

Toddler Tips: Meltdowns

Little ones don't always have all the words or skills they need to manage big feelings... so they show us with their behavior. And when something keeps them from enjoying their growing independence—whether it's having to leave the playground or not being able to do a task without help—that behavior might just be a meltdown! Meltdowns are common when children are tired, hungry, scared, or upset, and they can be frustrating and scary for parents. But remember... meltdowns are most intense at the beginning, and they usually last less than two minutes.

You may be able to avoid a meltdown by:

- Giving toddlers warnings before changes ("We're going to leave the playground soon to go to the store.")
- Trying to distract! Change the subject, offer a different toy, sing a song.
- Removing your child from a place that is likely to cause a meltdown.
- Letting your child make simple choices. ("Would you like to wear the blue shirt or the green one?")
- Praising and thanking them when they do what you ask.
- Keeping a routine for eating, sleeping, and activities.

When a meltdown is happening:

- Make sure your child is safe and can't hurt themselves.
- Stay calm: "I know you're upset. I'll help when your body is feeling calmer." (Stepping away may help, if you're in a safe place and can keep an eye on them.)
- Once your child begins to calm down, you can start helping them name their feelings, offer a hug, and use kind words.

After the meltdown:

- Comfort and praise your child as you notice them begin to calm their bodies down.
- Acknowledge their feelings ("I know you were frustrated when you couldn't tie your shoes.") and name more words they might use to express their feelings.
- Help children take three, slow, deep breaths in and out, and then offer a quiet activity, such as coloring or sharing a storybook.

When you're worried, talk to your doctor, especially:

- If your child hurts themselves or others during meltdowns.
- If meltdowns happen many times a day or it takes a long time to calm down.
- If your child is older than 4 and has meltdowns often.



Share this video with your child of a little Muppet having a meltdown! Notice how his dad handles it.

When Meltdowns Happen in Public

Try to focus on staying calm yourself, making sure your child is safe, and—as much as you can—disregard other people's reactions. Try to move to a quieter, more private space, then use the same strategies you would use at home.