

GUIDELINES FOR HELPING CHILDREN WHO WERE PRENATALLY EXPOSED

- **Maximize structure:**
This helps to reduce the internal feelings of chaos that your child may be feeling, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Examples include establishing routines for daily activities, such as bedtime, meals, naps, play, etc.
- **Build in predictability:**
Unexpected events and transitions can be incredibly stressful for children who are easily overwhelmed. Schedule events and transitions whenever possible and provide reminders.
- **Simplify the child's world:**
Too much stimulation can trigger hyperarousal: too many options, too many toys, too many people, too much noise, etc. Avoid environments that can be over-stimulating, such as shopping malls, toy stores, bowling alleys, etc., until children have learned to manage their own behaviors in these settings.
- **Avoid complex directions:**
Lots of changes in direction and conflicting information can be a problem for children with sensory processing difficulties. Keep activities and environments simple and structured.
- **Intervene with containment and down-regulation:**
Intervene the moment a child appears to be over stimulated, or going into a state of hyperarousal. When possible, physically scoop them up and help them calm and contain themselves. This may mean removing them from the environment temporarily. Have a back-up plan for activities that become too stressful for a child in order to avoid full meltdowns.
- **Avoid using lectures and lots of words with children in distressed states:**
Children in stress overload will often block auditory information, and be unable to respond to spoken language. Practice ways for older children to recognize their own signs of stress and find strategies to calm and contain themselves.
- **Provide opportunities for “re-dos” to correct negative behaviors:**
For children with poor impulse control, respond quickly to negative behaviors with containment, as mentioned above. Practice positive behaviors, such as making amends, and provide an opportunity to “re-do” the situation in a more positive way.
- **Help children to anticipate impulsive behaviors:**
Over time and with practice, children may learn to anticipate impulsive behaviors, such as hitting. Practice ways the child can ask for help the next time he/she feels like hitting someone, or other similar behaviors.
- **Consider working with an experienced Occupational Therapist:**
A complete physical and developmental assessment for your child and working with an Occupational Therapist who is experienced with sensory integration techniques can greatly assist parents of children who have been prenatally exposed. Incorporating these techniques into your child's every day routines and activities will help both you and your child find and develop your child's strengths, as well as building skills in areas that are more challenging.



Pathways to
Permanence 2

Parenting
Children
Who Have
Experienced
Trauma
AND LOSS

Session 7

Parenting
the Child
with Drug
and Alcohol
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Parent's
Toolbox



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- **Provide a sensory rich environment that suits the child's needs:**

With the guidance of an OT, you can develop a space and activities where your child can play in a way that is suited to his/her sensory needs. It is important to find safe ways for your child to appropriately “blow off steam” and leisure activities they can enjoy. Remember the variety of activities that were available to Randy, which he used frequently...trampoline, exercise balls, etc. This will differ for each child, and children will initially need guidance from the parent about how and when to do this. As children become more able to self-regulate, they may eventually be able to recognize when this form of activity is helpful to them.