

The Difference Between Tantrums and Sensory Meltdowns

Information originally from www.understood.org



Many people think the words “tantrum” and “meltdown” mean the same thing. And they can look very similar when you see a child in the middle of having one. But for kids who have sensory processing issues or who lack self-control, a meltdown is very different from a tantrum. Knowing the differences can help you learn

how to respond in a way that better supports your child.

What a Tantrum Is

A tantrum is an outburst that happens when a child is trying to get something he wants or needs. Some kids with learning and attention issues are more prone to tantrums. For instance, some can be impulsive and have trouble keeping their emotions in check. They may get angry or frustrated quickly.

A child may have a tantrum if he didn’t get to go first in a game of kickball. Or he might get upset when you pay attention to his sister and he wants your attention. Yelling, crying or lashing out isn’t an appropriate way for him to express his feelings, but he’s doing it for a reason. And he has some control over his behavior.

Your child may even stop in the middle of a tantrum to make sure you’re looking at him. When he sees that you’re watching him, he may pick up where he left off. His tantrum is likely to stop when he gets what he wants—or when he realizes he won’t get what he wants by acting out.

What a Sensory Meltdown Is

A meltdown is a reaction to feeling overwhelmed.

For some kids, it happens when there’s too much sensory information to process. The commotion of an amusement park might set them off, for instance. For other kids, it can be a reaction to having too many things to think about. A back-to-school shopping trip could cause a tantrum that triggers a meltdown.

Here’s one way to think about too much sensory input. Imagine filling a small water pitcher. Most of the time, you can control the flow of water and fill the pitcher a little at a time. But sometimes the water flow is too strong and the pitcher overflows before you can turn the water off.

That’s how a sensory meltdown works. The noise at the amusement park or the stack of clothes to try on in the dressing room at the mall is sensory input that floods your child’s brain. Once that happens, some experts think your child’s fight-or-flight response kicks in. That excess input overflows in the form of yelling, crying, lashing out or running away.

Different Strategies for Tantrums and Meltdowns

The causes of tantrums and meltdowns are different, and so are the strategies that can help stop them. It’s important to remember that the key difference between the two types of outbursts is that tantrums usually have a purpose. Kids are looking for a certain response. Meltdowns are a reaction to something and are usually beyond a child’s control.

A child can often stop a tantrum if he gets what he wants. Or if he’s rewarded for using a more appropriate behavior. But a meltdown isn’t likely to stop when a child gets what he wants. In fact, he may not even know what he wants.

Meltdowns tend to end in one of two ways. One is fatigue—kids wear themselves out. The other way is a change in the amount of sensory input. This can help kids feel less overwhelmed. For example, your child may start to feel calmer when you step outside the store and leave the mall.

So how can you handle tantrums and meltdowns differently?

- To tame tantrums, acknowledge what your child needs without giving in. Make it clear that you understand what he’s after. “I see that you want my attention. When your sister is done talking, it’ll be your turn.” Then help him see there’s a more appropriate behavior that will work. “When you’re done yelling, tell me calmly that you’re ready for my time.”
- To manage a meltdown, help your child find a safe, quiet place to de-escalate. “Let’s leave the mall and sit in the car for a few minutes.” Then provide a calm, reassuring presence without talking too much to your child. The goal is to reduce the input coming at him.

Knowing the difference between tantrums and meltdowns is the key to helping your child through them. It may also help to get a better idea of the kinds of situations that can be challenging for your child. You can also explore tips on how to deal with noise and other sensitivities.



Grand Families Support Group

Who: Run by grandparents for grandparents and other relatives raising the children of loved ones.

What: Build support, discuss topics related to challenges, celebrate successes, broaden areas of knowledge, and educate others through lived experience. Speakers to be announced.

When: Beginning on Friday, March 1st 2019
Every 1st and 3rd Fridays from March through May and September through November
6:30pm—8:00pm

Location: Lenape Valley Church
321 W. Butler Pike
New Britain, PA 18901
(turn onto Ute Road to access parking lot)

Registration required! Wednesdays prior to Friday meeting.

Email Contact: BCGrandFamilies@gmail.com

- Please email the names of grandparents/caregivers attending
- your phone #
- The names and # of children attending

Dinner/Refreshments Provided. Childcare offered for children who are potty-trained through age 12.

Upcoming Events

Eagles Autism Challenge

Who: Anyone is welcome!

What: Join Philadelphia Eagles players, alumni, coaches, executives, cheerleaders and SWOOP for the Eagles Autism Challenge, a one-day bike ride and family-friendly run/walk. Choose from 15, 30, or 50-mile cycling routes, the 5K run/walk, or the Sensory Walk, all beginning at Lincoln Financial Field and ending on the 50-yard line. Activities include a Friday Night Kick-Off Party and Saturday Finish Line Celebration on the field.

When: Saturday, May 18, 2019

Learn more by visiting www.eaglesautismchallenge.org/

Finding Recovery Through Real Connections

Who: This activity is targeted for intermediate skill levels and is intended for clinical staff, social workers and counselors. Others who should attend include Bucks County residents,

family members, mental health/substance use disorder professionals and anyone who is interested in learning more about these specific topics related to recovery connections.

What: How can individuals, their families and professionals work together for success? This free educational conference & resource fair will demonstrate the significant value of family

engagement, provide a historical perspective of family involvement in the adult mental health system, review the barriers to overcome for a cultural change in treatment and services delivery, and more!

When: Wednesday, May 22nd 2019
9:00am—3:30pm (registration opens at 8:00am)

Where: Bucks County Community College
Zlock Performing Arts Center
275 Swamp Road
Newtown, PA 18940

2.0 CE hours will be awarded for the keynote speaker sessions. Full attendance required.

Register by visiting www.surveymonkey.com/r/FindingRecovery052219

NAMI Bucks County Stride

Bucks County LIFE on Social Media



Twitter: [@accessservespa](https://twitter.com/accessservespa)
Facebook: www.facebook.com/accessservices
Instagram: [@accessservespa](https://www.instagram.com/accessservespa)

Check out our website www.lifeinbucks.org and join our email list to receive updates on monthly parent/professional workshop trainings, youth events, and family community events.

Looking for Camps This Summer?

- Here's a few tips to finding the right camp:
- Look local. Contact your local YMCA. Scholarships may be available.
 - Reach out to your local Township or Borough.
 - Inquire at your school district. Many schools host camps throughout the summer.
 - Check out www.summercamps.com
 - Search camps with keyword or zip code.
 - Check out www.acacamps.com. Search camps with keyword or zip code.
 - Bucks County LIFE has compiled a list of Bucks County Special Needs Camps. Contact the office at 888.442.1590 for more information.



PA Mental Health Consent Law FAQ

PA Family Alliance for Children's Services released a helpful PA Mental Health Consent Law FAQ sheet.

Are you looking for answers around the following questions?

- What is inpatient treatment?
- What is outpatient treatment?
- What makes inpatient treatment consent different?
- What about parental disagreement to inpatient treatment?
- Who can consent to a minor receiving mental health treatment?
- Can a parent refuse to allow treatment once a child (age 14-17) has consented?
- Can a child (age 14-17) refuse treatment once a parent has consented?

Visit <https://bit.ly/2WXa6n7> for these answers and more!



Our Mission is to build strong, resourceful families and resilient children by sharing knowledge, resources, referral to services, direct support and training; with a focus on building a culture of parents and youth as mentors, partnerships within the community and collaborations with systems of care.

In This Issue:

- Thinking Outside the Box
- Tantrums and Sensory Meltdowns
- Grand Families Support Group
- Upcoming Events
-And More!

How We Can Help:

- Parent and mentorship support
- Helpful resources for you and your child
- Referral to other services as needed
- Training and information
- Specialized care

Bucks County Life:

Courtyard at Ivyland
882 Jacksonville Road, Suite 203
Ivyland, PA 18974
1.888.442.1590 (toll free)
215.259.1974 (fax)
BucksLife@accessservices.org
www.accessservices.org
www.LifeInBucks.org

Thinking Outside the Box



Often times when parents are caring for a child with special needs it can be hard to figure out where to start. The Chesco LIFE Family Support Specialists are experts at helping families navigate the system and problem solve with creative, "outside-the-box" approaches. They understand and consider that each family has different needs and each child has distinct personalities and preferences.

The team can help families navigate the system through support with organizing paperwork, applying for medical assistance, getting an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) in place, and getting services lined up. Other times they are there to simply offer a listening ear and provide validation in tough moments.

They are also able to support families in individualized ways. One family struggled with getting their son to engage safely with their family cat and benefited greatly from being connected with a pet therapy center. Another family has a teenage son who is passionate about sports. The team is connecting him to a local youth group so that he can pursue this hobby and also connect with a new group of friends. Currently, the team is working on connecting another family with Big Brothers Big Sisters to provide a positive mentor in their teenager's life.

Having lived experience of caring for a child with special needs uniquely positions each of the Family Support Specialists to provide this level of mentorship. They share, "we are able to bounce ideas off of each other to provide the best level of care!"

If you are interested in learning more about Chesco LIFE we invite you to visit: www.accessservices.org/services/chesco-life-program/