A GUIDE FROM THE PRACTICE OF SHARIFUL A. SYED, MD

After-school meltdowns: what to do right now

Many children hold it together all day at school and let it out at home, where they feel safest. It isn't bad parenting and it isn't manipulation. A meltdown is a nervous system that has run out of room. These steps help in the moment and make the next one less likely.

If anyone may be in danger, call 911. For the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988.

During the meltdown

- Safety first. Move anything that can break or hurt, and give your child room. Siblings go to another room.
- One calm adult. Fewer people means less to take in.
- Fewer words. Short, quiet sentences: "You're safe. I'm here." Skip questions, reasons and consequences for now.
- Turn the input down: lights lower, TV off, phones away.
- Wait it out nearby. A meltdown has to run its course; you can't talk someone out of it.

Right after

- Water and a snack. Hunger and thirst make everything harder.
- Quiet time, alone or next to you, whichever your child picks.
- Hold the questions about the day for at least half an hour.
- Reconnect before you correct: a hug, a shared show, their favorite topic. Talk about what happened later, when everyone is calm.

Before tomorrow

- Build a landing routine for the first 30 to 60 minutes home: snack, quiet, no demands, the same order every day.
- Keep a simple log for two weeks: the day, the time, what happened just before, how long it lasted. Patterns show up fast.
- Ask the school what the day looked like: noise, changes of plan, lunch, recess, a substitute teacher.
- Show the afternoon in pictures or a short list, so there are no surprises.
- Name what you see without blame: "School takes a lot out of you. Home is where you can let go."

When to call a doctor

- Meltdowns are getting longer, more frequent or more intense.
- Someone is getting hurt, including your child hurting themselves.
- It's happening at school now too, or your child is refusing to go.
- Sleep, eating or mood have changed for weeks.

Talk with Dr. Syed for 30 minutes, free, by video or phone: **(516) 522-0410** or sharifulsyedmd.com/autism.

General education for families, not medical or legal advice and not a diagnosis. Every child is different; talk with your child's doctor about yours.