

Meltdown planning

What this plan looks like will depend on individual needs, preferences, and meltdown presentations. It should be completed with or by the autistic person, and there are examples in each section to help you to get started.

You may need to evolve your plan as you use it and learn what does and doesn't work for you. You can amend your plan as needed at any time.

Pre-meltdown (rumble stage)

What are my meltdown/overload triggers?

Example answers:

- *Sensory overload: busy environments, loud noises, bright lights*
- *Change: unexpected change to schedules, unpredictable situations eg new people, fire drills, vacations*
- *Social: conflict, misunderstandings, social overload*
- *Physical needs: getting hungry, thirsty, hot, cold, tired etc*
- *Emotional: big feelings/overload*

Sometimes meltdowns can be triggered by more than one thing, eg you cope with a certain amount but one too many issues occur which causes overload and leads to a meltdown.

What are the warning signs before I reach meltdown?

Example answers:

- *Increased stimming behaviours like rocking or pacing etc.*
- *Ranting/catastrophising/seeking reassurance*
- *Increased sensory sensitivities*
- *Difficulty communicating/loss of speech*
- *Signs of irritability*

What helps me during pre-meltdown stage?

Example answers:

- *Reducing input: helping me to leave a busy place, removing additional people, stop talking to me, turning down lights, closing curtains, providing noise-cancelling headphones etc*
- *Providing sensory tools: weighted blanket, fidget toys, turn on sensory lights/ bubble tubes etc*
- *Providing low stimulation distraction: comfort TV show, gentle video game, music etc*
- *Trying alternative ways of communicating: eg using communication aids like cards/ texting/ apps*

During meltdown

What do my meltdowns look like?

Example answers:

- *Crying*
- *Stimming: eg rocking, pacing, flapping, verbal stims*
- *Injurious stimming: eg hitting, kicking, biting, head-banging*
- *Distress: eg shouting/ screaming/ throwing or breaking objects*
- *Withdrawing: eg running away/ hiding*
- *Loss of speech*

What helps me during meltdowns?

Example answers:

- *Avoiding asking me questions or engaging in discussion*
- *Avoiding giving me instructions or information*
- *Staying calm*
- *Removing additional stimulation eg people, loud noises, bright lights*
- *Giving me space or staying close (based on individual preference)*
- *Reassuring me using minimal words eg 'I'm here, it's OK'*
- *Giving me a comfort object to hold, eg a soft toy or cushion*

After meltdown

What do I need after meltdown?

Example answers:

- *Reassurance that I am safe and I don't need to feel ashamed*
- *A calming space to rest in: eg with blankets, low lighting, sensory toys, comfortable clothes etc.*
- *Reduced demand*
- *Help to meet my needs, eg food, drink etc*
- *Help to engage in calming activities: someone to bring me gaming device/ turn on TV to a comfort show etc.*
- *Delay discussing what happened until I'm recovered: eg how others felt/ what we could do differently*

Meltdowns are exhausting and can cause embarrassment or shame, which can lead to further overload if the right support and recovery time isn't put in place. It's important that you and those around you try not to approach the situation with judgement, but instead take time to understand your triggers and needs, and to treat this process as a compassionate non-judgemental learning journey.