

Top Tips: Managing Tantrums and Meltdowns.

All children's behaviours have a purpose, a need and a goal. A tantrum happens when a child can't get what they want and will cease as soon as they get it.

Managing Tantrums.

Remain firm but fair. Depending on your desired outcome, use, planned ignoring, "When and then," or removal of privileges. If you give in to stop the tantrum, the child will never forget that if they continue their tantrum, they will eventually wear you down and will get what they want.

A meltdown occurs when the child is so overwhelmed that they lose control, often both physically and emotionally. Meltdowns are often seen in children with high anxiety, sensory processing difficulties or special educational needs such as ASD or ADHD.

Managing Meltdowns. (See Anger Mountain.)

The brain is the busiest organ in the body, consuming 20% of all our calories. After school, their brain has been working hard and they may be "Hangry." To avoid a meltdown offer a snack, like a banana or a biscuit. After school they may be like a pressure cooker, having kept in their emotions and behaviours all day, they need to let off steam. You could try going to the park before going home, walking home instead of driving, letting them go to an activity like an after school club or getting a trampoline.

Some children need some quiet time between school and doing homework to have a mental and emotional break. They can always have a healthy snack at this time.

Exposure therapy can help to lessen meltdowns. It takes a lot of time and effort but it helps the child to become emotionally more resilient and able to cope better.

Social stories can reduce the amount of meltdowns as it help the child prepare for, "Something different."

If you can identify when your child is about to have a meltdown, (Some show signs before it happens), or if you can identify the triggers, divert and distract. Bring their attention to a special interest of theirs, something they like doing.

Once your child is in a meltdown they are on an emotional rollercoaster and they need to get to the top before they can come down the other side. Don't reason with them or try to sooth or restrain them as this creates an emotional tug of war and it will prolong the meltdown.

Regulate your own feelings, take a breath and try to stay calm.

Use planned ignoring, but for safety reasons keep them within line of sight. Only intervene if they are hurting themselves, other people or property. If they are banging their head, use a pillow to stop them hurting themselves. If they are lashing out, remove others from the vicinity.

It helps to tell them that you are there if they need you and that everything will be okay. If they can hear you it will provide a sense of security.

Make sure they stay safe. Encourage them to take long, slow deep breaths with you to calm down. Use a slow, calm voice to help defuse the meltdown.

Top Tips: Managing Tantrums and Meltdowns.

After the meltdown some children are remorseful and may want a cuddle. Give them cuddles and reassurance. This is not the time for reprimands or consequences.

Some children will not remember events during the meltdown or understand why it happened. If they want cuddles give them, but some children want quiet time or to go to sleep.

You can discuss the event later, when everything is calm, preferably on another day. Name their emotion, "I know you were angry/upset/scared because....". This helps them to name their feelings at a later date and helps you support their needs more effectively. If they can't identify their emotions through words, try using emojis. Try to unpick what caused the meltdown to help you plan for the future.