Why School Quietly Fills Your Child’s Stress Cup (And Most Adults Miss It) Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Why After-School Meltdowns Happen

Ever notice how your child's biggest meltdowns happen after school? They walk through the door and suddenly everything falls apart. Crying, arguing, refusing homework, exploding over something small.

Parents often think, what happened at school today? But here's the surprising truth. For many kids, nothing dramatic has happened. it's really that their nervous system just ran out of room.

In the earlier episodes of this Stress Cup series, we talked about what the stress cup is, what are ways that it's quietly building in throughout the day so that we get you to think differently about, What is really happening with your kids nervous system, which is driving their behavior.

And imagine your child's nervous, system like that cup and every demand, frustration or stressor adds a little bit to it. Some drops are big. Some are tiny and the brain keeps track of it all day long.

And eventually the cup fills if you are not creating capacity and even one little demand, one thing. You're like, what was that? The nervous system overflows and that overflow is the meltdown, the freak out, big explosion that you're just perplexed by just because literally this is happening everywhere across the globe even, but definitely in America for kids that are just very overloaded.

The Stress Cup Analogy

And for many children, school is where a large portion of those drops accumulate. Certainly parents tell me a lot of things and a parent told me their teacher said he had a great day.

He's quiet, he's well behaved. He follows directions. But they were like, what are you talking about? Because the moment he gets home, like through that front door, He is explosive.

he is crying, yelling, refusing homework, not eating. The parents just really assumed something went wrong. And, and somewhere at home throughout the day, they didn't know what's going on.

They're like, he's great. So they were thinking he was acting like this on purpose. This is just willful behavior. Really didn' understand. And that's what brought him to me.

And this is not uncommon because by the time he got home, his stress cup was just really at maximum capacity. The moment his nervous system finally released the pressure, that is when he exploded.

Home is just that safe place. I mean, That's just what happens. And our kids will act out more for us. Some parents always say to me, Oh, I'm so grateful.

This only happening at home. And I get it, because we want our kids to be well behaved and I've had a kid who struggled to regulate everywhere. I know, I got it.

When they're, did this just regulate in that explosive? This is a problem. It's going to turn into a mental health problem if we don't create more capacity.

They're doing this at the safest place at home, and I get that. Why does school really fill the stress cup? What is going on with the constant demands on a kid's nervous system?

How School Drains Regulation Energy

Many of these demands really are invisible to adults, especially when a kids is well-behaved, quiet. Does it work? but they run continuously in the background and drain the regulation battery.

So let's look at some of the biggest ones. Sustained attention. Kids are expected to focus for very long periods of time doing often developmentally inappropriate complex work.

They're expected… Listen, process information very quickly and shift gears a lot. I mean, sometimes John Carlo will come to me and be like, this is what I think this says.

And I'll be like, is there a rubric? Like, how do we know? And thank God for chat GPT because sometimes these questions and what they're asking is really unclear.

And these are good people, like good teachers. I just don't think they realize like how much the work is moving to a level that a really conscientious student who is impeccable executive functioning can't even understand these directions.

And I think what happens to kids and they don't have supports. I had to change my whole schedule to be available for high school study buddy stuff. They're having to complete assignments.

They are having you do a lot. And for children with developing executive functioning or even ADHD or autism or having other clinical issues, this takes an enormous amount of effort.

I mean enormous. Their brain may be working incredibly hard just to stay engaged. We also are damaging our attention systems with constant device usage.

We're teaching the brain to only be pay attention for short amount of times and paying attention longer periods of time is becoming increasingly hard.

I know. It is what it is. I don't hate devices. Just we have to have balance. That's it. So another big component is constant transitions. School days involve dozens of transitions, math through reading or this assignment to that person, group to and all this other stuff, reading to lunch, lunch to recess.

All this test and staying after school and having to meet with a teacher and then going to sports and requires the brain to shift attention and regulate behavior.

And for kids with executive functioning challenges, those shifts require real cognitive effort and each one adds a drop to the stress gap. Okay, social navigation.

School is one of the most socially complex environments that children will ever experience. Depending schools that, I think schools, that are allowing kids to use devices, it becomes even more complex because they're not connecting at all.

I feel very grateful that my kid went to schools where no devices were not allowed and they don't use them. They get in serious trouble, even at the teenage level.

How about that? Kids are constantly navigating the friendships, peer dynamics, group work, social hierarchies. Even small moments can feel intense in a developing nervous system.

I mean, I can't believe how much kids are slackers and then how many times kids were amazing. Haven't you navigate the social side of that? Because in America, they've really have moved to group.

projects, okay? I see some benefits to them, but I think kids work at different levels and I can kids can work in a group in one way and another, it's really a tough thing socially, depending on how that teacher and what that school

environment is like, and it is different.

Kids can feel very excluded at school, they can be misreading social cues, dealing with embarrassment in front of peers, whether maybe they're behind or they are so ahead of their peers.

It requires confidence on both of those ends. Each of these experiences adds emotional stress.

Why Kids Hold It Together at School

Sensory load. Many classrooms are highly stimulating environments. Noise, movement, bright lights, smells, crowded hallways, background chatter. And kids with sensory sensitivity, their nervous systems may be working all day long just to filter out everything and that requires a lot of regulation energy.

They may be doing emotional masking, they may trying to pretend that it's not so distressing for them. they might not even realize how much it dysregulates them, hopefully most kids who have sensory issues and they're known can find a way to alert people.

I always was paying attention constantly to what kids, what their body language was like. Again, sometimes the body, language could, you could appear angry or fear can look like anchor.

And so kids can be misinterpreted and many children really spend the entire school day trying to behave, do what they're told, hold in their frustration, suppress their emotions, and then they try to follow the rules and not cry.

And that emotional suppression really is just an incredible amount of energy. Regulation fatigue, self-regulation is not endless and you need energy to regulate behavior.

You need capacity for attention, emotional regulation, social, and many kids just have used that up, which means their stress cup is very close or full.

And when they get home, even a small amount of frustration, they forgot they had whatever religious education or they forget they have sports that night just can send them into a tizzy.

These are real things we are constantly dealing with as parents. When they get home and they're so frustrated, we are really unsure. And what I want to say to educators, it's important for educators to understand this too, because a child who appears calm in the classroom may actually be using enormous regulation energy just to hold it together.

And so when parents report meltdowns at home and it doesn't necessarily mean the school was easy for that child, it may mean that the child used most of their energy of the nervous system capacity during the day.

And I think talking with parents and understanding and really forming a plan to find ways to build regulation throughout the school day can just be so dramatically helpful.

I've been part of many teams. where they are like in shock how dysregulated a kid is. I mean, I've had kids with, you name it, OCD behaviors that are, four hours at night and they're like, why?

I just shocked. And I remember this was probably 20 years ago. The school was like we can't do anything for him. Like, he's holding it together all day.

What Helps Kids Reset After School

just extreme things. And we wind up all working, how to regulate the nervous system, had to get clinical therapy, have to do a lot of things, but allowing for some flexibility during the school day was the first part of creating more capacity in his nervous system so that he could do harder work outside of school to deal with his OCD, because it's not the school's responsibility to treat the OCT.

It was the family's. But that was such a huge part. Creating educators and parents who work together can really make huge difference. When parents understand about capacity of the nervous system, something powerful really can shift for them.

So instead of asking again, why are you acting like this? they begin recognizing what's causing my child's nervous system to be exhausted. And that, you know, after-school meltdown or flip out or whatever you want to call it is not disrespect.

It's often regulation fatigue. What helps after school when kids come home from school and their nervous is just needs some time to reset. That might look very different.

it might like movement or quiet time or snack and hydration. you know, time without demands. Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is give the nervous system space to settle before asking for more.

And please don't think that device time is going to regulate your nervous. It is not. it is designed to stimulate it. I know this is very controversial and my neurodivergent people will get mad at me and they feel regulated.

But this is science. This is you need to power off in order to Power On and create that capacity. You can certainly use devices after you've created some capacity people.

When you understand the stress cup, after school meltdowns really start to make sense and you're going to really understand that your child just didn't suddenly do this.

It's about all those drops that have happened and their nervous system just ran out of space and the home is where they finally feel safe enough to release what they've been holding together all day.

And if you are trying to figure this out, what's actually filling your the best place to start is a solution matcher.

Finding the Right Support for Dysregulation

It's going to identify the pattern. And that's exactly why I created it so that, you know, it's a short quiz that helps you identify what may be driving your child's dysregulation.

So you can focus on the right supports and you go to drrosanne.com forward slash help, because once you understand what's filling your children's dress cob, You can finally start helping your Empty it.

And maybe this is really resonating with you and understanding your own stress cup. But I really hope you're really understanding and enjoying this analogy because this critical in the regulation first methodology.

It's definitely part of my book, The Dysregulated Kid. I'm glad you are here and I am glad that you doing this work and it's going to make a difference.

not just today, but for all the future generations that come. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our dysregulation insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.