

SENSORY VS. BEHAVIOUR

Sensory based meltdown

- May be unable to speak
- Autonomic response- may appear distant, pupils dilate, sweating, manic laugh or cry red ears, fight/flight/ freeze response
- Reaction to a stimulus/ sensory input
- Meltdown unlikely to stop as soon as need is met / longer time to settle after
- Doesn't care if adults looking or not

Tantrum

- May look at adult for reaction/ response
- Gives verbal threats " I will throw this chair at you if xxxx"
- May laugh whilst looking at adults
- Meltdown likely to stop once need is met (driven by a want or goal)
- No immediate autonomic response noted

Although sensory meltdowns and behaviour outbursts may look similar, the causes and appropriate responses are completely different. It's important for adults to understand the differences between these two occurrences so that they can offer the proper support. Please bare in mind, sometimes the response could be both or start as a behaviour and change to a meltdown.

Tips to support sensory meltdown

- Comfort the child
- Locate a calm quiet place for them to take some time away from the original environment
- Have a key safe adult present
- Reduce any verbal communication but calmly remain present
- Reassure them that everything is okay
- Do not provide a consequence

Tips to support tantrums

- Acknowledge what they are feeling. ("I see that you are upset because you are not ready to leave yet.")
- After acknowledging how they feel, stand firm on your answer. ("I see that you are upset because you are not ready to leave yet, but it is time to leave.")
- If you think that a behaviour is brewing, try to redirect the child to something else.
- Always model the behaviour that you want them to express.
- Sometimes behaviours are unavoidable. Once an outburst settles, encourage the child to talk about their emotions and what could have been done differently.

Remember!
All behaviour is communication of a need

