

“Stop the world I WANT OFF!!”j

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Afternoon at k for a child with Giveh difficulties

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“The world is spinning and bombarding too fast! I try, and try, until I cannot process any more. Help! My brain is drained, and my energy depleted. It is only noon ggand I have to somehow make it through the afternoon. Recess is chaotic; let me hide to the side. I have to somehow regroup and conserve, since I have little reserve . Like every afternoon I will have to “shutdown” to “shut out” the world. As I overload, my senses become heightened, hyper-sensitive, and impossible to tolerate. The sounds, the smells, the chaotic activity around me meshes into confusion. I have to hold it together, and stay calm, as to explode would to bring I . I V GHS hsit quietly, but stare off. To be aware will overwhelm.

Like most every afternoons I will not remember what happened. It will be a blur. I will withdraw to survive, and gasp for air to not suffocate! I hurt all over, but cannot cry! I feel panic as the bright lights blind my eyes, the voices overwhelm me, and the smells make me nauseous. I can barely feel my arms and legs, let alone use them effectivelyh. I am falling apart as I hold it in. As my coping skills collapse. I will withdraw and hide, sit quietly in my chair and hope that everyone forgets I am there. I want to hide in a corner, wrap up in a blanket, and withdraw to survive. I pray there will be no snags, or added demands, and hope that the teacher doesn’tv call on me. .I cannot distinguish between what is said, what I did, or what is happening around me. Please somebody! Stop the world and let me get off!”hVr

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☐ Pleaseh everyone, always be aware that a full day athjb school can be very draining and overwhelming. The sensory bombardment, social strain, and academic demands can tax an already vulnerable nervous systemic . Our world presents too much, too fast, and took uintense, for many on the spectrum. O to rMany have delayed processing issues that makes e nothing processing slow and taxing h. They have to consciously “think through” much of what hu process subconsciously and smoothly, with minimalh o tenergy. Slowg it down, break it down, and give them a lot of breaks to rebound. Their energy supply drains fast, and they must have time to withdraw to regroup r. Many have sleep disturbances, dietary concerns, and anxiety issues that leave them with a low reserve starting out the day. If they had a exhausting time the previous day, chances are they still have not replenished to full reserve. Do not pressure, do not demand, and let them pace themselves. Develop a sensory diet with plenty of breaks, and most importantly allow them to escape when needed. Give them a voice, and make sure they know how, and feel safe, to say “no” and “I need help.” As a teacher or aid, help them feel safe in your presence, and trust that you understand. As the day wears on, be awaty stress chemicals accumulate and the child will be drained. Do not pressure or ridicule, but support and reassure. In the mist of chaos, they need to feel “safe and accepted”, and know that they can

count on you to support them.

“Do you think I am having fun!”

“Do you think I am having fun when I scream, fall to the floor and slam my head repeatedly?”

“Do you think I am enjoying it when I meltdown by in the middle of a classroom with my peers staring at me?”

“Do you think I am having fun when I cannot sit still, and am running around the room, bouncing off the walls, ignoring your assistance?”

“Do you think I am having fun when I am staring into space, with glassy eyes, and turning away to block you out because I am overwhelmed and shutting down?”

“Do you think I am having fun when I repeatedly hit my face with my fists until all the frustration is gone?”

“Do you think that I enjoy hitting, kicking, and biting you when I love you?”

- When I hear people discussing my behavior, what is there that leads them to believe that I like to do this; that I find enjoyment in creating havoc, stress, and anxiety for myself and others? Do you think I would do this if I had more adaptive ways of dealing with the problem? When I am continually acting out to gain your attention, you say I am “seeking attention” (like I like it) and put me on extinction. Do you ever think about “why” am I needing constant attention in the first place. Why am I acting inappropriately to obtain attention? Instead of ignoring me, try and listen and understand why I “have the need” to act that way. Seeking attention may be the obvious observable function, but ask yourself (1) why am I trying to get so much attention, and (2) why am I using this behavior to get it. Don’t just “ignore” me. It doesn’t teach me anything, but it makes me feel isolated and unwanted. It does deal with why I need the attention, or teach me more appropriate ways of getting it.

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When I act out when you place demands on me, yes I may be trying to “escape and avoid” these demands, so you force me to comply so my acting out is not rewarded by allowing me to escape. You say I act out to “manipulate” you to avoid things I do not like. Have you asked yourself “why does he feel the need to escape or avoid?” If most children willfully comply, why am I resisting so adamantly. Don’t you think if I had the tools, and felt confident enough to do it successfully, that I would also “want” to do it?

When I become overwhelmed in events with overpowering sounds, sights, and smells, why would you

think that forcing me through it is somehow helping me? If my brain becomes overloaded with stimulation, how can I be expected to “handle it?” What is that teaching me, if my brain doesn’t allow me to learn during those moments?

I wonder why you do not ask these questions. You call me a manipulator, lazy, disrespectful, oppositional, etc, like I somehow intentionally choose to act this way; assuming I know how to act differently. You sit at a table and discuss among yourselves how I must learn to act better, to not be spoiled, learn to respect others, and comply with your demands, like I am so how having “fun”, intentionally choosing to act this way. You don’t first look at what you might need to change, but try to force change on me. You scold, force, punish, and restrain me, like I purposely want to be this way. Are you that DUMB to think that if I knew how to do it right, and I felt confident doing so, I wouldn’t have more “fun” being cooperative and receiving the positive attention and rewards like all the other children. Look at my face! Look at my g! Look at my emotions! How do you assume that this is fun! Do u

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Please let me tell you, if I felt good about myself, confident in what I am doing, and safe and accepted by you, I would not be acting this way. Either the demands of the situation are greater than I can handle, the way you are supporting (or not supporting) me is overwhelming me, or I do not feel “safe” in doing it. I do not mean to “piss you off!” I do not find joy in making you angry and lashing out at me in frustration. I am not having fun in watching everyone stare, scold, and ridicule me into submission. How do you think that timing me out, taking away privileges, and restraining me helps me to feel safe, accepted, and competent in your presence!

Please, when you look at me struggling, assume that I am feeling anxious, insecure, and most importantly “inadequate” at the moment. The stronger the opposition the more insecure and inadequate I am feeling. Then, ask yourself how can you (1) change the expectations and demands, (2) how can you provide greater assistance to support me, and (3) teach better skills for meeting these expectations. And most importantly, in the heat of a meltdown, think “how I help him feel safe”, not “how can I control him.” And when it is over with, ask yourself how you can change the conditions next time to avoid setting me into “fight or flight”, rather than how can you punish my behavior into submission. You are the one who is placing me in these conditions, you are the one who has to learn to change! Yes, like for all children, I need realistic boundaries and consequences to learn to be successful, but meet me where I can realistically succeed, be a supportive mentor, and please do not assume that I am having “fun” and “prefer” to act this way!

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Thanks you F for listening to me. Please do it more often!

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h, I hwould love to play!gj h

Every day at recess I play in the sand. I loveh letting the sand sift through my fingers! It feels so soft as it slowly falls through my fingers, back CB to the ground. I love to watch the way the sand looks falling through my joyh kg i hands and fingers. I can change how CNN nina B I do it so it falls in different patterns. I love the feel and calmness of doing it over and over again. It makes me feels safe and good. Occasionally min e hhrecess lady will ask me if I am ok. I usually say nothing and do not look hup.

This sand play feels so good to me, and it allows me to avoid the chaos on the playground. I try to avoid it; not because I don't want it, but I can't make it work. I look out at the kids all running, climbing, swinging and chasing each other. They must be having fun. They are all shouting and laughing. If they are laughing they must be having fun! How do they do it? What is there secret? Why can't CC get it work for me!!

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God, I would love to play!g he

I love to do these things! I love to run, climb and swing. I especially love to laugh! I know how to do all these things, but I don't know how to do them with them! I don't know how to talk to and play with others. I watch what they do, but I don't "get it." I don't understand. How do they do it? How do they know what to say, what to do, how to play the game? I just don't get it! I don't understand the rules, what they want, how to "do it together." They must know what to do and when to do it! I simply don't get it!

God, I would love to play!

I have tried over and over, but it doesn't work. It doesn't make sense to me. I know how to swing, run, climb, and I can talk. But it doesn't work. I can't seem to do it with them. When I have tried, I think I am doing it right! I watch and do what they do. But it somehow is not right. They look at me and laugh. I like to make them laugh, so I do it again! But, then they either push me down, or walk away from me. I don't understand that! What did I do wrong? Am I supposed to push back? Is this the fun? So I try to push back, then they yell for the recess lady. She pulls me away and yells at me! Why? I don't get it. I see them pushing each other, and they pushed me. Why can't I push them. Why don't they like that?

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I listen to what they are saying. Often their skin inq be I C in words come too fast. They talk back and forth so fast I can't understand what they are saying. I try and say the same words, but they look at me funny. I try to do what they are doing, but I must not do it right. I cannot tell if they like me or not. I just don't get it! I want to, but I don't "GET IT!" So, I stay to myself, quietly sifting sand. After all, I do feel safe in being alone. And I do love the feel of the sand. It is predictable, I have control over it, and it feels good.

God, I would love to play!

At home I have an imaginary friend. Her name is Sally. I have a swing set and slide at home. I play with Sally all the time. We swing together, climb together, and sift sand together. She follows my lead so it is easy to do. She accepts me, she doesn't laugh at me, she doesn't tell me what to do, or run from me. But how I wish I had a real friend! I watch the boys next door through the fence. Sometimes they stop and look at me. I look away. I am too scared. I know I can't do it! I only fail. How can I learn to do something I don't understand?

Yesterday we have a meeting at school. Maybe I did something wrong, I don't know. The teacher tells my mother that I am a loner, that I don't like being with the other kids. That I push them to the ground, and that they are scared of me. I am confused. I have not done anything to anyone. I just want to "fit in". I want to play! I want to yell and laugh, climb and swing with them. But I can't, I am dumb, I am not good enough. I could see my mom cry! I don't want my mom to cry. I am no good! They don't understand!!!

God, I would love to play!

Today was different. I ate my lunch alone as usual. I went outside and played with the sand. It was nice outside and the sand felt good! As usual the other kids were playing on the playground. But today, a girl came up and said "Hi." She told me her name, but I said nothing. I was scared! What did she want? She asked if she could play in the sand with me. I said nothing. She talked softly and slowly. Her voice felt good, soft, friendly. She sat near me and watched what I was doing. I didn't understand. She started to sift the sand like me! I looked up and she smiled! She didn't laugh, but she smiled! Somehow I knew that's he seeded I was LLP was good! She isaid "this feels good!" and did what I was doing. I am not used to that. It did not make sense, but it felt good. She liked what I liked! We didn't say much, but we did it together! She asked me what I do with the sand. I didn't say anything. I wanted to, but could not find the words. I just started to sift the sand another way. Again, she did it with me. Again, I was surprised, but it felt good. How different this was. I didn't have to watch her, to do what she was doing,

to make myself do something I didn't know how. She liked what I was doing! She liked doing it Huhx roughrww me! I don't know what thist means, but it feels good!

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The bell rung and we had to stop. I didn't want it to stop. I didn't want it to end! I was happy here with her. I was comfortable with her. She thanked me and asked if we could do this tomorrow. I could not speak. I did not know what to say. Does she really want to play with me? Will she actually come back tomorrow? I forgot her name! I am scared to ask.

Back in class I sat at my desk. I could not hear the teacher. I could not do anything. The teacher was talking, but I could not tell what she was saying. The girl was sitting up in front of the room. I now remember her sitting there before, but never talked to her. I felt good, but scared. Will she come play tomorrow? How can I tell? Before I knew it the bell rang again! It was time to go home. I just sat there. She turned a saw me. She smiled and came to me. "See you tomorrow!" she said. I looked at her, but could not speak. It didn't seem to matter! She smiled and left the room. It felt good!

God, I love to play!