

THE PLAY LAB FOUNDATION'S

LEARNING LAB

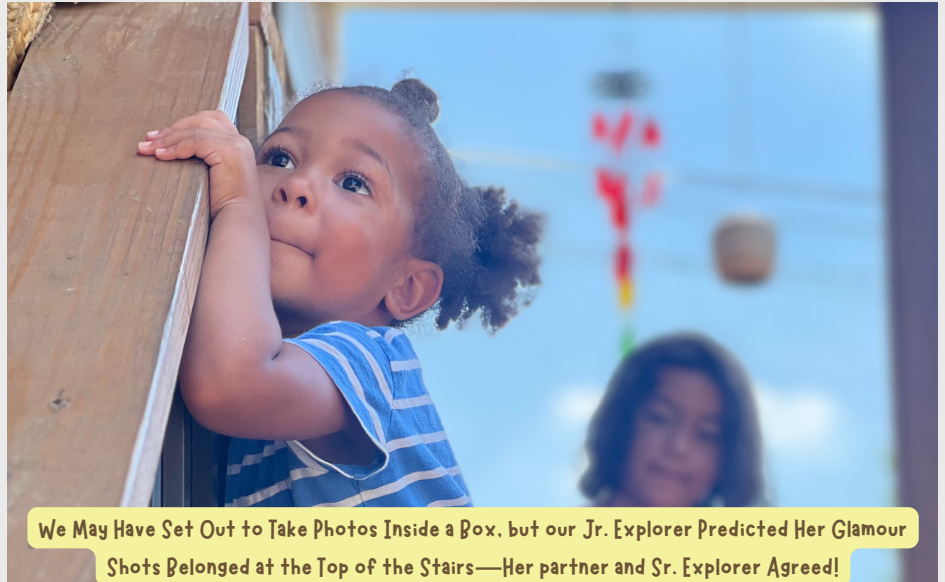
PREDICTION ERROR!

Picture it: It's the end of a busy day. Your child has been waiting patiently for their turn to explore a new item at the Play Lab. Just as they finally sit down—before they can figure out what it does or imagine what it could become—their trusted grown-up walks in. Boom: all their plans seem to vanish. The child you've missed all day dissolves into a puddle of thrashing arms and legs.

Are they that upset by your presence? Of course not. This is a classic case of **prediction error**—the gap between what a child expects and what actually happens.

Every time a child experiences a prediction error, their brain is actively learning, adjusting expectations, and building frustration tolerance.

Dysregulation is often a signal that their **body** and **brain** are working hard to navigate that gap in real time.



We May Have Set Out to Take Photos Inside a Box, but our Jr. Explorer Predicted Her Glamour Shots Belonged at the Top of the Stairs—Her partner and Sr. Explorer Agreed!

THE EXPECTATION GAP:

WHAT YOUR LITTLE PERSON WISHES THEY COULD TELL YOU

Adults experience this gap, too. Our own brains have to **recalibrate** when reality doesn't match what we pictured. By responding with **empathy** instead of frustration, we help children develop **resilience** and **self-regulation**.

Three Ways to Support a Child in These Moments

- **Pause and observe.** Take a breath. Notice what your child seems confused or frustrated about—these are prediction errors in action.
- **Validate first, guide second.** Offer calm, clear, and empathetic support rather than punishment. Let them know you see their struggle and you're there to help.
- **Adjust your expectations.** Their brains are still figuring out how the world works. Meeting them where they are builds trust and safety.

When we respond to where a child truly is in their learning process, we reduce stress, support regulation, and nurture our collective growth.