

Dysregulation vs Tantrum Information Sheet

Dysregulation and a tantrum may show a range of similar behaviours, such as screaming, kicking, hitting, biting, swearing and shouting. However, there are differences between the two and it is important to be able to differentiate between dysregulation and a tantrum in order to give the best support. Tantrums tend to occur in young children, whereas dysregulation may occur across the lifespan.

Dysregulation

VS

Tantrum

Is the child watching for a reaction?

The individual has no interest in how others react to their behaviour.

Depending on the reactions of who is there, the tantrum may change in intensity or nature.

Is the child able to consider their safety?

The individual may be injured when they become dysregulated.

The individual will avoid getting hurt.

Is the child in control of their behaviours?

During a dysregulation episode, the individual is not in control of their actions. The person is overstimulated and reacting instinctively to the distress they are in.

The individual is in control of their actions the entire time.

Is this goal-orientated - does the child want something?

Dysregulation is not goal-orientated. The individual does not make demands before or during the dysregulation episode.

Tantrums are goal-orientated. The individual is trying to get what they want.

Is the child able to calm down once the situation has been resolved?

Dysregulation episodes can be slow to end. They will slow down once the individual is accustomed to their surroundings. This will happen at their own pace.

Tantrums can end quickly. This can be either once the goal is achieved or the child is tired.