

SHUTDOWNS & MELTDOWNS

SHUTDOWN OR MELTDOWN?

The terms shutdown and meltdown are often used interchangeably. But they are NOT the same thing! While both are reactions caused by sensory, information, or emotional overload, a meltdown consists of more outward behavior, and a shutdown is an internalized mode that is much less noticeable.

SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE A SHUTDOWN:

- Being completely silent
- Staring into space (dissociating)
- Unable to communicate in any way
- Using incorrect words or stuttering
- Withdrawing to a dark or quiet place (to break away from the cause of the shutdown)
- Inability to move away (sitting or laying down in place)
- Lying on the floor or a flat surface and remaining very still

SIGNS THAT MAY INDICATE A MELTDOWN:

- **Outward displays of behaviors**
- **Screaming or yelling**
- **Throwing or breaking objects**
- **Becoming violent - this can sometimes include becoming violent towards themselves**

Contrary to popular opinion, autistic meltdowns are not temper tantrums. In an autistic meltdown, the person is not aware of self-control, as they are in the throes of distress, and typically the meltdown situation will have to calm itself down, meaning, it cannot simply be "turned off."

A person experiencing a shutdown, unlike someone who is having a meltdown, is aware of self-control and that they are in the throes of distress, however, the individual is not able during a shutdown to control their muted internal response. Their brain continues to process in shutdown mode until it recovers and resets.