

Basic Information:

Restraint Collapse can happen when a child (or adult) has worked really hard to “have a good day”. They’ve held it together enough to stay emotionally and behaviorally regulated while at school or an event and then they get to their safe space (usually a parent/primary caregiver) and emotionally collapse. This can look like an unexpected tantrum, an intense rush of emotion or a lack of ability to access usual coping strategies. It’s important to remember that when environments change so do expectations from adults, peer relationships, rules, sounds, sights and schedules. This can feel incredibly overwhelming to anyone

but especially to kids who may already struggle with these things. While this is often referred to as After School Restraint Collapse, it is also common with child custody exchanges.



Parent/Caregiver Tips:

- Don’t argue with the child ¹
- Relate to their emotion by imagining a time when you were just as upset as they are
- Don’t try to fix it. Sit in the feeling with them.
- Make time and space for the big feelings
- Normalize and appreciate how hard it is to try so hard and then lose control
- Be intentional about regulating yourself prior to interaction with your child
- Greet your child in positive ways. Ex. “I’m so glad to see you!”
- Silence is okay. Don’t ask questions. Instead wonder . . . “I wonder what the most fun thing was.”
- Be a detective! Don’t expect your child to know what they want or be able to ask for it. Watch for things that are calming and just provide it.
- Some kids thrive with more control so offer choices if that works for them. Ex. “Would you like the green water bottle or blue water bottle?” instead of “do you want a water bottle?”
- Increase your connect time when together (See Connecting w/ Your Child Tip Sheet)
- Stay connected throughout the day (ex. Notes in lunch box or draw a heart on their palm)
- Prescribe the meltdown. Ex. “When I pick you up from school today, you might feel like you need to scream or cry. That is okay. Mom will join you and then we can go to the park.”

Tips continued:

ALWAYS:

- Snacks
- Hydration
- Lower expectations
- Offer connection with trusted person/animal
- Have comfort items available
- Add in as much consistency as possible

TRY:

- Humming, drumming, music of child's choice
- Water activities
- Repetitive tasks like bike riding, puzzles and going for a walk
- Hard gum, drinking out of a straw, crunchy snacks, weighted item, deflated exercise ball

Next Steps:

Wait until the child has fully recovered and then wonder together about what happened. Imagine what contributed and discover where support could have been provided along the way. Use this time as an opportunity to expand your child's network of support and their understanding of who/what can be helpful to them. If you or your child need additional support, please reach out to a local therapist, your pediatrician or your school counselor.

Additional Resources:

- [After School Restraint Collapse is Real.](#) Marcoux, Heather
- [Why Children Misbehave at Home After a Day at School.](#) Ockwell-Smith, Sarah
- [Kidspot: There's a Reason Why Some Kids Have Epic Meltdowns After School.](#) Won, Vinnie
- Book: [The Kissing Hand.](#) Penn, Audrey