

PRIOR MINDSET

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC PEOPLE EXPERIENCING OVERWHELM OR MELTDOWN

What is Autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by difficulties with social interaction, communication challenges, and a tendency to engage in repetitive behaviours. It is a spectrum condition, meaning it affects individuals differently and to varying degrees.



Supporting Autistic People Experiencing Overwhelm or Meltdown

In extreme distress, some autistic individuals may experience a meltdown or a shutdown. It's crucial for everyone to understand these reactions to provide appropriate support and educate others.

About Meltdowns and Shutdowns

Meltdowns: Involves behaviours like self-injury, crying, shouting, rocking, and other outward signs of distress.

Shutdowns: The individual becomes "zoned out" and unresponsive to their environment.

Both reactions can result from sensory overload, social overwhelm, uncertainty, and unexpected changes. Triggers vary among individuals and can sometimes combine to create a feeling of overwhelm.

How to Help

Do:

- **Keep them safe:** Remove anything they might hurt themselves on.
- **Find a comfortable space:** Preferably quiet and without bright lighting.



- **Stay calm:** Be assertive, confident, and in control.
- **Provide clear directions:** Use short, direct sentences.
- **Reinforce calmness:** Recognize and encourage when they begin to calm down.
- **Use a slow, low tone of voice:** Keep words clear and minimal.
- **Limit interventions:** Allow one person to take control to avoid overwhelming them.
- **Sit at their level:** If possible, sit to one side and ask them to sit down.
- **Encourage deep breathing:** Join them when they can.

Don't:

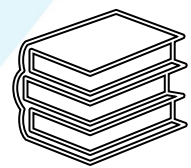
- **Restrain them:** Unless necessary to prevent violence or injury.
- **Match their mood:** Stay calm; your anxiety can increase theirs.
- **Discuss behaviour consequences:** This can increase their anxiety and frustration.

Directing People to Support

In most cases, intervention is not needed for a meltdown or shutdown. Calling emergency services can exacerbate the situation unless the person is in immediate danger or meltdowns are frequent.

Resources for Well-being

If you or someone else needs to talk, the following resources can provide support:



- **[Ambitious about Autism](#):** Offers information for parents and carers of autistic children and young people. Call 020 8815 5444 or email info@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.
- **[The National Autistic Society](#):** Provides online guidance, a services directory, forums, and local branches for advice and support.
- **[Scottish Autism](#):** Offers information and advice. Call 01259 222022 or email advice@scottishautism.org (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm; Tuesday, 10am to 7pm).
- **[Mind](#):** The mental health charity offers information and advice. Call 0300 123 3393, text 86463, or email info@mind.org.uk.

- **Samaritans**: Available 24/7 for listening and support. Call 116 123.
- **SANeline**: For anyone experiencing a mental health problem or supporting someone else. Call 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm to 10.30pm, every day).
- **Shout 85258**: A free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service. Text 'Shout' to 85258.
- **CALM Zone**: Offers support via web chat or telephone helpline 0800 58 58 58 (open 5pm to midnight).

For further details and support, you can book in a consultation with Jerri at www.PriorMindset.co.uk to see how she can support you through this difficulty.

