



AFTER-DAYCARE MELTDOWNS

It's REALLY Hard Being Good All Day

You pick up your child from daycare (or a playdate) expecting cheerful chatter about their day. Instead, you get whining, tears, or a full-blown collapse! If this sounds familiar, the good news is that your child isn't the only one who does this.

The even better news?

It's completely normal.

There Is Always a Reason:

Your child has spent their entire day working hard at something adults often take for granted—emotional regulation. They've been:

- Holding back tears when frustrated.

- Following rules (even when they didn't want to).
- Sharing toys, waiting for their turn, and generally keeping it together.

Daycare is fun, but for them, it's also work. Hard work.

When they see you, they feel emotionally safe; the mask comes off and they let it all out.

This makes you the privileged person who has their trust.

Here's What I've Found Works:

- **Food:**

A hungry child is a cranky child. Stave off the meltdown with a car snack for the road.

- **Be patient:**

Your calm presence helps them feel safe as they process the overwhelm of their day.

- **Allow decompression:**

Some children need cuddles, while others may prefer quiet time. Give them space to unwind in their own way.

- **Offer calming activities:**

Easy, low-energy activities help reset emotions. Consider drawing, puzzles, or coloring. Outdoor time—like soothing water play or even jumping in puddles on wet days—is calming.

- **Establish a predictable after-daycare routine:**

A special greeting, a favorite song or story in the car, or a specific order of activities when you get home. A

familiar sequence of events will help your child make a smoother transition from daycare to home.

- **Consider break days:**

If your child is exhausted from daycare, an occasional break day can help.

Common Challenges:

- **You want your child to be happy to see you:**

They are! But after a long day of holding in emotions, they need to let those feelings out. Don't take it personally!

- **You're looking forward to hearing about their day:**

Accept that they won't tell you during a meltdown. Instead, focus on that crumpled picture they drew for you (you'll find it at the bottom of their bag!).

- **You worry they're not happy at their daycare:**

While it's good to stay aware, most after-daycare meltdowns stem from emotional exhaustion, not problems at their center (but check with their teachers if you're really concerned).

- **You want your own after-work meltdown:**

Find time for yourself first (and maybe a little screen time for them?). Then do something together—outside is always a good option.

- **Everything you do is wrong:**

The snack is wrong. The seatbelt is wrong. Even how you opened the door is wrong! Of course, it's not really about those things—it's classic after-daycare meltdown

time. Stay calm, offer choices when possible, and give them time to unwind.

Look on the Bright Side

It can feel confusing, even a little hurtful, when your child behaves beautifully all day for others, only to fall apart when they see you. However, it's not a sign anything is wrong—with them or with you. It's evidence that they trust you enough to let their guard down.

Their meltdown isn't a rejection of you; it's a powerful sign of trust. Your child has been working hard all day to hold it together and seeing you—their safe person—gives them permission to let their real feelings out.

This stage won't last forever. With gentle routines, time to decompress, and your steady support, your child will gradually learn to manage the overwhelming feelings that come at the end of a busy day.

Your calm presence after a hard day means everything to them.

You're their safe harbor.

After-daycare meltdowns are a stage.

They are very normal.

