

## Key Takeaways

- These challenging and unwanted behaviors are developmentally appropriate and sometimes signify an upcoming milestone.
- All behavior is communication, so pay attention to the signals these children are showing you. Stay close and step in when you need to.
- Support them with these strong emotions and suggest other ways to express themselves.

## Episode Notes

This Infant/Toddler focused episode, Behavior is Communication: Understanding and Responding to Tantrums and Meltdowns features our amazing host Mamie Morrow, and our incredible guest Megin Ruston!

Meltdowns or tantrums in the classroom can be a frustrating experience for both the educator and the child, but as Megin shares in this episode, they are developmentally appropriate responses. Meltdowns happen when a child feels overwhelmed, either by their emotions or their environment, and are a common response to frustration, sadness, or even just emerging independence. Young children don't yet have the language to describe how they are feeling or what they are frustrated about, but also during those toddler years, they are realizing they are completely separate from the adults in their lives. Part of that emerging fierce independence can sometimes show up as a meltdown.

Biting, in particular, can be an especially difficult hurdle to overcome. Often, biting can be a result of children not knowing how to handle these big emotions they are having. Self-regulation takes time to develop, so support that child, and observe their behavior. **Are there certain times of days or events that trigger this frustration for the child?** When observing and trying to nail down a pattern, it can be beneficial to be mindful of this child throughout the day rather than for set periods of time. Be close to the child to see if any of these behaviors happen and be aware. Be sure to keep notes to keep track of your observations throughout the day and see how these behaviors evolve. Does the child show any signs that they are going to have a meltdown?

**Megin shares some great strategies to try to prevent these breakdowns such as:**

- avoiding power struggles
- avoiding demanding tasks at certain points of the day
- allowing the child to have as much independence as possible in the classroom
- being aware of the child

**Even still, sometimes meltdowns still happen. Here are some strategies to try when these meltdowns occur:**

- When you see frustration building, name that frustration and ask the child how you can help.
- Help that child through these big emotions by controlling your own emotions.

## Continued

- Conventional wisdom to ignore a meltdown is actually not that effective and can prolong meltdowns, and doesn't really teach what we think it's teaching (This includes sending a child to a "quiet corner" by themselves to "calm down.") At these times, they aren't thinking about why they are upset, they are just upset. Stay with the child.
- Acknowledge their emotions, don't dismiss or downplay their emotions in those moments. It is a big deal to them, otherwise, they wouldn't be so upset.
- Help the child return to a regulated state. Provide comfort.
- label the emotions you see the child going through, help them describe what they might be feeling, help them with the emotional vocabulary of what they are feeling.
- Once they are feeling better and are in a regulated state, acknowledge what upset them, and offer your support to help them find the solution.

## Your response matters. Here are some strategies to try when biting occurs:

- Address the child who is hurt and model empathy. "I am so sorry you are hurting, do you need some ice?"
- If there is an altercation for Toddlers and Preschoolers, approach the child who bit, be calm, and tell them "we do not bite, biting hurts, and I can't let you hurt your friends". Have them help find a solution and practice empathy as well. ask "how can we help your friend feel better? Maybe we can go get them a bandaid"
- If biting becomes a habit, be sure to reach out to the family to involve them in a solution. If you see a pattern of biting with a child and you are observing to find out the source of the frustration, see if the family has noticed this behavior and how they are handling this at home. Invite the parents to be a part of the solution process.
- When you have a plan in place, sometimes it may take time for these strategies to make a difference.
- Never bite back

Learn more about learning through play and child-led activities on our blog:

- [3 Overlooked Opportunities for Facilitation of Learning and Development](#)
- [Behavior Guidance Is as Easy as PB&J](#)

More good reads:

- [Understanding and Responding to Children Who Bite](#)

This episode focuses on Early Language Support, Behavior Guidance, and Regard for Child Perspective.