

HANDOUT 1: MANAGING CRISIS

Phase One: Triggers

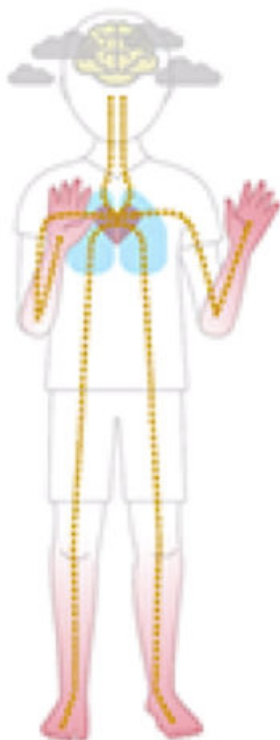
A “trigger” is an internal or external message that reminds the child about a past event. Triggers can be a negative or embarrassing experience that embarrasses, shames, frustrates, or scares the child. The initial feelings of the triggering phase are usually followed quickly by anger.

Examples of triggers include: events, times of the year, smells, sounds, situations or interactions such as holidays, homework time, transition to and from school, criticism from peers, hosting company, lack of sleep, changes in routine, etc.



WHAT TO DO

- Track what happens right before a crisis—use a journal or a calendar to take notes
- Collect information about the child and past events that will help you better understand possible triggers—talk to former caregivers
- Look for patterns and connections that will help you come up with ways to lessen their impact



Phase Two: Escalation

The escalation phase is when the child starts to lose control of their behavior. They may have behaviors such as yelling, swearing, becoming very demanding, or making threats.

WHAT TO DO

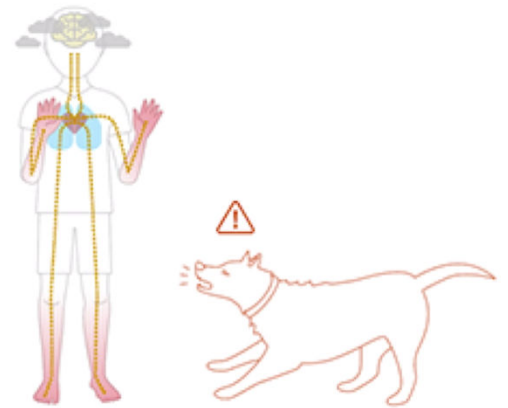
- Keep the stimulation level low
- Give them enough space so they don't feel trapped
- Move breakable items out of the way or items that could be unsafe for the child
- Ask other people to leave the area
- Step back and remember that how you react to them may cause their behaviors to further escalate
- Stay calm and do not over-react
- Listen to the child, rather than argue or try to reason
- Offer ideas, but avoid attempting to control
- If it's safe, sit down in order that you appear less threatening
- Look for constructive opportunities to distract

Phase Three: Crisis

As the situation progresses, the child enters the crisis phase. This is when the child is no longer able to think clearly. When in crisis mode the child cannot solve the problems constructively, nor are they able to express their feelings and control their behavior. They might become physically aggressive.

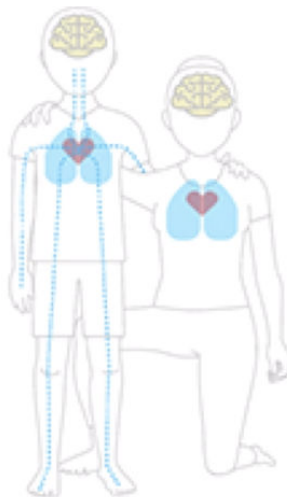
WHAT TO DO

- Stay calm and do not engage in the confrontation
- Keep some physical distance between you and the child
- Stay present but quiet
- Do not talk about consequences or try to reason
- Give the child physical and emotional space
- Focus on the feelings—not the behavior
- Remember: the acronym QTIP (**Quit Taking It Personally**)



Phase Four: Recovery

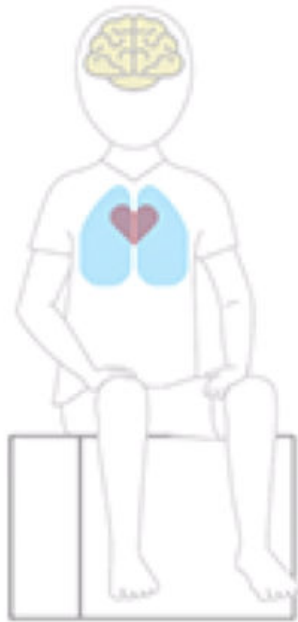
The recovery phase is when the child starts to gain more control over their behaviors again. You might notice their voice lowering. The child will start to relate to you more clearly and appropriately and seem more relaxed. When the child is calm, they may feel remorse for what happened and try to apologize, or they might remain upset and want to be alone. The recovery phase is the time when the child can learn from the crisis and hopefully be shown ways to handle a similar situation differently the next time.



WHAT TO DO

- Be patient as the child is showing signs of calming down
- Seek connection and trust
- Help your child reflect on the crisis
- Be present, loving and nurturing

While being nurturing and comforting, you might be met with anger from the child: “Get away from me! Leave me alone!” These angry statements can help you to give voice to the crisis. Respond by saying things like: “I know this is hard and that getting close is scary. I want you to know that I’m here for you.”



STRATEGIES TO PREVENT A CRISIS

While you will not be able to prevent every crisis, there are some things that can help prevent your child from entering the crisis phase.

WHAT TO DO

- Create routines
- Prepare the child for new environments and experiences
- Be an “attuned” parent— pay attention to the child’s unique patterns of communication
- Anticipate and plan for basic needs: HALT
- Create distractions
- Model for the child how you regulate yourself and keep yourself calm

Hungry/Thirsty
Angry
Lonely
Tired

MANAGING YOUR REACTIONS

- Identify your own “triggers”—such as the child not being respectful or not following directions, times when you feel misunderstood or when you experience too many new challenges
- Think about what the need is behind the child’s behavior
- Know ahead of time what things work to calm yourself down (turning down the TV that’s too loud or taking a few minutes to step outside)
- Stop for a minute to take a deep breath before you react can help you feel calmer and in control

IDEAS FOR MODELING SELF-REGULATION

- “I am frustrated right now, and I’m going to take a few minutes to calm down before we talk about how we’re going to solve this problem.”
- “I need a break, so I am going to go on a walk / call my friend / exercise / read/ journal.”
- “Can anyone tell me a funny joke right now? I really need a good laugh.”

CRISIS SAFETY PLANS

A Crisis Safety Plan is a plan for managing a child who becomes so elevated and out of control that they, you, or other people become at risk for harm.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- The steps that will be followed by all family members when a child’s behavior is escalating and when a child is in the crisis phase
- A ready and accessible list of people you can call to help

When you create your plan, prepare people for what they will need to do—don’t wait until you are in the middle of the crisis event.