Calm Beneath the Surface

a parent guide to meltdowns, big emotions, and the GAS pedal

Not a bad kid. A stuck nervous system.

“She melts down over socks.” “He’s fine at school, then falls apart the minute he gets in the car.” “Every transition is a battle.” If that is your house right now, you are not failing as a parent, and your child is not choosing chaos.

Big reactions to small things are often a sign of a nervous system that is running hot. This guide explains what is happening underneath, and gives you simple ways to help your child find calm.

01

Calm is a nervous system skill

Your child’s nervous system has a gas pedal and a brake. The gas gets them going. The brake lets them settle, recover from frustration, and come back to calm.

GAS	BRAKE
Fight-or-flight.	Rest-and-digest.
Reactive, wired, on edge.	Calm, flexible, able to recover.

When a child’s foot is stuck on the **GAS**, small things feel like big threats. A wrong-colored cup or a change in plans can tip them over. Getting back to calm takes the **BRAKE**, and some kids simply cannot reach it on their own yet. That is a regulation problem, and regulation can change.

02

What a foot on the gas can look like

Meltdowns	Big reactions to small things. Hard to calm once upset. Meltdowns that last far longer than the trigger.
After-school crash	Holds it together all day, then falls apart at home where it is safe to let go.
Transitions	Leaving the park, turning off a screen, or a change in plans turns into a battle.
Anxiety & clinginess	Worried, clingy, or quick to panic. Hard time separating at drop-off.
Sleep & gut	Wired at bedtime, restless sleep, tummy aches, or constipation. These live on the BRAKE too.

Every item here can have other causes, and some need support of their own. Please keep your pediatrician and your child's therapist in the loop. What we add is one more question: **how is this child's nervous system regulating?**

03

How a foot gets stuck

We group the stressors that load a young nervous system into what we call the Three T's:

Traumas
PHYSICAL

A hard birth, falls, sports, long hours sitting.

Thoughts
EMOTIONAL

School pressure, family stress, big changes, worry.

Toxins
CHEMICAL

Diet, environmental exposures, repeated rounds of medication.

Often it is several stacked up early: a stressful pregnancy, a hard birth, colic, reflux, ear infections. We call that the **Perfect Storm**. None of this is anyone's fault. Stress adds up, and a young system can get tuned to stay on alert.

04

Seven ways to help your child find calm

These are not a treatment. They lower the load on a system that is already working hard, and help the brake engage.

1. **Stay calm first**
   Your calm voice and slow breathing help their nervous system borrow yours. Fewer words, lower volume.
2. **Name it, then wait**
   “You’re really frustrated.” Then pause. Teaching and consequences can wait until they are calm.
3. **Warn before transitions**
   A five-minute and one-minute heads-up, or a visual timer, makes changes feel safer.
4. **Give a calm landing**
   After school, offer a snack and 20 quiet minutes before questions or chores.
5. **Use heavy work**
   Carrying, pushing, climbing, or a tight hug can settle a busy body fast.
6. **Keep a predictable rhythm**
   Same order for mornings and bedtime. Predictability tells the nervous system it can stand down.
7. **Protect sleep**
   Consistent bedtime, dim lights, and screens away at least an hour before bed.

05

What we actually do

We don’t diagnose or treat behavioral or mental health conditions.

We measure how your child’s nervous system is regulating. Then we use gentle, specific adjustments to help it shift out of GAS and into BRAKE.

How we measure. An INSiGHT scan is painless and quick. It looks at nervous system patterns along the spine (neurothermal), muscle tension (sEMG), and how flexibly the body shifts between GAS and BRAKE (HRV).

Alongside your child’s team. We work with your pediatrician, therapist, counselor, and OT, not instead of them.

06

Is your child’s foot stuck on the gas?

Does your child…

- ○ Have big reactions to small things
- ○ Melt down after school or at the end of the day
- ○ Struggle with transitions or changes in plans
- ○ Seem anxious, clingy, or quick to panic
- ○ Take a long time to calm down once upset
- ○ Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- ○ Have tummy aches, constipation, or picky eating
- ○ Have a history of a hard birth, colic, reflux, or lots of ear infections

If you checked more than a few, a scan can show you what is happening underneath.

> *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27*

Your child isn’t bad. Let’s find out what’s underneath.

The next step is a New Patient Experience: about an hour with one of our doctors, a full neurological exam, and INSiGHT scans. Kids are always welcome.

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This guide is for education only. It is not medical advice and does not diagnose, treat, or cure any condition. Chiropractic care at our practice focuses on nervous system function. If your child is in crisis or may be a danger to themselves or others, call 988 or 911. Please talk with your child’s pediatrician or therapist about any symptom, diagnosis, or medication.