



Surviving a Public Meltdown

A meltdown in the cereal aisle feels different from one at home, mostly because of the audience. The strategies that work are largely the same, it's staying calm under the extra pressure of being watched that's the hard part. Here's a plan for both.

"You're not responsible for what strangers think. You're responsible for your child, right here, right now."

IN THE MOMENT: WHAT TO DO

- 1 Have an exit plan before you go in.** Know where the car, a quiet corner, or a bathroom is if you need to step out.
- 2 Lower your own volume and pace, even more than at home.** It's tempting to react bigger in public, but it rarely helps.
- 3 Get down to their level if you can.** Block out some of the visual noise around them with your body.
- 4 If you need to leave, leave calmly.** Abandoning the cart or the table isn't a failure, it's often the fastest way back to calm.

ONCE YOU'RE THROUGH IT

- ☐ Give yourself credit, public meltdowns are genuinely harder to stay calm through, and you did.
- ☐ If you had to leave without finishing the errand, that's fine; it can wait.
- ☐ Note the setting and what led up to it, certain stores, times of day, or levels of crowd often repeat as triggers.

TRY THIS

A short, quiet script: "I know this is hard. We're going to step outside for a minute." Then just go, no need to explain to anyone else.

SETTING UP FOR FEWER OF THESE

Go at lower-traffic times when you can, and keep errands short, especially on already-hard days.

Bring a small, familiar comfort item or snack for waiting-heavy outings.

Practice shorter, lower-stakes outings to build tolerance gradually, rather than only attempting the hardest ones.

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