Strategies to Minimize Meltdowns for Students with ASD

Precursors to a Meltdown
- Increasing vocal intensity
- Decreased eye contact
- Downward gaze
- Tensing of muscles
- Quick or jerky motor actions
- Muttering about "unfairness" or "stupidity" of situation
- May shut down

Intervene in the Rumbling Stage
- Low and Slow: reduce volume and movement approach slowly and from below
- Distraction/Redirection: drawing attention to a favorite topic or calming strategy to refocus emotions
- Home base: student returns to a location where he/she can process with a trusted staff member
- Acknowledge difficulties: simply articulating the difficulty and reassuring the student that everyone faces difficulties at times can help a student save face and de-escalate the situation
- Just walk and don’t talk: physically moving away from the location of the stress without discussion can allow the situation to diffuse without a meltdown
- Humor: using humor to diffuse the situation by making a faux pas or directing the stress into laughter aimed away from the student can resolve a tense situation
- Silent signal: a mutually determined nonverbal signal can be provided that alerts the student to the rumbling and encourages prevention strategies

Practices to Avoid
- Public castigation
- Power assertions
- Rigid body language
- Sarcasm
- Comparison with peers
- Approaching quickly/from above
- Hands on—even gently
- Violation of instructor’s "rules"
- Threats (perceived as inevitable)

Verbal outburst
Stomping out
Property destruction
Self-injury

Explosion

Tears
Head on desk
Inertia/Freezing

Implosion

Recovery

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