

Out of Control Behavior

Your best opportunity as a parent to change your child's out of control behavior depends on what happens before your child loses her cool. Many parents tell me that they often have no idea how their child can so quickly lose control. Georgia A. DeGangi tackles this problem head on in her book "Effective Parenting for the Hard-to-manage Child". She describes what typically goes on with a child *before* the meltdown: the child is getting unsettled or over-stimulated throughout the day. Typically the child has experienced many small upsets during the day until their "cup runs over" and has little to do with what happens in that particular moment of the meltdown. It is no wonder parents say things like "he went from zero to sixty in a nano second!". This is helpful to know so that interventions can be made throughout the day where perhaps the child takes a self-soothing break by drawing, coloring, holding a stuffed animal. All of these things can calm a child and empty their nervous system of upsets before they lose it.

Try these suggestions partially taken from Dr. DeGangi's book:

- Ignore the negative behavior, otherwise behaviors will increase
- Become your child's 'observing self' saying "There is a problem. _____ (crumbs all over the floor) has happened and _____ (sweeping them up) needs to be done to fix the problem" or "I noticed you _____ (cleaned your room!), so now you are able to _____ (got out side and play with Javier)."
- Listen to your child's unreasonable request and say something like "I know that you really would like to go to the store right now and get the new toy (acknowledging their wishes) and you are probably feeling mad and disappointed (affirming their likely feelings) because we cannot go tonight". This allows your child to feel understood and far more likely to manage his/her emotions.
- Take a parent time out if you are really upset by something that happened with your child: "I am feeling very upset right now about _____, so I am going to my room to calm down and we will talk later tonight about what your consequences will be."
- Hard to manage children easily feel humiliated once admonished, so it is important to set very clear limits, letting your child know what you will and will not do before they make a poor choice.