



How to Help During a Meltdown (Any Trigger)

Meltdowns don't always come with a warning, and they don't always have one clear cause. Whether it started over a broken cracker or something you'll never quite figure out, the way through it is mostly the same. Here's a playbook you can use no matter what triggered it.

"You don't have to fix the meltdown. You just have to stay steady until it passes."

IN THE MOMENT: WHAT TO DO

- 1 Lower your voice and slow down.** Loud, fast, or frustrated energy from you adds fuel; calm and quiet gives their nervous system something to match.
- 2 Reduce the input.** Dim lights, turn down noise, move to a quieter spot if you can. Sensory overload is often part of what tipped things over.
- 3 Stay close but don't crowd.** Some kids want to be held; others need space. Offer, don't insist.
- 4 Use very few words.** This isn't the moment to problem-solve, negotiate, or explain. Save it for after.
- 5 Keep everyone physically safe first.** Move breakables or people out of the way rather than trying to physically stop the meltdown itself.

AFTER IT PASSES

- ☐ Give it a minute before debriefing, coming down from a meltdown takes longer than it looks.
- ☐ Keep the recap short: what happened, how they're feeling now, what might help next time.
- ☐ Reconnect warmly. A meltdown doesn't need to end the day on a bad note.
- ☐ Write down what happened and when, even briefly, the trigger often becomes obvious after a few entries.

TRY THIS

"I'm right here. You don't have to talk. We'll figure it out when you're ready." Then just wait, nearby, without pushing for a response.

LOWERING HOW OFTEN THEY HAPPEN

Watch for the build-up, not just the blow-up. Most meltdowns have an escalation phase, noticing it early buys you options.

Protect the basics. Hunger, tiredness, and lack of downtime make everything harder to handle.

Build in recovery time after hard transitions or busy environments, before asking for anything else.

Track patterns for two weeks. A simple log of time, place, and what happened right before is often more revealing than it seems.

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