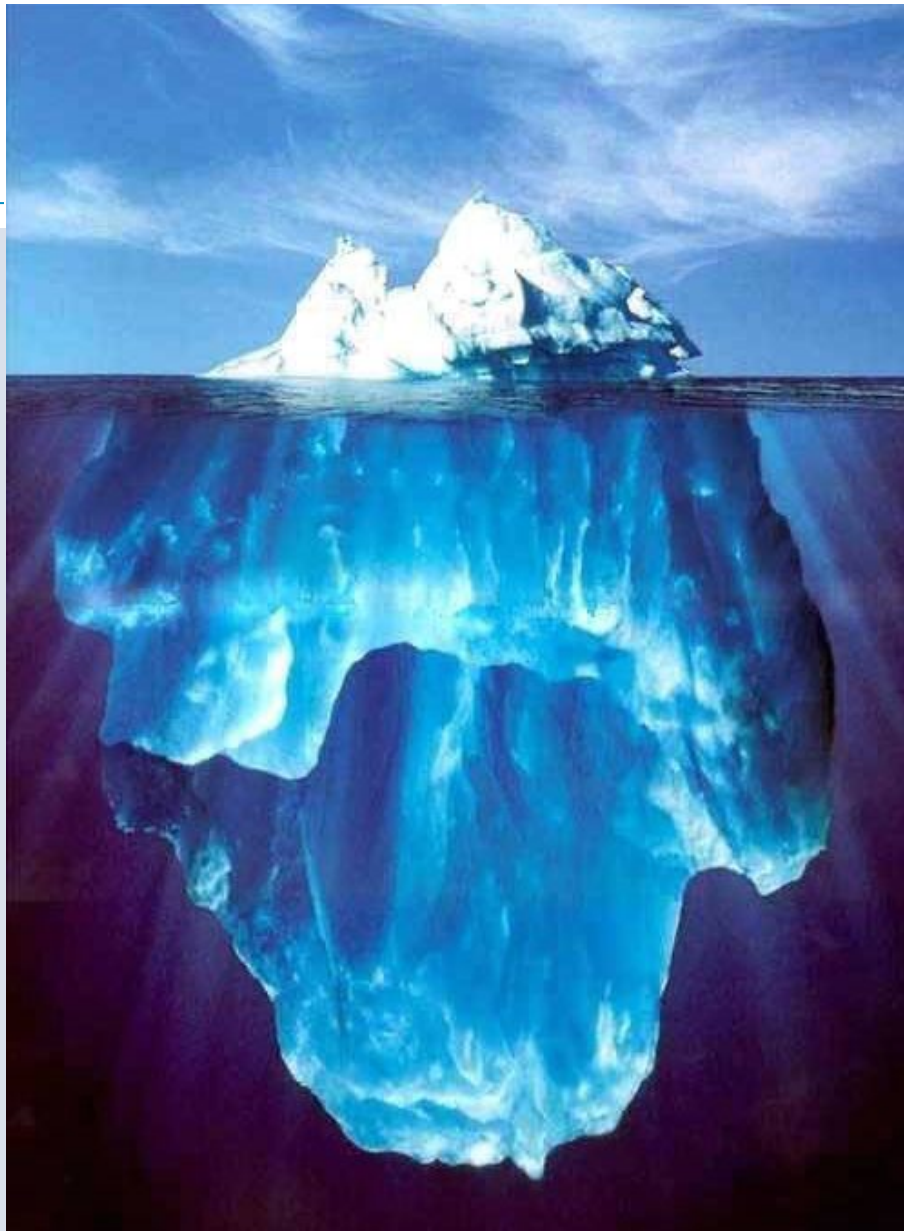
What does “Meltdown” Mean to You?



Tantrums and ASD



- Children with ASD have more tantrums than typically developing children, those with language impairments only, and those with ADHD only (e.g., Tureck, et al., 2013)
- ASD symptom severity is positively correlated with severity of tantrum behavior (e.g., Konst, et al., 2013)
- Tantrum behavior has been related to symptoms of anxiety and depression (e.g., Quek et al., 2012)



Features of ASD that Impact Behavior



- **Communication Deficits**
- **Difficulties with Social Interactions**
- **Challenges with Peer Relationships**

- **Preference for Routine/Sameness**
- **Restricted Interests**
- **Sensory Sensitivities and/or Aversions**

Related Challenges



- **Developmental and Cognitive Delays**
- **Trouble with Perspective Taking/Theory of Mind**
- **Difficulty with Generalization**
- **Challenges with Emotion Regulation**
- **Anxiety**
- **Inattention**
- **Impulsivity**
- **Processing Speed**



**Frustration
about
Communication
Problems**

**Limited
Coping Skills**

**Trouble
Initiating
Social
Interactions**

**Difficulty
Understanding
Emotions**

**Anxiety about
the Unknown**

**Sensory
Sensitivities**

The ABC's of Behavior



A → B → C
(Antecedent) (Behaviour) (Consequence)

The ABC's of Behavior



- Antecedents
 - Events or circumstances that occur *before* a behavior
 - Make a behavior more or less likely to occur
 - ✦ Where? What Time of Day? Who? What Activity?
 - ✦ Hungry? Sleepy? Sick? Dirty Diaper?
- Behaviors
- Consequences
 - Events that occur *after* a behavior
 - To increase a behavior → provide desirable consequence
 - To decrease a behavior → provide undesirable consequence

The Importance of Data



- May allow you to see patterns

Date/Time	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence

- Critical part of determining the “function”

Functions of Behavior



Attention

- When I want social interaction

Tangible

- When I want an object or activity

Escape

- When I want to get away from something I don't like

Sensory

- When I want certain sensory input

Function Should Guide the Intervention



**Identify the
Function**



**Modify the
Environment**



**Teach a
Substitute
Behavior**

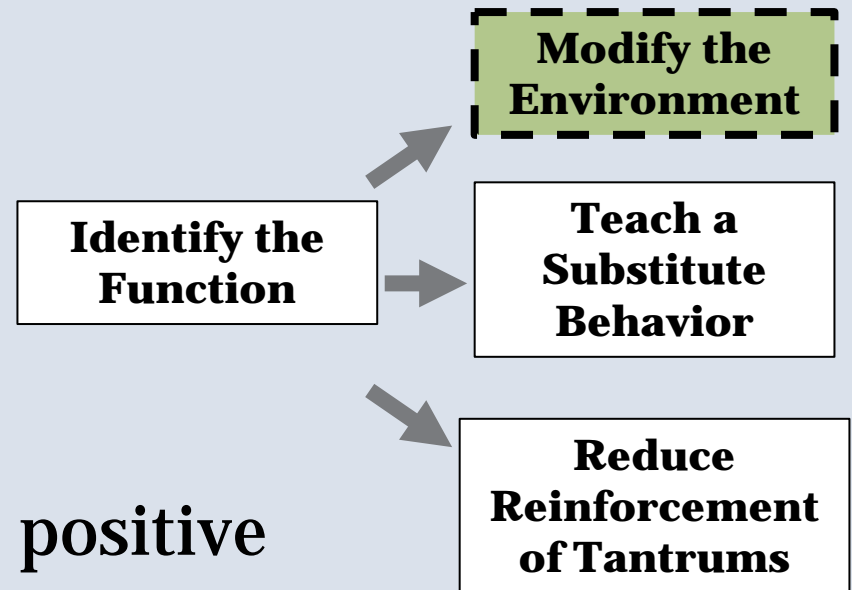


**Reduce
Reinforcement of
Tantrums**

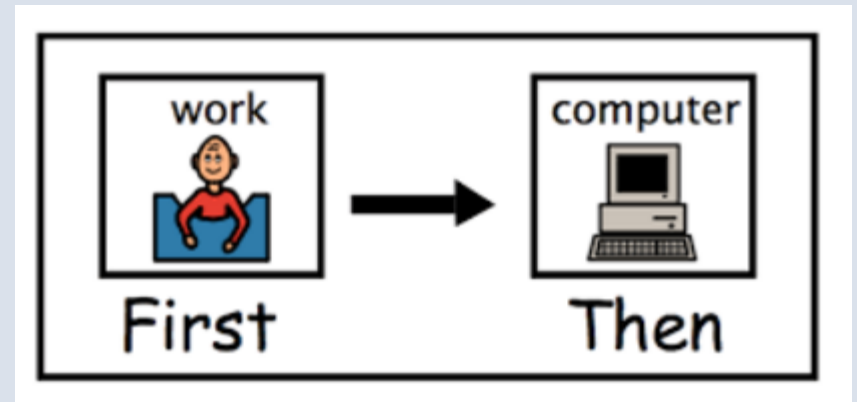
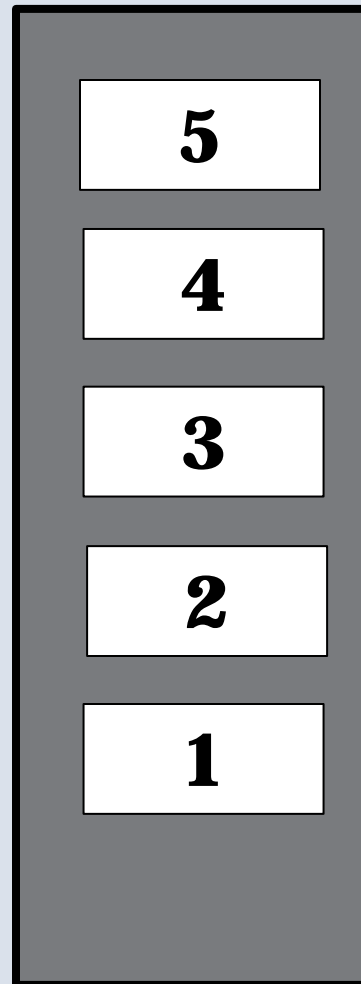
Modify the Environment



- Make the world more predictable
 - Schedules
 - Routines
 - Timers
 - Visual supports
 - Physical structure
- Give effective directions
- Increase specific praise and positive attention for desired behaviors



Visual Supports for Transitions/Routines



Give Effective Directions



- Ensure you have attention first
- Use a firm (not loud) voice
- Use specific and simple directions
- Use physical gestures such as pointing
- Use positive directions
 - “Stay by my side” rather than
 - “Don’t run down the aisle”
- Reward when he follows your direction
- Avoid questions, chain directions, and vague directions

Praise and Reward Desired Behaviors

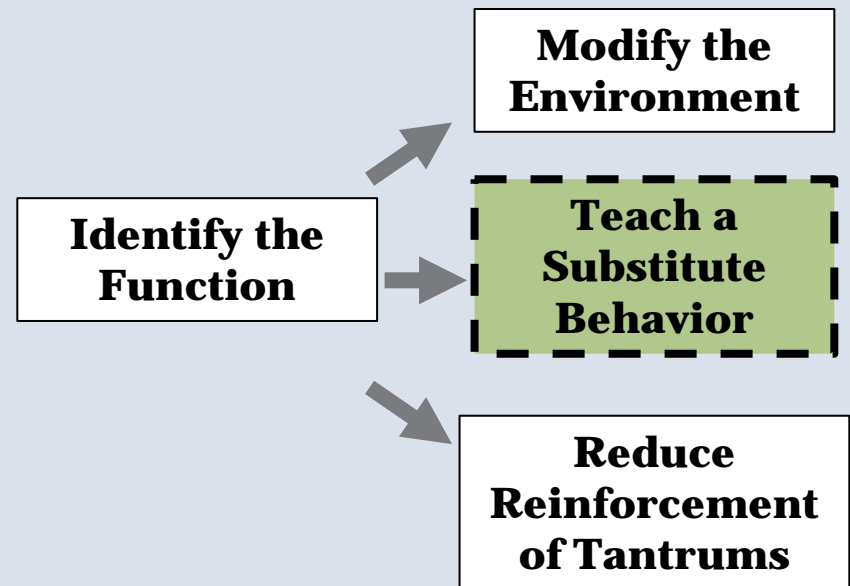


- Types of Rewards:
 - **Verbal Rewards** – praise (e.g., “I like it when you...” “Thank you for...”)
 - **Physical Rewards** – hugs, pats on the back, high five, tickles, etc.
 - **Activity Rewards** – things you do with the child that the child likes (e.g., playing a game, reading a story, making something together)
 - **Nonsocial Rewards** – include things such as toys, food, stickers, etc. ALWAYS combine nonsocial rewards with social rewards such as praise
- Use eye contact, smiles, and enthusiasm when you give praise

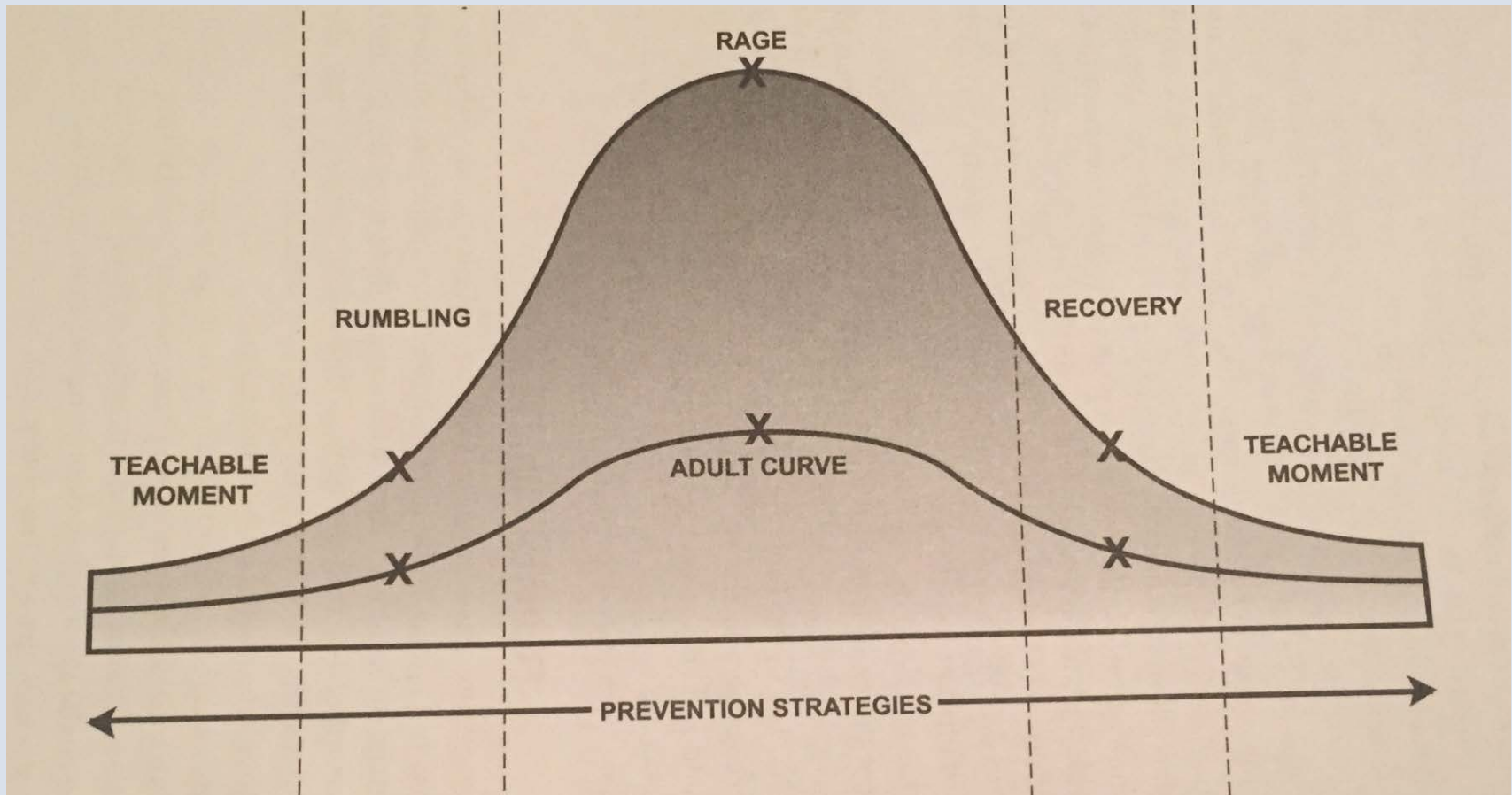
Teach a Substitute Behavior/Skill



- **Communication**
 - Picture communication or signs
 - A social script
- **Appropriate Social Initiation Skills**
- **Emotion Recognition**
- **Coping Strategies:**
 - Calm Down Space
 - Deep Breathing
 - Muscle Relaxation
 - Counting
 - Helpful Thoughts

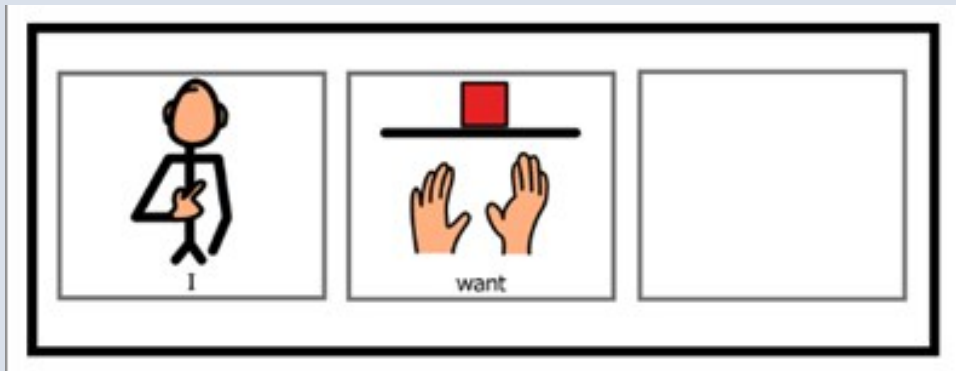
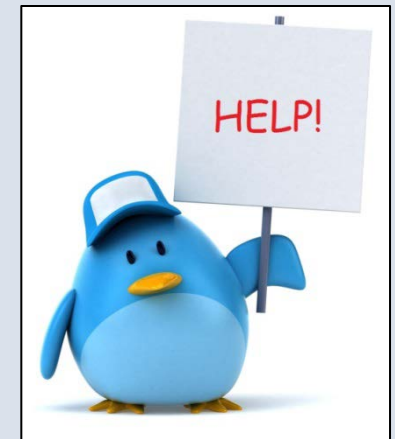
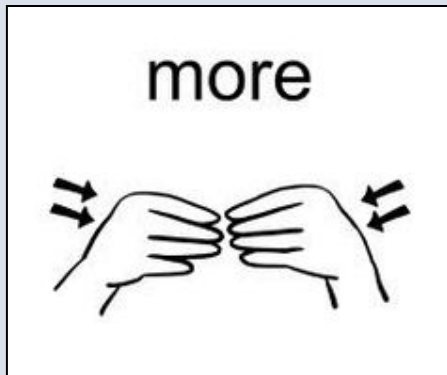


“The Rage Cycle”



From Smith Myles & Southwick, 2005

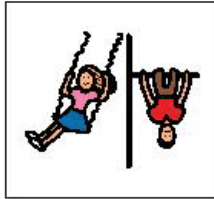
Teach Communication



“No thank you” or “Not right now”

Teach Skills with Social Stories

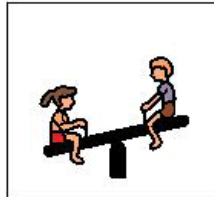
Playing



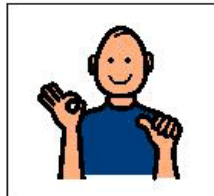
Sometimes I like to play with other kids.



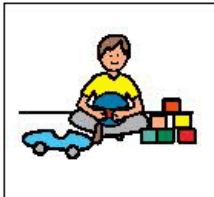
I can ask them, "Do you want to play with me?"



If they say "yes", I can play with them. I will have fun.



If they say "no", it's ok.



I can ask someone else or play by myself.

Teach Emotion Recognition



Angry

- Fall down
- Loud voice/Yell
- Throw/Grab
- Try to leave



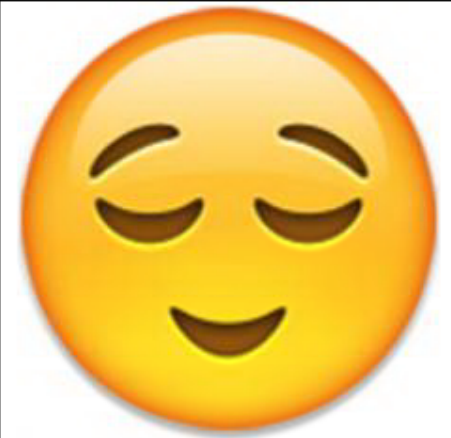
Worried

- Cry
- Scream
- Hit someone
- Refuse/Say, "No!"



A Little Stressed

- Sweaty hands
- Heart racing
- Breathe fast
- Clinched Fists



Calm

- Relaxed body
- Smiley face
- Calm voice
- Normal heart beat

Teach Coping Skills



Take 10 Deep Breaths



Count to 40

I can squeeze my squishy ball 5 times.

1. Squeeze



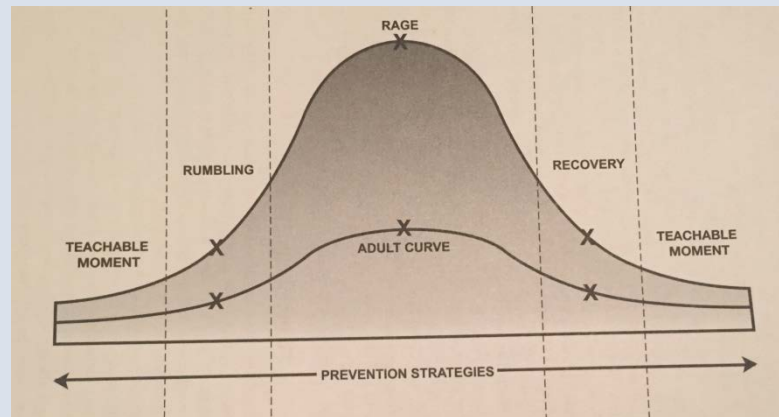
Relax



Notes for Teaching New Skills



- People are not available for learning when they are in the “rumbling,” “rage,” or “recovery” stages of a meltdown

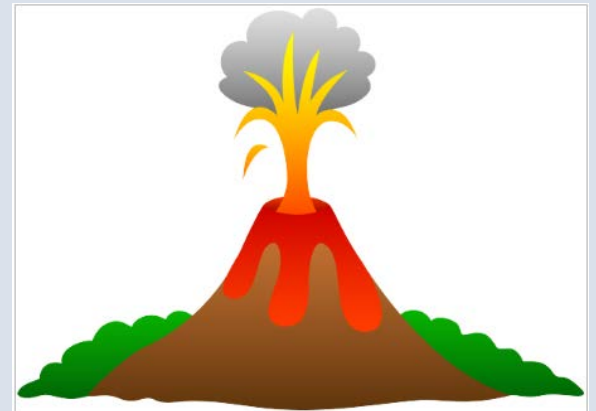


- Skills should be practiced repeatedly and regularly
- Visual supports and role play may be important

In the Meltdown Moment



- Minimize conversation and negotiation, quiet voice
- Use visual supports or modeling
- Validate feelings
- Relocate/Take a walk/Calm down space
- Be patient, use your own coping skills – deep breaths



Behaviors That Can Escalate the Tantrum

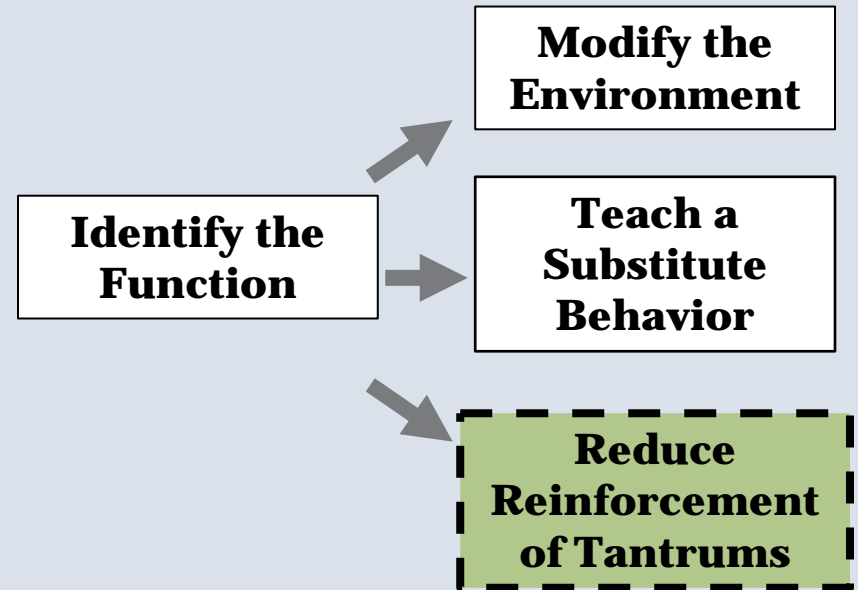


- Yelling
- Using physical force
- Bribing
- Rewarding tantrum behavior
- Giving complex instructions
- Backing the child into a corner
- Negotiating
- Insisting on having the last word

Reduce Reinforcement of Tantrums



- Planned Ignoring
- Response Cost
- Time-out



The Most Effective Consequences



- Immediate
 - Consistent
 - Frequent
 - Highly motivating
-
- It is very important for children to have a balance of positive (praise, rewards) and negative (ignoring, taking away something preferred) consequences

Planned Ignoring



- Best for mild behavior problems such as whining, crying, demanding attention, and tantrums
- When you are ignoring remove all attention, **DO NOT**
 - Make physical contact
 - Make eye contact
 - Talk
- Once you begin ignoring a certain behavior, you **MUST** keep ignoring until the behavior stops
- When it stops, give lots of attention for the next appropriate behavior

Extinction Bursts



Outlasting a Child is Difficult



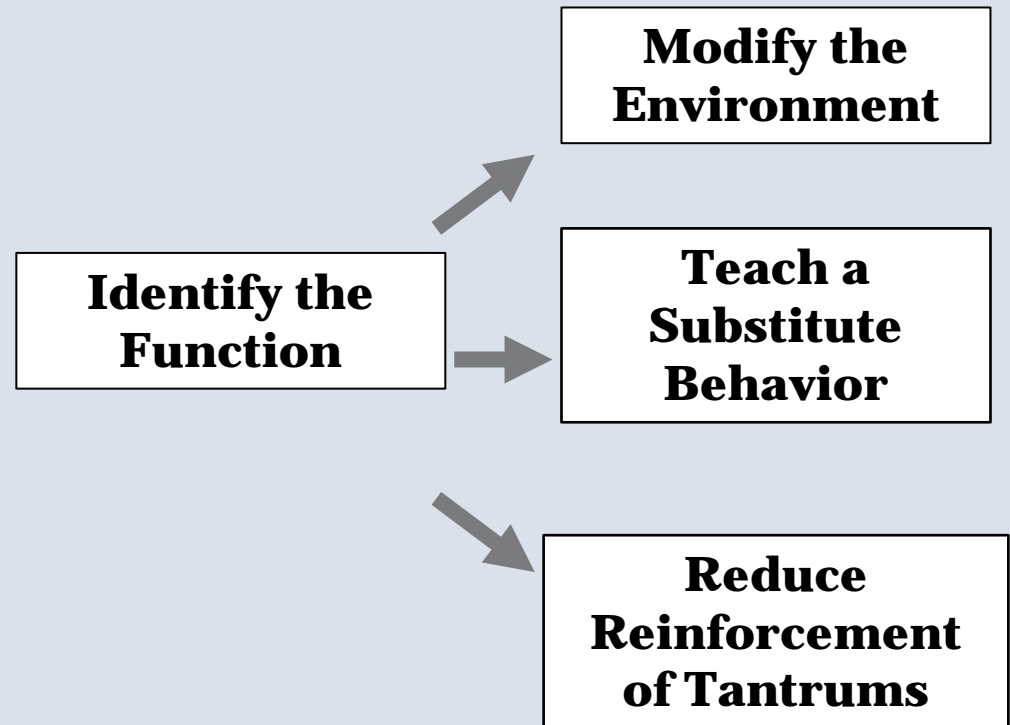
- **Relax**
 - Take deep breaths
 - Tense and relax your muscles
- **Think Helpful Thoughts**
 - Understand that the whining, crying, and other negative behaviors *are* behaviors—which you know how to deal with
 - “I have done this before, I can do it again” or “My ignoring will decrease this behavior, I can do this.”
 - Try thinking of something positive, like a pleasant activity that you have scheduled at the end of the day, etc.
- **Monitor Your Behavior**
 - Maintain a neutral face and neutral behavior
 - If the child sees anger in your verbal or nonverbal behavior—he or she may increase the negative behavior

Other Consequences



- **Response Cost**
 - Removal of access to a specific reinforcer
- **Time-out**
 - Removal of access to most reinforcers for a brief period of time

Example: Jack



Example: Sarah



**Identify the
Function**

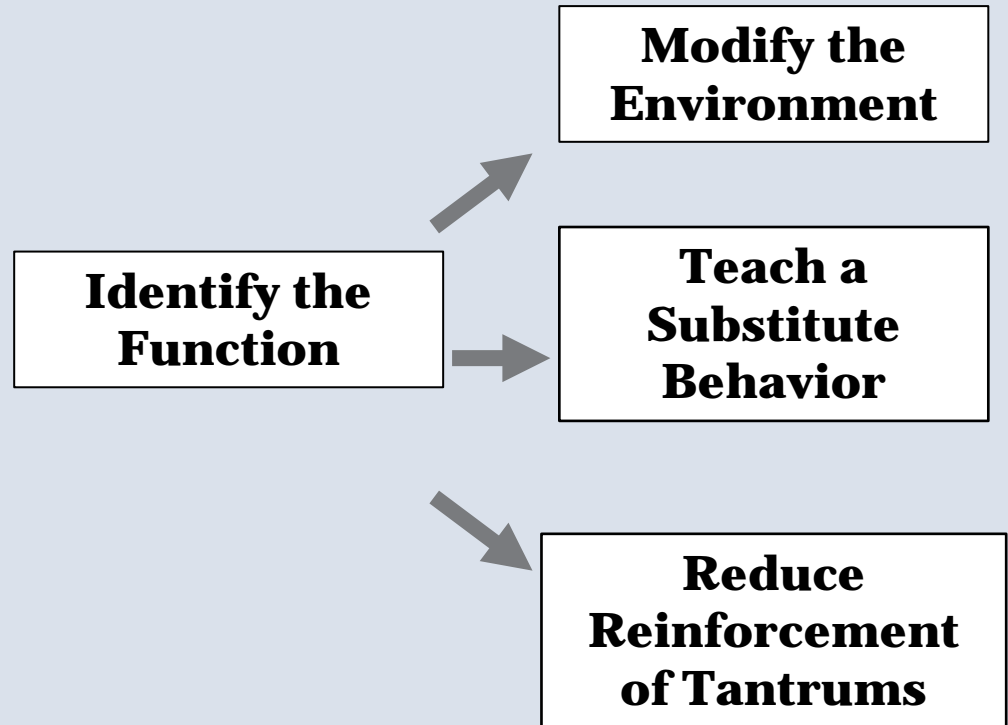
**Modify the
Environment**

**Teach a
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**Reduce
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Example: Jacob



Be Kind to Yourself

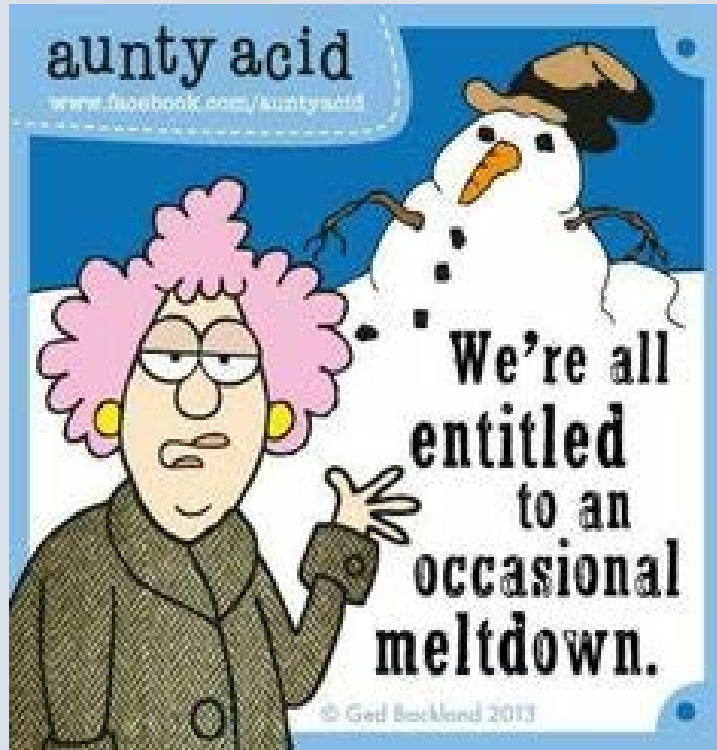


- Be aware of your basic needs
- Lean on others for support
- Self care strategies
- Mindfulness, gratitude, forgiveness

- Find a support group
- Consider respite



Questions?



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Resources



- **Behavioral therapy:**
 - Call the KKI referral line (443-923-9400)
 - Use the <http://www.pathfindersforautism.org/> website to find a local provider
- **Books for parents and teachers**
 - *Overcoming Autism* by Lynn Kern Koegel, Ph.D. and Claire LaZebnik
 - *Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments* by Brenda Smith Myles and Jack Southwick
 - *No More Meltdowns* by Jed Baker, Ph.D.
- **Websites**
 - Social stories: www.thegraycenter.org
 - Challenging behavior “Tool Kit” www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/challenging-behaviors-tool-kit