

# Managing Big Emotions

Many young children experience intense feelings such as disappointment, frustration, anger, overwhelm and anxiety. This can be expressed in outbursts and meltdowns. Managing meltdowns can be particularly challenging for parents especially when these emotions are directed towards them.

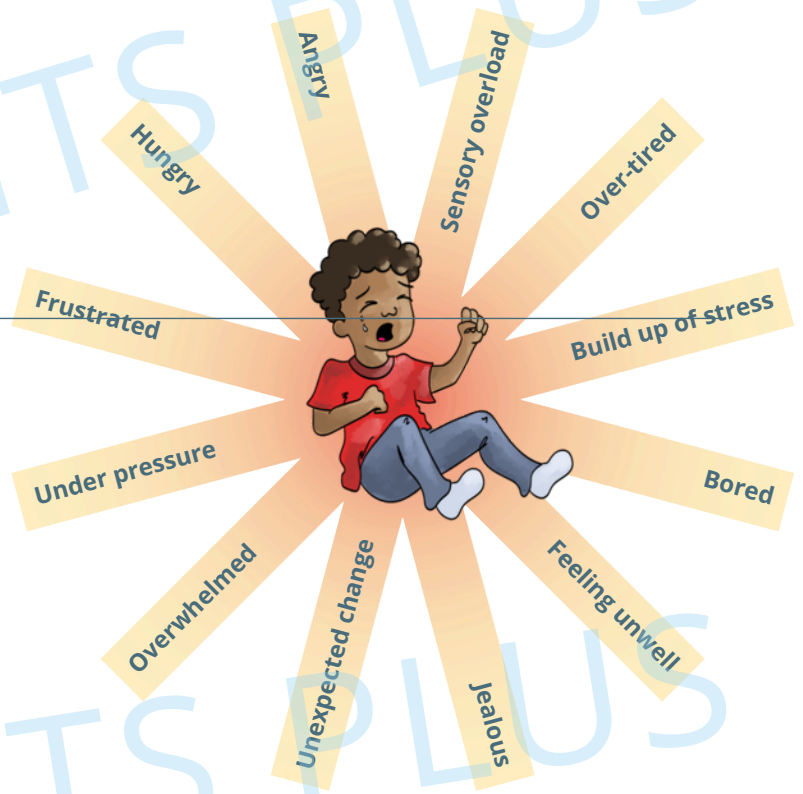


## Reframing meltdowns

Rather than seeing emotional outbursts or meltdowns as a personal attack, try to see them as an opportunity to support your child. Many young children only feel safe to express their distress to their parents. Through an emotional outburst they are seeking your understanding and trusting you to support them to regulate. See it as a good thing that they are reaching out to you for help!

## Understanding meltdowns

Children experience intense emotions and meltdowns for lots of different reasons. Sometimes there is a single trigger or stressor, but more often a meltdown represents a build up of stress and overwhelm.



## Co-regulating with your child

Co-regulation is how you can help your child process and manage their intense emotions. You act as a safe, understanding person in their presence as you help them regulate and regain their balance.

# Managing Big Emotions


Co-regulate with your child to help them manage intense feelings.



**Comfort them**  
Find out what works for your child. They might like you to give them a hug, rub their hand or say soothing words.




**Focus on what they enjoy**  
Distract them with activities that help them feel calm, safe and regulated.




**Name their feelings**  
Help your child feel understood so they learn how to cope.



**Give them space if they need it**  
If your child is too upset to be comforted, give them space and talk less. Offer to comfort them again after a moment.



**Set up a chill out space**  
Keep a special space in your home where you and your child can go to relax and re-balance.



**Manage your own feelings**  
If you feel overwhelmed it can be hard to comfort your child. You might need to:

- step back and take a few deep breaths, or
- contact a friend for support.

## The importance of prevention

Take time to address the **underlying issues** that might be stressing your child and leading to their distress and meltdowns. This might mean changing routines, providing extra support and ensuring there are lots of opportunities to relax and regulate during the day.

Jo's daughter would often have meltdowns when she came in from school so she made sure to create a relaxing **'low demand' routine** after school, when she could play and have some snacks.

Mo realised that his daughter was less anxious when she **knew the plan** for each day, especially who was collecting her from childcare. Every morning they would read the schedule on their kitchen wall to reassure her.

When she noticed her son getting agitated because he was bored, Sue would start a **guessing game** or do **puzzles** with him. He loved this and it helped him re-balance and focus.

Paul's oldest son loved **wrestling** and **horse play**. This helped him relax after a stressful day. His younger son preferred quieter **absorbing activities** such as **art** to help him regulate and relax.

Rather than insisting her son sit at the table to do homework, Úna offered him a **choice** to complete it **sitting** in his beanbag, **standing** up or while **rocking** on his balance board.

## Model self-regulation

Children learn most from what they see you do. You can show them how to regulate by being a good model yourself. When you are upset, acknowledge your feelings and show them how you manage.

