

MANAGING ANGER OUTBURSTS FROM DISTRESSED CHILDREN

Step 1: THE WEDGE

Sometimes children react in highly aggressive and/or unexpectedly hostile ways. This may be something that you sensed had been "building up" for a while. It may be something that seems to come out of the blue. From time to time distressed children are so wound up and so angry themselves that they continue to shout at you, to hit objects around them or to even hit themselves.

Our response is often a "fight-flight" response. We immediately feel under attack, our heart rate increases, our mind races and we feel poised for action. This is an entirely understandable response BUT we need to try to be non-reactive.

What do we mean by non-reactive? This means working against all of our instincts about fight- flight and instead taking a position or stance of "no response". To become NEUTRAL and not take action. This requires three steps:

Say nothing;

Do nothing;

Breathe and allow your heart rate to SLOW DOWN.

Easy to write; easy to read; at times an almost impossible way to act!

The idea of the WEDGE!

We need to create a picture in our mind of a great big wedge - that comes like a lightning bolt from the sky and wedges between the situation that is unfolding and your emotional response.

The WEDGE is there for only a few seconds.. The goal is to stop you from reacting in the flight-flight mode and to give yourself a moment - even less than a moment - a nano second - that then gives you an opportunity to think rather than react.

Step 2: NEUTRAL BREATH

If you can manage to get in the WEDGE for just a second then you can take a single BREATH. This will give you the opportunity to then take another BREATH. By the time you have managed three BREATHS your heart rate will have slowed and you can step back, think about the action that is needed and then do THIS as calmly as possible.

MAKE A PLAN & PRACTICE THIS WITH YOUR PUP THERAPIST: Think about a situation where the child in your care is distressed and is acting in a way that triggers your "flight-flight" system.

Talk this out with your PuP therapist; even allow yourself to have a "fight-flight" response so you can try to get the WEDGE working followed by some slow BREATHS.

What is happening with the child in your care?	What is your response?	Picture the WEDGE, practice your BREATH
Practice 1.		<p>Rate on a scale from 1 - 10 how successful you were at picturing the WEDGE.</p> <p>Rate on a scale from 1 - 10 how successful you were at taking 3 BREATHS</p>
Practice 2.		<p>Rate on a scale from 1 - 10 how successful you were at picturing the WEDGE.</p> <p>Rate on a scale from 1 - 10 how successful you were at taking 3 BREATHS</p>

Step 3: MAKING YOUR MIND BUSY TO HELP YOU STAY NEUTRAL

Sometimes we find that despite some deep breaths we are unable to stop the waves of emotional pain from sweeping over us. The comments from those we love leave us feeling sad, angry and lots of other emotions. And we are still caught up in the situation with a distressed child and our own emotional pain.

This is where the idea of detaching from emotions can be very helpful. You can leave the situation without exploding or without feeling overwhelmed by your feelings by stepping away from your emotions. There are also times when we need to stay in control even though we are feeling very sad: perhaps at a funeral or maybe you are having to prepare to tell someone some very bad news.

The way to interrupt the emotions that feel overwhelming is to simply fill your mind with other stuff..here are some things that people have found really useful.

FILLING THE MIND WITH OTHER STUFF:

The colour game

Look around you to find everything you can that is a particular colour: say BLUE. Say the name of the object in your head and move quickly to the next BLUE thing.

You are filling your mind with a task that will help the emotions from continuing to rise up and spill over. Do this for a minute before you try to continue with dealing with the current situation.

The counting game

Select a number: any number will do - let's say 129. Now count back in "7"s. This is tough and not something that many of us practice. This is not about getting it right! It is about filling our mind with other stuff that again helps us get a bit of distance from the emotions.

**THESE ARE SHORT TERM SOLUTIONS TO AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM:
GIVING YOU JUST ENOUGH TIME TO PREPARE YOURSELF TO DEAL WITH
THE SITUATION IN FRONT OF YOU.**