

WORKSHEET

SURFING EMOTIONAL WAVES

How is the child signalling that they're having a hard time?

Take a minute and describe what happens when a child is experiencing an emotional tsunami. What are they doing? Is there crying? Are they refusing to communicate? As you look through the list of common responses below, check the ones that most often apply to the child. Feel free to add your own if they have their own unique way of expressing their emotions.

- Screaming
- Crying
- Throwing things
- Hitting
- Lashing out verbally ("I hate you!")
- Whining
- Hurting self, physically
- Hurting others, physically
- Seething anger
- Refusing to communicate
- Slamming doors
- Sulking
- Flushed face
- Clenched fists
- Stomping feet
- Rolling eyes
- Loss of language
- Physical symptoms (e.g. stomach aches, headaches, etc)

Take a few minutes to list any additional details that may help you paint a full picture of the child during these events.

Let's give some thought to what causes children to have tantrums and meltdowns. What circumstances typically cause a child to melt down? Are there internal triggers, like family gatherings, hunger, lack of sleep, or perhaps certain holidays? In the chart below, fill the left column in with as many examples of these triggers as you can think of. You may even notice that some situations share the same triggers such as separation anxiety, difficulty with transitions, or testing boundaries. In the right hand column, write down the possible solutions. How can you be proactive in addressing these triggers?

Child's Triggers	Possible Solutions

Now that you're aware of the signals that the child sends when they need help handling their triggers and emotions. Think about how you respond in stressful situations. When you start to see the signs, how do you respond? In the space below, write down your responses. What triggers your reaction? Take a minute to relax and picture the situation, then write.

How do you respond to tantrums and meltdowns?

Think about your typical response to the following situations, being as honest as you can. Take your time imagining each situation, especially if it's a familiar scenario for you. In the right hand column, write down a few notes about how you might react in moments like these. There are no wrong answers. If you can think of specific situations that have come up recently, feel free to use those in place of the sample situations below.

Situation	Your Typical Response
The child seems stubborn, demanding and controlling, insisting that things be done their way	
You tell the child to stop playing with toys because it's time for dinner. They start throwing their toys across the room, crying.	
The child clings to you, crying, as you drop them off at daycare.	
The child says "go away, I hate you!"	

Reflecting on your typical response to their tantrums and emotional meltdowns allows you to make changes when necessary. This also gives you the opportunity to model the behaviour you want the child to exhibit. Did you find that, in some cases, you had more patience than in others? What judgments are you making about their behaviour? Write about your observations here.

Consider how effective your typical response is. Does your typical response to handling tantrums and meltdowns leave you and the child feeling connected or disconnected? Take a moment to think about the times the child in your home has been upset, and you offered a response without connection. Connection is more than just kind words or an acknowledgement of emotion. Connection requires providing warmth and assurance that you are there for the child when they really need it. Think about all the ways you can offer connection when a child is emotionally overwhelmed.

What keeps you from connecting with the child? Do any of these reasons ring true for you?

- Lack of sleep
- Lack of time/hectic schedule
- Lack of energy
- Expecting too much of a child at their age
- Lack of training
- Fear of being judged
- Feeling overwhelmed by other commitments

These are just examples that prevent caring adults from connecting with children from time to time. What else would you add to the list?

Think about the last time a child was upset and your response may have caused you and the child to feel more disconnected from each other. Write down the causes of the disconnection, focusing on your own response and not the child's behaviour.
