



THREE STAGES OF A MELTDOWN

Managing meltdowns is very important with children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The key is getting in early and putting in place strategies before the behaviour escalates, and you will need a range of strategies to prevent the meltdown escalating. For some students strategies that may help include ignoring, distracting, redirecting, send on an errand, and lots more.

Three Stages of a Meltdown

1. **Build Up**

It may look like walking in a different pattern, body posture (head down, head on desk, tense), become much more literal, change in voice tone, increase in wringing of hands/hypersensitivity to touch/picking at skin, become slower to respond or increase in vagueness, other students may become highly distractible, become more controlling, asking more questions and more rigid, more stock standard answers (I don't know, I forgot, I'm tired).

2. **Survival Mode**

In survival mode they will use skills to try and keep a meltdown from beginning. Their coping mechanism is coming into play. It may look like more controlling of their environment, seek sensory input (repetitive actions, flip back on chairs, pacing, jumping on trampoline), sleepy, staying completely still and become rigid, unaware of others, run away, climb, escape, hide (under table, outside).

3. **Meltdown**

In a meltdown the child is in panic mode and has no control. The child may not be able to respond and will use stock standard actions to make people move away and leave them alone (swearing, pushing and hitting). A behaviour management programme will usually be ineffective as the child has reached meltdown. The child will need to finish the meltdown before adults can take action.

Ideas to try when in Build Up and Survival Mode

- Limit instructions.
- Send child on an errand.
- Walk don't talk (take the child for a walk but don't ask questions or comment on behaviour).
- Redirect to quiet time (petition desk, reading corner, sit at teacher's desk, headphones).
- Give them a sensory toy to hold.
- Repetitive physical activity (jump on trampoline, run around the quadrangle/oval, gym circuit).
- May need a toilet break or drink break.

Remember: Once the child is in meltdown it is too late to use most strategies.

Recommended Resources (available online at www.suelarkey.com):

Teacher Assistants Big

Red Book of Ideas

By Sue Larkey and
Anna Tullemans



Teacher Assistants Big

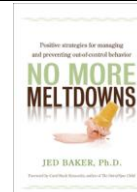
Blue Book of Ideas

By Sue Larkey and
Anna Tullemans



No More Meltdowns

By Dr Jed Baker



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