

Understanding Dysregulated Parents/ Tips and Tricks

What is Emotional Dysregulation?

The inability to control or regulate one's emotional responses, which can lead to significant changes in mood. It can involve many emotions that include sadness, anger, irritability, and frustration.

Why does it happen and what does it look like?

Need to provide examples and visuals...

Types of Emotionally Immature Parents - Keep in mind that there is a spectrum from mild to severe.

1. **Emotional Parents:** They are easily overwhelmed by their own emotions and have difficulty regulating them. They may act impulsively, unpredictably, or irrationally, and expect their children to soothe them or take care of them.
2. **Driven Parents:** They are extremely busy and goal oriented. They expect everyone to value the same things they do. They can appear to be highly invested in their children's lives, but are often overly controlling and struggle to have a healthy emotional connection with their children. They have a fixed mindset.
3. **Passive Parents:** They often avoid dealing with anything upsetting. They rarely offer their children any boundaries or guidance on how to help them navigate difficult situations. They may allow abuse by looking the other way or minimize problems brought to their attention.
4. **Rejecting Parents:** They often rule the family and everything revolves around them. Family members and others work very hard to try and not upset them. They show little engagement with their children and interact by issuing commands or blowing up. They reject advice and withdraw from any affection.

You cannot change how a parent responds, but you can change your expectations and approach.

Example - If you know a parent will always take their child's word and blame you for their child's behavior, then be prepared to have a response that covers your bases. " I am sorry you feel that way Mrs. Smith, but as I have shared with you before we have plenty of supports in place to help him be successful. I just wanted you to be aware of what happened today and if you feel we need a more detailed conversation then we can schedule a meeting to discuss further."

Do not take it personally, this behavior was long present before you came into their lives. Remind yourself that the parent you are talking to is dysregulated. There is always a back story, and most of the time it would break your heart.

Example: I had a parent who constantly called upset that her daughter was falling behind and losing her homework. The mother was so afraid of her child failing. Later I learned that she had lost a son to cancer a couple years prior and blamed herself for the illness. The trauma she felt from that experience had trickled into how she wanted to protect her daughter from feeling any failure.

Make sure you are emotionally regulated before you have any parent interaction. If you are caught off guard (after school in the car line, parent shows up unannounced, etc.), then make sure you know the school policy on parent communication and be prepared to advocate for the boundaries in place so that you are protected.

Example: Parent stops you on your way in and is upset about something that happened the day before. Calmly let the parent know that they need to check in at the office and can email you to make an appointment to talk. If they feel it is an emergency, then tell them that they need to go to the office and ask to speak to a school administrator.

Come up with your non-negotiables/ Have boundaries:

Name calling, threats, false accusations, yelling, etc...

Example: *I've heard you have favorites and if you do not like a kid you will treat them badly.*
"Mrs. Smith, that is a false accusation and if you continue to make those then we will need to reschedule with an administrator present".

Tips

1. Start with the positive.
2. Share that you know this will be hard to hear, but let them know you are motivated to find a solution.
3. Have some statistical information that might help the parent to not feel alone with the problem. "50% of students who have a difficult time learning to read become successful once some interventions are put in place".
4. Allow time for parents to vent and process. Say, "Hold on just a minute, I can tell what you are saying is important to you, so let me take some notes to make sure I hear everything correctly." You will be amazed at how their behavior changes.
5. Empathize with their response. Remember, most of the time it is out of fear.
 - Fear of falling as a parent.
 - Fear that you are judging them.
 - Fear that you are misunderstanding their child.
 - Fear that you do not like their child.
 - Fear that they cannot help their child.
6. It is ok to ask for an administrator to be present. It is also ok to lean on your teammates and administrators for support.