

## Tips for minimizing meltdowns *before* they happen...

- ☀ **Stick to routines** of eating, resting, outdoor play, quiet and active play, consistent boundaries/rules and daily schedules. Anything that throws the day “off course” is liable to trigger some children. Hungry, tired, over and/or under stimulated children are easily frustrated.
- ☀ **Give children choices as often as possible.** “Do you want the red truck or the yellow car?” “Do you want to hop to the potty or walk very, very slowly?” “Do you want your medicine now or in 5 minutes?” This simple approach allows children to be in charge of some things in their world.
- ☀ **And don’t give a choice when there’s not one!** Saying “Are you ready to go outside now?” when the class is going outside is not a good idea - because a ready answer will be “NO!”. Then you’ve gotten yourself into a bit of a power struggle. Instead make a statement, “We are going outside now.” A little advance warning will help. Teach yourself NOT to end your requests with the word, “okay?”
- ☀ **Give lots of positive attention.** Notice children doing good, and speak with them about it. Let them know that you see them, you appreciate them and you like them.
- ☀ **Keep off limits objects out of sight and out of reach.** This makes the struggle a little less likely. You can even drape a towel or blanket over things that are causing a fuss.
- ☀ **Consider your answer carefully when children ask for something.** Can you possibly say yes? Then do! Save your no’s for those times when it matters.
- ☀ **Let children know when changes are going to happen whenever possible.** If you know that you’re not going to be at work tomorrow, let your families know so children won’t be surprised to have a sub. Let children know what’s coming. We all appreciate *not* being surprised by change, really. This goes back to the “stick to routines” point...

## What to do when the meltdown happens...

- ☀ **Solicit help!** Ask someone to step into the classroom so you can give your full attention to the child having difficulty. Your attention will help the child feel safe and cared for, even if he doesn't communicate his desire for your presence at the moment. If no one can come help, calmly ask the other children to quietly play, read a book, etc. while you help the upset child. This communicates care and security.
- ☀ **Do not ask questions or try to reason.** Once the big emotions have risen to the surface, it's best to sit quietly and wait for them to pass. This usually will happen within 5-10 minutes. Simply say, "I'm going to be here until you calm down." They may push you away, tell you to leave, or object loudly to your presence. If you feel like you need to, give some space, but *don't ignore the child and don't leave the room.*
- ☀ **Be present.** It's been common practice to "ignore" tantrums - but this can fuel the feelings of distress. You can let the emotions run their course while you do something else, but make sure the child knows that you are near and you want to help them just as soon as they're ready for some comfort.
- ☀ **Communicate empathy.** Be honest, don't you know what it feels like to lose it? And you're all grown up - you can reason with yourself! Young children simply cannot do this on their own. They need your understanding, not your discipline in this moment. They need gentle smiles not stern words.
- ☀ **Once it's over, calmly talk with the child.** Depending on their age and the circumstance, state what happened in a matter of fact way or problem solve. Younger children simply need a statement, "You wanted to put your coat on by yourself and your arm got caught in the sleeve. That was very frustrating. Let's work together now to put your coat on so you can play with your friends."