



Toolkit: Handling Meltdowns

A calm, practical guide for managing meltdowns with care, compassion, and confidence

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1. Introduction

Meltdowns can be intense for your child, and for you.

They are not “bad behaviour” or tantrums. They are neurological overwhelm.

This toolkit is here to help you respond with understanding, not fear. It’s designed to give you practical steps, calm strategies, and emotional reassurance, grounded in lived experience and expert guidance.

You’re not doing anything wrong.

And you’re not alone. Barney’s Box is here for you step by step.

2. What is a Meltdown?

A meltdown is a response to overwhelming sensory, emotional or environmental input. It's not a choice - it's a loss of control.

Meltdowns may look like:

- Screaming, crying, hitting, or running
- Shutdowns: going quiet, curling up, hiding
- Repetitive movements, pacing, or throwing



Barney's Tip: *Every child expresses overwhelm differently. What matters is your calm, consistent support.*



3. Common Triggers & Patterns

Meltdowns are often preceded by stress build-up. Common triggers include:

- Changes in routine
- Loud noises, crowds, bright lights
- Feeling misunderstood or rushed
- Physical discomfort: hunger, tiredness, pain
- Unexpected events or transitions



Barney's Tip: *Track triggers in a notebook or app. Patterns often emerge.*

4. Responding to a Meltdown

DURING the Meltdown:

- **Stay Calm.** Your nervous system helps regulate theirs.
- **Remove or reduce triggers.** Lower lights, reduce noise, move to a safe space.
- **Use few words.** "I'm here. You're safe." is enough.
- **Protect from harm.** Use gentle physical barriers if needed - never restraint unless safety demands it.
- **Let it pass.** Meltdowns cannot be "talked down."

Grounding Tips:

- Offer a comfort object or calming tool (fidget, chew, weighted blanket)
- Sit or lie nearby without pressuring interaction



Barney's Tip: *Remember: this will pass. It always does.*

5. Aftercare & Emotional Recovery

Meltdowns leave everyone drained. Aftercare helps rebuild trust and calm.

Post-Meltdown Steps:

- Offer water, food, cuddles (if wanted)
- Speak gently: "That was hard. You're safe now."
- Avoid asking too many questions
- Give space to rest - even if that means screen time or quiet play



Barney's Tip: *Emotional recovery takes time. Don't jump straight into "what went wrong." Just reconnect.*

6. Building a Meltdown Response Plan

Barney's Box encourages families to create a **Meltdown Response Plan** to feel prepared.

● Known triggers to avoid	
● Early signs of overwhelm	
● Calming strategies that work (deep pressure, music, safe space)	
● A list of comforting words or phrases	
● Who to call for support (partner, friend, school)	



7. Tools & Templates

- Meltdown Response Cheat Sheet (for home or on the go)
- Daily Trigger Tracker
- Calm Corner Checklist

(Available from barneysbox.co.uk/tools)

8. Further Support

- [Ambitious About Autism](#)
- [Autistica – Research and support](#)
- Local authority SEND teams and EHCP guidance
- Your child's SENCO or pastoral care team



Barney's Tip: Print and stick planners, checklists and trackers somewhere visible, or use digitally. Choose what feels right.

9. Final Thoughts

Meltdowns are not reflections of failure - they're expressions of distress. You are the calm in the storm.

Every meltdown you support is proof of your love, your strength, and your courage.

Breathe. Regroup. Carry on.

We're with you. Always.

- The Barney's Box Team

www.barneysbox.co.uk