



# Meltdowns Summary

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## Why Meltdowns?

There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and helping your children learn to deal with their most upsetting emotions constructively provides a perfect opportunity.

### Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“When do you feel angry or intensely upset?”*
- *“What time of day?”*
- *“What people, places, and activities are usually involved?”*
- *“How does your body feel now? How does your body feel when you are angry?”*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

**Trap** Raising your voice and your level of upset in response to your child’s tantrum will only increase the intensity and duration of your child’s upset. Leaving your child alone in their room will also escalate the tantrum at this age. They need you, and they may be fearful of themselves because they have literally been overpowered by their own emotions.

### Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model! Design a plan for how you will calm down first before responding.
- Respond with emotional intelligence. Stand aside and focus on your own deep breathing to calm down while you allow your child time to calm down as well.
- Learn together! Anger or hurt is an important message from ourselves to pay attention to. It means our needs are not getting met or necessary boundaries are being violated. Ask: *“Why am I feeling this way? What needs to change in order to feel better?”*
- Brainstorm coping strategies. Write a list to keep at the ready such as, take a walk, get a drink of water, take deep breaths, count to 50, draw, color, build something.
- Create a calm down space. Design a “safe base” where your child decides they would like to go when upset to feel better.
- Ask yourself: *“What needs is my child not getting met? Can the issue be addressed by my child alone or do they need to communicate a need, ask for help, or set a boundary?”*

**Tip** The saying “name it to tame it” really works! Look for ways to identify feelings and name them.

**Tip and Trap** The only way a calm down space serves as a tool for parents to promote their children's self-management skills is if they allow a child to self-select the calm down space. Practice using it and gently remind them of it when they are upset.

### Step 3. Practice to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use "Show me..." statements like *"Show me how you use your safe base to calm down."*
- Accept feelings: *"I can see you're feeling frustrated with me."*
- Practice deep breathing.
- Proactively remind: *"Would your safe base help you feel better?"*

**Tip** Assign a few stuffed friends or favorite action figures to take care of your child's worries while they are sleeping. Your child can relay them as a secret if they wish. Addressing worries can help ease feelings that are compounding and may be building up to an explosion.

**Trap** If you command your child to make an apology, how will they ever learn to genuinely apologize with feeling? In fact, apologizing should never be assigned. Instead, ask the child how they think they should make up for the hurt they've caused, and help them implement their idea.

### Step 4. Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Ask key questions: *"You are going to see Julie today. Do you remember what you can do to assert your feelings?"*
- Reflect on outcomes: *"You were feeling really upset earlier. What events may have contributed to your upset?"*
- Stay engaged. Ask yourself if you need to reteach or make changes.
- Engage in further practice. Role play or rehearse calming down when needed.
- Follow through with logical consequences to repair harm when needed.

### Step 5. Recognize Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *"I noticed how you took some deep breaths when you got frustrated. That's excellent!"*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Consider a hug when the routine is accomplished.

**Tip** Be specific. "Good job" seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - *"You went to your safe base when you were upset earlier. Love seeing that!"* - can promote more of the same.

**Celebrate yourself** for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your child's success today and in their future!

*In this tool, the term "meltdown" and the term "tantrum" are used interchangeably. However, we recognize that some families have children who are sensitive to sensory input and may view meltdowns and tantrums differently.*

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