

The Meltdown Survival Guide

What to do in the moment, and after

A meltdown is not misbehavior. It's a nervous system that has become overwhelmed and can no longer cope. **Here's the truth:** you can't reason a child out of a meltdown, but you can help their body feel safe enough to come back down. Here's how.

In the moment: what helps

- ☐ **Stay calm yourself.** Your calm is contagious. A regulated adult helps a dysregulated child's body settle. This is co-regulation, and it's the most powerful tool you have.
- ☐ **Lower the input.** Fewer words, softer voice, less eye contact, dimmer and quieter if you can. An overwhelmed brain can't process more information.
- ☐ **Make the space safe.** Calmly move anything dangerous and give your child room. Safety first, teaching later.
- ☐ **Offer, don't force.** Stay near and offer comfort, but don't demand hugs, answers, or apologies. Presence over pressure.
- ☐ **Let the wave crest.** A meltdown has to rise and fall. Your job is to keep everyone safe and steady until it passes, not to stop it mid-wave.

What to avoid

- ✗ Piling on words, questions, or lectures. It adds fuel.
- ✗ Threats or consequences in the moment. The thinking brain is offline, so it won't land, and it raises stress.
- ✗ Taking it personally. This is distress, not disrespect.

After the storm: when calm returns

- ☐ **Reconnect first.** A kind word, a snack, a quiet moment together. Repair matters more than any lesson.
- ☐ **Keep it short and gentle.** "That was hard. I'm glad we got through it together." Save problem-solving for later.
- ☐ **Look for the pattern.** Note what came just before: hunger, transitions, noise, a demand, tiredness. Spotting triggers is how you prevent the next one.

A quick reframe on "attention-seeking"

Behavior that looks like "seeking attention" is almost always seeking connection, help, or relief: your child communicating a need the only way they can in that moment. Meeting the need calmly isn't "giving in." Stay calm, keep everyone safe, and teach better tools once the storm has passed.

When it's time to get support

Reach out if meltdowns are frequent or intense, if there's unsafe behavior or running off, or if the whole family is walking on eggshells. A behavior consultation or ABA support can help you get ahead of it, with a plan built around your child.

[Book a free consultation](#)

ACCEPT. UNDERSTAND. LOVE.