

Why Do Meltdowns Happen?



For an autistic child, a meltdown is not the same as a tantrum. Meltdowns are often very emotional, continue for a long time and can't be ended by giving a child their own way. A meltdown is one way for a child to communicate that they feel overwhelmed and they can't express this by talking. They may not be able to link sensations in their bodies to the emotion they are feeling. They may be feeling distressed, frustrated, angry and/or anxious but don't recognise the signs. They may have had a build-up of triggers until they have become overwhelmed and a meltdown happens. There could be a range of triggers such as a change to their routine, too much noise or feeling unwell.

Useful Websites

- [NAS \(National Autistic Society\) – Parent to parent service](#)
- [MIND](#)
- [Amaze](#)
- [PDA Society](#)
- [CLASS+ helpline](#)
- [ESCIS Local Offer](#)

Speak to your child's school.

Calming Apps

Useful Calming Apps for Autistic Children and Young People

Magic Fluids Lite

This app is interactive and creates swirling effects in colour, pattern and movement. These patterns could help with relaxation and regulate breathing and emotions. This version is free.

Sensory Plazma and Sensory Electra

This is a multi-touch interactive app that creates bubble effects when the screen is touched. The bubbles are colourful and there are also sound effects. Using the app could support relaxation and emotional regulation. This version is free.

MANAGING A MELTDOWN

A Parents' Guide



Before

- Identify what makes your child feel happy, relaxed and safe. This may also help you spot what can make your child feel unhappy (triggers).
- Talk about feelings, label emotions and connect with your child. Spend some time everyday listening to your child.
- Use rating scales to help your child to put things into perspective e.g. 0-5. Use it yourself to show them how this works.
- Can you spot any warning signs that a meltdown might happen? Have a 'Calming Box', with an app, game or putty etc in a handy place.
- Have an agreed plan. What will the rest of the family do if a meltdown happens?

During

- **STOP – STAY CALM – STAY CLOSE OR GIVE SPACE (you know your child best).**
- **Assess if there are dangers and quietly remove them where necessary.**
- **Reduce noise and visual input.**
- **Don't ask questions or offer solutions, your child will not be able to process anything else right now.**
- **Reassure e.g. "I'm here, it's okay" – Be consistent.**
- **Don't take it personally.**



After

- Keep a diary to help identify triggers and any patterns which may help things to be better next time.
 - When they are calm, safe and happy, reassure your child. Reconnect. Only THEN is it best to talk about it, without blame and when appropriate to do so (you know your child best).
 - Remember don't punish your child for the meltdown - they can't help it.
 - Reach out to other parents through support networks or social media groups. It may help you feel less alone to connect with others that understand.
 - Personalise the calming box to distract and help regulate your child. It could contain bubbles, something soft, something that smells of you, a sensory bottle, colouring, snack or something else you know will help soothe or distract your child.
 - Remember, this is not your child's fault and neither is it yours; be kind to yourself.
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