

Meltdowns vs. Tantrums

Many family members often ask how to tell the difference between a person experiencing a meltdown and engaging in a temper tantrum. We have provided some information to get you thinking about the potential differences.

Tantrums

Tantrums are emotional outbursts often associated with young children but can also happen in older children and adults.

Think about a time when you haven't got your own way with and you became really cross, what did you do?

In a tantrum the person usually:

- Has some level of control over their behaviour
- Makes a choice to engage in the behaviour
- Looks for reactions from others around
- Has the ability to talk and negotiate
- Can put an end to the tantrum quickly when the desired response is achieved

Meltdowns

When in a 'meltdown' the person is reacting out of fright and fear and their brain is in overload, which makes it very difficult to respond to others.

In a meltdown the person usually:

- Will appear to be in panic mode
- Have no control over their behaviour
- Will have uncontrollable physiological symptoms - e.g., sweating, shaking
- Find it hard to verbally communicate
- Find it difficult to follow instructions
- Find it difficult to problem solve
- Find it difficult to explain how they are feeling
- Takes a while to calm down and needs recovery time after

It is also worth noting that sometimes tantrums can lead to meltdowns.