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# The Five Foundations Family Check-In

**Understand how lifestyle affects your child's emotions and behaviour, and exactly what to do.**



## A psychologist's guide for parents

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**Child clinical psychologist • They Are The Future**

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# Why these five foundations matter

In my work as a child clinical psychologist, I often begin with sleep, food, movement, connection and downtime. These five foundations affect how children feel, cope with frustration and manage school and family life.

### How the foundations affect each other

In Daniel's story later in this guide, walking improves his mood and creates opportunities for social contact. Better sleep then leaves him less exhausted and more able to enjoy family time.

### Using the check-in as a family

Adults need these foundations too. When you are exhausted or have little time to rest, staying patient during difficult moments can be harder. Completing your own profile can help you choose a change for yourself, such as making time to rest. Use a separate copy for each person, involving older children and teenagers in their own profiles.

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# How the foundations help

## Sleep

When children are tired, they can find everyday frustrations harder to cope with. Better sleep supports concentration, patience and their ability to manage emotions.

## Food

Regular meals and a varied diet provide nutrients and steady energy. If tastes or textures make eating difficult, your child may need help finding foods they can eat comfortably.

## Movement

Physical activity can ease stress and improve mood and sleep. Walking, dancing or outdoor play may suit your child better than organised sport.

## Connection

Feeling understood helps children feel emotionally safe. Time with a trusted adult can help them manage difficult feelings and talk about what is troubling them.

## Downtime

School, noise and social situations can be exhausting. Time to rest helps children recover, especially autistic children who work hard to cope during the day.

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# Understanding the profile

Later in the check-in, you can complete a blank version for your own child, and for yourself if you wish. It will help you see which areas of lifestyle are already going well and where it would be helpful to make changes.

### What the bars show

Each bar represents one foundation. The percentages are rough estimates of how well that area is going for the person whose profile you are completing.

### Choosing a percentage

A score of 100% represents the best possible level for that person. Aim for gradual improvements, such as moving from 20% to 25%, rather than perfect scores. A low sleep score could reflect difficulty getting to sleep, frequent waking or daytime exhaustion.

### Using the profile

The percentages help you notice gradual progress as you make small changes. Complete the chart again later to see which areas have improved.

Daniel's example on the next page shows how his parents used the profile to choose where to begin, and how changes in one area helped his mood, sleep and family relationships.

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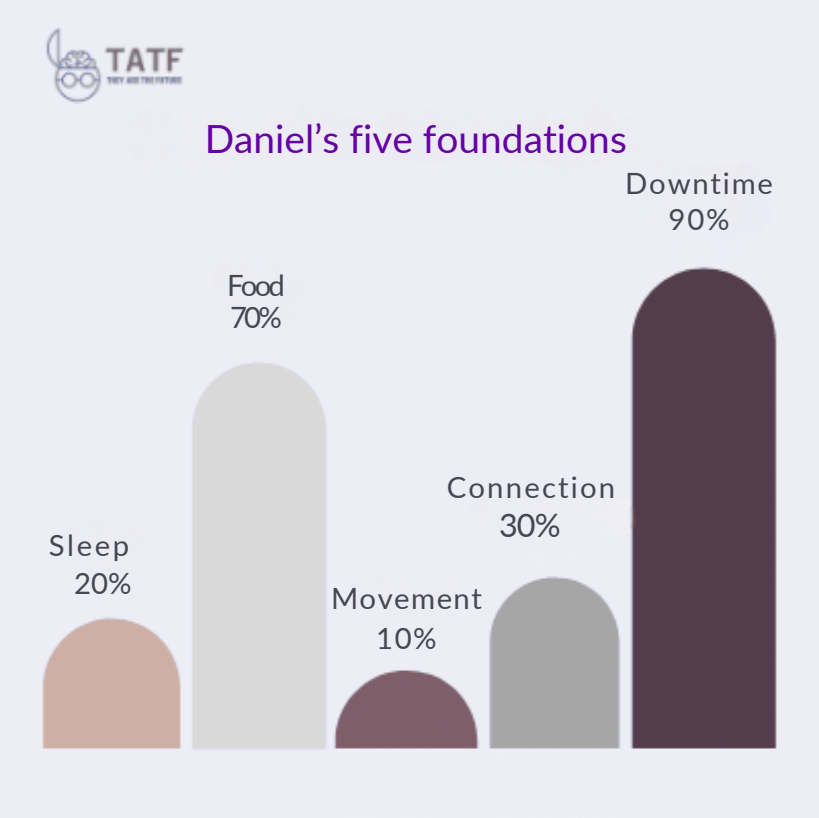
# Meet Daniel

Daniel is a made-up example, based on children I have seen through my work in the NHS and at Everlief. Looking at his everyday life helps his family understand where he needs support.

Daniel is twelve. His parents, Gemma and David, have noticed a decline in his mental health over the last six months.

He has become withdrawn from friends and family, and prefers to spend time in his bedroom.

Going out makes him anxious, and he gets angry when his parents suggest a walk.




His parents estimated the scores in the chart. Sleep, movement and connection all have low scores, so each could be an area to work on.

Daniel sleeps poorly and rarely exercises. His appetite is okay.

Home feels safe and gives him time to rest. He worries about school and family.

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# How Daniel’s family helped

Daniel’s parents chose to begin with movement. His score was particularly low in this area, and regular physical activity can improve mood and lead to better sleep.



## Walking a puppy

Suggesting a walk usually led to an argument, so Gemma looked for something Daniel would want to do. Daniel loved dogs, so she asked their neighbour if they could walk the new puppy. They began with 15 minutes a day and gradually made the walks longer as Daniel became more comfortable.

After two weeks, Gemma and David noticed that walking and playing with the puppy lifted Daniel’s mood. Collecting it from the neighbour and greeting people in the park also helped him reconnect with others.

## A calmer bedtime

Daniel was also sleeping a little better, so for their next change his parents helped him tidy his bedroom and plan a relaxing hour before bed. Daniel chose a bubble bath and calming music.

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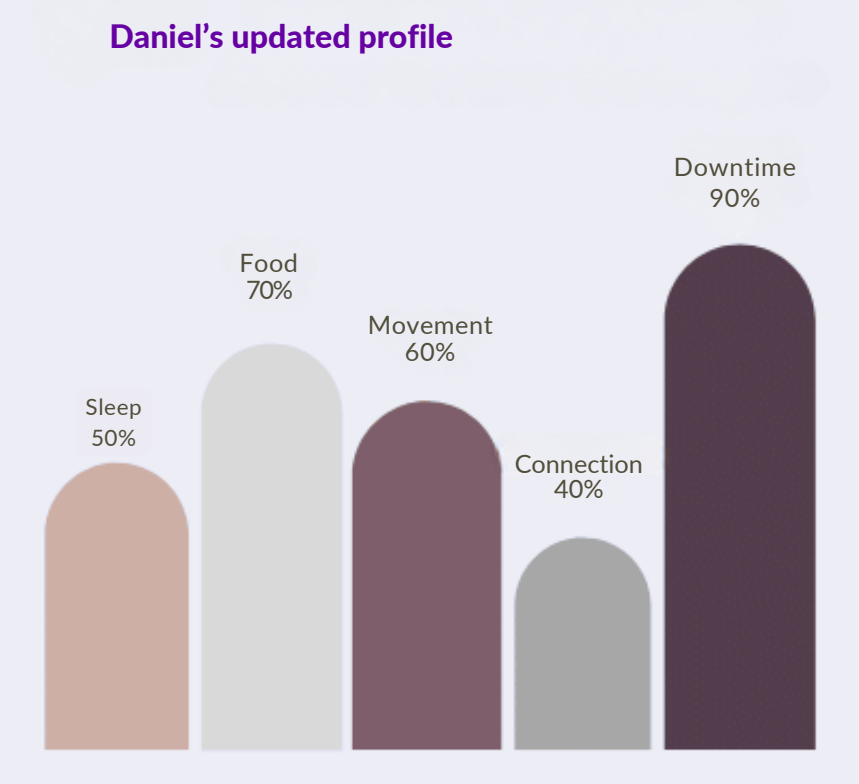
# How the changes helped

After two more weeks of his new bedtime routine, Daniel was sleeping more soundly. Being less exhausted helped his mood, and he began spending more time with his family in the evenings.

When they completed his profile again, movement had risen from 10% to 60%, with smaller gains in sleep and connection. Seeing these improvements encouraged Gemma, David and Daniel to consider what else might help.




## Your family's profiles

Use the blank chart on the next page to create a profile for your child or another family member. Refer back to How the foundations help (page 3) as you decide where to begin.

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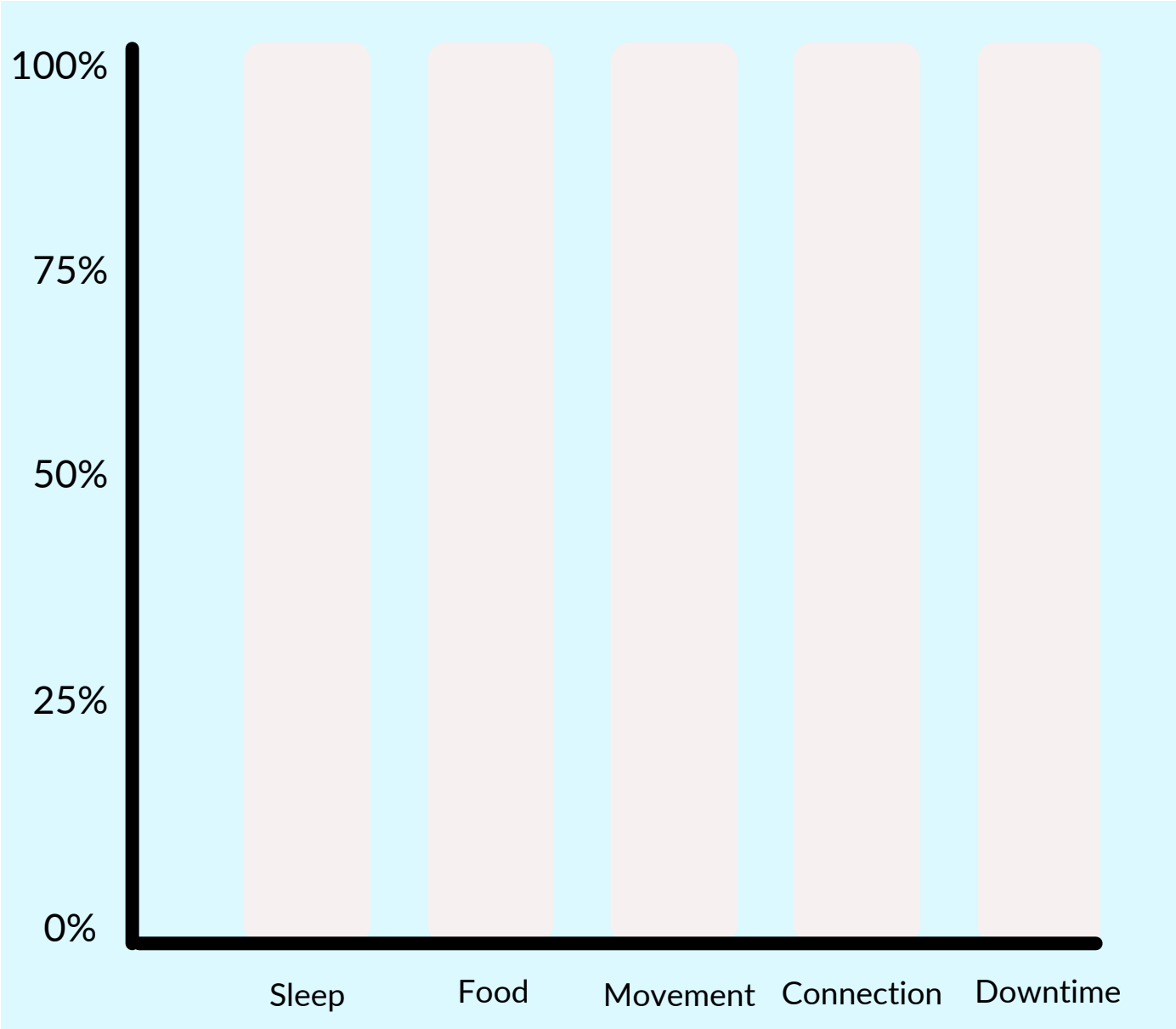
# Create your profile

Mark each bar using a rough estimate of how well each area is going for the person completing the profile. A score of 100% represents the best possible level for them. Use the lower scores to decide where to focus on making changes.

Name: _____ Date: _____

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# Choosing where to begin

Use the chart to choose an area to work on, and agree with your child which change you will try.

**1. Look for the area that needs support**
Look at the lowest bars and think about daily life. For example, does your child seem exhausted after school, or have difficulty getting to sleep?

**2. Choose a change together**
Show your child the profile and explain why the area you choose affects wellbeing. Listen to their ideas and agree something realistic, such as a regular snack or a walk after dinner.

**3. Decide how you will support it**
Use the action plan to record when the change will happen and who will help. Think about what you hope to notice, such as easier mornings or more energy after school.

**4. Give it time to work**
Support the change consistently for around two weeks, adapting it if needed. Notice your child's mood and routines, and speak to them about how it feels.

**5. Decide what to do next**
Compare the profiles and discuss what has helped. You might continue, adjust the change or turn your attention to another foundation.

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# My action plan

Try the agreed change and record its effects using this plan.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Foundation: _____ Starting score: _____

**The change we will try**
Action: _____
Hope to notice: _____

**When and how often?**

_____

**Who will help, and how?**

_____

Review date: _____ New score: _____

**What changed in emotions, behaviour or routines?**

_____

_____

**Our next step**

_____

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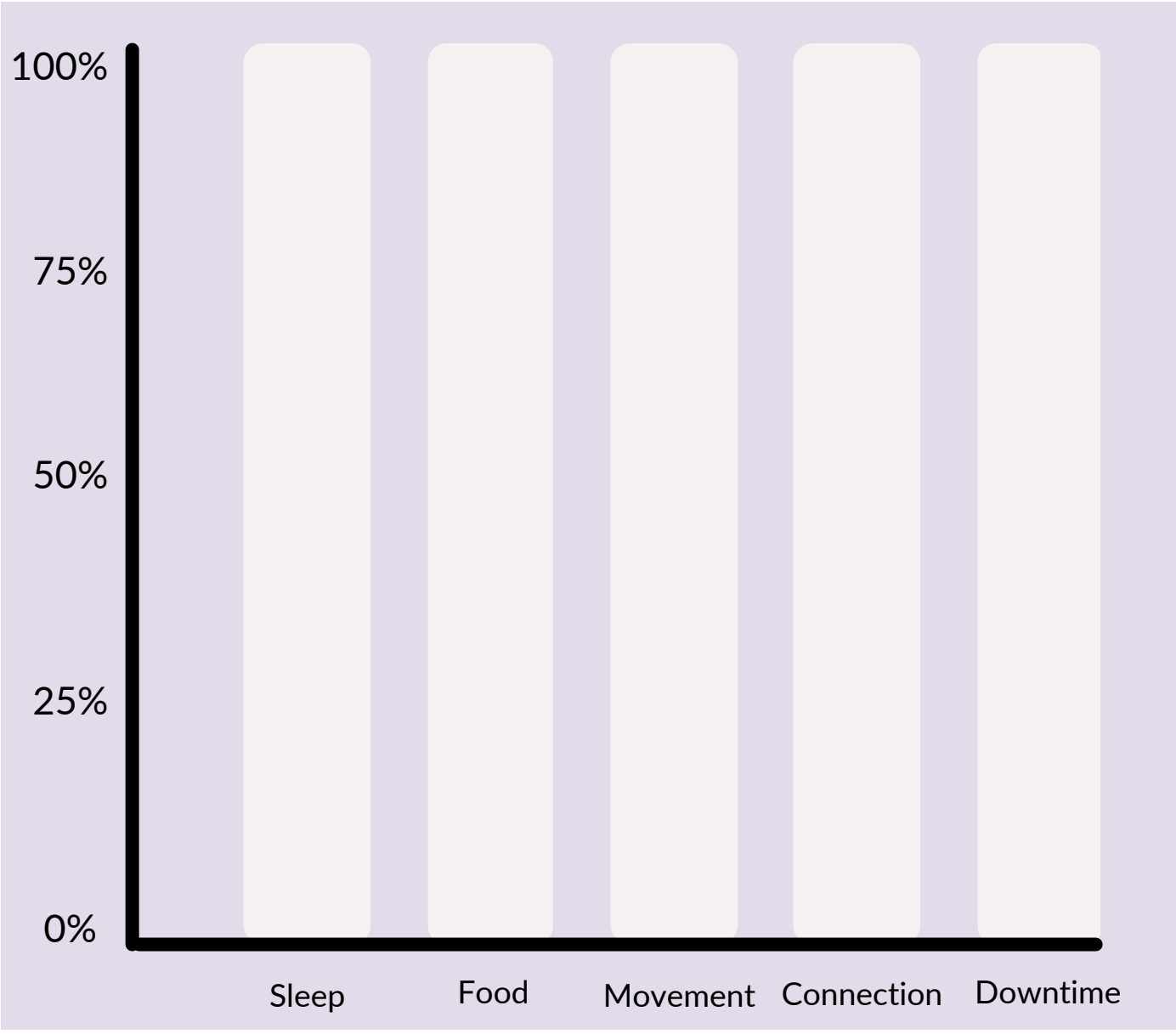
# Review your progress

After around two weeks, complete the profile again and compare it with your first chart. Consider how the change affected your child's mood and routines, and use your action plan to decide what to do next.

Name: _____ Date: _____

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# Articles for each foundation

## Sleep

Sleep solutions for children (age 5+)

Sleep problems in teens and pre-teens

## Food

Food and mental health: the lifestyle connection

NHS: everyday healthy eating for families

## Movement

Movement activities for wellbeing

Movement breaks and brain break ideas

## Connection

Family wellbeing activities for teens

Six listening skills to help your child feel heard

## Downtime

Create a calm space at home

Self-care menu for kids and teens

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# Your personal notes

**Ideas, questions and things you want to remember.**

## About Dr Lucy Russell

Child clinical psychologist



Through They Are The Future, I share the approaches I use in my work with children and families, drawing on more than twenty years as a clinical psychologist.

## Want calmer mornings and bedtimes?

Imagine mornings where you get out of the door on time and feeling calmer, and evenings that wind down more peacefully for the whole family. My Low-Stress Mornings and Bedtimes short course shows you how, step by step, in three days of short video lessons.




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