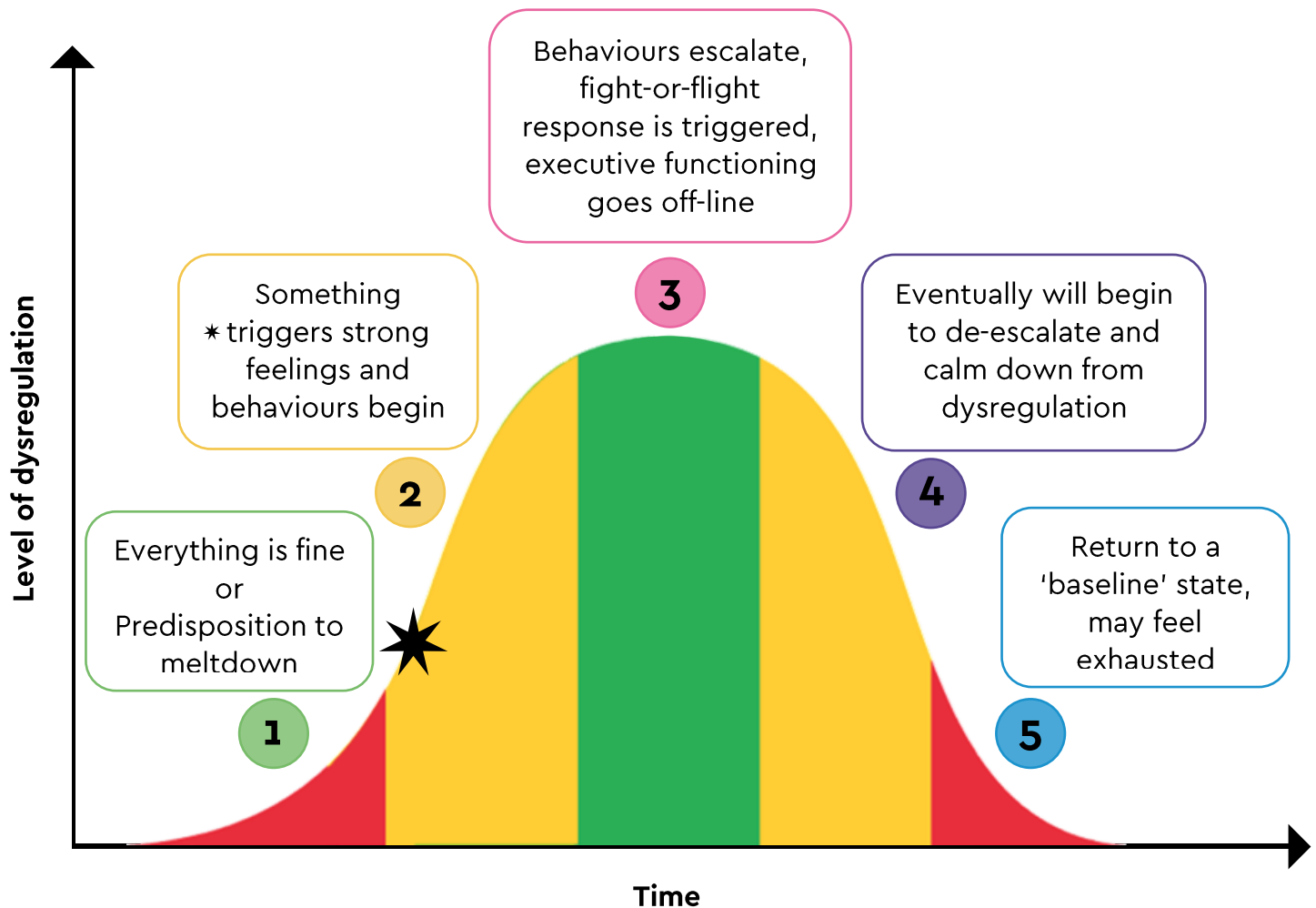


# The arc of a Meltdown



## 1 Before Trigger:

Everything may be OK, or there may be some factors that are predisposing an individual to a meltdown, such as having a tricky day, feeling overtired or certain events (e.g. dinnertime). This will look like their typical behaviour.

### Prevention techniques:

- Consistent routines
- Clear and consistent expectations
- Front-loading / preparing
- Meeting needs (sleep, exercise, nutrition)
- Support when necessary

**What does this look like?**



## 2 Escalation

Something has happened to trigger strong feelings of upset, frustration or distress. This will initiate corresponding behaviours, which will begin to escalate. This may look like arguing, shouting or a build up of tension.

### De-escalation techniques:

- Keep *yourself* calm
- Model de-escalation strategies: appropriate releases of frustration, deep breathes, relaxed posture, mindfulness strategies, slow physical movements, reduce/stop talking
- Show compassion and empathy
- Allow them to feel seen and felt

**What does this look like?**

## 3 Dysregulation

Levels of dysregulation have reached their peak, and they are in a Fight/Flight/Freeze response. This means their executive functioning is no longer responding, and they are no longer able to access logical/rational thought. Instead, their behaviours are driven by survival. This may look like screaming, hitting, or running.

### Self-Management and Healthy Boundaries

- Assure safety for living things
- Keep yourself calm
- Take time out for yourself if you are struggling to remain calm
- Co-regulate and Self-regulation
- Manage the environment
- Practice healthy emotional boundaries
- Verbal intervention is unlikely to be effective. Avoid talking, rationalising, fixing/advising, consequences
- Assess whether they require space from you - If you *need* to be physically present, take a step back and reduce involvement, talk less

**What does this look like?**

## 4 Calming Down

After being in a state of dysregulation, the body will naturally calm down over time. This can look like quieter voices, slower movements, hiding, exhaustion, slumping.

### Wait:

- Time passing is helpful in de-escalation. Avoid rushing into the circle-back phrase. This may reinstate the fight/flight response.
- If they are de-escalating, *let them* – do not intervene.
- Look for physical signs of relaxation/fatigue
- Co-Regulate and support – "Do you need a hug to help you with your feelings?"
- Check your own physical state before re-engaging
- Look out for feelings of guilt/embarrassment

What does this look like?

## 5 Back to Baseline

Eventually, the brain and body will return to its typical state. This will look like their typical behaviour.

### Circle back:

- After time has passed, you can circle back to the event and address important things related to the incident
- Reconnect, repair and rebuild the relationship
- Teach healthy coping skills. These can only be taught when in a calm state, so practice them before an incident occurs
- Reparation: You may notice signs of guilt or embarrassment - discuss and identify with them what you can both do together to 'make right'
- Do not attempt to do *everything*. Not every situation will require reparation or teaching. Some children can only bear a small amount of a circle-back conversation, and need to build up their ability to tolerate it for longer.

What does this look like?