**Book Study**
Prepared by the
Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN)

# *Managing the Cycle of Meltdowns for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

Geoff Colvin and Martin Sheehan
(Corwin Press, 2012)

**Book Description:**

This book describes a model of positive behavior supports for preventing and responding to the cycle of meltdown behavior for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).   The model includes six phases: Calm, Triggers, Agitation, Meltdowns, Re-Grouping, and Starting Over.  The goal is to identify specific behaviors the student exhibits for each of the phases, so that strategies can be applied to arrest the progression toward a meltdown, or after the meltdown, to help the student recover and return to learning in the classroom.  The book includes checklists for helping identify specific behaviors, and forms for developing a behavior support plan.  The authors also describe how to build teacher-parent partnerships in order to better develop effective, consistent behavior plans.

**Target Audience:**
  ➢ General Staff
  ➢ Tier 1 teachers
  ➢ Tier 2 teachers
  ➢ Tier 3 teachers
  ➢ Leadership
  ➢ Autism Interdisciplinary Teams
  ➢ Special Education Teachers
  ➢ Related Services Personnel

**SECTION I: A MODEL FOR MELTDOWN BEHAVIOR OF STUDENTS WITH ASD**

**-Chapter 1: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Overview-**

**Brief Overview:**
The term *autism* often refers to a diagnosis of a medical condition with neurological abnormalities.  The book focuses on how autism affects student learning and behavior in school.  This chapter describes seven patterns of behavior commonly exhibited by students with ASD:

1) deficits in social interactions,
2) deficits in verbal and nonverbal communication,
3) restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities,
4) atypical responses to sensory experiences,
5) deficits in cognitive abilities,
6) physical and emotional health, and
7) motor skill difficulties.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. The authors describe ASD as a disability that occurs on a spectrum.  Describe the extremes of the ASD spectrum.


2. Conduct a jigsaw with the 7 patterns of behavior listed above.  Assign one category to each person in your book study group.  Each person should read the assigned pattern and report on it to the rest of the group.  What are the major problems in school that each pattern of behavior might create?

**-Chapter 2: The Nature of Meltdowns-**

**Brief Overview:**
Meltdowns are described as "the extreme actions exhibited by children with ASD when they reach an intense state of out-of-control behavior." This chapter provides examples of situations leading to meltdowns, identifies contributing factors, traces the corresponding responses from the child during the meltdown, and uses the information to develop a working definition of a meltdown.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Read the elementary and secondary example of a meltdown. Before reading the rest of the chapter, identify the similarities and differences between the two examples. Now read the section on Preliminary Observations. Were your similarities the same as the authors'?


2. How did the classroom set-up contribute to the meltdowns?


3. Describe how the teacher behavior interacted with ASD characteristics to accelerate the student's behavior.


4. Why is important to think about the function of the student's behavior?


5. What are the differences between a meltdown and a tantrum?


6. What did the authors identify as the critical features of a meltdown? Do you agree?

### -Chapter 3: A Six-Phase Model of the Meltdown Cycle-

**Brief Overview:**
This chapter describes a six-phase meltdown cycle for students with ASD. The phases describe the behaviors to be expected during each part of the explosive behavior chain. The hope is that when the student's behavior pattern has been identified, adults are better prepared to intervene early and disrupt the sequence of escalating behavior.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. What behaviors are typical of the Calm phase?

2. What are common Triggers for students with ASD? How have some of these triggers impacted students with whom you work?

3. What are the increases in behavior that are characteristic of the Agitation phase? What decreases in behavior are characteristic of the Agitation phase?

4. What are characteristics of the Meltdown phase?

5. What behaviors are typical of the Re-grouping phase?

6. What behaviors are typical of the Starting Over phase?

7. How are the Calm phase and the Starting Over phase similar? How are they different?

8. If possible, try out Forms 3.1 and 3.2. Were they helpful in understanding the behavior of a student with ASD with whom you work?

**SECTION II: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING THE PHASES OF THE MELTDOWN CYCLE**

**-Chapter 4: Calm Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
This chapter highlights eight strategies for maintaining all students, but especially students with ASD, in the calm phase.  The strategies are: manage the physical environment, address sensory issues, provide visual supports, provide peer support, establish expectations and rules, implement routines, provide a practical schedule, and deliver instruction.  For each strategy, the authors describe the process and provide examples.

**Discussion Questions:**
1.  Use the guidelines for classroom design and the checklist for organization of classroom space to evaluate your own classroom space.  Why do you think these guidelines and the checklist are important for students with ASD?

2.  Review Form 4.2 Checklist of Adjustments for Sensory Issues.  If possible, apply the checklist to students with ASD with whom you work.  Why are these adjustments important for helping students with ASD maintain the Calm phase?

3.  Review the steps for developing a system of visual supports.  Have you used visual supports for students with ASD before?  If so, what factors enhanced their effectiveness?

4.  Have you used any of the pieces of developing a system of peer supports before in your work with students with ASD or students with a different disability?  What do you think would be critical in using peer supports with students with disabilities?

5.  How clearly and explicitly are schoolwide rules and classroom expectations stated and taught in your building?  Are classroom rules systematically taught?  How do the procedures for teaching rules to elementary and secondary students differ?  How are they the same?

6.  Would implementing routines be a good idea for all students?  Why?  Why would the practice of implementing routines be especially important for students with ASD?

7.  What aspects of providing a schedule are important for students with ASD?

8.  Discuss the instructional modifications for students with ASD.  Why are instructional modifications and curriculum interventions important for helping students with ASD maintain the Calm phase?

**-Chapter 5: Trigger Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
Despite good preventative efforts to maintain the Calm phase, events may occur that serve as possible triggers for problem behavior.  If triggers are identified and effectively managed, there will be less chance of escalation of problem behaviors.  The strategies described to weaken the impact of triggers include: modify the environment for sensory overload and sensory cravings, provide visual supports, prepare for the unexpected, prime desired behaviors, and adapt instruction.

**Discussion Questions:**
1.  Discuss the example of modifying the environment in Box 5.1 on page 97.  What did the teacher do to reduce sensory overload?  What other ideas do you have for reducing sensory overload for Enrico?

2.  The authors emphasize using visual supports for both the Calm Phase and the Trigger Phase. Why are visual supports important for students with ASD?  How can visual supports assist with communication?

3.  Select one of the strategies for preparing for the unexpected.  Describe how you have used or might use this strategy to help manage triggers for a student with ASD.  Do you think trying to teach these strategies might be a trigger for some students?  If so, how could you manage their stress and learn better coping skills?

4.   What does it mean to "prime" desired behaviors? Select one of the priming strategies and describe how it would be used to help elicit desired behavior.

5.  Conduct a jigsaw where each person in the group selects one of the instructional strategies, describes how it is implemented, and tells why it is important for students with ASD.

**-Chapter 6: Agitation Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
During the Agitation phase, students are beginning to lose control, so the strategies described are designed to help students settle down and regain control.  The goal is to enable students to re-engage with learning activities, rather than continuing to be agitated or accelerating to the meltdown phase.  Sixteen strategies for defusing agitation are described in this chapter, with an example of each.

**Discussion Questions:**
1.  Why do you think the authors list the strategy of "Know the Student" as the first strategy for defusing agitation?


2.  As you read each strategy, think about how you might apply each strategy to a student with whom you work.


3.  Review Form 6.1 Checklist and Action Plan.  Identify another action that could be used for at least 3 of the strategies.  Share your ideas with others in your study group.


4.  Why is it important to track results?  How do you track results for intervention plans you implement in your classroom?

**-Chapter 7: Meltdown Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
Despite the use of good preventative practices, meltdowns still occur.  The focus shifts in this phase from preventative practices to keeping students safe.  This chapter describes critical perspectives, essential prerequisite steps and interventions steps for managing meltdowns.  The authors emphasize that implementation of all the steps in the cycle play a critical role in preventing and managing meltdowns, not just the strategies of the meltdown phase.

**Discussion Questions:**
1.  Why is it important for staff members to understand that a meltdown will typically run its course?

2.  How do the recommendations about judiciously using restraint align with the requirements of the Kansas Emergency Safety Interventions (ESI) regulations?

3.  What are the six prerequisite steps that should be put in place before meltdowns occur?  Have you completed these prerequisite steps for the students with ASD whom you teach?

4.  What are the five intervention steps that should be followed when a meltdown occurs?  Have you used these steps before with a student with ASD?  Think about using the Checklist and Action Plan (Form 7.3) with a student with whom you work.  A blank form can be found at the back of the book in Appendix K.

5.  Review the Supportive and Unsupportive Practices listed in Box 7.2 on pages 135 and 136.  Identify the Supportive Practices that you use.  Ask yourself whether you engage in any unsupportive practices that you need to change.

**-Chapter 8: Re-grouping Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
The phase following the meltdown is called re-grouping (or sometimes reintegration).   This is a transition phase between the meltdown and the process of resuming normal functioning. There are three steps to managing this transition: critical perspectives, behavioral indicators that the meltdown is ending, and intervention steps.  All are important in shortening the Re-grouping phase and preventing the student from returning to the Meltdown phase.

**Discussion Questions:**
1. Discuss the critical perspectives.  Why do you think these three critical perspectives are important in working with students with ASD?

2. What are the behavioral indicators that a meltdown is ending?  What might you observe that would be examples of these indicators?

3. Discuss the transition model in Figure 8.1 on page 147.  Why is withdrawing if the student does not respond positively important for a student with ASD?

4. How are Interaction probes designed?  Have you used similar probes before with students with ASD?

5. How should the progressive interaction probes be implemented?  Why is this sequence important?

6. Discuss Form 8.2 Checklist and Action plan, and the examples of each step.  Develop your own examples for each step.

**-Chapter 9: Starting-Over Phase-**

**Brief Overview:**
The Starting-Over Phase helps students adjust to the stimulation of the classroom and teaches skills aimed at helping to reduce the likelihood of future meltdowns through the use of six steps. The authors provide examples of application of the steps through two case studies.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the components of Step 1: Provide a Strong Emphasis on Scheduled Activities?

2. Why is Step 2: Focus on Scheduled Transitions so important for students with ASD?

3. Describe Step 3: Develop a Debriefing Plan. For which students is this step appropriate?

4. What are the procedures used for Step 4: Shape Sensory Reactions? Can you give other examples of the psychological principle of "shaping"?

5. Step 5: Heighten the Emphasis on Skill Building focuses on providing quality instruction using research-based curricula. With your discussion group, review the curricula and instruction used in your building with students with ASD. Are there improvements that need to be made?

6. In Step 6: Develop a Behavior Support Plan the authors focus on the behaviors of the student as he/she progresses through the six phases of the meltdown cycle. Why do they recommend this approach? What is the purpose of identifying strategies to be used at the onset of each phase?

7. Divide your book study group in half. Have each small group review one of the case studies, and present their discussion and insights to the whole group.

8. If possible, have some members of your book study group apply the checklist and develop an action plan for a student with whom they work. Review the results with the discussion group.

**-Chapter 10: The Parent Component-**

**Brief Overview:**
It is critical for parents and teachers of children with ASD to work together collaboratively. This chapter reviews the benefits and challenges of parent-teacher collaboration, and steps for building parent-teacher partnerships.

**Discussion Questions:**
1.  Describe the benefits of parent-teacher collaboration.


2.  Discuss the challenges of building parent-teacher partnerships.


3.  Describe experiences you have had where you had strong feelings of empathy and understanding for parents of students with ASD.


4.  What are the ten steps for building parent-teacher partnerships?


5.  What do you believe are the key components of each step? Why do you think these are key?


6.  Why is it important not to skip Step 8: Celebrate Progress?


7.  Review the Home-based Behavior Support Plan for Ricky. Is there anything you would add? Is there anything you would leave out? If so, why?


8.  What do the authors say is the key message of the Steps for Building Parent-Teacher Partnerships?