

RSAC Tips: Managing Meltdowns

Helping your child overcome tantrums and meltdowns can be challenging. The tips below may help you begin to create a plan for helping your child communicate more productively.

Find the patterns.

Identify events that make tantrums more likely, such as particular requests or daily events. Keep a daily written log to help identify patterns. Use visual schedules in which the day's activities are represented by pictures, so that they are not surprised by required tasks that may make tantrums more likely.

Prevent when you can.

If you notice that your child tantrums when asked to do difficult things, break the task into smaller parts, each followed by a reward. For example, rather than saying "get dressed," instruct your child "Choose a shirt and then you can have 5 minutes of play time." You can also build up to difficult requests: ask your child to do two or three easy and fun things, then finish with a less likely request.

Plan for the future.

For many kids with autism, meltdowns are a way to communicate their wants and needs (even if that want or need is to "just be left alone" for a while). In the middle of a meltdown is not the best time to heap rewards on your child, but it's a good idea to think about how to teach your child other, better ways to communicate their wants and needs in the future. If needed, a professional BCBA can help with this; reach out to your provider or the RSAC team for more information.

In The Middle of a Meltdown

- Keep your child and the environment safe, above all else!
- Redirect attention to another, more calm task, like a puzzle. You can start the other task yourself and invite your child to join you when they are ready. Be sure to also do this fun task at times when your child isn't upset.
- Wait for brief moments when your child is not crying, and provide the majority of your attention then.
- Stay patient and calm yourself, as best you can!
- If meltdowns are severe or persistent, talk with your child's provider.

Want More Details?

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