



TANTRUM vs MELTDOWN



1. WHAT A TANTRUM IS

- A tantrum is a reaction to not getting something the child wants.
- The child still has some control.
- The behaviour often stops when the child gets what they asked for or when they realise it will not work.
- The goal is to change the situation.



HOW TO RESPOND TO A TANTRUM

Stay calm and consistent.

Set a clear limit.







Offer simple choices.



Praise any step towards calming.

Keep the boundary the same each time.

3. KEY DIFFERENCES

TANTRUM	MELTDOWN
Child has some control 	Child has no control 
Happens to get something 	Happens because they are overwhelmed 
Behaviour changes when the situation changes 	Behaviour continues until their body settles 

2. WHAT A MELTDOWN IS

- A meltdown happens when the child is overwhelmed.
- Their brain switches into survival mode.
- They lose control over their body and emotions.
- Noise, touch, change, tiredness, or stress can push them past their limit.
- The goal is to cope, not to get something.

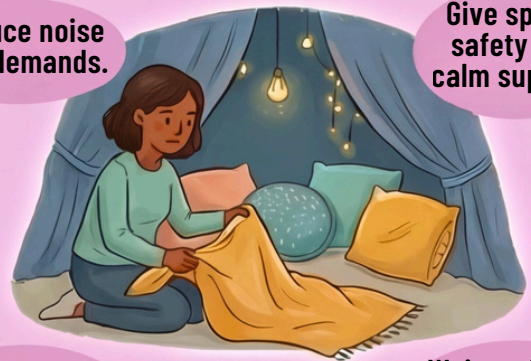


SURVIVAL MODE

HOW TO RESPOND TO A MELTDOWN

Reduce noise and demands.

Give space, safety and calm support.



Use a slow voice and steady breathing.

Help them move to a quieter area if needed.

Wait until their body settles before talking.

4. AFTER THE MOMENT

- When calm, talk through what happened in simple steps.
- Teach coping skills later, not during distress.
- Notice triggers so you can prepare next time.



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About this Resource

This free printable PDF poster clearly explains the difference between a tantrum and a meltdown in children and young people, and offers simple guidance on how adults can respond in a calm, consistent way. On one side, the visual guide defines what a tantrum is, why it happens and how the child usually still has some control over their behaviour. On the other side, it describes what a meltdown is, how feeling overwhelmed pushes the brain into survival mode, and why the child has no control over their body and emotions in that moment. Colourful illustrations and child friendly language make the information easy to understand for kids, teens and the adults who support them.

The poster sets out clear step by step responses for each situation. For tantrums, it reminds adults to stay calm and consistent, set clear limits, offer simple choices and praise any step towards calming, while keeping boundaries the same each time. For meltdowns, it suggests reducing noise and demands, offering space, safety and calm support, using a slow voice and steady breathing, helping the child move to a quieter area, and waiting until their body settles before talking. It also includes a simple summary table of key differences between tantrums and meltdowns, plus prompts for what to do after the moment, such as talking through what happened, teaching coping skills later and noticing triggers for next time.

This child behaviour resource is ideal for parents, carers, teachers, social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents, therapists, counsellors and other professionals who support children and young people with big feelings and strong emotions. It works well as a classroom poster, parenting handout or social work tool to build understanding of emotional regulation and to guide adults in how to respond in a supportive way during challenging moments.

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