

Three Questions for Assessing the Situation

Sometimes the hardest part about helping a child who is upset is figuring out what is wrong. Many children are not able to tell you, so being able to assess the situation is important. While there are many reasons a child may be upset, a good place to start is by looking at three common issues.

1. Could the child be overwhelmed by his environment?

- A student whose sensory system is overwhelmed may act out, pace around, shut down, or cover their ears. If you suspect this is an issue take the child to a calmer environment, give them a comfort item, noise cancelling headphones, or a fidget.

2. Could the child be confused on what to expect?

- Check for understanding by going over directions again. Be sure to break each step into small chunks and use visual aids if available.
- Be sure to warn before switching activities. Try the Countdown to Five method. Say, "We will switch when we get to five. Now we are at a one." Show the number one with your finger. Keep repeating until you get to five. Then say, "Now, we are at a five. Time to switch. Great job."

3. Could the child need positive choices?

- Instead of telling a child what not to do, offer positive prompting by telling them what the correct behavior looks like instead. For example, instead of saying, "Don't run in the hall." Say, "Walking looks like quiet feet." This will make the preferred behavior clear.
- Offer an anxious child two acceptable choices on what he would like to do next. This can help him feel more in control and reduce anxiety.!