

# Meltdown vs. Tantrum Psychoeducation Handout

Understand the crucial difference between meltdowns and tantrums — and why it changes everything about how we respond.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Clinician: \_\_\_\_\_

*For parents and caregivers: Understanding the difference between a meltdown and a tantrum fundamentally changes how we respond — and how effective our response is. This handout provides clear psychoeducation and practical guidance for each.*

	MELTDOWN	TANTRUM
<b>What it is</b>	A neurological response to overwhelm — the nervous system has exceeded capacity. Not intentional or manipulative.	Goal-directed behaviour to get a desired outcome. Child is in control even if distressed.
<b>Who experiences it</b>	More common in neurodivergent individuals. Can affect anyone under extreme stress.	Common in all children, especially ages 1–4.
<b>Child's control</b>	Very little to none — child genuinely cannot stop once in meltdown.	Some — child can often be redirected or will stop if they get what they want.
<b>Triggers</b>	Sensory overload, transition, unexpected change, demand overload, hunger/fatigue.	Denied request, frustration, tiredness, wanting attention.
<b>Best response</b>	Reduce stimulation. Stay calm. Do not reason. Wait it out safely. No consequences during.	Stay calm. Don't give in to escalation. Validate feeling, hold the limit. Reconnect after.
<b>After the episode</b>	Child may be exhausted and need rest. Warmth and reconnection, not lecture.	Reconnect. If appropriate, discuss briefly and calmly.

## REFLECTION & INTEGRATION

**My child's typical meltdown triggers — and my early warning signs:**

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**My meltdown response plan (what I will do, what I will NOT do):**

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**What I need to remind myself in the moment of a meltdown:**

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