

WHAT HAPPENS IN A CHILD'S BRAIN DURING A MELTDOWN?

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When a child has a meltdown, their brain believes it is in danger. The danger might be frustration, embarrassment, feeling unheard or being overwhelmed.

FIRST - THE AMYGDALA SWITCHES ON

The amygdala is the brain's alarm system. When something feels unsafe, it activates quickly. The body moves into survival mode:



FIGHT

FLIGHT

FREEZE

Heart rate increases.
Breathing changes.
Muscles tighten.



This happens automatically. It is not a choice.

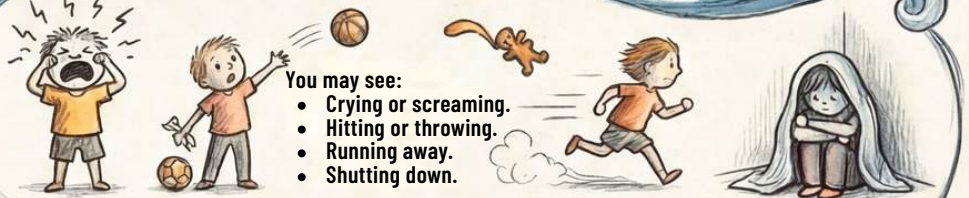
THEN - THE THINKING BRAIN GOES OFFLINE

The prefrontal cortex is the thinking part of the brain. It helps with reasoning, listening, problem solving and making good decisions. When the alarm system is active, this part cannot work properly.

That is why a child cannot:

- Calm down just because they are told to.
- Explain themselves clearly.
- Learn a lesson in the moment.

WHAT YOU ARE SEEING



You may see:

- Crying or screaming.
- Hitting or throwing.
- Running away.
- Shutting down.

This is a nervous system under stress, not deliberate misbehaviour.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

The alarm system settles when the body feels safe.

Children need:

- A calm adult.
- Fewer words.
- A steady tone.
- Physical safety.
- Time.



Calm first. Teaching later.

REMEMBER

Children borrow regulation from adults. Connection quiets the alarm system. Learning happens after the storm, not during it.



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