



Hello! My name is Sam, I created Helping Hands Creations to provide free resources for the ADHD/Autistic communities. Today's focus is making Meltdown Plans. Meltdowns can be scary and confusing, but I'm here to help you learn how to manage and reduce the amount you have so you can regain control in your life.

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Overview

Reoccurring and frequent meltdowns affect the quality of life autistic and ADHD people experience. To navigate meltdowns, we will explore:

- What is a Meltdown?
- What is a Meltdown plan?
- How to prevent and recover from Meltdowns?

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You first need to understand why meltdowns happen
Having a plan will help you navigate them once they happen.
And finally, the whole point of this presentation is to prevent and reduce the amount of meltdowns you have overall.

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AGENDA

- What are they?**
 - What are Meltdowns?
 - Why do autistic/ADHD people have Meltdowns?
 - Common Myths
- Creating Plans**
 - Why plan Meltdowns?
 - What are benefits to planning?
 - How to make a Meltdown plan?
 - Identifying Triggers & Needs
 - Rumbling Vs Baseline
 - Location Specific
 - Plan Your Communication Methods
 - Example Plan
- Prevention and Recovery**
 - Avoid OR Replace
 - Recovery Communication
 - Following Through
 - Activities

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Today's agenda



Let's explore what meltdowns are

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What are Meltdowns?

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- Meltdowns are the result of being **over stimulated**.
- The intensity of the meltdown depends on the **person and their environment**.
- Meltdowns can look **very different** person to person.

Some common behaviors are:

- Crying
- Yelling
- Running away
- Unable to communicate
- Repetitive behaviors;
 - i.e. rocking, head banging

Disclaimer: Not every ASD/ADHD person may experience meltdowns

A common misconception is that meltdowns are chosen actions

Just as people don't choose whether they are: freeze, run, or attack, neither can people who have meltdowns

Experiencing Meltdowns



- Meltdowns cannot be eliminated, **only reduced and managed.**
- Managing and reducing meltdowns is a skillset **built over time**
- It is **NOT** our fault having meltdowns
- While we cannot control how our bodies take in information, we **CAN** control our environments.

We did not choose the bodies we were born or how our bodies react to stress, so carrying guilt for when things go wrong will not improve things, but taking responsibility and changing our actions, we will improve the outcomes of meltdowns

Experiencing Meltdowns Cont.

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- We absorb information constantly around us
- The average person will receive information from their senses and their body tells them what they need
- But autistic/ADHD people may struggle to process information and a meltdown is the outcome instead
- However, uncontrollable meltdowns will affect your relationships in all aspects of your life

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Think of your computer, remember a time that your computer froze from too many commands

It then struggled to listen and instead struggled to do all your commands at once

Just like a computer, sometimes a “hard restart” is necessary in order stop processing all the failed input of information

Sometimes, it’s better to allow yourself time to forget all the input information and start over with fewer commands in a controlled environment

Common Myths

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It's just a tantrum!!

- A tantrum ends once the person gets the result they want.
- A meltdown will need time and certain sensory conditions to end.
- A tantrum can trigger a meltdown.

It's for attention.

- Meltdowns are painful and embarrassing.
- They can even be dangerous.
- ADHD/ASD people do not have to justify a well-documented experience

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A common problem in adhd/asd families is determining “is it a meltdown or a tantrum”

I’m here to tell you a secret, you don’t need to figure it out most of the time

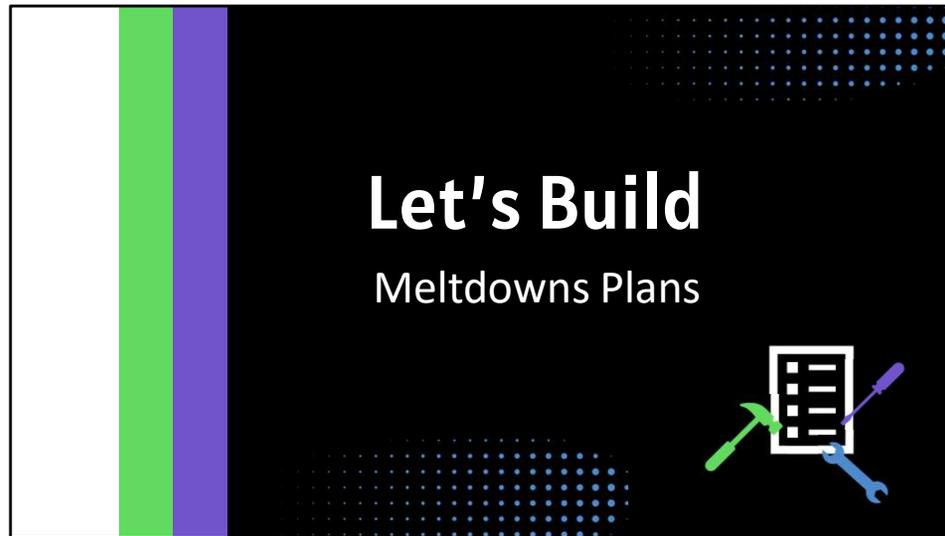
Many adhd/asd people struggle to transition or change subjects, thus work themselves up to a meltdown

When you think about it, during a tantrum, the person is getting angry/worked up/ overstimulated

It’s a good habit to try calming down, changing tasks, or purposely relaxing

Research has shown, exercising or ranting while angry can accidentally arouse the body and thus making the situation worse

A tantrum can morph into a meltdown when left unchecked



Let's build meltdown plans

Why Plan a Meltdown?

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- Why do we make emergency plans?
- To prevent "worst case scenarios"
- We WANT to reduce the amount of pain we will experience



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Just as we plan how to exit a city from a hurricane path or even how to exit a house from a fire, it helps to have a plan

The worst thing you can do to yourself is try to plan while in a crisis

You want the time, calm, and rational from planning ahead of time

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Benefits to Planning

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- 1 Easier to **communicate** with others your needs and triggers
- 2 You are **prepared** with all the supplies you need
- 3 Having a plan will **increase confidence** and reduce day to day anxiety

FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

HAVE 2 WAYS OUT Meeting Place

Planning before hand has so many benefits to you and the people around you

Give yourself AND other people the best possible outcome by planning ahead

Try to remember, while it is YOU who feels the direct pain of meltdowns, people around us are also affected

Them having a plan and being reassured will also grant them confidence in possible meltdown situations

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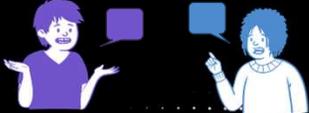
How do you make a Meltdown Plan?

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- 1 Identify Triggers/Needs**

- 2 Rumbling Vs Baseline**

- 3 Location Specific**

- 4 Communication Methods**


These are the four main areas you need to identify while planning a meltdown plan

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Identifying Triggers and Needs

- **Triggers**
Any input that creates **overwhelming stress** that is hard to manage.
- **Needs**
What you need to re-center yourself and go back to **baseline**



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Trigger is not anything that makes you slightly upset

While I can be slightly upset from receiving a bad grade, I am personally WAY more affected if I feel “cornered” in a one on one verbal discussion

Needs are going to be activities or necessities that help calm your body down back to baseline

In other words, its not ANYTHING you like, you need to be planning for things that help you calm down

The whole point is to return to baseline, remembering how past meltdowns went will help you narrow down triggers and needs

Rumbling Vs Baseline

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Rumbling

- May have encountered a trigger
- You may have **STRONG feelings** or feel **PHYSICALLY ill**
- Common signs:
 - Stressed
 - Anxious
 - Depressed
 - Sick
 - Stimming more
 - Struggle transitioning
 - Easily frustrated
 - Headaches or stomachache

*** This is the time to plan an exit and go rest ***

Goal

Is to return to baseline

How your body and mood usually feel

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If you can learn to identify your rumbling stage, you are preventing the worst possible outcomes

It's scary to think about, but having meltdowns in public is DANGEROUS, learning to identify the rumbling stage will help you plan safe exits

If you can take a break and return to baseline, then you may be able to stay at your event, BUT if you cannot return to baseline, it is better to exit

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Plan for Different Locations

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- Different environments are going to need **different plans**
- School, work, or even a vacation won't have the **same "rules"** as home
- **Plan for complications**, what can go wrong so you can work around it

It's important to remember, if you are in a public place, they do NOT understand what is going on, the population that understands what autism/adhd is actually very small

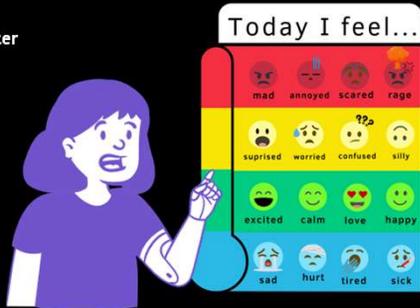
It is safer for YOU and for them if you can leave OR isolate yourself

Planning how to talk to workers and let them know you need to be isolated is important for the "worse case" scenario

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Plan Your Communication

- Communication also gets **HARD** before/during/after
- Consider using "signals":
 - Hand signs, code words, colors, numbers
- Practice "mindfulness" by asking
 - "What am I feeling right now?"
 - "What is causing this feeling?"



The illustration shows a woman with purple hair and a purple shirt pointing to a board titled 'Today I feel...'. The board is divided into four colored sections: red (top), yellow (middle), green (bottom-left), and blue (bottom-right). Each section contains several emoji-like icons representing different emotions. The red section includes 'mad', 'annoyed', 'scared', and 'rage'. The yellow section includes 'surprised', 'worried', 'confused', and 'silly'. The green section includes 'excited', 'calm', 'love', and 'happy'. The blue section includes 'sad', 'hurt', 'tired', and 'sick'.

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Remember not to assume people know you are uncomfortable

Communicating with others is necessary to let others know what you are feeling

But you can only communicate how you are feeling by KNOWING what you are feeling

Practice knowing the signs to what you are feeling

And some emotions may be easier than others, I can very easily tell when I am sad but struggle greatly to tell when I am getting frustrated

Keeping a journal and noting the physical signs along with emotional signs may help

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Example Plan A

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- 1 Identify Triggers/Needs**
 1. I need to be alone in the **dark and quiet**.
 2. Triggers can be feeling **"wrong"** or **"confused"** or **life stressors**.
- 2 Rumbling Vs Baseline**

I usually get **paranoid** or **anxious**.

I also feel **sick the morning of** a meltdown.

Call in to work ASAP.
- 3 Location Specific**
 1. If I can't go home, use my phone to make **white noise** and go to a **restroom**.
 2. If home, **go to room**
- 4 Communication**
 1. **Text** "I need to leave" or **ASL**.
 2. They are allowed to **redirect me to my room** until I am back to baseline.

Here is my personal plan

You may or may not relate to my plan.

Every plan is catering to YOUR NEEDS

If yours doesn't look like another autistic/adhd person, that's okay!

The point is to help YOU, not for your to "look or react" like everyone else

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Example Plan B

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- 1 Identify Triggers/Needs**
 - I need to be alone in my room with a **weighted blanket and a familiar TV show**
 - Triggers are **unexceped transitions**
- 2 Rumbling Vs Baseline**
 - I usually get **angry and repetitive.**
 - I **cannot tell when I'm in the rumbling phase** and rely on feedback from family, friends, and teachers.
- 3 Location Specific**
 - If at school, **my teacher calls my mom** and I get taken to a **quiet space.**
 - If home, **go to room and mom helps me setup**
- 4 Communication**
 - I **have a plan that if I can't talk or cry for too long, I need my mom.**
 - I trust adults to lead me home.

Here is my personal plan for my 4 yr old daughter

You may or may not relate to her plan.

Every plan is catering to YOUR NEEDS

If yours doesn't look like another autistic/adhd person, that's okay!

The point is to help YOU, not for your to "look or react" like everyone else

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Example Plan C

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- 1 Identify Triggers/Needs**
 1. I need to be surrounded by noise, TV show, games, and music
 2. Triggers are being overstimulated
- 2 Rumbling Vs Baseline**
 - I usually get angry or upset.
 - I am usually in the rumbling stage the first hour after work.
- 3 Location Specific**

I rumble AND have meltdowns at home.
It's my safe space where I can unmask.
- 4 Communication**
 1. Text "home please" or use ASL if with my partner
 2. Once home, I let them know I need alone time for around an hour.

Here is my personal plan for my husband

You may or may not relate to his plan.

Every plan is catering to YOUR NEEDS

If yours doesn't look like another autistic/adhd person, that's okay!

The point is to help YOU, not for your to "look or react" like everyone else



Let's discuss prevention and recovery

Avoid or Replace Triggers

- Being **flexible** and **finding compromises** will be key
- Example: **Trigger** is busy stores
 - **Avoid:** Shopping online and doing pickup or delivery
 - **Replace:** Finding smaller stores or shopping early hours
- You will **NOT** find compromises for everything
- Sometimes, it will be balancing pros and cons
- You may “lose out” on some experiences, but there are plenty of other choices and your quality of life will be **richer by reducing meltdowns**



It's okay to feel sad that you can't do an activity "like everyone else"

Just remember that EVERY person in the world is born with advantages and disadvantages

I am not saying that we are guaranteed to use those advantages/disadvantages, but we are born with them

Just as autism/adhd has the disadvantage of giving you meltdowns and preventing you from doing certain tasks, you may personal strengths associated with your diagnoses

Just how I would NEVER suggest someone with a physical/medical/demographic other than autism/adhd can't do something, YOU aren't just your diagnoses

Try to consider, some people have medicine they may take, or tasks they can't do due to physical limitations, just as THEY are NOT less than because of their condition, you are NOT less than either

The point is to live a good life, that goes for anyone born to any situation

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Recovery Communication

- **Gentle with Yourself**
 - Talking may be hard or confusing **after a meltdown**
 - Tip: **write your thoughts** down before having a conversation
- **Gentle with Others**
 - Witnessing a meltdown **can be scary**
 - Even the most understanding family or friends can still feel hurt from the episode
 - Talking to them and discussing what happened is the start of the **recovery for them too**



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First of all, it can seem a bit odd to think of others after a meltdown

Let's use an example: I am NOT saying a broken leg isn't painful to the one who is injured

But to the family or friends who witnessed the break? It was probably terrifying!

That is not including if there were behaviors that accidentally hurt the people around us

Taking responsibility isn't the same as saying you were in control during the meltdown

But all actions have consequences, whether they are good or bad

By communicating with others and moving forward in your recovery together, you are accepting their feelings as well

Preventing meltdowns from affecting your relationships is part of the prevention process and will make future meltdowns easier as a result

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Physical Recovery



- **Treat it like you would a Cold**
 - Rest, fluids, easy to digest foods, etc
 - Your body just went through trauma, **YOU** deserve rest
- **Remember, no details outside your home**
 - Many people **will not** understand what meltdowns are.
 - Simply say you are "**sick and recovering**", no one is owed your private medical information.

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There is a physical, mental. And emotional toll from having meltdowns

Treat yourself kindly during your recovery period, the sooner you return to your baseline, the sooner you can move on

It can be very hard to avoid saying “meltdown” to people you know: co workers, family members, friends, etc

But you are reducing the amount of complications if you keep the information of what happened to yourself

- Why did you have one?
- What triggered it?
- Why didn't you prevent it?
- Did you follow the plan?

After a meltdown, the questioning or even prejudice can negatively affect you

No one needs to know you had a meltdown if it's avoidable

Simply say "I'm sick and need a day to recover", the less information you give, the more time you can focus on resting

However, I HIGHLY suggest telling roommates or family members you will with so they may follow your meltdown plan and prevent miscommunication

Only avoid telling them if you feel it would make the situation worse, aka a difficult roommate situation or something similar

Activity One: Share Your Needs

- Let's take a moment to brainstorm some of our needs
- Either in chat or using your phone:
 - Narrow down your needs into emoji form
 - Or write down on paper
- Here are mine:



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Meltdown plans don't need to be complicated, you just need the essential parts to make it work and communicate to those who need to know

Mine is:

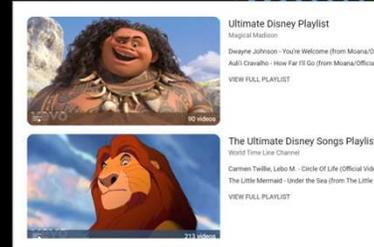
Drink ice water if I cannot escape right away

Take pain medicine or pet my dog if I'm at the rumbling stage

If a meltdown is unavoidable, take a nap in a dark and quiet room, use noise canceling headphones if needed

Activity Two: Prepare

- Bad days are going to happen, BUT we can plan out things to DO
- We are going to make "Chill-Lax" Lists!
- Make one of the following:
 - A playlist for music
 - List of things to draw
 - Bad day gaming library
 - List of care items to keep in a box



Prepare things to do during your rumbling stage to help you return back to baseline

Having to not think on the spot of "what to do" to calm down is very important

The first couple of times will be the hardest, but the goal is to make it a routine

"when I am upset, I will draw something from my list"

"when I am struggling, I will go to my stress box and take a relaxing bath and nap"

Follow Through

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It will take practice, time, and lots of communication

But having a plan WILL help manage meltdowns and prevent them impacting your life and lowering your quality of life.

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It is hard to remember to take care of yourself when you are overwhelmed with stress, sensory input, and feelings.

But the goal is to be happy, you can only get to that point if you practice self care and take a step towards independence.



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