

The **S.A.F.E.** Cheat Sheet

What to do when a meltdown starts. One plan, anywhere, in four steps.



Safety first

Move sharp or breakable things away. Move siblings to another room. Put space between your child and roads, water or traffic. If anyone is in danger, call 911.



Adjust the senses

Turn down the noise, dim the lights, turn off the TV or step outside. Offer headphones, sunglasses or a hood. Less input helps the brain reboot faster.



Fewer words

Say less. Use a low, slow voice and 2–4 word phrases. Skip questions, reasons and warnings until later.



Empathy, then reconnect

Stay close without crowding. Wait. When the storm passes, offer water, rest and comfort. Talk about what happened only later, when your child is truly calm.

The meltdown wave: know where you are

1 • Rumble

Pacing, louder voice, covering ears. Lower demands now.

2 • Storm

Screaming, dropping, hitting. Safety first. Say very little.

3 • Calm

Quiet and exhausted. Water, rest, no lessons yet.

4 • Reconnect

Back to baseline. Comfort first, then talk simply.

What NOT to do mid-storm

- ✗ Punish, threaten or take away comfort items
- ✗ Demand eye contact or "use your words"
- ✗ Ask "why?" or explain the rules

Words that help

"You're safe."

"I'm right here."

"Too loud. Let's step outside."

"You don't have to talk."

My child's early warning signs:

What helps my child most:

Who to call for help: