

The Parent Calm Guide

Simple reminders for staying steady, using fewer words and supporting your child when emotions are high.



Part of the SachAuDHD Stress Jar Toolkit



A calm, practical printable for families exploring ADHD, autism, sensory needs, big feelings, meltdowns, shutdowns or everyday overwhelm.

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How to use this guide

A gentle starting point



This guide is for parents and carers who want simple, practical reminders for supporting a child when emotions feel big. You do not need to read it all in one go. Use the pages that feel useful today and come back to the rest later.

This guide can help you...

- Understand what may be happening beneath behaviour.
- Spot early signs that pressure is building.
- Use calmer, shorter responses in tricky moments.
- Build a simple plan to share with others.

This guide is not...

- A judgement on you or your child.
- A one-size-fits-all answer.
- A replacement for professional advice.
- A crisis or safety plan.

How to get the most from it



Read: Use the teaching pages to understand emotional regulation.

Notice: Use the reflection pages to spot patterns.

Plan: Fill in the calm plan and update it as your child grows.

Share: Give useful pages to school, nursery, family or carers so support feels more consistent.

What emotional regulation means

Plain English explanation



Emotional regulation is how we manage feelings, energy and reactions. Children are not born knowing how to do this perfectly. They learn it slowly through safety, practice, trusted adults and repeated support.

For children with ADHD, autism or sensory needs



Feelings can rise quickly and the body can move into survival mode. This can look like shouting, crying, running, hiding, freezing, refusing, laughing, fidgeting or shutting down. It is not always a choice. Often, it is a sign that the child is struggling to cope in that moment.

Brain

Trying to process what is happening.

Body

Feeling stress, fear, discomfort or urgency.

Behaviour

Showing us, something is too much.

Key reminder



When we understand what is happening in the body, we can move away from blaming behaviour and start asking: What is the need underneath this?

Helping a child regulate is not about stopping all emotions. It is about helping them feel safe enough to cope.

The nervous system traffic lights

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Why this helps

The traffic light idea gives adults a simple way to notice what state a child may be in. The same child can move between green, amber and red many times in one day.



Green - calm enough

Relaxed, connected, able to play, listen, learn, talk or try.



Amber - pressure is building

Wobbly, unsure, sensitive, restless, easily triggered or starting to struggle.



Red - overwhelmed

Panic, shutdown, meltdown, lashing out or not able to manage words, choices or demands.

Important

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In red, teaching usually does not work. Long explanations, repeated questions and lots of instructions can add more pressure. Safety, calm, space and fewer words matter first.

What dysregulation can look like

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It does not always look the same

Dysregulation can be loud or quiet. Some children explode outward. Some retreat inward. Some look silly, over-excited or defiant when they are actually overwhelmed.

Fidgeting or bouncing

rocking, tapping, chewing, touching everything

Hiding

under tables, under covers, behind furniture

Going quiet

zoning out, staring, turning away, freezing

Shouting or hitting

throwing, pushing, lashing out when it is too much

Refusing

saying no, walking away, ignoring, not responding

Over-excited

laughing, being extra loud, running, silly noises

Sensory signs

covering ears, avoiding touch, needing pressure

Body clues

tired, hungry, tense, hot, restless, teary

Try asking this instead



Instead of asking, "Why are they behaving like this?" try asking, "What might be too much for their brain, body or environment right now?"

The Stress Jar: pressure building



The idea

Imagine your child has an invisible Stress Jar. Every demand, noise, change, disappointment, transition or uncomfortable feeling can add a little more. When the jar is nearly full, even a small thing can cause a big reaction.

Empty / space

Building

Nearly full

Overflowing



What the Stress Jar helps us ask

What has been added today?

What can we reduce, remove or make easier?

What support fits this child, this place and this moment?

What can I change before the jar overflows next time?



Helpful mindset

The Stress Jar is not about blaming the child or blaming yourself. It is a noticing tool. It helps adults slow down and look for pressure, patterns and practical support.

What can fill the Stress Jar?



Common pressure-builders

Every child is different. Use this page as a starting point. Add your own ideas on the reflection pages later.

Hunger	Tiredness	Noise
Bright lights	Waiting	Being rushed
Being told no	Change of plan	Too many words
Too many choices	Social pressure	Masking all day
Transitions	Unclear expectations	Clothing discomfort
Pain or illness	Strong smells	Screen stopping

A small thing is not always small



If the jar is already nearly full, the final trigger may look tiny from the outside. The reaction may seem “out of nowhere”, but often the pressure has been building for hours.

★ Your calm is the tool too



This is not about being perfect

You will not always feel calm. You are human. This page is about having simple reminders that help you reduce heat in the moment, especially when your child cannot manage lots of words or demands.

Pause before speaking

Give your own nervous system a few seconds to catch up.

Lower your voice

A quieter, steady tone can feel safer than a louder one.

Move slowly

Fast movements can add urgency. Slow body language can reduce pressure.

Use fewer words

Short phrases are easier to process when the brain is overloaded.

Stay nearby if safe

Some children need space. Some need quiet presence. Watch what helps.

Repair afterwards

Connection after the moment matters. You can come back and try again.



Calm does not mean giving in

Being calm does not mean removing every boundary. It means holding the boundary with less heat. For example: "I cannot let you hit. I am going to move this away. I am here when you are ready."



Use fewer words when emotions are high

Why fewer words help



When a child is overwhelmed, their brain may struggle to process long explanations, questions or lectures. Fewer words do not fix everything, but they can reduce pressure and make the next step clearer.

More words can sound like...

"I have already told you we are leaving, why are you doing this again, you need to listen, everybody is waiting, come on now, this is ridiculous."

Fewer words can sound like...

"Shoes first."

"I see it is hard."

"I am here."

"Space or hug?"

"First coat, then car."

Simple phrase bank

You are safe.

I can see this is too much.

One thing at a time.

First this, then that.

I will wait.

We can talk later.

Parent reminder

During the storm, aim for fewer words. After the storm, when the child is calmer, you can teach, reflect and problem-solve.



Before, during and after big feelings



A simple support map

Different moments need different support. What helps before emotions rise may not work during a red moment.

Before emotions rise

- Prepare for changes.
- Use visuals or First/Then.
- Reduce rushing.
- Offer small choices.
- Notice early amber signs.
- Build in breaks.

During a heightened moment

- Reduce words.
- Lower demands.
- Give space if safe.
- Reduce noise or audience.
- Keep boundaries short.
- Focus on safety first.

Afterwards

- Reconnect gently.
- Avoid shame.
- Reflect when calm.
- Notice what helped.
- Update the plan.
- Repair and move on.



Repair is powerful

Repair can sound like: "That was a hard moment. I am sorry I shouted. We are both safe now. Next time, I will try to use fewer words and give you more space."



What helps my child stay regulated?



Understanding the why helps you adapt the what

These are starting points. You may need to change them, combine them or invent your own. If it helps your child feel safer and it is safe to use, it counts.

Reduce noise

Why: sound can push a child into overload.

Try: headphones, calm music, quieter space.

Think outside the box: hoodie up, quiet hat, ear defenders in supermarkets.

Create a safe space

Why: some children need somewhere to retreat from sensory or social pressure.

Try: cosy corner, small tent, blanket, behind the sofa.

Think outside the box: empty bath, airing cupboard, box den.

Use visuals

Why: visuals reduce pressure on working memory and make the next step clearer.

Try: First/Then, picture cards, objects, written list.

Think outside the box: act it out with toys or point to real objects.

Offer small choices

Why: choice can help a child feel less trapped.

Try: "Now or in five minutes?" "Blue cup or green cup?"

Think outside the box: which sock first, which route, which spoon.

More support ideas



Every child is different

The best tools are the ones that match your child, the situation and the timing. A tool that helps in one setting may not work in another.

Deep pressure

Why: pressure input can help the nervous system feel safe and centred.

Try: weighted blanket, firm cushion, pushing hands together.

Think outside the box: cushion sandwich, yoga mat roll, beanbag pressure.

Movement

Why: movement can release stress safely and help the body reset.

Try: wall pushes, carrying books, animal walks, stretching.

Think outside the box: heavy laundry basket, pushing a door, dance reset.

Fidget or chew tools

Why: hands and mouth tools can help some children organise energy.

Try: chewies, putty, bubble wrap, twisty toys.

Think outside the box: chunky zip, soft sponge, pompom in pocket.

Your calm presence

Why: children can borrow calm from a steady adult.

Try: breathe slowly, sit nearby, use fewer words.

Think outside the box: hum softly, hand on heart, quiet side-by-side presence.

Notice the pattern

After using a support idea, ask: Did the jar lower a little? Did my child feel safer? Did the situation become easier? If not, it does not mean you failed. It means the support may need adjusting.

...



Reflection: what helps my child calm down?



Use this page to notice what already helps

List anything that helps your child feel safer, calmer or more settled. It can be a tool, place, person, routine, sound, movement, object or phrase.



Prompts

- What small things help my child relax when overwhelmed?
- What do they choose or ask for when things feel too much?
- Are there routines, places or activities that bring calm?
- Have any strategies from this guide helped in real life?

What helps my child calm down or feel safe?



Reflection: what fills my child's Stress Jar?



Use this page to spot pressure-builders

Think about the things that usually lead to stress, meltdowns, shutdowns, refusal, panic, anger, tears or withdrawal. The aim is noticing patterns, not blaming anyone.

Noise	Waiting	Being rushed	Change
Hunger	Tiredness	Too many words	Social pressure
Sensory discomfort	Screen stopping	Unexpected demands	Other

Things that may fill my child's jar are...

Reflection: early signs I notice



Green to amber clues

Early signs are gold. They help you step in before the jar overflows. Small changes in body, voice, movement or behaviour can tell you pressure is building.

Possible early signs

- getting louder
- going quiet
- asking repeated questions
- becoming silly
- hiding
- moving more
- chewing or fidgeting
- saying “no” more often

What I can do early

- slow down
- reduce words
- offer a break
- use a visual
- reduce noise
- give a small choice
- lower the demand
- check body needs

I notice my child may be moving into amber when...

Reflection: what I want others to understand



Help others see the whole child

This page can help school, nursery, family or carers understand your child with more empathy. It is a place to explain what is often misunderstood.



Prompts

What do I wish teachers, family or other parents knew?

What is misunderstood about my child's behaviour?

What support helps without judgement?

What should people avoid when my child is struggling?

I want others to understand that...



My child's calm plan

A quick reference sheet



Use this as a fridge sheet, school sharing sheet or reminder to keep in your bag. Keep it short, practical and easy to update.

My child may be getting overwhelmed when...

Things that fill my child's jar...

Things that help lower the jar...

Words or phrases that help...

Things that can make it harder...

What others need to remember...

...



Cut-out parent calm reminder cards



Print, cut out and keep nearby

Use these as quick reminders during tricky moments. Choose the card that helps you most.

Pause

Take one breath before responding.

Fewer words

Use short phrases. Teach later.

Lower voice

A steady tone can reduce pressure.

Safety first

Move unsafe objects. Reduce audience.

Name the need

“This feels too much right now.”

Repair later

Reconnect. Reflect. Try again.

Sharing with school, nursery, family or carers

Keeping support consistent

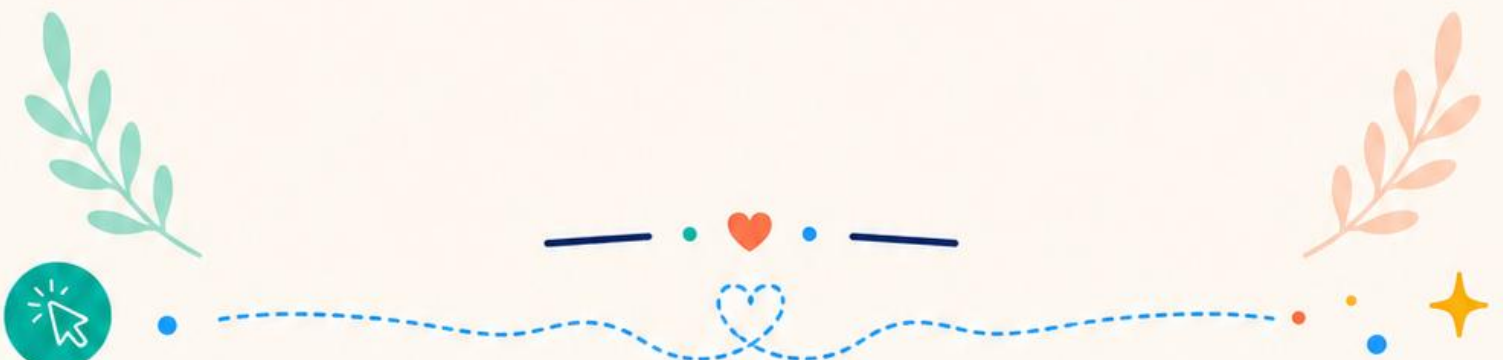
Children often cope better when the adults around them understand the same plan. This page can be printed, copied or used in meetings.

What helps at home...

What helps at school, nursery or other places?

Please avoid or reduce...

When my child is overwhelmed, please remember...



Who can I talk to?



You do not have to figure it out alone

If you are worried about your child's ongoing regulation, sleep, eating, anxiety, safety or daily coping, ask for support. Sharing your notes can help others understand what you are seeing.

Teacher or SENCo

Share what helps, what fills the jar and what your child may need.

Pastoral or wellbeing lead

They may help create a calm plan or sensory support approach.

GP or health visitor

Useful if you are worried about sleep, eating, anxiety or ongoing distress.

SENDIASS or Local Offer

Search your borough + SEND Local Offer or your borough + SENDIASS.

Trusted family or friend

Talking it through can help you feel less alone and more supported.

Emergency support

If there is immediate danger or risk, seek urgent help through appropriate emergency services.



Search tip

Type your borough + SEND Local Offer into Google. The Local Offer explains what support is available for children and young people with SEND in your area.

Glossary - words you might hear

Word	What it means
Dysregulated	When a child's body or brain feels overwhelmed and they struggle to stay calm.
Regulation	Managing feelings, energy and reactions in a way that feels safe enough.
Triggers	Things that add stress, upset or overwhelm, often suddenly.
Calming tools	Objects, actions, routines or strategies that help a child feel more settled.
Sensory	Linked to senses such as sound, light, touch, smell, taste or movement.
Meltdown	A full-body response to overload. It is not the same as a planned tantrum.
Shutdown	When a child becomes very quiet, withdrawn, frozen or hard to reach.
Overload	When too much is happening for the brain or body to cope with.
Neurodivergent	A word for people whose brains work differently, such as ADHD, autism or dyslexia.
Co-regulation	When an adult helps a child calm by staying steady and supportive.
Self-regulation	When a child is gradually learning ways to manage feelings or energy themselves.

Final gentle reminder



You are building understanding

Every time you pause, notice a pattern, use fewer words, repair after a hard moment or try a new support idea, you are helping your child feel more seen, safe and understood.



Come back to the Stress Jar

Use the Stress Jar activity when you want to slow down a situation and think about what may have added pressure. Then use this printable guide to plan what might help before, during and after next time.



Explore more from SachAuDHD

Watch helpful videos:

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@sachaudhd>



Important information

This resource is for learning, reflection and everyday support. It is not a crisis plan, therapy, medical advice or a replacement for professional support. If you are worried about your child's safety or wellbeing, seek appropriate professional help.

♥ Created by Sacha-Lianne - SachAuDHD ♥

Learning, reflection and everyday support - not medical, therapy or crisis advice

