

# 10 tips to managing meltdowns

<b>1 Stay calm</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are your child's anchor during the storm.</li> <li>Your child needs to know that he or she has a strong and supportive adult to depend on when the eating disorder becomes too difficult to manage.</li> </ul>
<b>2 Stay positive</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remind yourself and your child that you have the skills to manage stressful situations and have done so before.</li> <li>If you are feeling overwhelmed and cannot remain calm and positive, give yourself permission to take a short 5-minute break. Come back to the situation (such as a discussion or meal) when both of you are calm and ready to proceed. Or take turns – let one parent deal with the problem so the other can step back, then switch.</li> </ul>
<b>3 Be consistent</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remain consistent with your rules and work together as a team. Don't give in to meltdowns.</li> <li>If you remain consistent with your approach, your child will know that you are able to remain firm in the face of strong emotions and the meltdowns will soon decrease.</li> </ul>
<b>4 Be supportive</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be supportive and encouraging to your child. Use supportive statements such as "I know this is hard for you", "We'll get through this together". Don't use statements such as "Don't worry you're not fat" or "You still look skinny".</li> <li>Focus on your child, not the eating disorder.</li> </ul>
<b>5 Be proactive</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try to foresee stressful situations. For example, if you know your child has difficulty eating in restaurants or at large family gatherings, plan the outing together and have a back-up plan ready.</li> <li>Pay close attention and anticipate your child's anxieties.</li> </ul>

## **6 Use positive coping skills**

- Just as you are aware of your child’s anxieties, remember that he or she is aware of yours.
- It is important to be aware of your own anxiety and to model positive coping strategies.

## **7 Use relaxation techniques**

- Practice relaxation techniques at home with your child. Focusing on something else other than food, such as breathing or relaxing music, can be calming for you and your child.
- This is most helpful for children who find bedtime difficult.

## **8 Trust your judgment**

- Do not let the eating disorder take away your normal judgment as parents. Your child needs natural consequences for unacceptable behaviours, just as he or she did before the eating disorder.
- Engage your child in finding a solution. Your child doesn’t like feeling out of control any more than you like to see him or her distressed. After a difficult time, ask your child what he or she would like from you next time. Often it is something simple such as “I just want you to listen...not try to solve my problem”.
- Don’t forget to use distraction and relaxation strategies. You may need to take the lead in this area.

## **9 Look for triggers**

- It is important for your child to recognize the connection between stress and eating disordered thoughts.
- Ask your child if there is any else that has been upsetting him or her. Ask questions such as “How are things at school?”, “...with your friends?”, “...with the family?”.

## **10 Remember meltdowns are normal**

- Most importantly, remember that it is normal for all children to have meltdowns and that this is a part of the recovery process.
- Your child needs to be able to express his or her feelings in a safe and comfortable environment.