

## Extinction Burst Worksheet

When you have an undesired behavior that you are trying to extinguish, many times your child will “burst” that behavior (they will try to be bigger and louder) in order to get what they desire. For example, if you are trying to extinguish the behavior of crying to get ice cream after school, you will likely not choose to give your child ice cream during this time because that will reinforce the behavior of crying to get ice cream. You not giving the ice cream may cause the behavior to get worse for a period of time. The most important thing to remember is that it is JUST a period of time and not forever. Consistency will be key! If you are not consistent and give them the ice cream when the behavior starts getting bigger and louder, this only shows them that if they get bigger and louder they can get what they want. If you consistently do not give your child the ice cream during their crying behavior, they will learn that crying does not result in them getting ice cream.

The number one question is: What do I want to reinforce? Do you want to reinforce your child being able to avoid a non preferred activity by allowing them to avoid it after they scream or do you want to reinforce them accepting ‘no’ as an answer? Do you want to reinforce your child for screaming when they cannot watch TV or for using a coping skill when they are upset that they don’t get to watch TV?

Tips: It’s better to SAY LESS during an extinction burst. The more you say, the more attention you are giving them and the more riled up they may get. Pleading with them to stop or calm down is not typically helpful and only reinforces that they get attention for the behavior they are having. Some key phrases to keep in your back pocket might be, “I can see you are upset, my hope is that you can use a skill to calm down. I will wait for you to do so” or “Holding your stuffy (stuffed animal’s name) has made you feel better in the past, it’s on the table when you are ready” or “I’m sorry this is upsetting you. If you need to ask me for a hug (or a drink of water or some other coping skill that helps calm them) you can ask me when you are ready.”

Extinction Bursts can be difficult and overwhelming for adults to deal with. Here are some questions to ask yourself when you are feeling overwhelmed:

1. Do I need to use a coping skill right now to calm myself? (use it in front of them, this is good modeling)
2. Do I need to ask another adult for support, or to tap in so I can take a break?
3. Am I overstimulated by the noise of this outburst right now? If so, are there tools that I can use to decrease the sensory overload I am experiencing?
4. Do I need to create a visual for myself to help remember what my key phrases are going to be and to remember what I am trying to reinforce?

