

# AUTISM CONNECT 2026

*April 7<sup>th</sup>*

# Thank You!



**TO ALL OF OUR PLATINUM SPONSORS!**



# Helping Caregivers Support Emotion Regulation in Toddlers who may have Autism

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# Introductions

- Please raise your hand if you:
- Have a family member with autism or developmental delays
- Are a helping professional
- Serve Babynet families
- Are another type of educator, clinician, or therapist not contracted with BabyNet
- Have seen me speak before
- Have seen me speak on this topic or similar before 😊

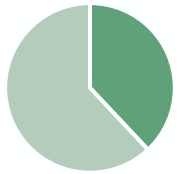
# Emotion dysregulation in toddlerhood is normal...to an extent



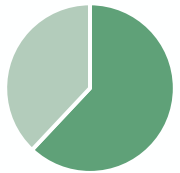
Brief, mild, predictable tantrums are common in toddlerhood

Prolonged, dysregulated, pervasive tantrums are a risk factor for later mental health problems<sup>1,2</sup>

# Social-emotional developmental concerns are very prevalent in EI



- 40% of families on BabyNet-contracted early intervention providers' caseloads may have social-emotional delays



- 60% of families on BabyNet-contracted early intervention providers' caseloads may have social-communication delays



- 89% of EI providers are interested in training to help families address emotion regulation and “challenging” behavior

# How should we address “tantrums” and “meltdowns”?

- Are there differences based on whether a person is autistic or not?
- What are other behaviors that are challenging?



# Upset behaviors are a type of communication

- What do they communicate?
  - Wanting something
  - Not wanting something
  - Fatigue
  - What else?



# First, we want to help parents:

1. Figure out *why* tantrums or challenging behavior is happening

- What is the child communicating?



2. *Prevent* the more intense tantrums or challenging behavior.

- How can we meet children's needs ahead of time?



# Part 1: Figure out the *why* (“function”) of a toddler’s tantrum

Questions to ask the parent:

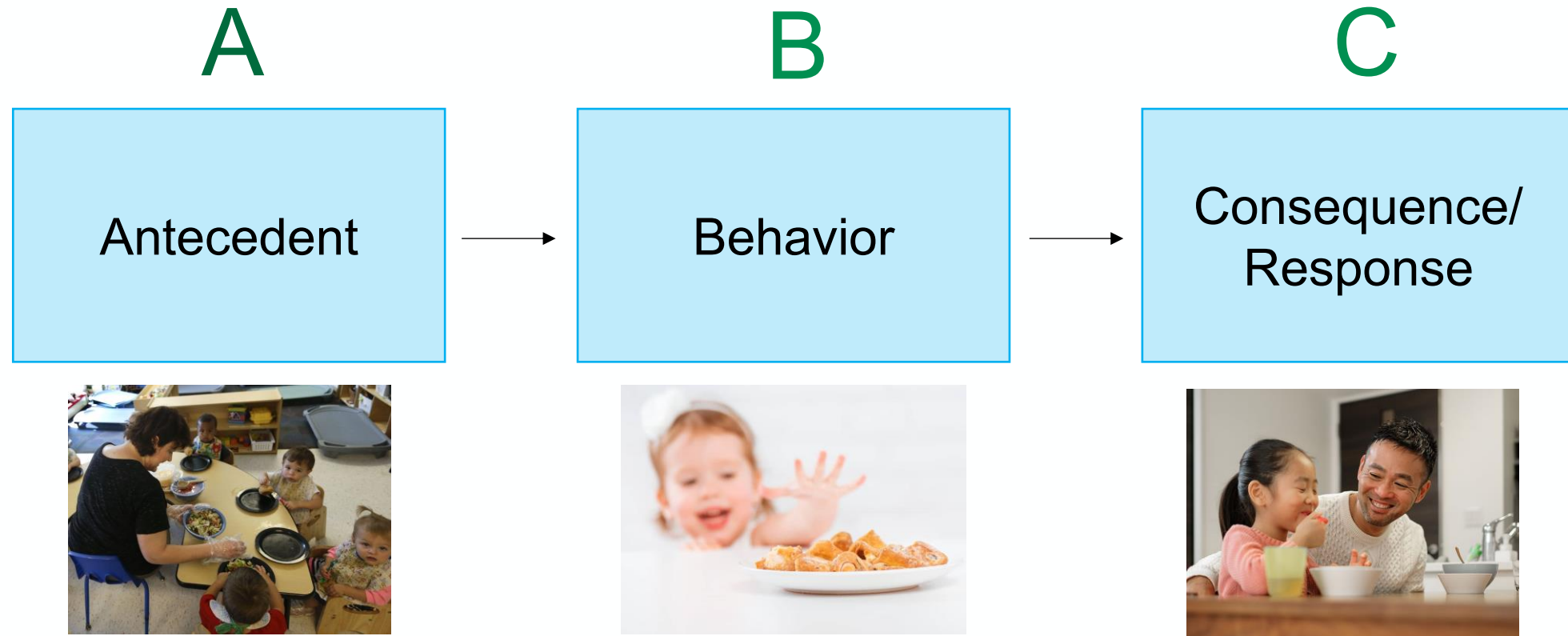
1. What happened right before the behavior?
  - What happened right before similar behaviors in the past?
2. What happened right after the behavior?
  - What happened right after similar behaviors in the past?

Asking about before and after helps us figure out why a child is tantrum-ing because...

Behavior always occurs after something  
and before something else

...these things might help us understand why the  
challenging behavior is happening

# Behavioral approach: the structure of how we learn



- There is structure in how we learn: “if I do this in this situation, then this happens”
- We understand children’s behavior as communicating a need- i.e., having a function
- Teaching children a skill to use to meet that need

# For example: Ruby

- Ruby's typical snack time was delayed because of the family's schedule for that day (early pick up for older brother). She began to yell and scream in the car. When she began to kick the seat in front of her, Ruby's father passed her a chocolate granola bar from his bag.
- What happened before the tantrum?  
After?



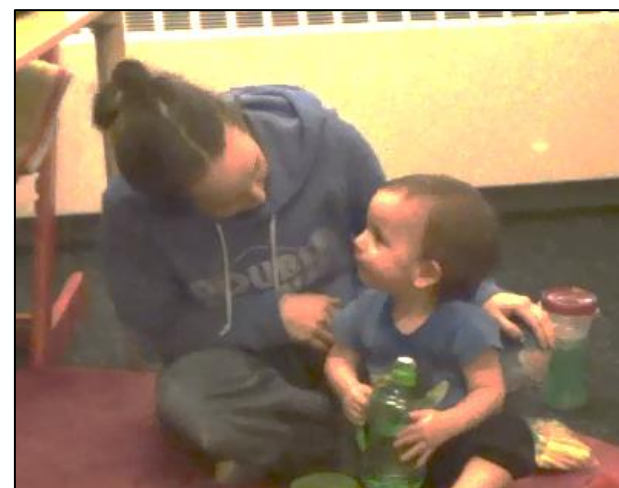
# Common *why's* (functions)

1. To try to get something they want
  - Access to physical item (toy, snack)
  - Access to attention from parent
2. To try to avoid or escape something
  - E.g., a task
3. Inability to communicate
4. Sensory stimulation
5. Something unexpected happened
6. Fatigue



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# Part 2: How can we prevent the tantrum?

1. Try to meet the child's "why"
2. Increase predictability
3. Plan ahead for "likely" tantrum times

And then:

Give "special time" or positive attention outside of tantrums



# Try to meet the child's "why"

To try to get something they want



In advance, offer two acceptable choices

To try to avoid or escape something



Use a "first-then" in advance

Inability to communicate



Model the word or gesture, use visuals

Sensory overstimulation



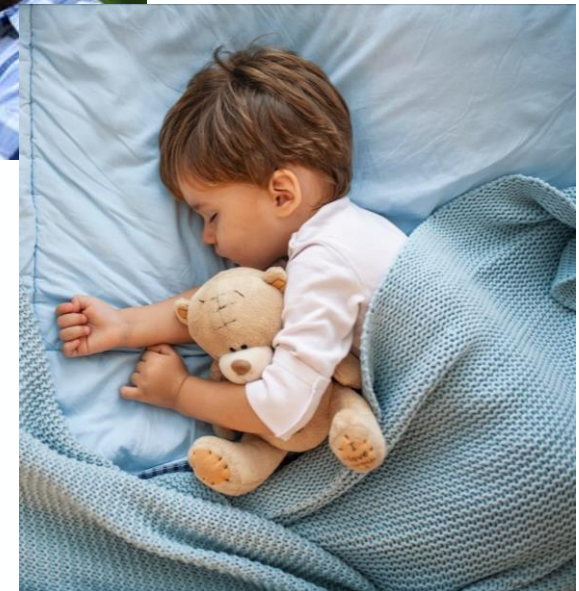
Offer breaks after activities you know are overwhelming

Fatigue or hunger



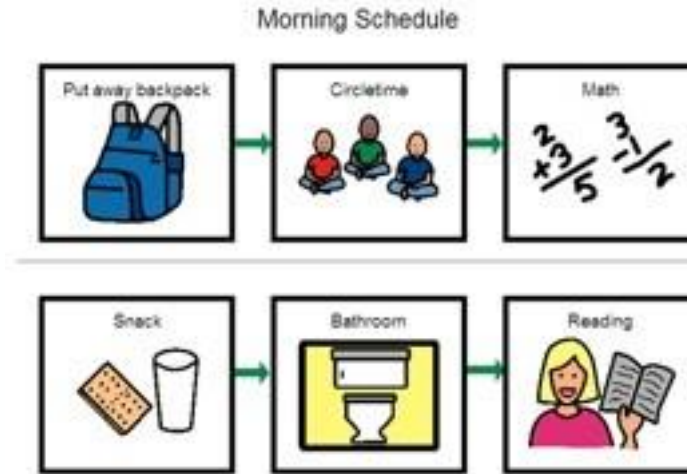
Keep a regular nap and snack time

first		then	
 whole group	 seat work	 ipad	 books/library
 free choice	 snack	 special activity	 music/movement



# Increase the predictability around a child

- Of schedule
  - Transitions are difficult!
  - Visual schedules
- Of environment
- Of rules and boundaries
  
- When a change is needed, introduce it in advance (e.g., with a “first, then” visual)



# Plan ahead for “likely” tantrum times

- What are your child’s “warning signs”?
- What are the hardest times of the day/situations?

## Then, try:

- Distraction
- Control the environment
- Offer two acceptable (to you) choices
- Break things up into small chunks
- Model the right thing to say



# Part 2: How can we prevent the tantrum?

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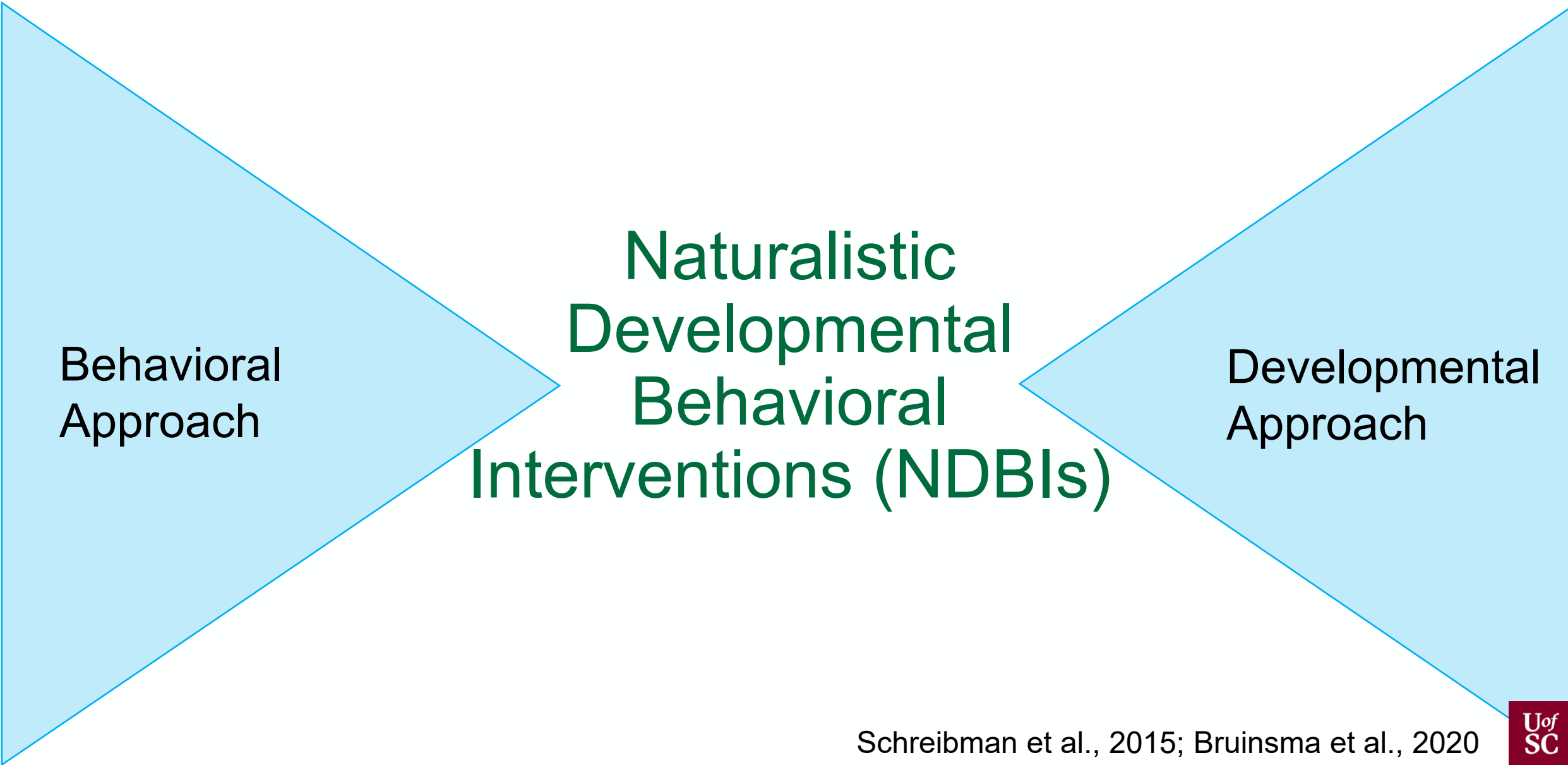


And then:

Give "special time" or positive attention outside of tantrums

i.e., play time using NDBI strategies!





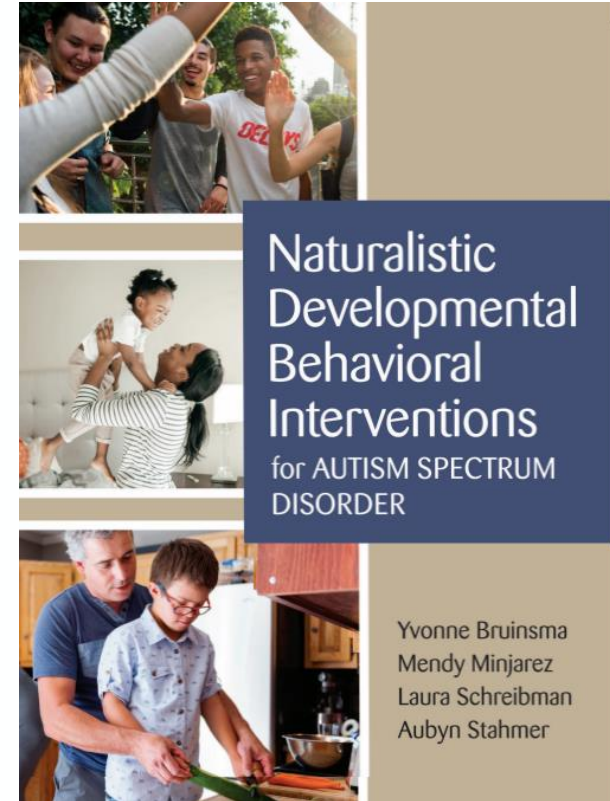
Behavioral  
Approach

Naturalistic  
Developmental  
Behavioral  
Interventions (NDBIs)

Developmental  
Approach

# Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBIs)

- Effective at improving social communication and language for:
  - Children 3-6+ with autism
  - Children 14 months - 4 years with social communication delays and/or at high likelihood of autism



# Here are a few early NDBI strategies to try

(3 of about 12)

# 1) Following the child's lead in play



## 2) Imitating the child



Imitation is a  
“pivotal skill”

### 3) Face to face, on the child's level

- Think of the child's attention as a spotlight
- It may not be coming to you as often, so you position yourself within it!



# Today we gave an overview of how to:

1. Figure out *why* tantrums or challenging behavior is happening

- What is the child communicating?



2. *Prevent* the more intense tantrums or challenging behavior.

- How can we meet children's needs ahead of time?



# Introducing...

The Minding Meltdowns Project

*Coming to SC in April 2026*

Module:

“Managing your  
Child’s Challenging  
Behaviors”

“MCCB”

# Teaching Social Communication

SECOND EDITION

to Children with Autism  
& Other Developmental  
Delays

The  
Project ImPACT  
**Manual for  
Parents**

Brooke Ingersoll and Anna Dvortcsak

# MCCB has 5 sessions:



In each session:

- Therapist teaches a skill
- Therapist and caregiver problem solve
- Therapist coaches the caregiver
- Caregiver practices at home
- Caregiver practices at home with their child

# Interested in the Minding Meltdowns Project?

Learn more:



## WE'RE RECRUITING SC EARLY INTERVENTIONISTS

For a research study on intervention training at the University of South Carolina

Please join us if you are a BabyNet-contracted early interventionist who has children in their caseload who are:

- between 1-to-3 years old
- autistic or have social communication delays



Help us learn if this parent training program effectively reduces family stress and child meltdowns compared to early intervention as usual.

### Participation:

- Take **30-60 minutes** of virtual surveys
- Be randomly assigned to training now or at the end of the study in an **intervention that supports emotional regulation** for infants and toddlers with social communication delays
- You may use the intervention you learned for **5-8 weeks** with a child on your caseload
- Complete a **phone call interview** about your experience in the study
- Receive **\$25 per hour** of participation

### Interested in participating?

Scan the QR code to complete the screener and learn more



COLAB@mailbox.sc.edu

(803)-386-1150



UNIVERSITY OF  
**South Carolina**



Are you a clinician or therapist addressing mental health challenges?

(e.g., counselor, social worker, marriage and family therapist, psychologist)

## NEURODIVERSITY IN THE THERAPY ROOM: WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

The purpose of this study is to better understand mental health clinicians' perspective on neurodiversity in their practice.

### We are seeking individuals who:

- provide mental health services
- see clients under 25 years old

### What does participating in the study look like?

- ✓ **Complete** an internet survey about how you understand neurodiverse clients
- ✓ **Provide feedback** about aspects of training that are most helpful to you when engaging in continuing education.

Participants are eligible to be entered into a drawing to receive a **\$25 gift card** or receive **continuing education resources**

**Participate Here!**

Link: <https://redcap.research.sc.edu/surveys/?s=XX8NRTPCM4NADF49>

Email: [mrenaud@email.sc.edu](mailto:mrenaud@email.sc.edu) OR text/call (803) 567-2721

A research study at the University of South Carolina



Please help us learn more!



# All COLAB studies:

<https://www.uofsc-colab.com/>



COMMUNITY-ORIENTED LAB FOR  
AUTISM & BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS

## COLAB Participant Interest Form



# Take-Aways

The most important steps to handling meltdowns and tantrums, especially for toddlers who may have autism, are:

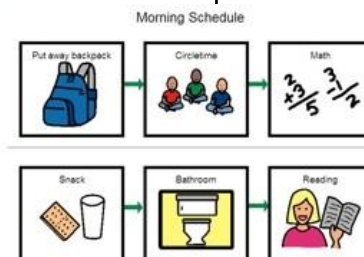
Figure out the child's "why":

- What is the child communicating with their behavior?



Try these strategies:

- Try to meet the child's "why"
- Increase predictability
- Plan ahead for likely tantrum times



And also:

- Increase positive attention outside tantrums through play.
  - Following their lead
  - Imitating them
  - Getting on their eye level



# Thank you! Questions?



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Community-Oriented Lab for Autism  
Behavioral Interventions (COLAB)

[www.uofsc-colab.com](http://www.uofsc-colab.com)



# Session Survey



Carolina B 9:30-10:30