

in the red

by Rachael Jansen

WE ALL HAVE them – moments of madness where we see red.

But while some women handle their frustration with good grace, others are finding themselves in meltdown, where their behaviour can leave them embarrassed and relationships with loved ones or colleagues bruised or in tatters.

Whether it's a tantrum, hissy fit, an explosion of rage or teary tirades, meltdown moments come in many shapes and forms.

Behaviour expert Tan Curtis says while meltdowns are nothing new for women, they are becoming more frequent and intense because of pressure we put on ourselves to meet unrealistic expectations.

Lives are busier, more stressful and more complex, so women from all walks of life – from career women to mothers – are finding themselves in a "bad behaviour pattern vortex" more often than they would like to admit.

"Women have been having meltdowns for centuries, however, I do believe as a society that women have increased their expectations of themselves 'as women' and as such these moments of meltdowns are increasing in frequency and intensity for today's women," Tan says.

As women, she says, we expect we should be: The perfect multirole person who is perfect in each and every one of their chosen roles.

"Yet the honest reality is we are not perfect, we are just 'normal' humanbeings increasing our expectations of ourself and often placing unrealistic demands on ourself and, as our expectations increase our meltdowns will also increase," she says.

"All because we have lost sight of who we really are as we put our roles before ourselves."

Women behave in different ways when they see red, from crying to screaming and snapping at loved ones, or even strangers.

"Others suppress and bury their built up emotions with excessive alcohol, drug, nicotine or caffeine use, while others feel like every part of their body is going to explode as their adrenalin pumps through their body," says Tan.

She says women then become trapped in a vicious cycle.

"As these feelings increase, so does their need to identify themselves with the roles they play. These expectations are guaranteed to lead to feelings of failure and the reality is we are not perfect."

WHEN YOU HAVE a meltdown, it's important to remember:

- 1 You are not alone, everyone has them from time to time.
- 2 This meltdown is actually a good thing as it helps remind us that, yes, we are "human".

- 3 It has occurred for a reason. Could it be you have forgotten to look after yourself or are asking too much of yourself?



tip the scales

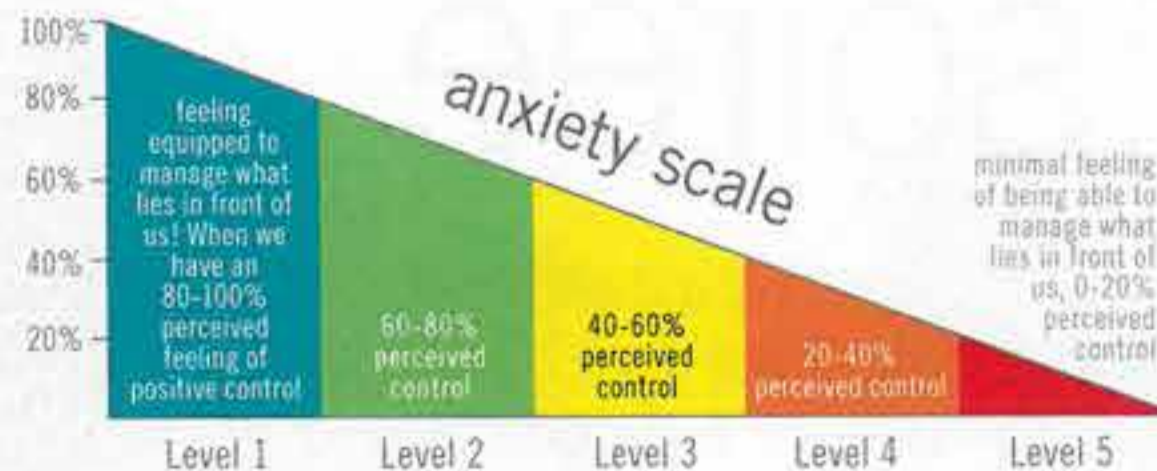
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LONG BEFORE WE reach our meltdown moment, we've had a few clues it might be coming, says Tan.

She says we operate daily on an "anxiety scale" where we move between the calm blue of feeling in control and capable, to possibly hitting the red zone, where a meltdown is inevitable because we feel we can't cope.

Tan says we come across "challenging situations", times when we feel discomfort, and these are "our triggers to our meltdowns".

"What's important to remember about this, is that as women we often don't identify our earlier triggers and early warning behaviours and ignore when we go from blue, to green, to yellow, to orange, and so the trigger that results



in our code red meltdown often seems petty to our self and others.

"But really this last trigger is 'the straw that broke the camel's back', the last of many accumulated triggers that were ignored and buried."

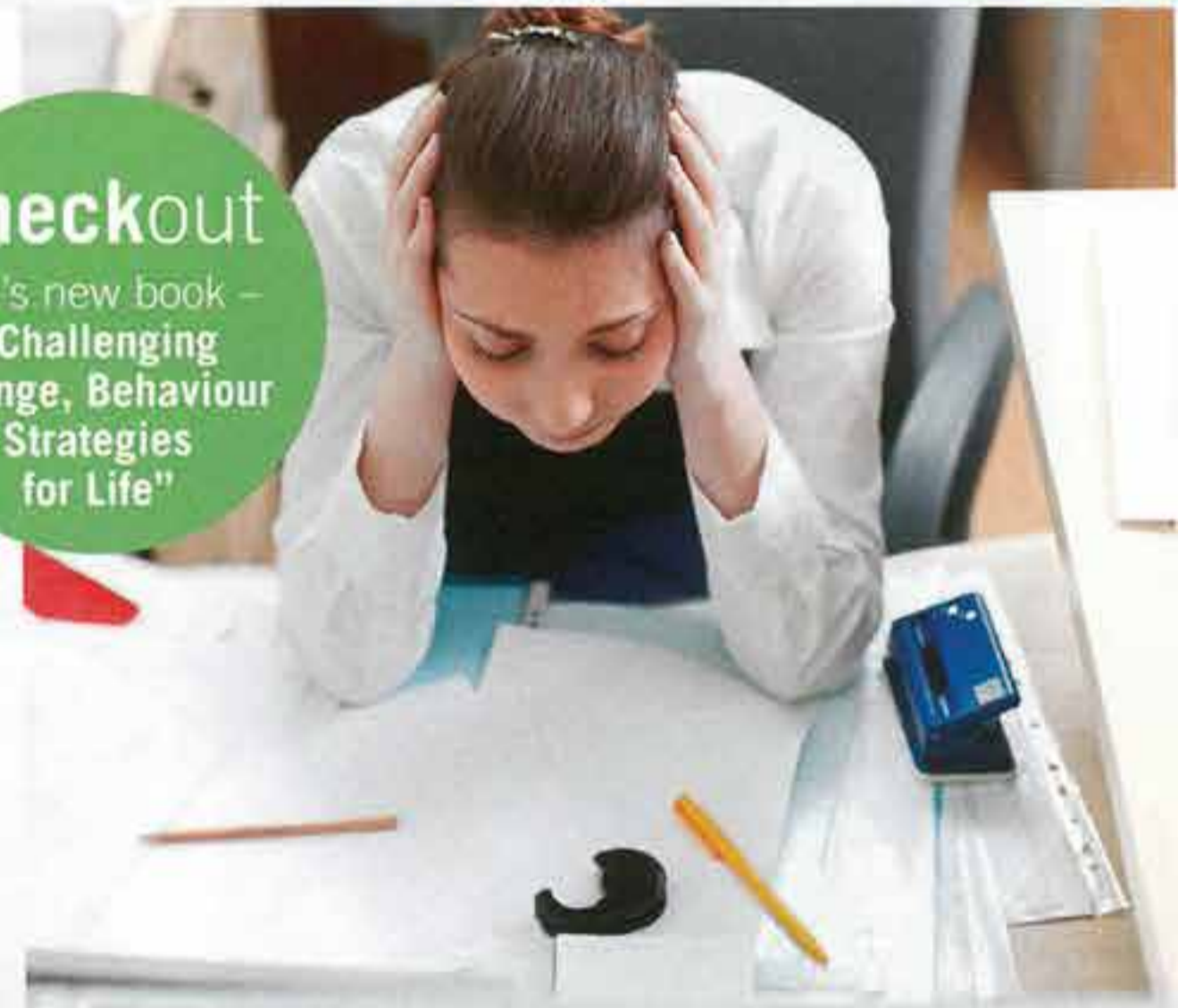
Tan, who is the director of behaviour management specialist centre Fabic, says women can use these tips to manage their meltdown, or avoid the red zone altogether.

once at red

A code red strategy for people who have got to red is stop, breathe, squeeze and communicate.

Stop what you are doing. Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose, squeeze and relax muscles in your body and communicate to yourself and to others "what has taken you to red".

checkout
Tan's new book –
"Challenging
Change, Behaviour
Strategies
for Life"



Be extremely honest while taking responsibility, this is not a blame exercise but one of responsibility.

before red

1. Learn to listen to your body and identify the signs your body uses to tell you have left blue (level 1) on your anxiety scale and on your way up.
2. Learn to identify your triggers, the individual challenging situations.
3. Communicate to yourself and

others what these triggers are.

4. Find ways to help you feel more equipped to manage these triggers.
5. Learn to ask for help.
6. Don't bury how you feel.
7. Ensure your self-expectations are realistic and fair on you.
8. Be realistic – Change will not occur overnight.
9. You are the most important person in this equation.