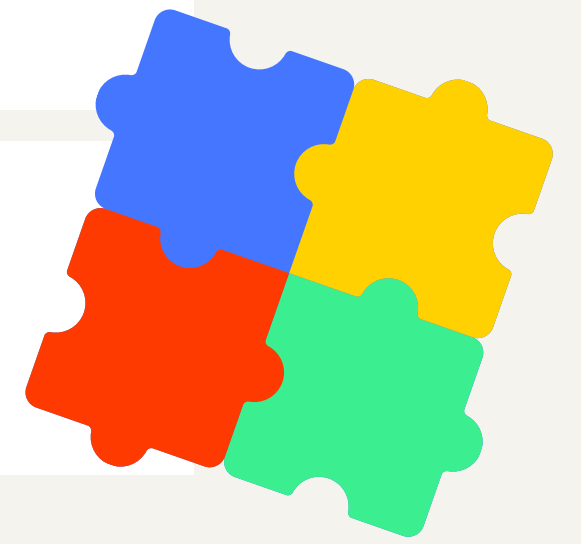




Managing Meltdowns



1

WHAT IS A MELTDOWN?

Many individuals who have autism experience meltdowns. A meltdown is characterised as an intense response to a situation - it occurs when an autistic person feels overwhelmed by the situation they are in and temporarily loses control of their behaviour. This may be expressed physically, e.g. through kicking, biting or lashing out or verbally, e.g. by screaming, crying and shouting, or both.

It is important to acknowledge that a meltdown is not the same as a temper tantrum, despite common public misconceptions. A meltdown is not reflective of bad behaviour, instead, it happens when an individual with autism is overwhelmed and experiencing difficulty with expressing that. However, meltdowns are not the only way in which an autistic person may express feelings of being overwhelmed - they may also withdraw socially and refuse to interact with situations that they find challenging or completely avoid them altogether.



2

ANTICIPATING A MELTDOWN

Before experiencing a meltdown, many autistic people will display signs of distress, such as pacing, rocking or becoming very still. During this stage, which is sometimes referred to as the "rumble stage", there is a possibility to prevent a meltdown. Strategies to employ include using calming tools such as listening to music or playing with fiddle toys as well as removing potential triggers.

3

IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES

One useful tool to help manage a meltdown is identifying what specifically the individual finds overwhelming. This can be done by completing a diary across a period of time, recording what happens before, during and after each meltdown. This can then be used to reflect on and identify patterns which may occur, allowing an individual to limit exposure to triggers.

4

MINIMISING TRIGGERS

Following on from identifying the causes, once you have a better idea of what it is that may be triggering meltdowns, you can think about ways in which you may minimise that trigger. Common triggers include:



- Anxiety,
- Changes in routine,
- Sensory differences,
- Communication difficulties.

5

AFTER A MELTDOWN

After a meltdown, it is normal for the individual to feel exhausted or embarrassed. Because of this, it is important, where possible, for the individual to take time, space and even engage in a calming and familiar activity as a way to help them recover. For example, they may want to touch a sensory object, read a book or listen to their favourite music. It may also benefit them to talk about what happened once they feel calmer.

