



BUILDING RESILIENCE IN A CHILD WITH SPD

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Helping children with SPD practice strategies to regain their footing is important for life success. Children with SPD often get overwhelmed by sensory challenges and can react with meltdowns, tantrums or withdrawals. Resilience is needed to bounce back and recover, and resiliency skills can be learned. To start helping a child, adults must reframe a negative SPD reaction from “bad behavior” to an “attempt to get needs met.” By assuming a child is simply using the skills he/she “has access to” at the moment, the solution becomes a technical issue of developing better skills. Skills should be practiced at home, not in the moment of public stress! Any ordinary daily home challenge (chores, bedtime, dinner, etc.) can be a distress-and-recover practice opportunity.

General Suggestions:

1. Be aware of your child’s “triggers” so you can be better prepared for challenging situations
2. Wait and teach problem-solving strategies when your child is calm and alert
3. When calm, jointly review desired problem-solving strategies and pick rewards and consequences that are acceptable to you AND meaningful to your child
4. Practice with your child on only one challenge at a time, starting with easier ones
5. Focus attention on what you WANT a child to do, not on what you don’t
6. Practice with all intense emotions, not just negative ones

When you notice a child with SPD is having an emotional reaction:

1. Tell the child what you notice and what you think they are feeling.
(I see you are yelling and so you must be feeling angry!)
2. Suggest a reason for the emotion and ask for their feedback
(I saw your sister take your truck and then you yelled... Are you mad at her for taking your truck?)
3. Normalize the feeling to help the child feel accepted.
(It makes sense that you would be upset when your toy is taken!)
4. Help them label the emotion and intensity. (How angry are you?)
5. Offer appreciation. (I’m glad you are telling me how you feel.)
6. Ask if they want help – try to use problem-solving strategies you have previously discussed.
(Would you like me to help you find words to tell your sister what you want?)
 - If “Yes,” make the process as supportive and “shared” as possible. (Ok...Let me think... Hmm...)
 - If “No,” honor the response and reassure the child you will be available when they want your help.
7. If behaviors are inappropriate, set reasonable limits. Accept the child’s feeling without accepting the behavior, giving the child as much control as possible. (I totally understand you are angry, still, it is not OK to kick me. I think your body is not able to calm down. Is that what your body is saying? Would you like me to hold your leg so you don’t kick, or can you make your leg stop?)
8. Conclude with a positive statement, followed by a problem review statement, and end with a positive remark.
(I’m glad you told me how mad you were when your sister took your truck. I didn’t like it when you kicked me. You did a really great job taking a really big breath and controlling your body.)