

In a meltdown the thinking part of the brain is **offline**. You cannot reason it back — you can only keep it safe while it reboots. So the plan gets written **now**, on a calm day, by everyone who lives here. In the moment, nobody should be improvising.

How to use this page: fill it in when nothing is happening — not tonight, mid-storm. Then put it where the whole family can see it, and agree that *everyone* follows it, including the grown-ups.

1 The tells — what it looks like just before *the fuse getting shorter*

FIRST SIGN — the earliest one you can catch

SECOND SIGN

Volume creeping up · shorter answers · pacing · going quiet · body getting tight

THIRD SIGN — the last exit before the storm

2 What empties the tank *the storm is the third thing, not the first*

THE TWO OR THREE THAT ALWAYS COST HIM

OUR DANGER HOURS — when it usually lands

Hunger · a long day of holding it together · not enough sleep · noise · transitions · one more demand

☐ **What we protect that window with** — food, a break, less stacked on top, nothing asked for twenty minutes

3 When the storm hits — who does what *agree this in advance*

- ☐ **One adult stays. One adult leaves.** Two people managing a meltdown is one too many.
- ☐ **Quiet voice, low and slow, fewer words.** Your heart rate is the tool, not your sentences.
- ☐ **Safety first, always.** Move what he could get hurt on. Stay between him and the road, the stairs, the door.

☐ **Where the siblings go** — decided now, so nobody has to think:

☐ **The one thing that has helped before** — pressure, a dark room, silence, a blanket, being left alone:

What makes it worse — every single time

Explaining why it's not a big deal. The part of him that weighs "big deal" is the part that's offline.

Offering a consequence. Consequences need a working brake. There isn't one right now.

"Calm down." "Use your words." Both are instructions to a system that can't take instructions yet.

Teaching the lesson. It comes later. Much later. See box 4.

4 After — where the learning actually happens *an hour later, or the next morning*

WHEN WE DO THE REPAIR — pick a time, not "sometime"

On a calm brain this is worth a hundred lectures delivered to a brain in flames.

- ☐ **Ask, don't lecture.** "That was a big one. What do you think set it off? What could we try next time?"
- ☐ **Repair out loud, if you got sharp.** "That got hard and I got loud. That wasn't about you."

The words — for the middle of it

To your child: "I'm right here. You're not in trouble. I'm not going anywhere." — then stop talking.

To the other adult: "I've got him. Can you take the others?"

To yourself, first: one slow breath out before you say anything at all. His storm will pull you toward one of your own — that's the whole reason this page exists.