

Turning Traumatizing Meltdowns into Building Blocks

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Become the Exact Parent
Your Child Needs!

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It's the end of a long day, you're tired. You finally catch your breath; your instincts tell you to check on your child – something is not right – you see all the signs of a pending meltdown...

Maybe you are picking your child up from an appointment or school. As soon as you catch sight of them your internal alarm bell starts...oh no...you don't know how to handle this in a public setting.

Or, maybe your child is already there – in full meltdown.

You feel the pit in your stomach and your panic rising. Your mind is racing. You feel so out of control... Help!

And it's not their fault. Your child isn't deliberately throwing a tantrum or trying to be difficult, they're just completely overwhelmed.

So, it begins. You're wracking your brain. How to help? What can you do, where do you start, and what could make a difference?

Hello! I'm Melissa.

I'm a professionally certified coach and mom to an autistic daughter. I've experienced every one of these situations and completely understand how hard it can be to manage and support your child compassionately.

It is so overwhelming and undermines your confidence as a parent. You don't know how to help or what led to it.

Let me help you make managing a meltdown a little less stressful and give you the helpful tools and strategies so you can feel more in control and build your relationship with your child at the same time.



Here are 5 really useful things to know:

1. Get Ahead of the Curve – Quickly Recognize the Signs:

When you are new to this it can be easy to miss some of the common signs. First, understand that there may not be a specific trigger, it's more like the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.

Your child is at their limit and has hit the 'fight, flight, or freeze' stage.

They are not in control.

You may notice:

- Loss of language processing (understanding what you are saying and being able to respond).
- Rocking or slapping their leg or another part of the body
- Staring off in space or zoning out
- Screaming or crying, maybe even both.
- Generally being out of it and not acting as they usually do

Knowing your child's particular signs will help.

What are the common signs that your child experiences?

As you start to recognize the early signs, you may be able to lessen the intensity or possibly head off the full-blown meltdown.

The most important tool in your possession is your notebook. Keep it handy as you learn more about what works for you.

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Create a section in your notebook for your child's stressors.

You can add to this section as you **continue to observe behaviors.**

2. Take a Moment to Ground Yourself:

Focus on calming yourself. Keeping as calm as you can is important because your energy and emotions transmit to your child. If you are calmer your child will feel it.

- **First, remind yourself:** YOU are a GOOD parent and you are doing the best you can!
NO one finds this easy!
- **Take a deep breath** (really breathe; in through your nose, fill your belly, hold for a moment, and then exhale slowly through your mouth). Do it a few times – as often as you need.
- **As you work to feel calmer, resist the inclination to go into your own ‘fight or flight’ mode.** Know that this will pass and your child will move through it and self-regulate. You will, too.

Build deep breathing into your day as frequently as you can to help yourself keep a sense of calm and feeling grounded. You may find the Pro-tip helpful.

What helps you feel calm, powerful, and ready to take action?

Identifying this ahead of time builds resources for you to pull from when you are at the height of a stressful moment.

“Being a parent is like folding a fitted sheet, no one really knows how.”

-Unkown

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Create a section in your notebook of things that you find calming.

Refer back to this list when things are going quite right. **You never know what might work next.**

Pro-Tip for Regular Use:

During quiet moments (driving in the car or playing together) **teach your child to breathe deeply using this trick:**

- Breathe in through the nose, like you are smelling a flower, really deeply and fill the belly.
- Hold for a moment and then exhale out the mouth as though you are blowing out a candle.
- Be sure to explain to your child that this breathing helps them to feel better, slows their body down, and helps focus them which helps them become calmer.
- Make this a game and have fun with it. Adjust the language so it makes sense to your child. Practice with them and do it often to create a tool to draw from when times are tough.
- You may want to share this technique with your child's caregivers as well.

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

-Maya Angelou

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Create a section in your notebook of tricks and tips you learn along the way.

The longer your list, the better chances you have of overcoming a difficult situation.

3.Sensory Input and Practical Steps:

Autistic children can be very sensitive to sensory input and frequently start their days at a higher stress threshold than those who aren't.

Imagine that stress is measured in a drinking cup. For an autistic child, the water level in the cup starts the day at one-third to one-half full. (A neurotypical child may only have a bit of water at the bottom.) As the day goes on, the cup becomes more and more full of stress-inducing sensory inputs (unexpected change of routine, loud noises, bright lights...). It doesn't take long before the cup overflows creating overwhelm and a meltdown.

Now, your child is dysregulated. Your child's capacity to handle sensory input and the demands of daily life have far exceeded what they can handle.

Your goal is to help your child with skills and tools so they can learn to work to re-balance themselves.

Consider your child's day:

- Have their basic needs been met (enough sleep, eating regularly, etc.)?
- Have they been exposed to excess sensory stimuli (noisy traffic, loud classmates or siblings, bright lights)? It's easy to overlook every day inputs that seem 'normal'. A neurotypical person may take these for granted throughout the day.
- Routines can be reassuring providing a sense of predictability and control. These can be helpful for you both so try to avoid deviating from these important grounding points. Remove stress by sticking to a known routine so your child isn't on edge wondering what comes next.

Keeping your child on a schedule, and identifying and recognizing their particular needs will help. When you have done your very best and their cup still overflows, try the following suggestions.

Here are some great tips:

- **Take your child to a quiet place** with as little noise and interference as possible. This may mean leaving your cart full of groceries and making a run for the car. It's okay!
- **Offer a deep, tight hug**, or grab a weighted blanket and wrap them up. The intensity of feeling your tight hold, love, and support is super comforting. It may not work for every child but is frequently helpful.
- **Noise Cancelling Ear Wear** – AirPods, Loops (small device worn in the ear), noise canceling ear muffs (some times called defenders) – all drown out the ambient noise thus reducing overload.
- **Car rides** – some children find the drone of the engine and tires on the pavement soothing.
- Always remember **DEEP BREATHS** for both of you. This is where your “downtime” Pro-tip training covered in section 2 will pay dividends to calm you both.

Remember:

During or just **after a meltdown is not the time to ask questions.** Language and communication abilities are often the first thing your child may lose in a meltdown.

Not everything will work every time; be willing to try different approaches and abandon any that aren't working quickly so you can try something new. It's not a 'one size fits all' situation.

Over time you will figure out what your child responds to best.

“Gentleness is strength under control.”

-Elizabeth George

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Make some notes of things that you are discovering offer comfort to your child. Add to the list as you try new things.

4. Release Self-Judgment:

Be kind to yourself – let go of self-judgment! Some days you will have the empathy of a saint and some days your nerves will be completely on edge and you will lose it (and then feel terrible) – we all do!

Remind yourself that **you're learning too**, and know that you are doing the best you can for your child and yourself. Right now, all of this is new to you. Will you lose your cool and yell? Possibly. That's okay. I can't tell you how many times I lost it or had to walk away to pull myself together.

YOU are human and your reactions are normal. Ask any parent of an autistic child. Take care of yourself; are you eating regularly? Are you getting enough sleep? Step back, be kind and allow yourself some grace.

Think about your reactions with your child in these tough moments.



“Butterflies can’t see their wings. They can’t see how truly beautiful they are, but everyone else can. People are like that as well.”

–Naya Rivera

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In your notebook, write a couple of sentences to yourself.

Be compassionate, and kind, and **give yourself a break.**

5. Evaluate Potential Triggers Once Calm Has Been Restored:

Whew. You've both come through the 'eye of the storm' and you've had a moment to catch your breath and reflect on what helped and even what didn't. As you consider what your child has been managing, you'll have solid 'data' to try to head off the next instance.

- **Remember your notes and observations.** Having a diary will help you identify patterns. Note different situations so you can anticipate potential triggers before they happen. Remember, it may be a culmination of things.
- **Review common triggers. Is sensory overload involved?**
 - Was there an unusually loud noise? Possibly from the television? Is their clothing irritating?
 - Is your child melting down after a particular activity or therapy session? After school?
 - Were the lights too bright in the store? Or is the HVAC system too loud?
 - Was there a change in the routine at home or school?
- **As you recognize triggers, you may be able to reduce them** for your child or help other people/professionals working with your child to become more aware.
- **Over time your child may learn to help themselves** regulate using the tools you share and model.

In your notebook, consider your approach to supporting your child; what was helpful?

What didn't work at all? **What might you have done differently?**

Being the Supportive and Loving Parent Your Child Needs:

The key is to be consistently supportive and loving so that your child knows that no matter what you are there to love, support and champion them.

Shame around meltdowns is super normal and can be a powerful and difficult emotion.

Your child may feel embarrassed or remorseful after losing control. Remember, it's possible they don't recall much and may lack the ability to identify details but they will likely know they were very upset.

Asking questions or spending too much time rehashing might make it feel like a big deal. You know that your child didn't deliberately choose to throw a tantrum. Recognizing that it's not about fault and allowing them to quickly move on helps to limit shameful feelings. Assure them that all is okay and you understand.

This is one of the pivotal keys to being exactly the parent your child needs, wants and loves. Your unconditional love builds the foundation for your child to feel accepted and assured that you are always there for them.

I've been through all sorts of scenarios with my daughter and I know how demoralizing and humbling it can be to struggle to find the best ways to help.



Believe me, I screwed up in almost every way possible.

It's a natural and normal part of the process of learning ways to help your child. And it's an inevitable part of becoming the parent they really need. It will become possible to get through the tough moments.

Be patient, and kind to yourself and remember parenting is a marathon and not a sprint.

Hang in there. You can do this!

If you are looking for more support as you navigate your journey, check my [website](#) for further resources or sign up for a quick chat below.

1. **Books for parents of autistic children:** You'll learn from professionals and parents who have great suggestions and advice.
2. **Sign up for my mailing list:** This is where I share practical tips and resources to support your parenting journey.
3. **Schedule 15 minutes for a chat:** I'll answer any questions and you can learn more about what I offer parents of newly diagnosed autistic children.

My goal is to help you make
your road to thriving easier and
shorter than mine.

SCHEDULE NOW

