A Framework for Decreasing Meltdowns: The Cup Kid

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Agenda

- Learn the importance of identifying activities, situations, or events that
  - Contribute to meltdowns
  - Help the student de-escalate
- Learn to
  - Analyze the student’s day
  - Determine the danger zones for the student
  - Develop an emptying plan for each danger zone
- Learn to collaborate with the student, other staff members and the student’s parents to teach the student how to handle his cup

CUP BASICS

- Things go in the cup.
- The cup fills up and runs over.
- The cup empties.

We all have a cup
- Different things are cup fillers for different people
- Different things are cup emptiers for different people

A Day in the Life of a Cup Kid

MANAGING THE CUP

Cup Fillers
- Make a list of things that fill the cup. Ask
  - Other staff members who know the student
  - The student’s parents
  - The student
• Environmental factors
  o Physical comfort
  o Amount of sensory input
    ▪ Visual
    ▪ Auditory
    ▪ Olfactory
    ▪ Movement
    ▪ Proximity of others

• Physical needs and feelings
• Emotional needs and feelings
• Concerns for physical or emotional safety

• Being told “no” or not getting his way
• Slower rate of processing information

• Not knowing what to expect or having inaccurate expectations
• Unforeseen changes in the schedule
• Exciting events

• Difficulty with social interactions
  o Communication differences
  o Difficulty noticing and interpreting social cues

• Difficulty with executive functioning tasks
  o Trouble multi-tasking
  o Difficulty organizing and prioritizing
  o Difficulty sustaining effort on tasks that are hard or of low interest
  o Trouble initiating tasks

**Cup Emptiers**
• Make a list of things that empty the cup. Ask
  o Other staff members who know the student
  o The student’s parents
  o The student

• Self-stimulatory behaviors
  o Proprioception (jumpers, runners)
  o Vestibular (swingers, spinners)
  o Deep pressure (crashers, squeezers)

• Preferred activities
  o Not as a reward, but as a strategy
  o Teach how to stop when time is up

• Organizational tasks
  o Mundane, easy to do
  o Tasks that require little thinking
• Include emptiers that could be performed
  o At home
  o At school
  o In the car or bus

Monitor the Cup
• What signs does the student give that indicate his cup is filling?
  o Movement: more or less
  o Vocalizations: more or less
  o Self-stims increase
  o Withdrawal: close eyes, hands over ears
  o Talk about specific topic

Danger Zones
• Review the child’s schedule and determine where the most cup fillers are
• List the time, place, environment, and specific cup fillers of each danger zone
• Develop an emptying plan for each danger zone

Emptying Plans
• Analyze the cup fillers in each danger zone
  o Which can be removed?
  o Which can be changed to be more tolerable?
  o Given the cup fillers that are left, how quickly will the cup fill?

(Anytime you remove or change a filler, plan how you will reintroduce it in small amounts over time so the student learns to tolerate it.)

• Determine
  o When the cup will be emptied
    ▪ Be aware
    ▪ Be flexible
  o Where the cup will be emptied
    ▪ Identify a safe place, home base, etc. for home, school, and while in the community
  o How the cup will be emptied

Collaborate with Parents
• Share the strategies with the student’s parents
• Teach them to develop emptying plans for the home

• Keep each other informed of changes and issues
  o Changes in who lives in the home or significant health issues
  o Heads up when the teacher will be absent
  o Changes in medication
  o Changes in the school schedule
• Schedule conferences as needed to ensure you stay on the same page
• Revise emptying plans as needed
• Strive to return the cup fillers that were removed or changed so the Cup Kid learns to handle the fillers

Consideration 1: A cup that is emptied frequently enough will not run over.

Consideration 2: Taking a nearly full cup into an environment/situation that has numerous cup fillers is a sure-fire way to create a meltdown or shutdown.

Consideration 3: If the environment/situation has so many cup fillers that the student’s cup is not big enough to hold them all, a meltdown is a certainty unless you intervene.

Consideration 4: If the student has performed the task multiple times before without incident, but melted down this time, the cup was too full this time.

Last Time…This Time

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If a Cup Kid lived out in the country, would he be a hick-cup and drive a pick-cup?
If two Cup Kids fell in love, would they be a “cupple?”

Illustrations and content taken from the following books written and illustrated by Nancy W. Kling
The Cup Kid: Parenting a Child with Meltdowns © 2008 by Nancy W. Kling
I’m a Cup Kid! the workbook © 2013 by Nancy W. Kling

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