

# Meltdown vs Tantrum

A meltdown and a tantrum will show a range of similar behaviours including: screaming, kicking, hitting, biting, swearing, and shouting. However, there are differences between the two and it is important to be able to differentiate between a meltdown and a tantrum in order to give the best support. Tantrums tend to occur in young children, whereas meltdowns may occur across the lifespan.

## Meltdown

VS

## Tantrum

### Is the child watching for a reaction?

The individual has no interest in how others react to their behaviour.

Depending on the reactions of who is there, the tantrum may change in intensity or nature.

### Is the child able to consider their safety?

The individual may be injured during a meltdown.

The individual will avoid getting hurt.

### Is the child in control of their behaviours?

During a meltdown, the individual is not in control of their actions. The person is overstimulated and reacting instinctively to the distress they are in.

The individual is control of their actions the entire time.

### Is this goal-orientated - does the child want something?

A meltdown is not goal-orientated. The individual does not make demands before or during the meltdown.

Tantrums are goal-orientated. The individual is trying to get what they want.

### Is the child able to calm down once the situation has been resolved?

Meltdowns are slow to end. They will slow down once the individual is accustomed to their surroundings. This will happen at their own pace.

Tantrums can end quickly. This can be either once the goal is achieved or the child is tired.

# Meltdowns How to Help

A meltdown is the result of being overstimulated, leading to the person reacting in an instinctive way to their surroundings as they temporarily lose behavioural control. This can be expressed verbally (e.g. screaming, shouting, swearing) and/or physically (kicking, hitting, biting). Meltdowns are slow to end and will slow as the individual becomes accustomed to their surroundings. Meltdowns can occur across the lifespan.

## During a meltdown, the individual:

- has no interest in how others react to their behaviour;
- may be injured;
- is not in control of their actions - their actions are instinctive;
- will not make demands.

## What can you do to help?

- Make sure the person is safe. Have a strategy in place to ensure the safety of the person and anyone around them.
- Give them time. It can take time to recover from overload.
- Reduce sensory or information overload, e.g. turn down lights, turn off music. Give the person a quiet, safe space.
- Develop a calming routine.
- Track the meltdowns. This can be useful in trying to predict when a meltdown might happen. Tracking how the escalation occurs can be useful in identifying triggers. You may be able to begin the calming routine once you see signs of escalation and avoid meltdown.
- Stay calm.