

7 Quick Fixes for ADHD Meltdowns

When your child has a behavior breakdown, brought on by symptoms of ADHD like poor impulse control, use these parent-approved fixes to pick him up.

by Michele Novotni, Ph.D.

Nothing can make a parent feel more powerless than an [ADHD child in meltdown mode](#). The tears, the irrationality, the flailing limbs? No, I'm not talking about the parent, but the child.

When a child breaks down in public, parents feel like failures — we should be able to control our child, right? We see the judgment in other parents' eyes, and we resent the “helpful” suggestions from the passerby who means well but who doesn't know a whit about ADHD.

Keep your head and your perspective. Often [kids with ADHD are impulsive](#) and can't regulate their behavior. Meltdowns say nothing about your parenting ability, but they do reflect the nature of ADHD.

So what to do when your child has a tantrum in a department store or at the kitchen table? Arm yourself with quick fixes. I offer my seven favorites.

Fix #1: [Agree on a Plan](#)

Managing Meltdowns



Managing Meltdowns

FIX #1: Agree on a plan

Before going to the grocery store or the video-game parlor, ask your ADHD child what would [calm him down](#) if he gets upset. If he does have an episode, you will have a plan because your child has delivered it to you. His ownership of it should pretty much guarantee that he will cooperate with your enforcing it.

FIX #2: Acknowledge her anguish

Let her know you understand what she is going through. In a calm voice, tell your child, "I know you're disappointed that you didn't find the toy you wanted" or "I know you're angry because your friends didn't ask you to play." Then ask your child to rate her disappointment or anger on a scale of 1 to 10. This gives you an idea of the severity of the problem, [without having to nag or repeat what you say](#).

FIX #3: Set the bar

Explain to him that the clock is running. You can say, "Let's see how fast you can calm yourself down, so we can get on with the rest of our day" or "Even though you're upset, you need to get in control, so we can continue shopping."

Fix #4: [Snuff Out the Emotion](#)

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FIX #4: Snuff out the emotion

Ask your child to imagine that there is a candle painted on her palm. Then have her hold her hand with her palm facing toward her face, and ask her to blow out the imaginary flame. [Deep breathing settles out-of-control children](#). An alternative: Keep a balloon or two in your purse and ask her to blow them up.

FIX #5: Get punchy

If you're at home during a meltdown, ask your child to punch a pillow, cushion, or another soft, safe object. Pillow fights, ripping up newspapers, or squeezing a ball can short-circuit a meltdown.

FIX #6: Press the right button

Have your child pretend that she is holding a remote control in her hand. Ask her to press the button that turns down her emotions.

FIX #7: Ask for help

If your child has frequent meltdowns that aren't responsive to interventions, don't wait until you are at your wit's end. [Work with an ADHD professional](#), to improve the chances of avoiding them.

More: Growing Up ADHD: The Early Years**BEEN THERE, DONE THAT?**

Share your strategies (and find new ones) for controlling a meltdown with readers at additudemag.com/adhd-behavior-discipline.html.

TIP From Our Readers

“Let your child know you love her, just not her behavior. It's important to make this distinction. I hug my daughter and hold her in my lap during a meltdown, reassuring her she is safe. Her anger often softens to manageable sobs while she's in my embrace.”

—from *ADDitude*'s [ADHD Community Forums](#)