

00:00.41

Sasha Long

Hello. I am so excited to have Dr. Nicole Tibbetts with us to talk about one of our mutual favorite topics of conversation, executive functions. Dr. Tibbetts, thanks so much for joining us.

00:11.43

Nicole Tibbits

Thank you for having me. I am also super excited. This is such a great topic and it just shows up everywhere. So it's super important.

00:19.53

Sasha Long

I agree. And I do feel like I've talked about this a ton on the podcast, but I couldn't take pass up the opportunity to chat with you about this too. But for anyone that this is new to, that a teacher, or a parent that's like, I've kind of heard of this, but like, really, what is it?

00:26.70

Nicole Tibbits

Totally.

00:33.10

Sasha Long

How would you explain executive functions in plain language?

00:37.15

Nicole Tibbits

Such a great question for me. I consider it the brain's like management system. So if we're... kind of comparing it to a corporate world. It's the set of skills, and for this, it's mental, that kind of let you turn.

00:50.36

Nicole Tibbits

I know what to do into, okay, I'm actually doing it. I'm putting it into action. So it's kind of like an internal project manager. It plans the steps, holds the goal in mind, kind of filters out distractions and adjusts if something changes. But it also really impacts emotional regulation, which is important.

01:10.60

Sasha Long

I mean, it's like that definition you see right away while you're like, this impacts so many things because.

01:15.26

Nicole Tibbits

Mm-hmm.

01:15.59

Sasha Long

I mean, it's like to get anything done, we need this.

01:19.26

Nicole Tibbits

Totally exactly. Yep.

01:21.39

Sasha Long

So thinking about a typical classroom, obviously, you know there's a lot of executive functions going on at any given point. Where do you see executive functions in spots that maybe teachers might not think about initially?

01:33.73

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah. To me, I think in some ways it's everywhere. it's just any spot that it could be it's It's there. So you know if we think of a student who can't seem to start their independent work, they're just kind of sitting.

01:48.39

Nicole Tibbits

That's. often the issue is actually with initiation and not laziness or if they're losing track in the middle of multi-step directions. That's an issue with working memory. um Difficulties with cognitive flexibility, so our ability to kind of switch or problem solve in a creative way. it's often seen through the meltdown when a schedule changes unexpectedly and we don't know how to fix that or we don't know how to regulate through it.

02:13.88

Nicole Tibbits

Even the kiddo who might. blurt or interrupt or grab without asking, that's just a difficulty with inhibiting their responses. so It's really...

02:24.27

Nicole Tibbits

Everywhere and kind of any moment that you may feel some frustration, there's probably something happening with their executive functioning.

02:31.94

Sasha Long

Yeah, that's a great way to think about it when we see that like frustration. It's probably something underneath there

02:35.58

Nicole Tibbits

This is really good. Yep, absolutely

02:39.15

Sasha Long

And when we're thinking about those executive function demands, things like starting a task or transitioning between centers or sustaining a work task like you just mentioned. For some of our unique learners that have, you know, different learning styles, why might those demands feel different compared to a neurotypical student? Not saying that neurotypical students don't struggle with this too.

02:59.94

Nicole Tibbits

Totally. and And you're right. Executive functions are impacted in every single person. We all have them. But for our neurodivergent friends. Our executive functions are just built different and they're on a different timeline. So if we're looking at kind of classrooms and obviously we know curriculum grows every year, but so do the executive function demands.

03:22.45

Nicole Tibbits

Now, a neurotypical kid. Their executive function often grows at the same rate as what the expectations are in the classroom. For a neurodivergent kid, that's not always the case. Their executive functions

03:35.90

Nicole Tibbits

not only grow kind of on their own timeline, but they also, each executive function grows on its own timeline. So they might be great at cognitive flexibility, but then in other ways, their working memory has a lot of trouble or they have trouble with the planning and the organization that's required for the classroom.

03:54.20

Nicole Tibbits

And so when we talk about neurodivergent students, that's not just autism, but that's ADHD, learning disorders, sometimes even anxiety, and OCD falls under this category as well. So in some ways, that's that's a big percentage of the kids in the classroom.

04:09.75

Nicole Tibbits

um And their frontal lobe, which is where the executive functions are housed. it just develops differently and so a really large gap can come between their classroom abilities. and their actual ability to do it. So they're academic versus just.

04:25.05

Nicole Tibbits

jumping in and doing it the same as their neurotypical peers. then of course that connects to their emotional regulation, not only because it's kind of hitting our self-esteem when we see... All of my friends are doing this. and I'm struggling. Why is that? And that why builds in the frustration. But now we're kind of

04:43.56

Nicole Tibbits

dysregulated with our emotions. And I'm sure we'll talk about it more, but when our emotions are dysregulated, our executive functions aren't firing as well as they could either. So it's this cycle that kind of continues to happen within the classroom.

04:57.29

Sasha Long

For sure. And I think. What I see and I'm sure you see as well is when that cycle is happening. Every like outside people, staff, teachers often read that as like.

05:08.19

Sasha Long

Noncompliance, negative behaviors.

05:09.50

Nicole Tibbits

Mhm.

05:10.95

Sasha Long

When really there's so much going on beneath the surface.

05:14.63

Nicole Tibbits

Yes. Definitely.

05:16.11

Sasha Long

So.

05:16.28

Nicole Tibbits

i see I see that a lot as well.

05:19.20

Sasha Long

For teachers in a classroom, how do we get to... what that core issue is instead of just being, I mean, noncompliance is like a trigger word for me, but like, I mean, I see it on so many behavior plans and IEPs

and I mean.

05:28.96

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

05:32.94

Sasha Long

I think I could overgeneralize that more often than than not, it's likely an executive function challenge beneath that quote unquote noncompliance.

05:41.15

Nicole Tibbits

Yes, absolutely. I think. Something I remind myself, I remind my clients, I remind teachers, I work with parents is We.

05:51.72

Nicole Tibbits

are doing the best we can with the tools and the resources we have. If that is our baseline and that is what we try to remind ourselves for every kiddo that we see, I think that really helps.

06:02.90

Nicole Tibbits

And so with that. Not to say that some kiddos aren't defiant at times. And for me, that's a whole other topic because there's a lot of other factors that could be playing.

06:10.15

Sasha Long

Yeah.

06:12.50

Nicole Tibbits

with defiance. But. Innately, kids want to do well and they really want to succeed. So. In the classroom, I think. This is not, you know, a limited list by any means. Lots of other questions can be asked. But here are some of the questions that I might ask as a teacher. And you can just ask yourself.

06:31.79

Nicole Tibbits

Has the student done it successfully before? If yes, then capability isn't the issue. We have to look at, okay, what's different this time that's impacting their success?

06:42.81

Nicole Tibbits

Are they tired? Are they hungry? Is the classroom too noisy? Are there

distractions? All of these things impact their executive functions, which then, like we said, impact emotional regulation.

06:55.47

Nicole Tibbits

And then the cycle happens again. Now our ability to do tasks and follow instructions is also impacted. We can also ask, you know Is there a pattern to when it happens?

07:06.29

Nicole Tibbits

Is there certain events that trigger this like transitions, multi-step tasks, unstructured time? sensory load. Executive function breakdowns often cluster around specific demands depending on the specific child.

07:20.91

Nicole Tibbits

And then the last question I like to ask is... What's the student's mood? How are they feeling? Genuine defiance often has a kind of testing the boundary quality. Executive function overwhelm often looks more like a freeze, avoidance, deflection, or even kind of using humor as a way of escaping.

07:40.40

Nicole Tibbits

But I also do like to point out for those with ADHD, boundary testing is also a way of communicating. I'm looking for more dopamine and this is really working for me. So they do overlap in a lot of ways. And I think that's kind of to your point of why.

07:54.17

Nicole Tibbits

Noncompliance or defiance. is a bit of a trigger word because there's just so many factors. But I also want to validate. I'm from a family of teachers and I think teachers do amazing work and it is really hard to know and see the difference while you're in the middle of a classroom full of kids.

08:12.63

Nicole Tibbits

So that's why I go back to my question or my thought of. We do the best with the resources that we have, and we just have to see which resources are we using right now and which ones can we help support further.

08:25.37

Sasha Long

Yes, I love that. I like those those three questions to ask. I have two follow-up things on this. So the first one you were saying is...

08:31.31
Nicole Tibbits
mm-hmm

08:32.83
Sasha Long
is something like sometimes I struggle with when looking at data or when talking with teachers is the inconsistencies. Well, Sasha, last week they went to lunch no problem every day.

08:38.80
Nicole Tibbits
Mm-hmm.

08:41.76
Sasha Long
And then this week is a total disaster. Today was. a huge challenge. I know he can do it. And then I think we get stuck in that like mindset of like. well is it you know all these other kind of non-productive labels like lazy doesn't want to defiant

08:55.24
Nicole Tibbits
Mm hmm.

08:57.52
Sasha Long
But I think that's a great point that you're saying. like Are you tired? Did you not sleep well last night?

09:00.89
Nicole Tibbits
Mm hmm.

09:02.00
Sasha Long
And that cycle of emotional regulation.

09:04.49
Nicole Tibbits
Yep. Yeah, absolutely. because It goes so beyond the classroom. And that's where I want to validate for teachers that so much of this. that's impacting their executive function and their ability to do these tasks consistently is outside of the classroom sometimes. And we don't have control over that. But if we can find what do we have control over in the classroom, how can we do our best to help set them up for success, I think we'll start to see more of those behaviors occurring more consistently.

09:34.16

Sasha Long

Yeah, I think that's a really good point. I mean, that's kind of it's frustrating because you're like, I'm doing all the right things in my class, but we can only control so much.

09:37.73

Nicole Tibbits

mm-hmm

09:41.14

Nicole Tibbits

Yep. Exactly.

09:42.88

Sasha Long

and And then kind of not to like segue too much into defiance, but I also love this topic.

09:47.47

Nicole Tibbits

listen

09:47.78

Sasha Long

I mean, are there times like because there are for me where I'm like. kind of like excited to see a little defiance like what what amount of like healthy defiance and like developmentally appropriate defiance can we allow i think especially in special ed classrooms where teachers get a little bit removed from like age level norms if you know what i mean

10:00.81

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

10:04.66

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah. Mm hmm. think it it depends on who you are and how much you can handle. but Ultimately, I think. Again, in special ed classrooms, it is really important that we can help build that autonomy and the ability. to sometimes say no and have that reinforced.

10:23.02

Nicole Tibbits

So for me, I like to. Consider what is my ultimate boundary? Like for a really, really simple example, if I say. Please put away your notebook. It's time to change tasks.

10:35.100

Nicole Tibbits

And that notebook gets put away, but we're slamming and crashing and doing it with a lot of force or in a kind of defiant way. My boundary was that it got put away. great, I'm moving on.

10:45.58

Sasha Long

Yeah.

10:46.80

Nicole Tibbits

And so I think that's a way that.

10:47.39

Sasha Long

Yeah.

10:50.58

Nicole Tibbits

Most simple is figuring out what's your boundaries and how do you want to reinforce that in general. And then as maybe we're seeing things happen more consistently, we can increase our boundaries to something stronger.

11:02.54

Nicole Tibbits

or more specific and build some of those skills. but also it I think sometimes if kids can give us a good reason. And maybe that helps build their insight to their body that they say,

11:13.83

Nicole Tibbits

I'm really hungry right now I do not feel like doing math. hey, I hear you. Thank you for letting me know you're so hungry. Maybe we can get you a snack and then we can do math. So again, we're ultimately, we'd love for them to do math, but they're also using their words and explaining to us what they need.

11:31.05

Nicole Tibbits

Can we meet them partially there? Because I always look at what skills are we building for adulthood? If I'm an adult. sure, maybe sometimes I have to go into a meeting hungry, but nine times out of 10, I can just say, hey, I'm going to eat a quick snack before we get started. I'm feeling hungry. And we have control over that. So can we build some of that autonomy and decision-making within the classroom or even at home as well? And what kind of changes and results do we see when we do that?

11:59.67

Sasha Long

Oh, I love the boundary idea. I feel like I felt like guilty as a parent. I'm like, I need to use that as a parent more because. Yeah, like. I think sometimes in a classroom or in a parenting setting. It's like, we're like picking at like, you need to do this and this and this.

12:11.81

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

12:12.05

Sasha Long

And it's a demand overload then. But like, yeah, they put the notebook away. Like it's okay.

12:16.20

Nicole Tibbits

Right. Sometimes we got to pick our battles. And I think, like you said, as a parent, sometimes we almost feel guilty for picking our battles. But then also on the flip side, we feel guilty for. doing too many battles.

12:27.27

Sasha Long

Yeah.

12:28.35

Nicole Tibbits

And that's okay. like I want to validate that. as well because it is really hard. And how do we know that balance? And sometimes the balance isn't right and that's okay. We try again the next day.

12:39.38

Sasha Long

Yeah. absolutely well kind of shifting gears back to the class my own like wonderings as parents but um Thinking about, I mean, there's obviously limitless strategies we can use to support students struggling with executive functions in the classroom. Do you have any like favorites, go-tos, or just low-lift things to share with teachers?

12:59.92

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah. I think. For me, breaking tasks down for the students rather than having to them relying on working memory is super helpful. It's just one.

13:11.18

Nicole Tibbits

thing that our brains as adults do pretty easily. And I think that's

why sometimes we don't even realize we're doing it, but it's something that really loads on kids. because it's effortful.

13:21.99

Nicole Tibbits

So it can look a few different ways.

13:22.22

Sasha Long

Hmm.

13:24.61

Nicole Tibbits

But maybe a teacher can just verbally state the task one step at a time. Okay. get your notebook out and then look at the board and then we pause and then we move on to the next task. That requires no prep and just kind of requires a little bit of extra patience or going a little slower, but they can also make a visual chart that kind of breaks down the tasks.

13:44.48

Nicole Tibbits

So it could be done electronically. I know so many teachers are amazing at figuring out really creative, beautiful ways to electronically make charts and have them be automated. um So maybe it's presented through the projector on the smart board if they have one.

13:59.67

Nicole Tibbits

And you can just point to the next step. Or again, lots of things get automated. Maybe we can have the system kind of highlight the next task. So it's something that's easier for our adult brains, but for kids. just going one step at a time.

14:14.42

Nicole Tibbits

takes off that effort of working memory. And now we can use some of that effort on some of our other executive function or academic skills instead.

14:23.42

Sasha Long

Oh, I love that because there's. countless times in a day where It's such a multi-step. task but you don't even realize it like You know, taking a bathroom break.

14:31.14

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

14:32.52

Sasha Long

there's I mean, there's even a lot of different pieces of that, like walking down the hall and finding the bathroom.

14:36.07

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

14:38.22

Nicole Tibbits

Yep. And then we have to consider all the sensory experiences that we're having at the same time that we're trying to block out those distractions or keep our emotions regulated while all that's happening too. So it gets really complex really fast. And that's why you'll notice.

14:54.10

Nicole Tibbits

At the end of the day, some of these kids are so burnt out. And that's where we see that kind of meltdown that can happen because they're finally maybe in a safe space where they don't have to use as much executive functioning.

14:56.95

Sasha Long

Yeah.

15:05.13

Nicole Tibbits

Or you'll have the parents who are like. I don't see any use of executive function at home, but teachers are like, no, they're doing great at school.

15:13.27

Sasha Long

Hmm.

15:13.09

Nicole Tibbits

We only have so much capacity for it. And so sometimes our brain has to just pick. when and where we use it.

15:19.93

Sasha Long

Yeah. I mean, I feel like so many parents say things like that too.

15:22.62

Nicole Tibbits

and ho

15:22.93

Sasha Long

like or Or they just get home and they just like totally melt. And you're like, oh God, you were like holding this in all day.

15:26.17

Nicole Tibbits

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yes exactly.

15:29.71

Sasha Long

And... um Talk to me a little bit about prompt fading when teaching like a so and a strategy, like you have a new visual schedule, like you said, on the smart board.

15:38.19

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

15:38.95

Sasha Long

What? do How do you work with teachers and and teams and parents on? kind of removing yourself from that so they're not only reliant on the adult.

15:47.74

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm. that's a great question. And I think it's very environment specific because I feel for the teachers when you've got a class of. 12 to 30, depending on what you teach.

16:00.60

Nicole Tibbits

Every student works at a different timeline. And so I think that's where it's really tough to figure out how do I. do something that works for the whole class but also some kids are at a higher level than other kids. And, you know, we hope that that's where IEPs and some individualized support. will be helpful.

16:18.91

Nicole Tibbits

But in general. I go by developmental level more than anything. And so as for parents, really seeing what developmental level is my child at. regardless of their chronological age. That doesn't matter to me.

16:32.99

Nicole Tibbits

I'm going to start at that level. And then I'm slowly going to back

off. So maybe from. If we're doing... of visual and verbal prompting. I come in, we've got our visual schedule. I point to it and I say it. And now I stand there waiting. That might change to coming in. Okay, I'm coming in. I point to it. I say it but instead of waiting I'm going to go walk away and they can do the task independently and I'll come back when it should be about time for the next one to check in on them.

17:01.10

Nicole Tibbits

Or it could be different where instead of. pointing and verbally saying it. Now we're just pointing. And then we move from just pointing to just having the visual chart in the room. So teachers can do this as well. But again, it really depends on kind of where their class is at and what students can handle.

17:18.59

Nicole Tibbits

That's where I think ah like technology can help a lot too, because it can go from a teacher repeating the instructions to then just having the resource on the board. And she maybe prompts, look at the board or points to the board instead. And then potentially. the technology can just highlight it for them.

17:38.15

Nicole Tibbits

So she's completely out of it. And I think that's where we kind of see the fading. But the caveat is sometimes we have to fade ourselves back in. And we have to add a little bit more because we try to fade out.

17:46.53

Sasha Long

Yeah.

17:49.96

Nicole Tibbits

And again, maybe it's a day that there's a field trip or there's something where. emotions are high and executive functions are not working as well, we might need to add some extra support on those days and then try to fade back out on a different day. So there's a lot of waxing and waning and a lot of flexibility on the adult part.

18:09.11

Sasha Long

That's a good point because I think we do sometimes think of prompt fading as like, okay, well now I'm at this kind of you know level of prompting or scenario.

18:15.61

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

18:16.33

Sasha Long

but like And we go back to.

18:18.77

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah, progress is not linear in all senses of the word.

18:23.48

Sasha Long

Yeah. And I love the technology suggestions because yeah, there's so many cool like apps and, you know, plugins on in Google extensions that can do so many things.

18:29.57

Nicole Tibbits

Mhm.

18:34.10

Sasha Long

And even for our older kids, I mean, it looks so age appropriate too.

18:36.50

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah.

18:37.44

Sasha Long

I mean, we all, I use. executive function technology tools like all the time so

18:41.41

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah.

18:42.35

Sasha Long

it's it's cool it's a cool era to be in with all of these different strategies

18:42.36

Nicole Tibbits

Yep.

18:47.46

Sasha Long

accessible.

18:47.75

Nicole Tibbits

Absolutely. Definitely.

18:50.39

Sasha Long

So I loved, you know, how you've been explaining emotional regulation throughout this kind of whole conversation, like, you know, when emotions are higher than executive functions go down and it's like kind of cycle because that totally makes sense to me.

19:00.70

Nicole Tibbits

mm-hmm

19:02.32

Sasha Long

How what strategies are in general is a broad question, but supports do you suggest for?

19:06.81

Nicole Tibbits

Hmm.

19:09.55

Sasha Long

addressing the emotional regulation piece.

19:12.15

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah. So starting with, like you said, it's a cycle. They go hand in hand. And so I like to just first introduce a common analogy or metaphor. And I'm sure lots of people have heard it at this point, but it's the flipping your lid and Dan Siegel created it.

19:28.18

Nicole Tibbits

So if you make a number four with your hand and then fold your fingers over your thumb. Your thumb that's tucked under your fingers is your emotional brain or your amygdala.

19:38.87

Nicole Tibbits

And the four fingers that are covering it is your thinking brain or your prefrontal cortex, which that's where our executive functions are. So when we're having trouble using our executive functions or our prefrontal cortex as a whole, our lid flips. So those four fingers lift up.

19:54.18

Nicole Tibbits

And now our emotional brain is in charge. So when our emotional brain is in charge, we're not always making the best decisions. We're not always saying the things that we want to be able to say. And definitely we're not getting our schoolwork done because emotional brain does not care about our academics and it has no idea how to do them.

20:12.38

Nicole Tibbits

So first, we we have to calm down and help our bodies and our brains calm. so that we can get our thinking brain or that prefrontal cortex back in charge.

20:22.58

Nicole Tibbits

So in the classroom, if we're trying to figure out, you know You're having a meltdown and I need to get you back to math. The first step. is how can we calm our brain and body? And it is going to look different for every kid, but my favorite regulation tactics are sensory.

20:38.99

Nicole Tibbits

And. I think that's where I typically start. And so if we know our kids well enough, we might know what that looks like specifically for them. If not, I think the general talk tactics of.

20:50.70

Nicole Tibbits

Lower lights. Less noise. and something. tactile. So maybe it's petting a stuffed animal. Maybe it's a weighted stuffed animal or blanket. Maybe it's a squishy of some sort. Some kids like it to be kind of hard on their hands to squish. Some people like it a little bit more slimy or slippery.

21:10.04

Nicole Tibbits

But if we can have some of that, and I love to just call it like a sensory toolkit. And teachers can make it completely appropriate and fit for their classroom because we know that there's certain sensory toys that are more fun than they are productive. And it might look different at home versus school. But if we can start there and regulate our senses, that immediately hits our nervous system and our body's already going back to calm.

21:33.96

Nicole Tibbits

Once our body and our brain are calm, now our prefrontal cortex or our thinking brain is back in charge and we can start getting back to

doing the academics or making the best decisions that are coming from our true selves and not our emotional side.

21:48.64

Sasha Long

Oh my gosh, I love that. hole I was like over here nodding. You couldn't see me. but um Yeah, i and I... I feel for kids because I do see. such a disconnect sometimes when, you know, emotions are running the show and it's like right away and I'm like.

22:01.76

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm.

22:03.69

Sasha Long

boundaries and rules and i'm like we're not ready for it yet and

22:05.18

Nicole Tibbits

mm-hmm Yeah.

22:07.18

Sasha Long

It snowballs.

22:08.56

Nicole Tibbits

Yep, exactly. We're not listening with our thinking and rational brain when our emotional brain is in charge. And a lot of times, you know, if we look at lots of different therapeutic modalities.

22:21.85

Nicole Tibbits

Utilize the amygdala and that is where we're having this emotional brain come from and we really emphasize The amygdala does not listen to words, whether it's anxiety and we're trying to say, you're okay, it's okay, don't worry. Our amygdala does not hear that word at all. We've got to do it through behaviors and actions. So the anxiety side is we've got to expose ourselves to things that make us a little bit scared and nervous. But even from a nervous system regulation side,

22:49.15

Nicole Tibbits

We need to get. our body regulated with actions, not just words. And so definitely not extra boundaries and hey, calm down.

23:00.07

Nicole Tibbits

do this. It's so hard for our brain to listen. And again, what we

talked about earlier, it's not noncompliance. It's not defiance. It is truly that part of our brain is turned off right now. We've got to do some actions that help us get back to that regulated state so that our brain actually can listen to what we're saying and what we're asking for.

23:20.93

Sasha Long

What kind of... I don't know, response would you have to a teacher or a parent that for this suggestion would be like, well, like then I'm letting him.

23:31.28

Sasha Long

Get away with this negative behavior. I'm reinforcing the negative behavior because that's something I mean. As a BCBA, I don't think that, but I hear that sometimes.

23:36.24

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

23:37.90

Sasha Long

I actually heard that recently. Like, well, then you're reinforcing the behavior. I'm like, but we're not. Like, what response would you give to that teacher?

23:46.69

Nicole Tibbits

Great. I'm glad you brought it up. It is tough and I... That's where I, again, I validate the parents and the teacher that I get that. I also came from an incredibly behavioral background and I think there's.

23:59.60

Nicole Tibbits

so much space for that and Those ideas are right. And I don't want to consistently reinforce. purposeful behavior. But I think what we're talking about is behavior that's really not purposeful. Our lid has flipped and that brain is. off And we really have to remind ourselves that.

24:17.83

Nicole Tibbits

But also, if the function of the behavior is I want to get out of math. And so I have this really big meltdown. Well, we have to ask ourselves first. is Is this meltdown a true my lid is flipped? Or is it some of us are really good at showing emotions at different times?

24:36.81

Nicole Tibbits

oftentimes it ends up actually being a true, my lid is flipped. And with that, now the behavior is not purposeful. So we're not actually reinforcing anything because there's not a purpose to it other than trying to communicate, I need help.

24:49.77

Sasha Long

Yeah.

24:50.13

Nicole Tibbits

but also Ultimately, if we need to get math done, if we can get our body and our brain back to calm. The math often still happens. Now, if we're noticing we got back to calm, we you know restated the request of please finish your math page. And we're noticing immediately another big meltdown is coming. That tells us again.

25:12.03

Nicole Tibbits

something with our executive functions is not working or academically, this sheet is maybe too hard for them, but maybe they need the task broken down into steps. Maybe it's really overwhelming to see I have. 10. problems to do. And that feels like way too much in this moment. And now my brain is spiraling. oh My lid flipped again and now my emotional brain is in charge.

25:34.30

Nicole Tibbits

So how can we, once we're back to calm, how can we scaffold and support some of those executive functions? Maybe covering part of the page, maybe sitting and working through the problem together, maybe identifying.

25:47.40

Nicole Tibbits

That's not the format that this child works best in. and i I get that sometimes we don't have that privilege to say this doesn't work best for you. Let's change it. But that goes back to then how can we best support their executive functions in the constraints that we have?

26:04.65

Sasha Long

oh I love that thank you I was like I have to ask this because Someone actually asked me that the other day and I was like, well, i got ah it's like a long answer like you just gave.

26:12.53

Nicole Tibbits

It is.

26:12.76

Sasha Long

But it's ah it's a complex thing, you know, and it's not just one.

26:13.69

Nicole Tibbits

Mm hmm. It's me.

26:16.91

Sasha Long

It depends on obviously the scenario and the child.

26:19.50

Nicole Tibbits

Right. And it takes a lot of practice too. I think sometimes... you know we as professionals are able to just say it. And even then I think I took a solid five minutes trying to explain it.

26:30.30

Sasha Long

and

26:30.87

Nicole Tibbits

But we still say it. And it's a lot harder to put it into practice. And that's where. Adults also need to give themselves some grace that we're asking for a big mindset shift here as well. And that's where, you know, working with for schools, working with an educational coach or someone else at the school or the school counselor or psychologist who can kind of.

26:53.58

Nicole Tibbits

be your like therapist in a way to walk you through or your behavior and emotions coach. We still need the help when we're. completely shifting our mindset and trying to do something different.

27:04.92

Nicole Tibbits

Because even for adults, it's really hard to notice these nuanced small patterns when we're first. practicing it and trying it out, but it does get easier the more and more we kind of slow down and try to ask ourselves.

27:17.78

Nicole Tibbits

what else is happening in this moment

27:20.05

Sasha Long

Yes. I mean, mindset shift is a great phrase because we're. you know going from maybe a different framework to something that is kind of effortful to think about all the nuances and complexities here.

27:27.87

Nicole Tibbits
evening

27:30.83

Nicole Tibbits
Absolutely.

27:32.05

Sasha Long

And that collaboration piece, I mean, sometimes it's hard to get into school, but I think it's so important. You have to like, hey, like, let's talk through this. What are you seeing that I'm not? Because often when you're in it. you don't see those other pieces

27:42.77

Nicole Tibbits

Exactly. And because we as adults also have a thinking brain and an emotional brain. And sometimes when our little friend, is their emotional brain is in charge, our adult brain wants to put our emotional brain in charge too.

27:56.71

Nicole Tibbits

It's overwhelming to have somebody cry a whole bunch. It's overwhelming to try to think of 18 things at one time and work with an entire classroom. And so we're constantly trying to regulate our own nervous system while regulating a small human's nervous system as well.

28:13.13

Sasha Long

I mean, yeah, it makes it even more complex.

28:15.32

Nicole Tibbits
Exactly.

28:17.12

Sasha Long

I love all of this. Thank you so much for sharing all of your expertise and insights. Where can people go to learn more from you?

28:26.25

Nicole Tibbits

Yeah, absolutely. So I am on Instagram and my Instagram handle is Dr. just d r period Nicole And I like to share lots of just little tidbits and nuggets of knowledge because I think it's great to get it out into the world and have the resources be accessible. But if you are in the San Diego area, I do in-person.

28:49.95

Nicole Tibbits

diagnostic evaluations, giftedness, kind of intellectual evaluations, as well as therapy in the North County, San Diego area. So Carl's bad, but I also see.

29:00.99

Nicole Tibbits

parents and children via telehealth all the way through Arizona and California because I'm licensed in both states. So lots of different places to get in touch.

29:10.28

Sasha Long

Awesome. I will link all of that in the show notes. Well, thank you so much for joining us. It was such a great conversation. And please give Dr. Tibbetts a follow on Instagram because that's where I found you originally.

29:22.01

Nicole Tibbits

Thank you so much. This was so much fun and I love talking about this and sharing as much information as we can.

29:29.44

Sasha Long

Thank you.