ADHD CONNECT — EPISODE 35 GUIDE

Calm Through the Storm

Helping children and teens build the internal capacity to steer through big emotions without being overtaken by them

Dr. Tish TAYLOR, Ph.D

Emotional Regulation | **Internal Experience**

WHAT THIS EPISODE COVERS

Emotions can feel like a storm — swirling, intense, impossible to see through. Dr. Tish uses that analogy deliberately: storms pass. And just like a storm, the goal isn't to stop the emotion from happening — it's to steer through it without making things worse. She walks through the anchoring visualization, two breathing techniques, the problem-size framework applied in the moment, and a three-part sequence for what to do once the storm starts to clear: accept, communicate, or solve.

THE STORM ANALOGY — WHY IT WORKS

What the storm represents	What the anchor represents
Emotions that feel overwhelming — too big to think through, too intense to ignore. The storm externalizes the feeling just enough to give the child some distance from it. It's not "I am out of control" — it's "there's a storm happening, and I can steer through it."	Something that stays still while everything swirls — a mountain in a snowstorm, a lighthouse, a solid place to hold on. Dr. Tish asks children to find their own anchor image: what feels stable and calm to them, even in the middle of something intense?

The storm will pass. It will not last forever. The goal is to steer through it — guided by your values — until you reach the other side.

TWO BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Five-finger breathing	Square breathing (box breathing)
Hold up one hand. Use the index finger of the other hand to trace up each finger as you breathe in slowly, and down each finger as you breathe out slowly. Five fingers, five slow breaths. Works well for younger children — the physical tracing gives the body something to focus on. *Key reminder: breathe slowly. The slow pace is what activates the calming response.*	Trace a square in the air. Breathe in as you go across the top. Hold as you go down the side. Breathe out as you go across the bottom. Hold as you go up the side. Four seconds each — breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold. *Works well for older children and teens. The structure of the square gives the mind something to track while the body calms.*

WHEN TO USE WHAT — THE INTENSITY GUIDE

At an 8, 9, or 10	At a 5, 6, or 7	At a 1, 2, or 3
Rational thought is hard to access. Prioritize: anchor image, breathing, sensory support, safe space, calm adult presence. Don't try to problem-solve or reason yet — just steer through.	Some rational thought is available. You can begin to introduce: how big is this problem? Can I accept this? Is there something I need to communicate? Start gentle — don't push too fast.	The storm is clearing. Now is when acceptance, communication, and problem-solving become possible. This is also when you can debrief and build the next-time plan.

THE PROBLEM-SIZE FRAMEWORK — IN THE MOMENT

Once there's enough calm for rational thought, the problem-size question becomes useful: how big is this, really? Dr. Tish is clear — this framework needs to be established before the storm hits, so it can be referenced during and after. Build it on a calm day, then coach it in the moment.

Small problem	Medium problem	Large problem
Doesn't affect my life much. I probably won't think about it much soon. I can solve it or accept it on my own. The key skill: acceptance.	Worth talking about. Needs communication or help solving. Might keep happening if not addressed. The key skill: communicate with the right person.	Genuinely serious. May be an emergency. Definitely needs adult involvement. The key skill: ask for help immediately.

AFTER THE STORM — THREE PATHS FORWARD

Accept it. Can I accept this is what it is? Can I accept I can't have this right now, or that something happened that I didn't like? Acceptance doesn't mean agreeing it was fair. It means putting it down and moving forward. This is the path for most small problems.

Communicate about it. Is there something I need to say to the right person? Not in the storm — after it. When I can say it clearly, respectfully, and in a way that actually gets heard. Communication is the path when something needs to be addressed but doesn't require a full solution.

Solve it. Is this something that keeps happening and needs to actually be fixed? Medium and larger problems often need problem-solving — with adult help if needed. The storm has to pass first before problem-solving can work.

BY AUDIENCE — YOUR NEXT STEP

EDUCATORS	PARENTS	PROFESSIONALS
→ Introduce the storm analogy and anchor image during a calm classroom moment — before you need it → Teach and practice square breathing as a class routine, not just a crisis tool	→ Find your child's anchor image together on a calm day — what stays still in a storm for them? → Practice five-finger breathing before bed or during a quiet moment so it's already familiar when things get hard	→ Use visualization and drawing to help clients find and own their anchor image → Practice both breathing techniques in session so the child has body memory of them before needing them

→ Post the problem-size categories somewhere visible so students can reference them independently	→ Build the problem-size framework explicitly — what's a small, medium, and big problem in your family?	→ Help clients build the full sequence: anchor → breathe → problem-size → accept/communicate/solve

REFLECT

Think of a child who gets overtaken by the storm. What do they currently do when emotions hit an 8 or 9? Is there anything functioning as an anchor for them right now?

Have you established a shared problem-size framework with this child — or is it only introduced in the middle of a hard moment? What would it look like to build it first?

After the storm clears, which path do you usually take — accept, communicate, or solve? Is that the right one for the situations you're thinking of?

WHERE THIS LIVES IN THE CURRICULUM

*This episode connects to two core elements of **ADHD: The Social and Emotional Self***

Emotional Regulation — low frustration tolerance, building the internal capacity to steer through big emotions

Internal Experience — what it feels like to be in the storm from the inside, and the self-knowledge needed to navigate it