



## Tantrums vs meltdowns

Tantrums are an angry or frustrated outburst, often because the child cannot get what they want in that moment. Typically, tantrums require an audience and can be reduced by a rewards system.

Meltdowns are a reaction to being overwhelmed; when the child reaches the point of sensory, emotional, or information overload, it can trigger a variety of external behaviours that are similar to a tantrum or it can trigger a complete shutdown and withdrawal.

Strategies for dealing with a **meltdown** - the ultimate goal is to reduce the amount of information coming at your child.

### Triggers

If you can identify and remove sensory triggers, you might prevent a meltdown in the first place. Triggers might include loud noises or bright lights etc.

### Distraction

This will only work if you spot the tell-tale signs of a meltdown before it happens and can distract your child with something they like.

### Safety

Take your child somewhere they feel safe; this will vary between children but could be somewhere quiet and clutter free, maybe with dark or dim lighting, maybe with a small den they can go into.

### Resources

Again this will depend on what your child likes and what their triggers are but could include a weighted blanket, noise cancelling headphones or a stress ball to squeeze.

### Calm

Your child will find it easier and quicker to calm down if you are calm. If possible, don't talk. If you need to, use single words, symbols or signs.

Strategies for dealing with a **tantrum** – effective use of time out.

### Spot

Choose a specific time out spot – somewhere safe and boring where you can see them.

### Warning

Before giving a time out, give your child a warning (ideally use a symbol too) and give them 10 seconds to follow your instruction.

Exception: if your child is hurting someone or breaking something, take them to time out straight away.

### Time

Your child should stay there until they are quiet and calm, but if they are still angry after 10 minutes, you might need to try something else.

### Return

Your child should return to their previous activity and complete it as expected (without the undesirable behaviour from before time out).

Helpful tips for both tantrums and meltdowns.

- Model calm behaviour
- Reward or praise good behaviour
- Have a consistent or predictable daily routine
- Say “now and next” when talking about routine, e.g. “now is getting dressed, next is breakfast”
- Use symbols, traffic light colours and sand timers along with language
- Remove the audience if a tantrum or meltdown occurs
- Consider what physical activities or sensory input your child needs or needs to avoid - a “sensory diet”

More information: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/meltdowns>