

Handling Emotional Outbursts

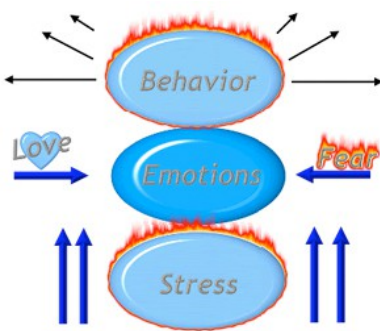
Freeze, Fight, or Flight

The moment that we are startled—we freeze, we jump, we run, we flinch, we dart, we hide or prepare to fight. Adrenaline rushes through the body getting the muscles ready for emergency action. Breathing and heart rate speed up as more oxygen is channeled to the muscles. All nonessential processes cease. **God designed our bodies to respond automatically so that we can protect ourselves quickly—even before our brains can analyze the situation.**

For those who have lived in threatening situations, the brain gets stuck in this protective mode, quickly promoting the “freeze, fight, or flight” response at the *slightest hint of perceived danger*. However, the same holds true for children who have faced any kind of trauma- any stressful event that is prolonged, overwhelming, or unpredictable. Children who are chronically ill, or learning challenged, or have been adopted, experiencing the trauma of separation from their biological mother, all fall in this category. ***Even when there is no visible threat or demand, these children quickly enter the “freeze fight, or fight” state.*** This is often expressed by quickly disengaging, and then spontaneous running, or instantaneous anger and aggression. **It is imperative to remember this is an automatic brain response. To calm the behavior you must calm the brain- not try to modify the behavior!**

The Stress Model- as taught by Dr. Bryan Post

The Stress Model explains the root cause of all problematic behavior. It says, **“All behavior arises from a state of stress.** In between the state of stress (albeit good or bad stress) and the behavior, is presence of an emotion. It is through the expression, processing, and understanding of this emotion that we can calm the stress (reducing the bodymind’s overwhelming stress reaction) and diminish the behavior.”



Two Critical Points:

***We only have 2 primary emotions: Love and Fear.** This may be hard to grasp because we identify a large spectrum of feelings, but any emotion or behavior that isn’t loving stems from a root of fear. You may see jealousy, defiance, attachment disorder, anxiety, and depression, hurt, or you may see behaviors such as self-mutilation and stealing. But they all stem from fear. **Children with severe behavior do not consciously choose to act out that behavior!** These behaviors are driven from a highly unconscious place.

***The expression of emotion triggers a fear reaction in others.**

When this occurs we are only able to see a threat. For instance, a child saying “no” to a parent creates an immediate stress reaction for the parent. This will lead to a cascade of emotions on behalf of the parent, making it impossible to clearly see the essence of the child’s behavior. **Remember, when you feel threatened or afraid, you cannot see another person’s fear- you are in the self protection mode.**

BE S.A.F.E.

When you as a parent (or professional) are triggered, **there is a way to get back to the calm, loving, supportive place of safety so you can continue to support the child. By learning these simple cues** (and lots of practice!) the child can learn to calm his brain and change his behavior, as well.

S top! Completely **stop**. **Stop** talking, **Stop** moving, **Stop** arguing, and **Stop** reacting.

A **lign** yourself with God, our Creator. Ask Him for wisdom, perspective, and strength- while taking 3 deep breaths to replenish your stressed brain with much needed oxygen.

F **ind** your logical brain. Dr. Daniel Siegel’s *hand model of the brain* explains that our upstairs brain (thinking brain) needs to consciously work to hug our downstairs brain to calm our out-of-control feelings.

E **xtend** emotional connection. Understand that connecting with your child’s emotions first is an important key to cooperation. When he feels heard and cared for, his logical brain can then receive redirection.

Unlocking the mystery of your child’s OUTBURSTS could be a piece to your Parenting Puzzle!

To learn about parent coaching or for more training on this topic,
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