



The HALTS of Behavior

Has your child ever had a bad day with a lot of meltdowns? Whether your child is falling out, melting down, or having a tantrum, their behavior is just a way of expressing a need. Using HALTS¹, we can figure out what the need is, how it can be met, and teach our child how to recognize it in the future.

H: Hungry. Is your child hungry? This one seems simple, but young children should eat many small meals throughout the day. Healthy snacks can help improve behavior if it's been a while since they had a meal.

✓ *Solution: Be intentional about snacks and consistent mealtimes to help manage hunger meltdowns. Have healthy snacks on hand for hunger needs.*

A: Angry. Anger is often about control or lack thereof. It can also be a result of emotional pain or sadness. Every human has a need for control in life, even children. Children do not get a lot of say in their day, and this can create meltdowns when their needs for choice and control are not met, or if they don't have the language or courage to speak about their sadness.

✓ *Solution: Provide choices and a routine schedule so your child knows what to expect. Take the time to ask your child about activities of interest and be intentional in providing those. Model using "I feel" statements and naming different emotions during times of calm.*

L: Lonely. We all need attachment and attention. If children are not getting attention in a positive way, they will seek it out with negative behavior. Even small amounts of 1:1 quality time with your child supports positive connection.

✓ *Solution: Be intentional about regularly carving out quality time with your child. Make sure it's 1:1 time, with your full attention on them, and let them choose how you spend your time together.*

T: Tired. Children need a lot of sleep and a consistent sleep schedule. When they are sleep deprived, you may see more meltdowns and refusal to cooperate. Here's what pediatricians say is enough sleep.²

Age	Recommended Sleep Hours Per 24-Hour Period
Infants 4-12 months	12-16 hours (including naps)
Toddlers 1-2 years	11-14 hours (including naps)
Preschoolers 3-5 years	10-13 hours (including naps)
Gradeschoolers 6-12 years	9-12 hours
Teens 13-18 years	8-10 hours

S: Stressed. We might think because children don't have responsibilities like jobs and bills that they are not stressed. But the developmental tasks of childhood – learning how to relate to others, pick up a new skill and do well in school – are hard work. Plus, our kids are sensitive to any family stress as well. Our best looks different when under stress.

✓ *Solution: Notice how developmental and family transitions may be impacting your child and talk with them about ways to cope with stress. And don't forget to take care of yourself and manage your own stress too!*

Being proactive and planning can minimize meltdowns. Staying calm and empathizing by understanding "the why" behind the behavior will also help your child manage big feelings and behaviors over time.

¹HALT was first used in addiction recovery to help people remember their basic needs and to prevent relapse by never getting too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired. The same can be used for parenting, but with an additional letter S for "Stressed."

²Guidelines from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.