



PDA Trigger Tracking Worksheet

Identifying patterns to build a better support plan

Tracking your child's meltdown triggers is one of the most practical things you can do to reduce their frequency. Patterns often emerge that aren't obvious in the moment — time of day, specific demands, sensory factors, or cumulative demand load. This worksheet helps you gather that information systematically.

How to Use This Worksheet

1. Complete one row for each significant meltdown or shutdown episode
2. Fill in as soon as possible after the event — while detail is fresh
3. After 2-3 weeks, look for patterns across the rows
4. Share with your support team — therapist, paediatrician, school

Incident Log

Complete one row per incident. Print multiple copies as needed.

Columns to track for each incident

- Date / Time of day (morning, after school, evening)
- Where it happened (home, school, shops, car)
- What immediately preceded it (the apparent trigger)
- What had happened earlier that day (cumulative load)
- Duration and intensity (1–5 scale)
- What helped de-escalate it
- What made it worse

Common Trigger Categories to Watch For

Demand-Related Triggers

- Transitions between activities (especially from preferred to non-preferred)
- Unexpected changes to routine or plans
- Direct instructions or commands
- Time pressure ("you have 5 minutes to get ready")
- Multiple demands in quick succession

Sensory Triggers

- Specific sounds, textures, smells, or visual stimuli



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- Hunger, thirst, or fatigue (body sensations as demands)
- Clothing, tags, or temperature discomfort
- Bright lights, crowded environments, or loud spaces

Social Triggers

- Conflict with peers or siblings
- Feeling embarrassed, criticised, or misunderstood
- Having had to "perform" socially all day at school
- Unexpected social interactions (visitors, phone calls)

Cumulative Load Triggers

- End of the school week (Friday afternoons)
- After a busy social period
- Following a particularly demanding school week
- Return after school holidays (re-entry demands)

Pattern Analysis — Questions to Ask

- Is there a time of day that accounts for most incidents?
- Is there a specific day of the week?
- Is the same demand appearing repeatedly?
- Does the severity increase when demand load is higher?
- Are there sensory factors that appear across incidents?

Using your data

Once you identify patterns, you can work with your support team to modify the environment or routine to reduce those specific triggers. This is not about eliminating all demands — it is about reducing unnecessary demands and finding better timing or framing for essential ones.