



PDA Safety Planning Guide

For families experiencing meltdown-related aggression

This guide is for families where PDA meltdowns include physical aggression. Aggression in PDA is almost always driven by extreme anxiety and is not a deliberate choice. A safety plan helps protect everyone in the family while maintaining a compassionate approach.

If you're in immediate danger

Call 000 in an emergency. For ongoing crisis support, contact the Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14). You can also ask your child's paediatrician or support coordinator to refer you to a Family Support Service.

Part 1 — Environmental Safety Audit

Modifying the environment reduces the risk of harm during a meltdown without adding pressure to the child. Review each room where meltdowns commonly occur.

- Remove or secure breakable objects in high-risk areas
- Ensure there are no sharp-edged furniture corners at head height
- Consider soft furnishings (cushions, rugs) in rooms where physical impact is possible
- Ensure exits are accessible — do not trap the child in small spaces
- Keep dangerous items (knives, scissors, heavy objects) secured or out of reach during high-risk periods

Part 2 — Personal Safety Plan

This is about protecting yourself, your child, and siblings during a crisis — not about restraining or controlling the child.

During a meltdown with aggression

- Create physical distance — move to a safe part of the room
- Do not attempt to hold or restrain unless there is immediate life-threatening danger
- Turn sideways rather than facing directly — this reduces perceived threat
- Keep your voice calm and low: "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just giving you space."
- Monitor from a safe distance — don't abandon the child, but don't engage

Part 3 — Sibling Safety Plan

When there are siblings in the home, their safety and emotional wellbeing during meltdowns requires specific planning.

- Identify a designated safe space for siblings (bedroom with lock, neighbour's house, etc.)



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- Teach siblings an age-appropriate signal or phrase that means "go to your safe space now"
- Prepare siblings with language: "When [sibling] is really upset, their brain is overwhelmed — it's not about you."
- Debrief with siblings after incidents — they need acknowledgement and support too
- Consider individual time and support for siblings — they may be carrying more than they show

Part 4 — De-escalation Script

Having set phrases ready reduces the cognitive load on you in the moment. These are suggestions — adapt them to suit your child.

- "I'm not angry. I'm right here."
- "You're safe. No one is going to hurt you."
- "You don't have to do anything right now."
- "I'm going to sit here quietly until you feel a bit better."
- "Take all the time you need."

Part 5 — After the Meltdown

- Give yourself time to recover before re-engaging
- Check in with yourself: Do you need support too? (You do.)
- Document the incident — patterns, triggers, duration — for your support team
- Wait until everyone is fully calm before any debrief conversation
- Don't add shame or consequences to an already distressing event

Part 6 — Building Your Support Team

- Paediatrician or developmental paediatrician
- Clinical psychologist with PDA or autism experience
- Occupational therapist (regulation, sensory)
- NDIS Support Coordinator (if the child has an NDIS plan)
- Your GP (for your own health as a carer)
- Parent peer support groups (PDA Society of Australia, state groups)



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You deserve support

Parenting a child through frequent meltdowns and aggression is one of the most challenging experiences a parent can face. Asking for help is not giving up. It is the most important thing you can do for yourself and your family.