



NEWSLETTER

CONTENT

1 DIG DEEPER TO TREAT THE CRUX OF THE CAUSE

3 SLEEP, WAKE AND SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER

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DIG DEEPER, TO TREAT THE CRUX OF THE CAUSE

This is a follow up article from our last month's issue, "Dig deeper, when you see a challenging behavior" (February, 2018). Reading that article first will help give you more insight on this one.

"No, it's my turn first!" "How could Rahul win the game? He's a cheater, I'll never play with him again!" "No one ever follows my rules." "I want only my blue color Uniclick gel pen, to do my homework." "We always go out at 10:30 for recess. I don't care if there is an assembly today, I am going out for recess!" "I'm going to do it this way only."

These are just a few things we hear our children say. For them it's usually their way or the highway. And well, the highway almost always leads to a dead end i.e. an episode of a meltdown or a challenging behavior.

As discussed in our last month's issue, every meltdown has a reason/trigger. Along with sensory challenges and behavioral concerns we underlined how lack of flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance and problem solving skills can be prominent factors that impact a child's social, emotional and academic development. These are essential skills that every child needs honing in.

Precaution is always better than cure! Taking measures beforehand will help regulate our child's behavior and emotions. This can be done by;

- Using a structure (visual and/or verbal)
- Verbal preparation
- Laying down appropriate expectations



- Setting limits and boundaries
- Reinforcing positive expected behaviors using points system, token systems, and reward charts

At the same time these will improve their flexibility and adaptability. Thereby decreasing the number of conflicts, arguments and negotiations the child indulges in with parents, caregivers or others.

Most often an explosive child is unable to shift gears in response to parent's instructions or change in plans as per his/her peers. If a situation calls for flexibility and adaptability this is a child who will be quickly overwhelmed. As the child becomes frustrated, he/she is unable to think through ways of resolving these conflicts with others. The best way to deal with a frustrated child is using the following steps:

- 1) See it: Empathize with your child "I see that you are very upset!"
- 2) Feel it: Help your child, give meaning or a name to their feelings and emotions "Are you feeling angry? Because your face has turned red and hands are clenched."
- 3) Pause: Wait for your child to say his/her side of the story. This is really important.
- 4) Validate his/her feelings: Say, "I understand it." and speak about it briefly.
- 5) Provide options: Teach your child probable solutions that can be accessed now as well as the next time he/she is in a similar situation. For example: Do you need a break? Can I be of any help? Do you want to try it again?

Make sure to give your child time to process his/her emotions and understand the crux of why he/she is feeling so in the first place. Sometimes you may have to lead in and give probable options, if they aren't able to process their own emotions or express themselves. This is precisely leading your child to the cause of the problem that needs to be solved. Use a collaborative approach where you can work with your child to come up with mutually satisfying as well as appropriate solutions to the problems. Through this approach show your child that you can be his/her tour guide and help him/her navigate through difficult situations and aide them to regulate emotions. This is also a good opportunity to teach your child the cognitive skills such as task initiation, self-regulation, impulse control, self-monitoring and social thinking to understand different social concepts like turn taking, sharing and understanding the other person's perspective etc. that he/she is lacking. But remember to do this at a time when you and the child are not emotionally charged or drained.

A specific cognitive strategy that is extremely helpful with these children for problem solving is STOP, OPT & GO! This basically is teaching your child to STOP self when in a problematic situation, think of the various OPTIONS to solve the problem at hand and then GO using the most appropriate and expected solution instead of acting on impulse. This is also a great way to teach them self-regulation and impulse control.

All in all teaching children flexibility and adaptability will invariably make them more open to working



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collaboratively for solving problems and moving forward with fewer conflicts. Forming the basis of improved frustration tolerance and impulse control.

Now, a child who has learnt these skills will demonstrate better emotional and behavioral regulation at all times. While playing with peers, instead of having an outburst or fit about not getting to go first he/she will stop self, think of options {such as, [A] I can go second for now that way we can get started and play my favorite game, [B] Maybe, if I request Rahul he'll let me go first in the next game [C] It's okay to let Rahul go first that will make him happy.} and then act appropriately in the given situation. Or will go and congratulate his friend Rahul on his victory in the game, and think to self that "I will try harder next time so that I can win too". At home he/she will be flexible enough to finish the homework using the first pen they find in their pouch. At school, this child will now be regulated enough to cordially participate in the surprise assembly instead of running off for recess.

These are just snippets of his/her day, but equipping your child with the important skills as discussed, you and your child will have a much smoother day, free of too many explosions.

SLEEP, WAKE AND SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER

Just one night of a disruptive sleep cycle leaves us cranky, irritated, disorganised and deregulated the next day. Think about a time you didn't sleep well—how were you at work the next day? Were you more fidgety? Did you get up more frequently from your desk to move around? Did you have a hard time multi-tasking and keeping up with details? Did you notice your tolerance of people around you dropped? I'm sure your answer to most of these questions was, yes!

Now, think about a time you were tired in a meeting or presentation—what did you do? Oftentimes adults get up to move, swivel in the chair, chew on a pen, drink or eat something, fidget with an object, doodle on the paper. All of these are just sensory strategies that help us stay awake and alert. Also, think of when you were at a spa- How did the deep massage make you feel? What did the soothing, instrumental music playing in the background do to you? After my trip to the spa, I for sure am ready to sleep like a log! Well, my point here is that different sensory experiences can help your brain and body, to either wake up, or fall asleep.



Sleep is a complex process of activating and inhibiting certain parts of your brain -- it seems like a simple necessity until the process doesn't happen, as it should. This is controlled by a centre in the brain, called the hypothalamus. Our bodies have a normal sleep wake pattern called circadian rhythm. Two major neurochemicals responsible for it are Melatonin and Cortisol. Research indicates that children with sensory processing disorder experience high levels of cortisol and low levels of melatonin, the opposite of what is typical (and recommended) to support normal sleep cycles.

To explain this further, let's understand sleep and how it is induced. At night the hypothalamus releases a neurochemical Melatonin; that helps your body become tired. In children with Sensory Processing disorder (SPD) the levels of melatonin maybe higher in the day and lower at night leading to disruption of sleep at night. Hence,

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parents of a child with SPD need to try extra hard to put their not so sleepy child to bed at 12:30 a.m. Another neurochemical that is responsible for waking us up is Cortisol. Cortisol is the major stress hormone that is produced when children are anxious, stressed, over-stimulated, and/or in sensory overload. Typically, cortisol levels should be higher in the morning (to wake up the body and brain) but gradually decrease over the course of the day, until eventually being at a low point when it is time to sleep. Again, the opposite can happen if the child is in a constant dysregulated state due to sensory processing issues, impacting his/her sleep cycle.

Therefore, an irregular sleep pattern can be both, the cause as well as the effect of challenges seen in Sensory processing disorder. Imagine how a child who chronically has an irregular sleep wake cycle feels. He/she may;

- Manifest tiredness by constantly jumping or skipping around in an attempt to stay awake
- Zone out or be inattentive
- Chew on their sweatshirt or nails to help focus



- Be more reactive towards peers.
- Demonstrate low frustration tolerance
- Spin in circles or use any strategy/sensory stimulation to practically “wake up, body!”

To avoid these challenges and help your child regulate themselves more efficiently, it is essential for every child to sleep well. While all children are different in their sleep routine preferences there are a few things that can help provide your child a good night’s sleep.



1. Eat dinner early—about 2 ½ hours before bedtime. This will allow time for digestion
2. Avoid any screen time TV, I-pads, or any bright lights before bedtime as it is responsible for limiting melatonin levels in the brain
3. Play activities involving heavy work and good physical tasks like pushing pulling lifting etc. for about 45 minutes before you start the quiet bedtime routine
4. Give your child a warm water bath; follow it up with a deep rub/firm massage using a thick but soft Turkish towel (the deep pressure and proprioception is generally calming and helps increase in the levels of melatonin)
5. Transition to the calming routine by dimming the lights and playing classical instrumental music
6. Tuck your child in bed. Use of a weighted blanket or a thick rug will also be helpful
7. Read a book/sing 1-2 soft slow songs together in bed
8. Deep Hug/cuddle and kisses
9. Lights out.



It’s important to make slow changes to the bedtime routine and to try each strategy for 1-2 weeks before giving up. Change is hard so it may be met with initial resistance. But consistency is the key. Following the same routine will help the child organize and acquaint self to it. The above suggested strategies may vary from one child to another. It is best to consult your occupational therapist about the same for a more child specific night routine program.



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