

NEUROHEAL PROGRAM

# Meltdown-to-Calm

10-Minute De-escalation Playbook

FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGES 3-10

*"What do I do in the moment?"*

**3-STAGE**

Meltdown Map

**25**

De-escalation  
Scripts

**CALM**

Corner Setup  
Guide

**FULL**

Recovery  
Routine

INCLUDES: PDF Guide - Script Cards - Calm Corner Posters - Recovery Tracker

**NeuroHeal Program**

Evidence-based support for neurodivergent families

[neurohealprogram.com](https://neurohealprogram.com)

# What's Inside Your Playbook

Everything you need — right when you need it most

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# How to Use This Playbook

01

## Keep It Accessible

Print this guide and place it on your fridge, in your car, and near your child's play area. In a meltdown you won't have time to search for it.

## Use Scripts Word-for-Word at First

These phrases are carefully calibrated for a dysregulated nervous system. Use them as written until they feel natural — then adapt.

## Practise Between Meltdowns

Role-play the scripts with your child during calm moments. Familiarity with your voice and words builds a sense of safety.

## Follow the Stages

Each stage of a meltdown needs a different response. What works at Stage 1 can escalate Stage 2 — trust the map.

## Skip the Why (For Now)

During a meltdown, reasoning doesn't work. The thinking brain is offline. Return to 'why' conversations only in Stage 3 or after full recovery.

## You Cannot Do This Wrong

Your calm presence is the intervention. These scripts and tools help you access that calm even when you are scared or overwhelmed.

# The 3-Stage Meltdown Map

02

1  
STAGE

## THE BUILD-UP

*Warning Signs — Window of Opportunity*

CATCH IT HERE

### SIGNS YOU'LL SEE

- Whining or increased fussiness
- Clinginess or sudden withdrawal
- Heightened sensitivity (sound/light/touch)
- Rigid thinking — 'No!' to everything
- Voice volume rising
- Body tension, clenching fists

### DO THIS

- Whisper — lower your voice
- Get to their eye level
- Offer a binary choice: 'X or Y?'
- Name what you see: 'Your body looks tense'
- Reduce demands immediately
- Move toward the calm corner

### AVOID

- Reason or explain
- Raise your voice
- Add more demands
- Touch without asking

2  
STAGE

## THE PEAK

*Full Meltdown — Safety First*

SURVIVE, DON'T SOLVE

### SIGNS YOU'LL SEE

- Screaming, crying, hitting
- Throwing objects
- Complete emotional overwhelm
- Cannot hear or process language
- May hurt self or others
- No logical thought possible

### DO THIS

- Ensure physical safety
- Speak 5 words or fewer
- Sit nearby — don't leave
- Breathe slowly and visibly
- Repeat: 'I'm here. You're safe.'

### AVOID

- Explain, reason, or threaten
- Add consequences now
- Match their energy
- Force eye contact or touch
- Walk away

3  
STAGE

## THE RECOVERY

*Coming Down — Reconnect & Repair*

CONNECT BEFORE CORRECT

### SIGNS YOU'LL SEE

- Crying softens
- Body begins to relax
- Accepts comfort
- Eye contact returns
- Speech comes back
- Seeks physical closeness

### DO THIS

- Offer water and a small snack
- Gentle touch if welcomed
- Validate: 'That was really hard'
- Co-regulate: breathe together
- 15-min minimum before any talk

### AVOID

- Debrief immediately
- Demand an apology
- Lecture or moralize
- Dismiss with 'you're fine'

# Stage 1 Scripts: The Build-Up

03

Scripts #1-8 | Use at first warning signs — the earlier the better

**WHEN: Noticing the warning signs**

1

*"I can see your body is getting really full right now. Let's find a calm spot together."*

**WHEN: Offering a choice**

2

*"Do you want to squeeze my hand or hug your stuffie? You pick."*

**WHEN: Transition resistance**

3

*"I know stopping is hard. You have two more minutes, then we'll take a quiet break."*

**WHEN: Sensory overload starting**

4

*"This place is really loud, isn't it? Let's find a quiet corner just for us."*

**WHEN: Demand refusal**

5

*"Okay. No rushing. I'm right here. We can wait together."*

**WHEN: Hunger or tiredness trigger**

6

*"I wonder if your body needs a snack. Let's try that before anything else."*

**WHEN: Sibling conflict escalating**

7

*"Both of your feelings make sense. Right now, let's all just breathe first."*

**WHEN: Anticipation anxiety**

8

*"You're thinking a lot about what's coming. That makes sense. I've got you."*

# Stage 2 Scripts: Peak Meltdown

04

Scripts #9-18 | Safety first — 5 words or fewer — wait it out

9

**WHEN: Full meltdown — physical safety**

*"I'm staying right here. You are safe. I'm not going anywhere."*

10

**WHEN: Child hitting or kicking**

*"I'll keep your body safe. [create distance] I'm right here with you."*

11

**WHEN: Screaming and inconsolable**

*"I hear you. [pause] I hear you. [keep breathing slowly]"*

12

**WHEN: Throwing objects**

*"I'm moving things so nobody gets hurt. I'm still right here."*

13

**WHEN: 'I hate you!' outbursts**

*"I know you're really hurting. I love you. That won't change."*

14

**WHEN: Child tries to run**

*"I'm right behind you. I'm keeping you safe. [follow calmly]"*

15

**WHEN: Hyperventilating or gasping**

*"Watch my belly. [breathe visibly] In... and out. Copy me."*

16

**WHEN: Repeated shouting**

*"[Don't mirror. Breathe. Wait.] I'm here. Your body is working hard."*

# Stage 3 Scripts: Recovery

05

Scripts #19-25 | Connect before you correct — minimum 15 min wait

19

**WHEN: First signs of calming**

*"You worked so hard just then. I'm proud of how you came through it."*

20

**WHEN: Offering comfort after the storm**

*"Can I sit next to you? I don't need to talk. I just want to be close."*

21

**WHEN: Child says sorry / feels shame**

*"You don't need to be sorry for hard feelings. We all have them. I love you."*

22

**WHEN: Reconnecting gently**

*"Your body did something really big. Want some water? [offer, don't push]"*

23

**WHEN: Discussing what happened, when ready**

*"When you're ready, we can talk about what happened. No rush at all."*

24

**WHEN: Rebuilding after property damage**

*"We'll fix that together later. Right now, you matter more than things."*

25

**WHEN: Creating safety for next time**

*"I wonder what your body needs when it gets that full. Shall we make a plan?"*

# Calm Corner Setup Guide

06

A dedicated space for big feelings — set it up before you need it

## What Is a Calm Corner?

A calm corner is a designated, non-punitive space where your child can go to regulate their nervous system. It is not a time-out — it is a tool for self-regulation.

### Sensory Items

- Weighted lap pad or small blanket (2-4 lbs for most children)
- Fidget tools: textured ball, stretchy band, pop-it, kinetic sand
- Noise-cancelling headphones or soft earplugs
- Sunglasses or sleep mask for light sensitivity
- Scented item: lavender sachet or familiar scent

### Visual Anchors

- Printed Feelings Wheel poster (included in this pack)
- Printed 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding reminder card
- Photo of a calming place or a happy memory
- Small lava lamp or colour-changing light (no flashing)
- Your 'I'm Here' poster — reassures child of your presence

### Comfort Items

- Child's favourite stuffed animal or comfort object
- A cosy hoodie, blanket, or 'hug shirt' (something soft)
- A water bottle with a straw — hydration aids regulation
- A small healthy snack in a zip-lock for hunger-triggered episodes

## 3 Golden Rules for the Calm Corner

- NOT a punishment — never send child here as a consequence
- Child can go at any time — teach them to self-refer
- Parent may suggest gently — never force: 'Want to try the calm corner?'

# Recovery Routine After a Meltdown

07

For child AND parent — recovery is a two-person job

## 0-5 min SURVIVE

- Your only job: stay physically present
- Breathe slowly — your nervous system is their anchor
- Don't speak unless for safety: 'I'm here. You're safe.'
- Regulate yourself first — even 3 deep breaths helps

## 5-15 min SETTLE

- Offer (don't push): water, blanket, comfort object
- Sit quietly nearby — side by side, not face-to-face
- Match their energy downward: softer voice, slower movement
- If they want contact, follow their lead

## 15-30 min RECONNECT

- Gentle check-in: 'How's your body feeling now?'
- Offer a small snack if possible
- Validate: 'That was really hard. I'm glad we're through it.'
- Short, warm physical contact if welcomed — hug, hand-hold

## 30-60 min REPAIR

- Only if child is fully calm AND you are too
- 'I noticed you were really upset about X. Want to talk?'
- Listen more than you speak
- Problem-solve together: 'What might help next time?'

# Printable Script Cards

08

Cut out and keep — fridge, wallet, car, bedroom door

Print on card stock and laminate if possible. Colour-coded by stage.

## #1 Warning Signs Seen

*"I can see your body is getting really full. Let's find a calm spot together."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 1

## #2 Reduce Overwhelm

*"Do you want to squeeze my hand or hug your stuffie? You pick."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 1

## #3 Transition Resistance

*"Two more minutes, then we'll take a quiet break. I'm with you."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 1

## #4 Sensory Overload

*"This place is really loud, isn't it? Let's find a quiet corner just for us."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 1

## #5 Full Meltdown

*"I'm staying right here. You are safe. I'm not going anywhere."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 2

## #6 Child Hitting/Kicking

*"I'll keep your body safe. [create space] I'm right here."*

NeuroHeal Program | Stage 2

# Calm Corner Poster — Print & Display

09

Post in the calm corner for your child to read during and after a meltdown

## When Feelings Get Big...

Here's what you can do:

1

### STOP

Freeze like a statue for 3 seconds

2

### BREATHE

Breathe out slowly — longer than you breathe in

3

### NOTICE

Name it: 'I feel angry / scared / sad / frustrated'

4

### CHOOSE

Pick a calm tool: squeeze stuffie, squeeze ball, ask for a hug

5

### WAIT

Stay here until your body feels quieter inside

**Your calm corner is here for you.**

You are safe. Mum/Dad is close. Big feelings always pass.

# Parent Self-Care After Meltdowns

10

You cannot pour from an empty vessel — your regulation matters

## Remember This:

Surviving a meltdown is physically and emotionally exhausting. You are not failing — you are doing one of the hardest things a parent can do. Your regulated nervous system is the intervention.

### In the Moment (During / Right After)

- Breathe out longer than you breathe in — activates your parasympathetic system
- Drop your shoulders and unclench your jaw — your child feels your body language
- Say silently: 'I am safe. This is temporary. I can handle this.'
- Avoid speaking until you feel the charge in your body reduce

### Within the Hour

- Drink a full glass of water — cortisol depletes your hydration
- Text or call someone who gets it — don't suffer in silence
- 3 minutes of physical movement: shake hands, walk, stretch
- Write one thing you did well, no matter how small

### Longer-Term Patterns

- Track patterns: time of day, hunger, sleep, transitions — prevention is possible
- Join or create a parent support group — community reduces shame
- Consider your own nervous system support: therapy, coaching, breathwork
- Celebrate wins. 'We made it through' IS a win.

### Words to Carry With You

- 'I am not failing. I am learning.'
- 'My child is not giving me a hard time — they are having a hard time.'
- 'My calm is the bridge back to safety.'
- 'I don't have to be perfect. I have to be present.'

# You've Got This.

Every meltdown you survive together  
is a step toward a more connected relationship.

This playbook is part of the NeuroHeal Program  
Evidence-based tools for neurodivergent families

## QUICK REFERENCE

**Stage 1 — Build-Up:** Lower voice · Offer choice · Reduce demands

**Stage 2 — Peak:** 5 words max · Stay present · Safety first

**Stage 3 — Recovery:** Connect first · Water · Wait 15 min

[neurohealprogram.com](https://neurohealprogram.com)

For more resources, support, and community