

# *Welcome!*

**Thank you for giving this book a place in your journey.**

Whether you're a parent, caregiver, teacher or someone who simply wants to better understand children's emotions...

**I'm truly grateful you're here.**

My hope is that these pages will help you look beyond behaviour, strengthen your connection with your child, and remind you that progress—not perfection—is what matters most.

This book was created with one simple mission:

**To help more children feel understood, safe and emotionally connected.**

## **One Small Favor**

If you find this book helpful, I'd love to ask you for one small favor when you reach the final page.

A few minutes of your time could help another parent discover this resource when they need it most.

You'll find all the details at the end of the book.

For now...

Take your time.

Highlight your favorite pages.

Come back whenever you need.

And remember:

**Behind every big feeling is a child hoping to be understood.**

Enjoy the journey.

**Little Calm Club**

# Behind Big Feelings

— • —  
UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS  
THROUGH CONNECTION, NOT CONTROL



LITTLE CALM CLUB

# ***Behind Big Feelings***

***Understanding Children's***

***Emotions Through***

***Connection, Not Control***

***Little Calm Club***

# Copyright

## ***Behind Big Feelings***

*Understanding Children's Emotions Through Connection, Not Control*

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# BEFORE WE BEGIN

## A Different Way to Understand Big Feelings

If you ask a hundred parents what they want most for their children, you'll hear many different answers.

*"I want them to be happy."*

*"I want them to be confident."*

*"I want them to be kind."*

*"I want them to believe in themselves."*

Yet, long before children become any of those things, they become something else.

They become angry.

They become frightened.

They become disappointed.

They become jealous.

They become overwhelmed.

Sometimes they laugh so hard they can't catch their breath.

Sometimes they cry so hard they can't explain why.

Sometimes they collapse onto the kitchen floor because their toast broke in half.

Sometimes they slam a bedroom door with a force that seems impossible for such a small person.

And somewhere between those ordinary moments, many parents begin asking themselves quiet questions they rarely say out loud.

*Why does everything become such a battle?*

*Am I doing something wrong?*

*Why doesn't anything seem to work?*

*Why can everyone else stay patient except me?*

If you've ever asked yourself one of those questions, this book is for you.

Not because you need to become a better parent.

But because parenting is one of the few jobs in the world that almost everyone begins without ever being taught how emotions actually work.

We teach children to count.

To read.

To write.

To tie their shoes.

To say "please" and "thank you."

But very few adults were ever taught what to do when a child screams because it's time to leave the playground.

Or refuses to put on their shoes.

Or bursts into tears over something that seems unbelievably small.

Or looks you in the eyes and says,

*"I hate you."*

Those moments don't simply test our patience.

They test our understanding.

Because when emotions grow louder, our instinct becomes stronger.

We explain.

We persuade.

We distract.

We negotiate.

We warn.

We threaten.

Sometimes we even raise our own voice, hoping that a little more volume will bring back a little more control.

It rarely does.

Not because we're bad parents.

Because we're responding to what we can see.

Not necessarily to what's actually happening.

That may be the most important sentence in this entire book.

We usually respond to the behaviour we see.

While our child is reacting to an experience we cannot.

A slammed door is easy to notice.

A frightened nervous system is not.

A tantrum is obvious.

Overwhelm is invisible.

The shouting captures our attention.

The disappointment underneath often goes unnoticed.

This is where this book begins.

Not with behaviour.

Not with discipline.

Not with parenting techniques.

It begins with a different question.

### **What if behaviour is only the visible part of the story?**

Imagine standing on a beach, looking out across the ocean.

In the distance, an iceberg floats quietly on the water.

Only a small part rises above the surface.

Everything else remains hidden beneath it.

Children's behaviour works much the same way.

The crying.

The shouting.

The refusal.

The hitting.

The arguing.

The silence.

Those are the parts we see.

Beneath them lies something much larger.

Fear.

Disappointment.

Confusion.

Loneliness.

Embarrassment.

Exhaustion.

Sensory overload.

A need for connection.

A need for safety.

A need for autonomy.

A need that the child often cannot name, explain or even understand.

Adults sometimes expect children to tell us exactly what's wrong.

The truth is, many children don't know.

Not because they're hiding it.

Because the skills required to recognise, organise and express emotions develop slowly over many years.

Behaviour becomes their first language.

Long before they can say,

*"I'm feeling overwhelmed."*

they throw the toy.

Long before they can say,

*"I'm disappointed."*

they scream.

Long before they can say,

*"I'm anxious about tomorrow."*

they refuse to go to bed.

The behaviour isn't the whole message.

It's only the envelope.

The emotion is the letter inside.

Most parenting advice focuses on changing the envelope.

This book is about learning to read the letter.

That doesn't mean every behaviour should be accepted.

Far from it.

Children need boundaries.

They need guidance.

They need adults willing to protect them and others when behaviour becomes unsafe.

But boundaries are most effective when they grow from understanding instead of frustration.

A child can hear,

*"I won't let you hit."*

and,

*"I can see you're having a really hard time."*

in the very same moment.

Those sentences don't compete with one another.

They complete one another.

That is the philosophy that runs through every page of this book.

Feelings are always welcome.

Harmful behaviours are not.

There is another belief that guides everything you are about to read.

Children do not need perfect parents.

They need emotionally available ones.

Parents who repair after difficult moments.

Parents who stay curious.

Parents who are willing to keep learning.

Parents who understand that relationships are not built by never making mistakes, but by knowing how to come back together after mistakes happen.

If that feels like a relief, it is meant to.

Because perfection has never raised a child.

Connection does.

As you read this book, you will discover practical tools, real conversations, everyday strategies and simple explanations of what is happening inside your child's developing brain.

But before we explore any of those ideas, I hope you'll leave one belief behind.

The belief that your child's biggest emotions are problems to eliminate.

They are not.

They are invitations.

Invitations to pause.

To become curious.

To look beneath the surface.

To understand before correcting.

To connect before directing.

To teach instead of simply stopping.

Everything that follows begins with that single shift.

Because the moment we stop asking,

**"How do I make this feeling disappear?"**

and begin asking,

**"What is this feeling trying to tell us?"**

we stop fighting against our children...

and begin walking alongside them.

Let's begin.

# CHAPTER 1

## **Big Feelings Are Not the Problem**

### **Why emotions are signals, not something to eliminate**

There is a moment that almost every parent knows.

Your child is crying so hard they can barely breathe.

Or shouting.

Or refusing to move.

Or throwing something across the room.

Your heart starts beating faster.

People are watching.

You can feel your patience slipping away.

In that moment, one thought usually takes over.

**"How do I make this stop?"**

It's a natural question.

When emotions become loud, messy and overwhelming, everything inside us wants to bring the situation back under control as quickly as possible.

We want the tears to stop.

The screaming to stop.

The arguing to stop.

The tantrum to end.

Not because we don't care.

Because we care deeply.

We don't like seeing our children suffer.

We don't like feeling helpless.

We want everyone to feel better again.

So we do what most of us have learned to do.

We explain.

We persuade.

We distract.

We negotiate.

We count to three.

We offer rewards.

We threaten consequences.

Sometimes we lose our own temper and become just as overwhelmed as our child.

Afterwards, when the house is finally quiet, another question often appears.

*"Why didn't any of that work?"*

The answer is surprisingly simple.

Because most of us have been trying to solve the wrong problem.

---

### **The Problem Isn't the Feeling**

Imagine you're driving home after work.

Without warning, a red warning light appears on your dashboard.

You have two options.

You can cover the light with a piece of tape and pretend it isn't there.

Or you can stop and find out why it appeared.

No one would say the warning light is the problem.

The light isn't causing the engine to fail.

It's revealing that something needs attention.

Children's emotions work in exactly the same way.

Fear.

Anger.

Sadness.

Frustration.

Disappointment.

Jealousy.

Excitement.

Embarrassment.

None of these emotions are problems to eliminate.

They are signals.

They tell us that something important is happening inside a child.

An emotion is the brain and body's way of saying,

**"Something here matters."**

The feeling itself is not the enemy.

Ignoring it doesn't make it disappear.

Punishing it doesn't teach a child how to understand it.

Shaming it doesn't make it smaller.

Like a dashboard light, emotions are designed to capture our attention.

Not because something is broken.

Because something needs care.

---

## **What We Often Get Wrong**

Many of us grew up hearing messages like these:

*"Stop crying."*

*"You're fine."*

*"It's not a big deal."*

*"Calm down."*

Most adults who said those words had good intentions.

They wanted to comfort us.

They wanted life to move forward.

They wanted peace.

But there is an important difference between calming a child and silencing a child.

When children repeatedly learn that uncomfortable emotions should disappear as quickly as possible, they don't actually stop feeling them.

They simply become less willing—or less able—to express them.

The feeling remains.

Only the communication changes.

Sometimes it becomes withdrawal.

Sometimes anxiety.

Sometimes anger.

Sometimes perfectionism.

Sometimes people-pleasing.

Emotions that are ignored do not vanish.

They simply look for another way to be heard.

## **Emotions Have a Purpose**

Every healthy emotion exists for a reason.

Fear helps us notice danger.

Anger tells us something feels unfair or blocked.

Sadness slows us down after loss.

Frustration reminds us that what we're trying isn't working.

Excitement gives us energy to explore.

Jealousy can reveal something we deeply value.

Even emotions we dislike have a purpose.

Imagine if your child never felt fear.

They would run into traffic without hesitation.

Imagine if they never felt sadness.

Relationships would have little meaning.

Imagine if they never felt frustration.

They might never develop persistence or problem-solving skills.

The goal is not to remove emotions.

The goal is to help children understand them, express them safely and learn what to do with them.

That is emotional intelligence.

Not feeling less.

Understanding more.

---

### **Emotion Is Not Behaviour**

This distinction changes everything.

An emotion is what your child feels.

A behaviour is what your child does.

Feeling angry is always acceptable.

Hitting someone is not.

Feeling jealous is acceptable.

Hurting another child is not.

Feeling frightened is acceptable.

Running away into a busy street is not.

Parents sometimes worry that validating emotions means allowing inappropriate behaviour.

It doesn't.

In fact, separating feelings from behaviour allows us to respond with both empathy and leadership.

You can say,

*"I won't let you hit."*

while also saying,

*"I can see you're really angry."*

Those statements do not contradict each other.

One protects people.

The other protects the relationship.

Children need both.

Boundaries without empathy often create fear.

Empathy without boundaries creates confusion.

Healthy emotional development grows where both exist together.

---

### **The Real Question**

The next time your child has a meltdown, imagine pressing a pause button.

Not on your child.

On your assumptions.

Instead of asking,

*"How do I stop this behaviour?"*

try asking,

*"What is this behaviour trying to tell me?"*

Perhaps they're exhausted.

Perhaps they're overwhelmed.

Perhaps they feel embarrassed.

Perhaps they're scared.

Perhaps they simply need your help finding their way back to calm.

You won't always know the answer.

That's okay.

Curiosity is far more powerful than certainty.

Children don't need adults who have every answer.

They need adults who are willing to wonder before they judge.

---

### **A Small Shift That Changes Everything**

Nothing in your child's emotional world will change overnight.

There will still be tantrums.

Arguments.

Tears.

Moments when both of you feel overwhelmed.

This book is not about creating a childhood without difficult emotions.

Such a childhood does not exist.

It is about creating a relationship where emotions become opportunities to teach instead of problems to eliminate.

That shift may sound small.

In reality, it changes everything.

Because the way we respond to emotions today becomes the way our children will respond to their own emotions tomorrow.

Every calm conversation.

Every repaired mistake.

Every moment of connection.

Every safe boundary.

Every time you choose curiosity over control.

You are helping build emotional skills that will stay with your child long after the toys have been packed away and childhood has passed.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child experiences a big feeling, don't rush to fix it.

Pause.

Take one slow breath.

Then silently ask yourself:

**"If this emotion could speak, what would it want me to understand?"**

You don't need a perfect answer.

You only need a willingness to listen.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children's emotions are not interruptions to parenting. They are the moments parenting matters most.**

# CHAPTER 2

## Behaviour Is Communication

What children are trying to express when words are not enoughImagine moving to a country where you don't speak the language.

You know what you need.

You know when you're hungry.

You know when you're scared.

You know when you're frustrated.

But you don't know the words to explain any of it.

You point.

You gesture.

You raise your voice.

You become impatient when people don't understand you.

Eventually, you might even stop trying.

Not because your needs have disappeared.

Because you have no reliable way to communicate them.

Young children experience something surprisingly similar every day.

They have rich emotional lives long before they have the vocabulary to describe them.

They can feel disappointment without understanding what disappointment is.

They can feel anxiety without knowing the word *anxiety*.

They can feel shame, embarrassment, loneliness or overwhelm without being able to explain any of it.

So they communicate the only way they know how.

Through behaviour.

That is one of the most important ideas in this book.

**Behaviour is communication.**

Not manipulation.

Not defiance.

Not evidence of a "bad child."

Communication.

Sometimes clear.

Sometimes confusing.

Sometimes loud.

Sometimes silent.

But communication nonetheless.

## **Looking Beyond What We See**

When children behave in ways that challenge us, our attention naturally goes to the behaviour itself.

The shouting.

The refusal.

The tears.

The hitting.

The whining.

The arguing.

Those behaviours are real.

They need to be addressed.

But they are rarely the whole story.

Imagine receiving a letter in the mail.

Would you spend your time studying the envelope?

Or would you open it to discover what was written inside?

Behaviour is the envelope.

Emotion is the letter.

Parents often spend enormous amounts of energy trying to change the envelope.

This book invites you to become curious about the message inside.

Because once you understand the message, your response changes naturally.

---

### **Every Behaviour Asks a Question**

Children rarely wake up in the morning thinking,

*"How can I make today difficult for everyone?"*

Yet that is often how challenging behaviour feels to exhausted adults.

A child refuses to put on their shoes.

Another throws their homework across the room.

A younger sibling bites without warning.

A preschooler collapses into tears because the banana broke in half.

The behaviour may seem irrational.

But underneath almost every behaviour is a question.

**"Am I safe?"**

**"Can you help me?"**

**"Do you understand me?"**

**"Am I allowed to feel this?"**

**"Will you stay with me when I'm struggling?"**

Children don't ask these questions with words.

They ask them with behaviour.

The younger the child, the more likely behaviour becomes their primary language.

---

### **Behaviour Is the Last Step, Not the First**

By the time you see a behaviour, many things have already happened.

Perhaps your child slept poorly.

Perhaps they skipped part of their lunch.

Perhaps school felt overwhelming.

Perhaps another child excluded them during recess.

Perhaps the classroom was noisier than usual.

Perhaps they tried all day to hold themselves together.

Then you asked them to turn off the television.

From your perspective, the television caused the meltdown.

From your child's perspective, the television was simply the final drop in an already full bucket.

Behaviour is often the end of a story we didn't get to watch.

That is why understanding context matters.

Without context, behaviour looks random.

With context, it often becomes understandable.

---

### **The Behaviours That Confuse Adults Most**

Some behaviours are easy to recognise.

Others leave parents wondering what happened.

A child who suddenly becomes silly when they're anxious.

A child who laughs after hurting someone.

A child who goes completely silent instead of crying.

A child who insists everything is "fine" while clearly struggling.

These reactions can seem confusing because children do not all communicate emotions in the same way.

Some move towards adults.

Others move away.

Some become louder.

Others become quieter.

Some seek hugs.

Others reject comfort completely.

Different behaviours.

The same underlying need.

Support.

---

### **Misbehaviour or Missing Skills?**

When adults describe children as "difficult," they are usually describing behaviour.

Not ability.

Imagine expecting a child to solve a complex maths problem they have never been taught.

We would recognise that the issue isn't motivation.

It's skill.

Emotional situations deserve the same understanding.

A child who cannot calm themselves is not demonstrating laziness.

They are demonstrating a skill that is still developing.

A child who hits when frustrated has not yet learned a safer way to express anger.

A child who screams when disappointed has not yet built the emotional bridge between feeling and self-control.

Seen this way, behaviour becomes less about blame.

And more about learning.

That doesn't remove responsibility.

It changes how we teach it.

---

### **Curiosity Before Conclusion**

The human brain loves quick explanations.

*"He's just stubborn."*

*"She's doing it for attention."*

*"He's trying to manipulate me."*

Those conclusions feel satisfying because they are simple.

The truth is usually more complicated.

Curiosity slows us down.

Instead of assuming intention, curiosity asks questions.

*"What happened before this?"*

*"Has something changed today?"*

*"What need might be hidden underneath?"*

*"What skill is missing right now?"*

Curiosity doesn't excuse behaviour.

It helps explain it.

And understanding almost always leads to better decisions than assumptions.

---

## **The Need Behind the Behaviour**

Many challenging behaviours grow from a small number of unmet needs.

A child may need:

- Safety.
- Connection.
- Rest.
- Predictability.
- Autonomy.
- Help solving a problem.
- Sensory regulation.
- Time.
- Encouragement.
- Reassurance.

The behaviour may differ.

The need is often surprisingly ordinary.

When adults respond only to behaviour, the need remains unmet.

When the need is recognised, behaviour often begins to change naturally over time.

Not because the child has been controlled.

Because they have been understood.

## **Listening With New Eyes**

Imagine watching your child for one entire day without trying to change anything.

Simply observing.

Noticing.

Wondering.

You might discover that every difficult behaviour follows a pattern.

Perhaps mornings are hardest after late nights.

Perhaps homework always becomes a struggle after busy school days.

Perhaps bedtime battles happen on days when you had very little time together.

Patterns are invisible when we focus only on behaviour.

They become obvious when we start looking for meaning.

Children are constantly telling us about their internal world.

The question is whether we have learned how to listen.

---

## **A Different Definition of Success**

Success is not raising a child who never cries.

Or never argues.

Or never loses control.

Success is raising a child who gradually learns that their feelings make sense.

That they can ask for help.

That difficult emotions do not have to become dangerous behaviours.

That someone will help them understand what is happening inside.

This kind of learning happens conversation by conversation.

Moment by moment.

Relationship by relationship.

It is slow.

Sometimes invisible.

Always worthwhile.

---

### **Try This Today**

Choose one behaviour that usually frustrates you.

Before responding, write down three possible reasons your child might be behaving that way.

Not excuses.

Possibilities.

You may discover that your first assumption is rarely the only explanation.

---

### **Remember This**

**When words are too small for what children feel, behaviour becomes the language they use to ask for understanding.**

# CHAPTER 3

## Inside the Developing Brain

Why Children Lose Access to Skills They Usually Have One of the most confusing experiences in parenting is watching your child do something you know they already know not to do.

Yesterday, they used their words.

Today, they hit.

Last week, they calmly accepted that it was time to leave the playground.

Today, they collapse onto the ground screaming.

An hour ago, they happily shared their toys.

Now, they're shouting, "*Mine!*" while pulling one away from their sibling.

What changed?

Did they forget everything they had learned?

Did they suddenly become defiant?

Were they simply choosing not to behave?

Probably not.

More often than parents realise, children don't lose their willingness to cooperate.

They lose temporary access to the skills that normally help them cooperate.

Understanding why this happens is one of the most important steps toward responding with confidence instead of frustration.

---

## **A Brain Under Construction**

Children are born with extraordinary potential.

But they are not born with a fully developed brain.

In fact, one of the defining features of childhood is that the brain is still being built.

Every day, billions of neural connections are strengthened, refined and reorganised through experience.

This process continues throughout childhood and adolescence.

That means the skills adults often take for granted—pausing before reacting, thinking through consequences, controlling impulses, managing frustration, solving problems and calming strong emotions—are still under construction.

Imagine moving into a new house while the builders are still working.

Some rooms are finished.

Others are missing walls.

Electricity works in one part of the house but not another.

That doesn't mean the house is broken.

It means it isn't finished yet.

A child's brain works in much the same way.

Some abilities are available one moment and temporarily unavailable the next.

Development is not a straight line.

It is a process.

---

### **Why Skills Disappear During Big Feelings**

Have you ever noticed that your child often seems perfectly capable—until emotions become overwhelming?

When they're calm, they remember to say "please."

They wait for their turn.

They solve small disagreements with words.

Then something unexpected happens.

A tower falls over.

A sibling takes a toy.

Plans suddenly change.

Within seconds, all those skills seem to disappear.

It can feel as though your child has forgotten everything you've taught them.

But they haven't.

Their brain has simply shifted into survival mode.

When the brain perceives a situation as emotionally overwhelming, its priority changes.

Instead of learning...

it focuses on coping.

Instead of reasoning...

it focuses on protection.

Instead of reflection...

it reacts.

This is not a conscious decision.

It is an automatic response designed to help human beings survive threatening situations.

For children, however, a "threat" is not limited to physical danger.

Feeling overwhelmed.

Feeling rejected.

Feeling embarrassed.

Feeling frightened.

Feeling deeply disappointed.

All of these experiences can activate the same protective systems inside the brain.

That is why children sometimes react to everyday events as though they are much bigger than adults expect.

Their brains are responding to how the situation feels, not to how it appears from the outside.

---

### **The Thinking Brain and the Protective Brain**

To understand what happens during emotional overload, it helps to imagine the brain as having two important jobs.

One part helps us think.

The other helps us survive.

The thinking brain helps children:

- make decisions,
- solve problems,
- remember rules,
- consider consequences,
- control impulses,
- use language,

- show empathy.

The protective brain has a different mission.

Its only question is:

**"Am I safe?"**

When the answer feels uncertain, speed becomes more important than reasoning.

The protective brain takes over.

That is why a child who normally says,

*"Can I have a turn?"*

may suddenly push another child instead.

It is why a child who understands house rules can suddenly throw a toy across the room.

It is why a child who knows how to calm down sometimes seems completely unable to do so.

The skills have not disappeared.

Access to those skills has.

---

## **Why "Calm Down" Usually Doesn't Work**

Many parents instinctively say,

*"Calm down."*

It's a kind intention.

But imagine hearing those words during one of the most stressful moments of your own life.

Would they instantly calm your nervous system?

Probably not.

Children experience something similar.

When the protective brain is fully activated, logical instructions become difficult to process.

Their body is already reacting faster than their thinking brain can catch up.

This is why repeating the same instruction louder and louder rarely changes the outcome.

Children cannot consistently access reasoning until they begin feeling safe again.

Safety comes before self-control.

Connection comes before correction.

This does not mean allowing harmful behaviour.

It means recognising that teaching happens most effectively after regulation begins to return.

## **Borrowing an Adult's Calm**

One of the remarkable things about childhood is that children often learn to regulate themselves by first experiencing regulation with someone else.

Think about a newborn baby.

When they cry, they cannot calm themselves.

An adult picks them up.

Speaks softly.

Rocks them.

Holds them close.

Little by little, their body settles.

As children grow older, the process becomes more sophisticated, but the principle remains remarkably similar.

Children often "borrow" an adult's calm until they gradually build their own.

Your calm voice.

Your slower breathing.

Your predictable presence.

Your willingness to stay nearby.

These experiences teach the nervous system something powerful:

*"Big feelings can be survived."*

Over time, those repeated experiences become internal skills.

Children begin doing for themselves what adults have patiently done with them for years.

That is emotional development.

Not magic.

Not instant transformation.

Practice.

Repeated thousands of times.

---

### **Why Progress Looks Inconsistent**

Many parents become discouraged because progress does not happen in a straight line.

A child manages disappointment beautifully on Monday.

Has a huge meltdown on Tuesday.

Handles frustration well on Wednesday.

Falls apart again on Thursday.

This inconsistency is not failure.

It is exactly what learning looks like.

Think about learning to ride a bicycle.

Some days you balance for several metres.

The next day you fall again.

No one concludes that learning has stopped.

Emotional skills grow in the same uneven way.

Children move forward.

Step back.

Move forward again.

With each experience, the brain strengthens the pathways that support regulation.

Progress is measured across months and years, not individual afternoons.

---

## **What Children Need Most**

When children lose access to their emotional skills, they do not need adults who immediately become bigger, louder or more controlling.

They need adults who can become steadier.

This does not mean becoming permissive.

It means becoming regulated enough to provide what the child's brain cannot yet provide for itself.

Safety.

Predictability.

Clear boundaries.

Compassion.

Leadership.

Your child does not need you to have perfect emotional control.

They need to experience someone who is willing to pause, repair mistakes and keep showing up.

Every one of those moments teaches the developing brain something far more valuable than obedience.

It teaches resilience.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child becomes emotionally overwhelmed, pause before assuming they are refusing to cooperate.

Instead, ask yourself:

**"What skill might my child have temporarily lost access to right now?"**

Perhaps it's impulse control.

Perhaps it's flexible thinking.

Perhaps it's problem-solving.

Perhaps it's simply the ability to find the right words.

Respond to the missing skill before reacting to the behaviour.

You may be surprised by how much changes.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children don't lose control because they forget what you've taught them. They lose control because, in that moment, their developing brain temporarily loses access to the skills they are still learning to build.**

# CHAPTER 4

## When the Nervous System Takes Over

### Understanding Fight, Flight, Freeze and Shutdown

One of the most frustrating moments in parenting is when your child suddenly seems like a completely different person.

One moment they're laughing.

The next, they're screaming.

One moment they're listening.

The next, they're kicking the car seat, throwing toys, or refusing to move.

You wonder what happened.

*"This came out of nowhere."*

But it almost never does.

What changes is not your child's personality.

What changes is which part of their nervous system is in charge.

To understand children's behaviour, we must first understand something surprisingly simple:

**Every nervous system has one primary job.**

To keep us alive.

Long before children learn to read, solve maths problems or tie their shoes, their nervous system is already asking one question, every second of every day:

**"Am I safe?"**

When the answer is yes, children can explore.

They can learn.

They can play.

They can connect.

They can think.

But when the answer becomes uncertain—even for a moment—the nervous system changes priorities.

Learning can wait.

Safety cannot.

---

## **The World's Fastest Security System**

Imagine your home has the most advanced security system ever created.

It constantly scans for danger.

Most of the time, it quietly stays in the background.

But the moment it believes something is wrong, alarms begin to sound.

Doors lock.

Lights flash.

Emergency systems activate.

It doesn't stop to ask whether the danger is real.

Its job is to react first and ask questions later.

Your child's nervous system works in much the same way.

The problem is that children's security systems are still learning the difference between discomfort and danger.

To an adult, leaving the playground may simply be disappointing.

To a four-year-old, it can feel like losing something deeply important.

To an adult, putting away a favourite toy is routine.

To a child, it may feel like losing control.

To an adult, a loud hand dryer in a public bathroom is an inconvenience.

To a sensitive child, it may feel terrifying.

The nervous system responds to how safe something feels.

Not to how logical it appears.

---

## **Four Ways the Nervous System Protects Us**

When children feel overwhelmed, their nervous system generally responds in one of four ways.

These responses are automatic.

Children do not choose them.

Understanding them helps us respond with greater wisdom and less frustration.

---

### **Fight**

Some children move toward the problem.

Their bodies prepare to defend themselves.

This might look like:

- yelling,
- hitting,
- kicking,
- throwing,
- arguing,
- refusing,
- becoming controlling.

Adults often see aggression.

The nervous system sees protection.

This does not mean aggressive behaviour is acceptable.

It isn't.

But recognising it as a protective response changes how we intervene.

Instead of asking,

*"How do I stop this?"*

we first ask,

*"What is making my child feel unsafe?"*

---

## **Flight**

Other children try to escape.

Sometimes physically.

Sometimes emotionally.

They hide.

Run away.

Leave the room.

Avoid eye contact.

Ask to go home.

Refuse to enter school.

Cling desperately to a parent.

Adults may interpret this as avoidance.

The nervous system calls it survival.

---

## **Freeze**

Some children become completely still.

They stare.

They stop talking.

They seem unable to make even simple decisions.

Parents often think,

*"Why won't you answer me?"*

The answer is usually not stubbornness.

When the nervous system freezes, thinking slows dramatically.

Speech often becomes difficult.

Children may genuinely struggle to find words.

The more pressure they feel,

the harder speaking becomes.

---

## **Shutdown**

Sometimes the nervous system decides that the safest option is to conserve energy.

The child may seem emotionally distant.

Uninterested.

Flat.

They stop engaging.

They may say,

*"I don't care."*

But often, they care very deeply.

They simply no longer have enough emotional energy to show it.

Shutdown is frequently misunderstood.

It can look like laziness.

Defiance.

Lack of motivation.

In reality, it may be the nervous system saying,

*"I have nothing left."*

---

## **Different Children, Different Patterns**

Not every child responds the same way.

One child explodes.

Another withdraws.

One becomes louder.

Another becomes quieter.

One argues.

Another cries.

Neither response is better.

Neither response is worse.

They are simply different protective strategies.

Over time, you'll probably notice that your child has a preferred pattern.

Knowing this helps you recognise distress long before behaviour becomes overwhelming.

---

## **Your Nervous System Matters Too**

Here is something many parenting books overlook.

Your child's nervous system is not the only one in the room.

Yours is there too.

Imagine your child begins screaming.

Your shoulders tense.

Your heart races.

Your breathing becomes shallow.

Your voice becomes louder.

Without realising it, your own nervous system has also shifted into protection.

Now two nervous systems are trying to survive at the same time.

This is why emotional moments escalate so quickly.

Children do not borrow only our words.

They also borrow our emotional state.

A calm adult cannot always calm a child.

But a dysregulated adult almost always makes regulation harder.

This is not about blame.

It's about awareness.

The calmer nervous system usually becomes the leader.

As adults, we have the opportunity to become that leader.

---

## **Safety Before Solutions**

When the nervous system believes it is in danger, teaching becomes almost impossible.

Imagine trying to solve a complicated puzzle while a fire alarm is blaring beside your head.

You could do it eventually.

But not while your brain is focused on survival.

Children experience something similar.

This is why lectures during tantrums rarely work.

This is why repeated explanations often seem ignored.

This is why consequences delivered in the middle of emotional overwhelm frequently fail to teach the lesson we intended.

First comes safety.

Then connection.

Only then can learning begin.

That sequence appears throughout this book because it reflects how the nervous system actually works.

---

## **Becoming a Safe Place**

Children cannot avoid difficult emotions.

Nor should they.

Fear.

Anger.

Sadness.

Disappointment.

These are all part of being human.

What children need is not a life without emotional storms.

They need confidence that someone will help them navigate those storms.

Over time, your calm presence becomes something remarkable.

Not because you always say the perfect words.

Not because you never lose patience.

But because your child begins to associate you with safety.

And safety changes the brain.

A child who feels safe learns more easily.

Recovers more quickly.

Builds stronger emotional skills.

Develops greater resilience.

The nervous system is always asking,

**"Am I safe?"**

One of the greatest gifts a parent can offer is helping the answer become,

**"Yes."**

## **Try This Today**

The next time your child's behaviour suddenly changes, pause before reacting.

Ask yourself:

**"Is my child giving me a behaviour problem... or a nervous system problem?"**

That single question may completely change your response.

---

## **Remember This**

**Children cannot consistently access their best thinking when their nervous system believes they are in danger. Before they can learn from us, they must first feel safe with us.**

# CHAPTER 5

## The Adult in the Room

### How Your Emotional State Shapes What Happens Next

Before children learn to calm themselves, they learn what calm looks like.

Not from books.

Not from lessons.

Not from being told to "use their words."

They learn it by watching the adults who care for them.

Long before children understand emotional regulation, they are already studying it.

Every sigh.

Every smile.

Every gentle voice.

Every slammed cupboard.

Every impatient response.

Every deep breath.

Every repair after a mistake.

Children are constantly asking themselves one silent question:

## **"When big feelings happen... what do the grown-ups do?"**

Whether we realise it or not, we are answering that question every single day.

---

### **Children Read More Than Words**

Imagine walking into a room where two people are smiling politely.

They tell you,

*"Everything's fine."*

But their arms are crossed.

Their voices are tense.

Neither person makes eye contact.

You immediately know something is wrong.

Not because of what they said.

Because of everything they didn't say.

Children notice these things too.

In fact, they often notice them better than adults.

Before children fully understand language, they understand tone.

They notice facial expressions.

They recognise changes in breathing.

They feel tension in a room long before anyone explains what is happening.

This is why a parent can calmly say,

*"I'm not angry."*

while every signal their body sends communicates the opposite.

Children trust what they observe more than what they hear.

Our nervous systems speak long before our words do.

---

## **Emotional Contagion**

Have you ever walked into a room where someone was laughing so hard that you found yourself smiling before you even knew the joke?

Or entered a meeting where everyone seemed anxious, and suddenly your own stomach tightened?

Emotions are surprisingly contagious.

Scientists sometimes describe this as emotional contagion—the natural tendency for human beings to influence one another's emotional state.

Families experience this every day.

One person's stress quickly becomes everyone's stress.

One person's calm often becomes everyone's calm.

Children are especially sensitive to this because their emotional regulation is still developing.

Their nervous systems naturally look to trusted adults for information about whether a situation is safe.

If the adult appears overwhelmed, the child's brain receives another signal that something may be wrong.

This is not about pretending to be calm.

Children quickly recognise pretending.

It is about learning how to return to calm.

That is something very different.

---

### **Your Child Is Not Responsible for Your Emotions**

Many parents, without meaning to, place an impossible responsibility on children.

*"You're making me angry."*

*"Look what you've done."*

*"You made Mummy shout."*

*"You know exactly how to push my buttons."*

These phrases are common.

They are also deeply unfair.

Children influence our emotions.

They do not control them.

The difference matters.

Imagine carrying the belief that every time an adult loses patience, it is somehow your fault.

Many children do exactly that.

Over time, this can create shame instead of responsibility.

Healthy emotional development begins with a different message.

**I am responsible for my emotions.**

**You are responsible for yours.**

We influence each other.

We help each other.

But we do not carry responsibility for one another's emotional reactions.

That distinction protects both the parent and the child.

---

### **The Pause That Changes Everything**

There is a small moment that separates reacting from responding.

It often lasts no more than a few seconds.

Your child shouts.

Your body tenses.

You feel your heartbeat quicken.

Words rush into your mind.

*"I've told you three times."*

*"Not again."*

*"I've had enough."*

This is the crossroads.

One path is automatic.

The other is intentional.

The automatic path is driven by emotion.

The intentional path begins with a pause.

Not because pausing magically solves the problem.

Because pausing gives your thinking brain time to rejoin the conversation.

One slow breath.

One second of silence.

One conscious decision not to let the moment decide who you become.

Parents often believe emotional regulation means never feeling angry.

It doesn't.

It means recognising anger before anger begins making decisions for you.

---

### **Children Don't Need Perfect Calm**

Many parents become discouraged because they lose patience.

They raise their voice.

They react too quickly.

They say something they immediately regret.

Then they think,

*"I've ruined everything."*

You haven't.

Children do not need perfect parents.

Perfect parents do not exist.

What children need are parents who know how to repair.

Imagine two families.

In one family, the parents never admit mistakes.

Arguments are ignored.

Everyone pretends nothing happened.

In the other family, a parent sometimes loses their temper.

But later they return.

They kneel beside their child.

They say,

*"I'm sorry I shouted. I was frustrated, but shouting wasn't the right way to handle my feelings."*

Which child learns more about emotional health?

The answer surprises many people.

Children do not learn emotional regulation from perfection.

They learn it from repair.

Every sincere apology teaches something powerful.

Adults make mistakes.

Relationships can heal.

Love remains.

That lesson may be more valuable than avoiding every mistake in the first place.

---

## **Becoming the Emotional Leader**

Leadership in parenting has very little to do with control.

It has everything to do with direction.

Imagine climbing a mountain with someone who knows the path.

The weather changes.

The climb becomes difficult.

You begin to worry.

The guide does not panic.

They acknowledge the challenge.

Adjust the route.

Keep moving.

Their calm confidence becomes part of your confidence.

Children need that kind of leadership.

Not certainty.

Not perfection.

Steadiness.

A parent who can say,

*"This is hard."*

while also communicating,

*"We'll get through it together."*

offers something every nervous system longs for.

Safety.

## **When You Feel Triggered**

Some behaviours affect us more than others.

Whining.

Backtalk.

Defiance.

Public tantrums.

Disrespect.

These moments often activate something inside us that has very little to do with our child.

Sometimes they awaken memories of our own childhood.

Sometimes they challenge deeply held beliefs about what a "good child" should look like.

Sometimes they simply arrive on days when we are exhausted, worried or carrying burdens our children know nothing about.

Recognising your own triggers is not selfish.

It is responsible.

Because once you know what activates you, you can prepare for it instead of being controlled by it.

Children are not responsible for healing our past.

But parenting often invites us to notice the parts of ourselves that still need healing.

This can be uncomfortable.

It can also become one of parenting's greatest gifts.

---

### **The Calm They Borrow Today**

Children borrow our calm long before they create their own.

Every time you lower your voice instead of raising it...

Every time you choose curiosity instead of assumptions...

Every time you repair after a difficult moment...

Every time you remain present during a storm of emotions...

you are teaching lessons that no lecture could ever replace.

Children may not remember your exact words.

They will remember how it felt to be with you.

And that feeling gradually becomes part of who they are.

One day, years from now, your child will face disappointment without you beside them.

They will hear an inner voice.

The hope is that voice sounds something like yours.

Steady.

Kind.

Patient.

Confident.

That voice begins forming today.

One interaction at a time.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child has a big emotional reaction, notice your own body before you notice theirs.

Ask yourself:

- What am I feeling right now?
- What is my body doing?
- What kind of emotional example am I about to give?

Take one slow breath before saying your first sentence.

You may discover that changing your emotional state changes the entire conversation.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children may not always follow our instructions, but they are always learning from our example. The emotional climate we create today becomes the emotional foundation they carry into tomorrow.**

# **PART II — UNDERSTANDING WHAT LIES BENEATH**

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Anger Is Never Just Anger**

#### **The Needs, Fears and Frustrations Hidden Underneath**

**If there is one emotion that frightens parents more than any other, it is anger.**

Not because anger itself is dangerous.

But because of what often comes with it.

The shouting.

The slammed doors.

The clenched fists.

The thrown toys.

The harsh words.

The younger sibling who gets pushed.

The parent who suddenly hears themselves saying,

*"That's enough!"*

Anger is loud.

It demands attention.

It fills the room.

And because it feels so uncomfortable, our instinct is often to stop it as quickly as possible.

*"Don't speak to me like that."*

*"Go to your room until you've calmed down."*

*"There is no reason to be angry."*

Sometimes those words stop the behaviour.

Rarely do they solve the problem.

Because anger is almost never the real story.

It is usually the final chapter of a much longer one.

---

## **The Emotion We See**

Imagine standing at the edge of a lake on a windy day.

The waves crash against the shore.

They are impossible to ignore.

But no one believes the wind begins at the surface of the water.

The waves are only showing us what is happening underneath.

Anger works in exactly the same way.

It is often the visible wave created by invisible forces.

Fear.

Embarrassment.

Disappointment.

Shame.

Loneliness.

Exhaustion.

Feeling misunderstood.

Feeling powerless.

Feeling ignored.

Feeling overwhelmed.

These emotions rarely announce themselves first.

Instead, they gather quietly beneath the surface until anger becomes the loudest voice in the room.

This is why two children can both appear angry while experiencing completely different emotional worlds.

One child is frightened.

Another is grieving.

One feels rejected.

Another feels helpless.

The behaviour looks almost identical.

The need is completely different.

---

### **Why Anger Feels Powerful**

Imagine being five years old.

You cannot decide when to wake up.

You cannot decide what to eat.

You cannot decide where to go.

Adults tell you when to leave the park.

When to brush your teeth.

When to turn off the television.

When to get dressed.

When to go to bed.

Most of the time, children accept these limits surprisingly well.

But there are moments when life feels full of decisions made by everyone except them.

Anger often appears when children experience a loss of control.

Not because they want to control everyone else.

Because they are desperately trying to regain a sense of influence over their own world.

Think about your own life.

When do you feel angriest?

Usually when something important feels blocked.

When you are treated unfairly.

When someone ignores your opinion.

When you lose something valuable.

Children experience these moments too.

The difference is that they have far fewer emotional tools available to manage them.

---

### **Anger Is a Secondary Emotion**

Psychologists often describe anger as a **secondary emotion**.

That simply means another emotion usually arrives first.

A child loses a race.

First comes disappointment.

Then anger.

A child is laughed at by classmates.

First comes shame.

Then anger.

A child is scared of sleeping alone.

First comes fear.

Then anger.

Imagine wearing a thick winter coat.

The coat is the only thing people see.

But underneath it are several layers of clothing.

Anger is often the coat.

Underneath it are emotions that feel far more vulnerable.

Children quickly discover that anger feels stronger than sadness.

Safer than fear.

Less exposing than embarrassment.

It becomes the emotion that protects all the others.

When we respond only to the anger, we often miss the child hiding underneath it.

---

### **"He's Just Angry"**

Parents sometimes describe children by their most difficult emotion.

*"She's an angry child."*

*"He has an anger problem."*

Labels are understandable.

But they are also dangerous.

Because children grow into the stories they repeatedly hear about themselves.

Imagine hearing throughout your childhood:

*"You're so dramatic."*

*"You're aggressive."*

*"You're impossible."*

Eventually those words stop describing behaviour.

They begin describing identity.

Behaviour changes.

Identity lasts.

Whenever possible, describe the behaviour rather than the child.

Instead of:

*"You're an angry boy."*

Try:

*"You're having a hard time with your anger right now."*

One sentence creates shame.

The other creates possibility.

## **Looking Beneath the Surface**

The next time your child becomes angry, imagine asking yourself three quiet questions before saying anything.

**What happened just before this?**

**What might my child have lost?**

**What might my child be protecting?**

Sometimes the answer will be obvious.

Sometimes it won't.

Curiosity matters more than certainty.

A child who screams because the wrong cereal was poured may not be upset about cereal at all.

Perhaps school felt overwhelming.

Perhaps they're exhausted.

Perhaps today is the anniversary of losing a grandparent.

Perhaps nothing dramatic happened.

Perhaps their emotional bucket simply became too full.

Anger rarely arrives without a story.

---

## **When Children Borrow Our Anger**

Children do not learn what anger is from a single conversation.

They learn by watching how the adults around them handle it.

If anger always becomes shouting...

they learn that shouting is what anger looks like.

If anger becomes silence...

they learn to hide.

If anger becomes blame...

they learn blame.

But if anger becomes something else...

a deep breath.

A pause.

A calm boundary.

A repaired relationship.

Then children begin to discover another possibility.

Anger does not have to control what happens next.

It can become information instead of instruction.

---

## **What Anger Actually Needs**

Many parents ask,

*"How do I stop the anger?"*

A more helpful question is,

*"What does anger need?"*

Sometimes it needs safety.

Sometimes understanding.

Sometimes movement.

Sometimes space.

Sometimes a hug.

Sometimes firm limits.

Sometimes simply someone who stays nearby without making the situation bigger.

No single response works every time.

Because anger is not a single emotion.

It is many different experiences wearing the same face.

---

### **Teaching a New Path**

The goal is not to raise children who never feel angry.

That would be impossible.

Anger is part of being human.

The goal is to raise children who gradually learn that anger is something they can understand rather than fear.

Something they can express without hurting themselves or others.

Something that points toward an unmet need instead of becoming a source of shame.

Every time you help a child move from,

*"I'm angry!"*

to,

*"I'm angry because..."*

you are strengthening one of the most important emotional skills they will ever develop.

Not the absence of anger.

The understanding of it.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child becomes angry, resist the urge to ask,

**"What's wrong with you?"**

Instead ask yourself,

**"What happened before the anger appeared?"**

Then remember:

The first emotion is not always the loudest one.

## **Remember This**

**Anger is rarely the beginning of the story. It is often the strongest voice protecting emotions that feel too vulnerable to show themselves first.**

# CHAPTER 7

## Fear, Worry and Anxiety

Helping Children Feel Safe Without Teaching Them to  
AvoidEvery parent has witnessed fear.

A toddler hides behind a parent's leg when someone new says  
hello.

A child refuses to sleep alone after a frightening dream.

Another clings tightly at the school gate, tears filling their eyes.

A seven-year-old insists there is a monster under the bed.

A ten-year-old worries that something terrible will happen while  
their parents are away.

Fear wears many faces.

Sometimes it cries.

Sometimes it freezes.

Sometimes it argues.

Sometimes it looks like stubbornness.

Sometimes it hides behind anger.

Whatever form it takes, fear has one purpose.

To protect us.

Without fear, children would run into busy roads without hesitation.

They would touch hot ovens.

Climb dangerous heights.

Approach strangers without caution.

Fear is not a weakness.

It is one of the oldest survival systems the human brain possesses.

The problem is not that children feel fear.

The problem begins when fear starts making every decision for them.

---

### **The Brain Cannot Tell the Difference Between Real and Imagined Danger**

Imagine watching a frightening movie.

Your heart races.

Your breathing changes.

Your muscles tense.

Even though you know you're sitting safely on your sofa, your body reacts as though the danger were real.

Children experience this even more intensely.

Their brains are still learning to distinguish between possibility and probability.

A shadow in the bedroom can become a monster.

A barking dog can become a life-threatening danger.

A spelling test can feel like a catastrophe.

An upcoming birthday party can feel terrifying.

Adults often respond with logic.

*"There's nothing to be afraid of."*

*"It's just a shadow."*

*"You'll be fine."*

These responses come from love.

But they rarely reduce fear.

Because fear is not created by logic.

It is created by perception.

The child is not reacting to what is objectively true.

They are reacting to what feels true inside their nervous system.

Until we understand that, our reassurance often misses its target.

---

## **Fear Is a Prediction, Not a Reality**

One of the simplest ways to understand anxiety is to think of it as the brain trying to predict the future.

The anxious brain constantly asks,

**"What if something goes wrong?"**

What if Mum doesn't come back?

What if everyone laughs at me?

What if I fail?

What if I get hurt?

What if I can't do it?

Notice something important.

Almost every anxious thought lives in the future.

Fear imagines.

It predicts.

It prepares.

Sometimes those predictions are useful.

Many times they are wildly inaccurate.

Children, however, do not yet have enough life experience to recognise this.

For them, imagining something frightening can feel almost identical to living it.

## **When Reassurance Becomes a Trap**

Parents naturally want to comfort their children.

A worried child asks,

*"Are you sure nothing bad will happen?"*

Our instinct is immediate.

*"I promise."*

*"Everything will be okay."*

*"Don't worry."*

For a few minutes, the child feels better.

Then another question appears.

*"But what if...?"*

The reassurance works briefly because it calms uncertainty.

Unfortunately, it also teaches the anxious brain that reassurance is necessary before it can feel safe.

Soon the child needs more reassurance.

Then even more.

Eventually, reassurance becomes like scratching an itch.

It brings temporary relief while making the itch return even stronger.

This does not mean we stop comforting children.

It means we comfort differently.

Instead of promising certainty, we build confidence.

Instead of saying,

*"Nothing bad will happen."*

we might say,

*"Whatever happens, we'll handle it together."*

One promises a future we cannot control.

The other strengthens a child for whatever the future brings.

---

### **Courage Is Not the Absence of Fear**

Many adults accidentally teach children that bravery means not being scared.

It doesn't.

Think about the bravest person you know.

Were they fearless?

Probably not.

They were afraid.

They acted anyway.

Courage and fear are partners.

One cannot exist without the other.

Children need to hear this.

*"Being brave doesn't mean your hands stop shaking."*

*"Being brave doesn't mean your heart stops beating fast."*

*"Being brave means taking one small step even while you're scared."*

This changes everything.

Instead of waiting for fear to disappear, children begin learning how to move forward with fear beside them.

---

### **The Cost of Avoidance**

Imagine your child becomes frightened by dogs.

The next time you see a dog, you cross the street.

Your child immediately feels relieved.

The brain learns something important.

*"Avoiding worked."*

Next week, another dog appears.

Again, you cross the street.

Again, relief.

Soon your child wants to avoid every dog.

Then every park.

Eventually, every place where a dog *might* appear.

Avoidance always makes life feel smaller.

This is one of anxiety's greatest tricks.

It promises safety.

But slowly steals freedom.

The goal is never to force frightened children into overwhelming situations.

Nor is it to remove every uncomfortable experience from their lives.

The goal is gradual confidence.

Small steps.

Supported experiences.

Successes that teach the brain,

*"I was scared... and I got through it."*

---

## **Borrowing Safety**

Children often borrow courage the same way they borrow calm.

Not because adults tell them not to be afraid.

But because adults stay close while they face something difficult.

Imagine teaching a child to swim.

You don't throw them into the deep end.  
Nor do you promise they'll never feel afraid.  
You stand beside them.  
One hand supporting.  
One encouraging word at a time.  
Little by little, they discover they can do more than they believed.  
Fear becomes manageable because someone trustworthy stayed  
with them long enough for confidence to grow.  
That is exactly how emotional courage develops.

---

### **What Fear Needs Most**

When children are afraid, adults often try to remove the fear.  
Sometimes what children need is something different.  
They need someone who believes they are capable of facing it.  
Not alone.  
But not rescued from every challenge either.  
This balance is delicate.  
Too much pressure creates panic.  
Too much protection creates dependence.  
Between those extremes lies growth.

Children become confident not because life feels easy.

They become confident because they repeatedly experience themselves overcoming difficulty.

Confidence is not given.

It is built.

One small success at a time.

---

### **The Words Children Remember**

Years from now, your child probably won't remember every conversation you had about fear.

But they may remember how you made them feel.

Did you make them believe the world was dangerous?

Or did you help them believe they were capable?

Those are two very different messages.

One grows anxiety.

The other grows resilience.

The world will always contain uncertainty.

Our children do not need certainty.

They need confidence that uncertainty is something they can survive.

That may be one of the greatest gifts a parent can offer.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child says,

*"I'm scared."*

Pause before reassuring them.

Instead ask,

**"Can you tell me what your fear is trying to protect you from?"**

Listen without correcting.

Then remind them,

*"You don't have to stop feeling scared before you take your next small step."*

---

### **Remember This**

**Fear's job is to protect children. Your job is not to erase fear, but to help your child discover that they are stronger than fear wants them to believe.**

# CHAPTER 8

## **Sadness, Grief and Disappointment**

### **How to Stay Close When You Cannot Make the Pain Disappear**

There is a particular kind of helplessness that comes with watching your child cry.

Not the frustrated cry that follows a tantrum.

Not the angry tears that appear after being told "no."

But the quiet tears.

The tears that come after losing something important.

A favourite toy.

A beloved pet.

A friendship.

A competition.

A grandparent.

A dream.

Or simply a day that didn't go the way they had hoped.

These are the moments when parents often wish they could trade places with their child.

We would rather carry the pain ourselves than watch someone we love hurt so deeply.

Our instinct is immediate.

*"It's okay."*

*"Don't cry."*

*"You'll get another one."*

*"There are plenty of other friends."*

*"It's not the end of the world."*

These words come from love.

But they also reveal something about us.

We struggle to sit beside sadness.

Especially when it belongs to someone we love.

---

## **The Problem We Cannot Solve**

Most parenting challenges invite action.

A child is hungry.

We prepare food.

A child is cold.

We find a blanket.

A child falls.

We clean the wound.

Sadness is different.

Often, there is nothing to fix.

No solution.

No shortcut.

No magic sentence.

The disappointment is real.

The loss has already happened.

The tears make sense.

This is difficult because human beings naturally want to reduce suffering.

Parents especially.

Seeing our child in emotional pain activates something deep inside us.

We want to repair.

To distract.

To improve.

To rescue.

But sadness asks for something different.

Not solutions.

Presence.

---

### **Why We Rush to Make Children Feel Better**

Imagine a close friend tells you they have lost someone they love.

You probably wouldn't say,

*"Don't think about it."*

Or,

*"You'll find someone else."*

You would simply sit with them.

Listen.

Acknowledge the pain.

Allow silence.

Yet when children are sad, adults often rush to erase the feeling.

Why?

Because children's sadness hurts us too.

When our child cries, our own nervous system becomes uncomfortable.

Sometimes we try to stop their sadness because we cannot tolerate our own discomfort.

Without realising it, we begin soothing ourselves instead of supporting them.

Children don't always need us to remove sadness.

Sometimes they simply need someone who is willing to stay.

---

### **Sadness Is Love With Nowhere to Go**

Imagine your child's favourite teddy bear disappears forever.

To an adult, it may seem replaceable.

To a child, it represents comfort.

Memories.

Safety.

Routine.

Connection.

The sadness isn't about fabric and stuffing.

It's about what the teddy bear meant.

Every loss carries meaning.

Children grieve broken routines.

Cancelled plans.

Moving house.

Changing teachers.

A friend who suddenly stops playing with them.

The arrival of a new sibling.

Even growing up involves small losses.

The loss of being carried.

The loss of familiar routines.

The loss of feeling like the centre of someone's world.

Adults sometimes underestimate these experiences because they seem small from the outside.

Children experience them from the inside.

That perspective changes everything.

---

### **Disappointment Builds Strength**

No parent enjoys disappointing their child.

You say no to another biscuit.

You cancel a trip because someone is ill.

Rain ruins the picnic.

The birthday party ends earlier than expected.

Children cry.

They protest.

Sometimes they accuse you of being unfair.

In those moments, many parents feel guilty.

But disappointment is not something children should be protected from at all costs.

It is something they need help learning to survive.

Life will disappoint them.

Friendships will end.

Dreams will change.

Plans will fail.

They cannot avoid disappointment.

What they need is confidence that disappointment is survivable.

Every time children experience disappointment and recover, their emotional resilience grows a little stronger.

Not because disappointment feels good.

Because they discover that painful feelings do not last forever.

---

### **You Cannot Rescue Every Feeling**

Imagine trying to remove every stone from your child's path.

At first, it seems loving.

Eventually, it becomes impossible.

And even if it were possible, your child would never learn how to walk on uneven ground.

Emotional life works the same way.

If we remove every disappointment...

every frustration...

every sadness...

our children never discover their own capacity to recover.

The goal is not to eliminate pain.

The goal is to make sure children never face pain alone.

There is a profound difference.

One creates dependence.

The other creates resilience.

---

## **The Healing Power of Being Understood**

Think back to a time when you felt deeply sad.

What helped most?

Was it advice?

Probably not.

Was it someone telling you to cheer up?

Almost certainly not.

More often, healing began with something much simpler.

Someone listened.

Someone stayed.

Someone allowed your sadness to exist without trying to change it.

Children need the same gift.

When a child hears,

*"I can see how disappointed you are."*

something remarkable happens.

The emotion becomes shared instead of carried alone.

Nothing has been solved.

Yet something important has changed.

The child no longer feels alone inside their experience.

Connection reduces emotional pain in ways solutions sometimes cannot.

---

## **Grief Has No Timetable**

Adults often expect children to "move on" quickly.

Sometimes they do.

Sometimes they don't.

A child may cry intensely after losing a pet...  
then laugh ten minutes later.  
This doesn't mean they have forgotten.  
Children naturally move in and out of grief.  
One moment they play.  
The next they remember.  
The next they play again.  
Grief is rarely linear.  
Neither is healing.  
The same is true after divorce.  
Moving house.  
Losing friendships.  
Experiencing illness.  
Children revisit losses as they grow.  
Each stage of development brings new understanding.  
The grief may return.  
Not because healing failed.  
Because the child now understands the loss differently.  
Patience matters.  
Healing cannot be rushed.

## **What Sadness Needs**

Sadness rarely asks us to fix it.

It asks us to witness it.

To sit beside it.

To name it.

To make space for it.

To remind children that tears are not signs of weakness.

They are signs that something mattered.

Children who learn this do not become emotionally fragile.

They become emotionally honest.

And honesty is the foundation of resilience.

Because resilience is not pretending pain doesn't exist.

It is trusting that pain can be experienced, shared and survived.

---

## **When You Don't Know What to Say**

Parents often worry about finding the perfect words.

The truth is, children rarely remember perfect sentences.

They remember how we made them feel.

Instead of searching for brilliant advice, try simple honesty.

*"I'm here."*

*"This really hurts."*

*"I'm so sorry this happened."*

*"You don't have to go through this alone."*

Sometimes those quiet sentences carry more healing than any explanation ever could.

Presence has a language of its own.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child is sad, resist the urge to make the feeling disappear.

Instead, sit beside them for a moment.

Say only,

**"I'm here with you."**

Then allow silence to do some of the work.

You may discover that connection often comforts more deeply than solutions.

---

## **Remember This**

**Children do not need adults who can take away every sadness. They need adults who are willing to stay close until sadness no longer feels so heavy to carry alone.**

# Chapter 9

## Frustration, Rigidity and the Need for Control

### Why small changes can create enormous reactions

**To many adults, it begins with something so small it barely seems worth mentioning.**

The wrong coloured cup.

A sandwich cut into squares instead of triangles.

A sock that feels "funny."

The television turned off five minutes earlier than expected.

The blue shirt being in the washing machine.

A parent sitting in the "wrong" chair.

A banana broken in half.

From an adult's perspective, these moments can seem irrational.

*"Why is this such a big deal?"*

*"It's only a cup."*

*"We'll use a different shirt."*

*"It's just a banana."*

Yet within seconds, your child may be crying, screaming, refusing to move, or acting as though something truly terrible has happened.

It is easy to assume they are overreacting.

But what if they are reacting to something we cannot see?

---

### **It Was Never About the Cup**

Imagine arriving at work one morning to discover that someone has emptied your office.

Your desk has been moved.

Your computer has disappeared.

Your favourite chair has been replaced.

Your schedule has changed.

No one warned you.

None of these changes are dangerous.

But together they create uncertainty.

Suddenly, you no longer know what to expect.

Children experience this feeling far more often than adults.

Their world is small.

Their routines are familiar.

Their favourite objects become emotional anchors.

The blue cup isn't just a blue cup.

It's the cup they always use at breakfast.

The bedtime story isn't just a story.

It's part of the ritual that tells their brain the day is ending.

The usual route to school isn't simply a road.

It's predictable.

Safe.

Known.

When one of these pieces suddenly changes, the emotional reaction is often far bigger than the object itself.

The object is not the problem.

The unexpected change is.

---

## **Why Predictability Feels Safe**

The human brain loves patterns.

Patterns reduce uncertainty.

And uncertainty requires energy.

Every predictable routine answers a question before we even have to ask it.

Children rely on these patterns even more than adults.

Morning routines.

Favourite foods.

The same bedtime song.

The same goodbye at school.

The same order of events.

These repeated experiences quietly tell the nervous system,

*"You know what comes next."*

That feeling creates safety.

When the pattern suddenly changes, the nervous system must work much harder.

Adults often adapt quickly because years of experience have taught us that unexpected changes are usually manageable.

Children have not yet built that confidence.

For them, uncertainty can feel overwhelming.

---

## **The Hidden Cost of Constant Change**

Think about your own life for a moment.

Imagine that tomorrow your employer changes your working hours.

Your phone stops working.

Your car breaks down.

Your plans for the weekend are cancelled.

Someone rearranges your kitchen.

Your internet fails.

None of these events are life-threatening.

Yet by the end of the day, you might feel exhausted.

Not because each event was enormous.

Because your brain spent the entire day adapting.

Children experience this kind of mental effort much more easily than adults.

Their ability to shift between expectations is still developing.

Every unexpected change demands flexibility.

And flexibility is a skill—not a personality trait.

---

### **Rigidity Is Often a Sign of Overload**

Parents sometimes describe children as rigid.

*"Everything has to be exactly the same."*

*"She can't cope if plans change."*

*"He gets upset over the smallest things."*

Rigidity is rarely about being controlling.

More often, it is about reducing uncertainty.

Imagine carrying a heavy box.

Someone suddenly asks you to juggle while holding it.

The request isn't impossible.

It's simply too much given what you're already carrying.

Children experience emotional flexibility in much the same way.

A child who slept poorly.

Who had a difficult day at school.

Who feels hungry.

Who is overwhelmed by noise.

Who is worried about tomorrow.

Will have much less flexibility available than usual.

What looks like stubbornness may actually be emotional exhaustion.

---

### **Control Creates Temporary Safety**

Have you noticed how many children insist on doing certain things themselves?

*"I want to open it."*

*"I wanted to press the button."*

*"I wanted Daddy to do it."*

*"I wanted the red bowl."*

These moments are not always about independence.

Often they are about predictability.

When children control a small part of their world, the world feels less overwhelming.

Adults do this too.

Some people always sit in the same seat.

Always drink from the same mug.

Always follow the same morning routine.

These habits create comfort.

Children simply rely on them more heavily.

The goal is not to eliminate this need for control.

It is to gradually help children discover that they can cope even when life doesn't go exactly as planned.

---

## **Flexibility Cannot Be Forced**

Imagine someone throws you into deep water before you've learned to swim.

You would probably panic.

Now imagine someone teaches you in the shallow end.

One step at a time.

One new skill after another.

Flexibility develops in exactly the same way.

Children do not become adaptable because adults repeatedly tell them,

*"Just deal with it."*

They become adaptable because they experience manageable changes while feeling supported.

A different cup.

A new route home.

A change in dinner plans.

A favourite toy temporarily unavailable.

Each successful experience teaches the nervous system something important.

*"Things changed... and I was still okay."*

Confidence grows one experience at a time.

---

## **The Power of Preparation**

Adults often underestimate how helpful preparation can be.

Imagine boarding an aeroplane.

Halfway through the flight, the aircraft suddenly drops.

No announcement.

No warning.

Most passengers panic.

Now imagine the pilot calmly says,

*"We're about to experience some turbulence. It may feel uncomfortable, but it is expected and the aircraft is safe."*

The turbulence feels exactly the same.

But your experience changes completely.

Children benefit from the same principle.

Simple warnings help the brain prepare.

*"Five more minutes, then we'll leave."*

*"After dinner, we'll take a bath."*

*"Tomorrow Grandma is visiting."*

Preparation does not remove disappointment.

It reduces surprise.

And surprise is often what overwhelms the nervous system.

---

## **Choosing Your Battles Wisely**

Not every rigid behaviour needs correcting.

Some routines genuinely help children feel secure.

The bedtime story.

The special goodbye hug.

The favourite spoon.

The familiar blanket.

These rituals often support emotional regulation.

Other rigid behaviours gradually limit children's ability to function.

Insisting that every meal be identical.

Refusing every new experience.

Avoiding any unexpected change.

The goal is not to remove comfort.

The goal is to gently expand confidence.

Helping children feel safe enough to discover that the world can change without falling apart.

---

## **Growing Flexibility Together**

Emotional flexibility is not about liking change.

Most adults don't.

It is about trusting ourselves to handle it.

That trust grows slowly.

Through hundreds of ordinary experiences.

A different teacher.

A cancelled picnic.

A new babysitter.

A broken toy.

A changed routine.

Each time a child experiences change and discovers,

*"I didn't like it... but I got through it,"*

their emotional world becomes a little larger.

Not because change became easier.

Because they became stronger.

---

### **Try This Today**

Notice one moment when your child becomes upset by a small change.

Instead of focusing on the object, ask yourself:

**"Is my child reacting to the change itself... or to the loss of predictability?"**

Then offer calm guidance rather than immediate correction.

Sometimes understanding the reason behind the reaction is the first step toward helping your child become more flexible.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children rarely struggle because they need everything to stay the same. They struggle because change temporarily removes the sense of safety that predictability provides. Our role is not to eliminate every change, but to help them discover that they are capable of adapting to it.**

# Chapter 10

## **Shame, Jealousy and Other Hidden Feelings**

### **The emotions children often struggle to admit**

Some emotions arrive loudly.

Others hide.

A child who is angry often lets everyone know.

A frightened child may cry or cling tightly to a parent.

But some emotions are quieter.

They slip beneath the surface, disguised as something else.

A child rolls their eyes after losing a game.

Another laughs when someone else gets hurt.

One insists they "don't care."

Another becomes unusually bossy.

A child suddenly refuses to join an activity they once loved.

An older sibling becomes mean to a new baby.

At first glance, these behaviours can seem confusing—even cruel.

But beneath many of them lie emotions children rarely know how to name.

Shame.

Jealousy.

Embarrassment.

Envy.

Guilt.

Loneliness.

Feeling left out.

Feeling not good enough.

These emotions are uncomfortable for adults.

They are even more confusing for children.

Because children are not only feeling them.

They are also trying to understand what those feelings say about who they are.

---

### **The Emotion No One Wants**

Imagine making a mistake during an important meeting.

Everyone notices.

You immediately feel your face becoming warm.

Your stomach tightens.

Part of you wants to disappear.

That experience has a name.

Shame.

Shame is different from guilt.

Guilt says,

*"I made a mistake."*

Shame says,

*"I am the mistake."*

That difference changes everything.

Children experience shame much earlier than many adults realise.

A child spills milk after being told to be careful.

A classmate laughs because they answered a question incorrectly.

They wet the bed.

Forget their lines in a school play.

Lose a race.

Struggle to read aloud while others seem confident.

These experiences are part of growing up.

But if children begin believing that mistakes define who they are, shame quietly settles into their identity.

That is why the words we choose matter.

## **Correct the Behaviour, Protect the Child**

Every parent must correct behaviour.

That is part of the job.

But there is a profound difference between correcting what a child did and defining who a child is.

Compare these two sentences.

*"You lied."*

*"You're a liar."*

One describes behaviour.

The other assigns identity.

Or consider these.

*"That choice wasn't kind."*

*"You're a mean child."*

Again, one leaves room for growth.

The other quietly closes the door.

Children build their identity from thousands of small messages.

Not only from what we intentionally teach...

but from the labels they repeatedly hear.

Whenever possible, describe the action.

Never define the child by their worst moment.

Because no child deserves to become trapped inside a single mistake.

---

### **Jealousy Is Love Looking for Reassurance**

Few emotions make parents more uncomfortable than jealousy.

Especially between siblings.

A new baby arrives.

The older child suddenly becomes demanding.

They interrupt while the baby is feeding.

They ask to be carried.

They start behaving "like a baby."

Sometimes they even say,

*"I don't like my little brother."*

Parents often respond with correction.

*"Don't say that."*

*"You should love your sister."*

*"Be nice."*

Those words are understandable.

But they rarely address what jealousy is trying to say.

Jealousy is not usually about disliking another person.

It is about fearing the loss of something precious.

Attention.

Time.

Connection.

Belonging.

Children rarely think,

*"I'm jealous."*

They think,

*"Will you still love me the same?"*

That is a very different conversation.

---

### **The Hidden Comparison Trap**

Children begin comparing themselves surprisingly early.

*"She's faster than me."*

*"He gets better grades."*

*"Her drawing is prettier."*

*"Why can't I do that?"*

Comparison is a natural part of development.

It helps children understand where they fit within their world.

The problem begins when comparison becomes identity.

*"I'm the slow one."*

*"I'm the naughty one."*

*"I'm the clever one."*

*"I'm the difficult one."*

Even positive labels can become heavy burdens.

A child who believes they must always be "the smart one" may become terrified of making mistakes.

A child known as "the funny one" may feel pressure to hide sadness.

Children are more than their strongest quality.

And they are certainly more than their weakest moment.

---

## **Embarrassment: The Emotion That Makes Children Hide**

Imagine being asked to stand in front of a room full of strangers and sing alone.

Most adults would feel uncomfortable.

Children experience embarrassment with the same intensity.

Perhaps even more.

A teacher corrects them in front of classmates.

They trip during sports.

Someone laughs at their haircut.

They pronounce a word incorrectly.

Suddenly, they refuse to participate.

Adults sometimes mistake this for laziness or defiance.

In reality, the child may simply be trying to avoid feeling embarrassed again.

Embarrassment often teaches children to hide.

Not because they lack confidence.

Because they fear being judged.

Confidence grows when children learn that mistakes are survivable.

Not humiliating.

---

### **When Children Say, "I Don't Care"**

One of the most misunderstood phrases in childhood is,

*"I don't care."*

Sometimes children truly don't care.

Often they care deeply.

Imagine trying very hard at something...

and failing.

It hurts.

Now imagine convincing yourself you never cared in the first place.

The disappointment becomes easier to carry.

Children do this too.

*"I didn't even want to win."*

*"That game is stupid anyway."*

*"I don't like football anymore."*

Sometimes indifference is simply disappointment wearing a disguise.

Before correcting the attitude, consider what feeling may be hiding underneath it.

---

### **Creating a Home Where Every Emotion Is Safe**

Children quickly learn which emotions feel acceptable.

If anger is punished...

they hide anger.

If sadness is dismissed...

they hide sadness.

If jealousy is criticised...

they hide jealousy.

The emotion does not disappear.

It simply goes underground.

Homes become emotionally safe when children discover something powerful.

*"I can tell the truth about what I'm feeling, even when the feeling is uncomfortable."*

This does not mean every behaviour is accepted.

It means every honest emotion has a place.

Children who can safely admit,

*"I'm jealous."*

*"I'm embarrassed."*

*"I'm ashamed."*

*"I feel left out."*

are much more likely to learn healthy ways of managing those emotions.

The emotions we acknowledge become the emotions we can guide.

The emotions we deny often become the emotions that quietly control us.

## **The Gift of Self-Compassion**

One day, your child will make a mistake without you being there.

No teacher.

No parent.

No friend.

Only their own inner voice.

What will that voice say?

Will it sound like this?

*"I always ruin everything."*

Or like this?

*"I made a mistake. I can learn from it."*

That voice is not created overnight.

It is built through years of conversations.

Years of correction wrapped in dignity.

Years of discipline without humiliation.

Years of hearing,

*"I love you, even when your choices need to change."*

Children who learn self-compassion do not become less responsible.

They become more resilient.

Because they no longer waste energy believing they are broken.  
They use that energy to keep growing instead.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child behaves in a way that seems unkind, defensive or unusually withdrawn, pause before correcting.

Ask yourself:

**"Is there a more vulnerable feeling hiding underneath this behaviour?"**

Listen before you lead.

Often the hidden emotion tells the real story.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children grow when they believe their mistakes are something they do—not someone they are. When we protect their dignity while guiding their behaviour, we help them develop the courage to face even their most uncomfortable emotions without shame.**

# Chapter 11

## Overwhelm, Sensory Stress and Exhaustion

### When the real problem is simply too much

**Some days, nothing seems to go right.**

Your child wakes up already irritable.

Breakfast becomes a battle.

Getting dressed takes forever.

The car ride to school is filled with complaints.

By the afternoon, one tiny disappointment leads to tears, shouting, or complete withdrawal.

You replay the day in your mind, searching for the moment when everything went wrong.

Was it the argument over breakfast?

The homework?

The broken toy?

The truth is, it may not have been any of those things.

Sometimes the real problem isn't a single event.

Sometimes the real problem is simply...

**too much.**

Too much noise.

Too much stimulation.

Too many demands.

Too many transitions.

Too many decisions.

Too little rest.

Too little connection.

Too little time to recover.

Children don't always fall apart because something terrible happened.

Sometimes they fall apart because their emotional backpack has become too heavy to carry.

---

### **The Backpack We Cannot See**

Imagine asking a child to wear a backpack all day.

Every difficult moment adds another book.

A disagreement with a friend.

Another book.

A loud classroom.

Another book.

A poor night's sleep.

Another book.

A change in routine.

Another book.

Feeling hungry.

Another.

Trying hard to behave at school.

Another.

Nothing in the backpack seems impossible on its own.

But by late afternoon, the weight becomes overwhelming.

Now imagine asking that same child to carry just one more book.

Objectively, it weighs very little.

Subjectively, it feels impossible.

That is how emotional overwhelm often works.

The final event is rarely the biggest problem.

It is simply the last thing the nervous system can carry.

---

## **The Myth of the "Small Problem"**

Adults often say,

*"You're upset over something so small."*

But children are not reacting only to what just happened.  
They are reacting to everything that happened before it.  
A child cries because their biscuit breaks.  
Another because their pencil snaps.  
Another because someone sat in "their" chair.  
These moments can look absurd.  
Until we remember the backpack.  
The broken biscuit isn't carrying the full weight of the reaction.  
The entire day is.  
When we understand this, our question changes.  
Instead of asking,  
*"Why is my child overreacting?"*  
we begin asking,  
*"How heavy has today already been?"*

---

### **The Invisible Work of Being a Child**

Adults sometimes forget how demanding childhood really is.  
Imagine starting each day surrounded by people who are bigger  
than you.  
Stronger than you.

Making most of the decisions for you.

Now imagine spending hours learning new information, following instructions, managing friendships, coping with unexpected changes, sharing space with dozens of other people, controlling your impulses, sitting still, listening carefully and constantly adjusting your behaviour.

That is an ordinary school day.

Children are not only learning maths, reading and science.

They are continuously managing sensory, emotional and social demands.

By the time they arrive home, many have already spent hours doing difficult emotional work.

Home is often the place where that effort finally becomes visible.

Parents sometimes say,

*"My child is perfect at school but impossible at home."*

This is rarely because home is the problem.

It is often because home is where the child finally feels safe enough to stop holding everything together.

---

## **Sensory Stress Is Real**

Not every child experiences the world in the same way.

One child barely notices the noise in a busy shopping centre.

Another feels overwhelmed within minutes.

One child happily wears any clothing.

Another cannot concentrate because the tag inside their shirt feels unbearable.

One child enjoys birthday parties.

Another spends the entire time covering their ears.

This is not attention-seeking.

It is not stubbornness.

It is sensory processing.

Every brain receives information from the world.

Sounds.

Lights.

Textures.

Smells.

Movement.

Temperature.

Most of us filter much of this information automatically.

Children are still learning how.

Some children experience the world as though the volume has been turned all the way up.

A fluorescent light may feel painfully bright.

A crowded classroom unbearably loud.

A scratchy jumper impossible to ignore.

By the time adults notice challenging behaviour, the child's nervous system may have been struggling for hours.

---

### **Exhaustion Doesn't Always Look Tired**

Adults usually recognise exhaustion when someone yawns.

Children often express exhaustion differently.

They become silly.

Louder.

More emotional.

More impulsive.

Less cooperative.

They argue over tiny things.

Forget skills they normally have.

Become unusually clingy.

Or unusually distant.

Parents often interpret these behaviours as poor choices.

Sometimes they are simply signs of an exhausted nervous system.

Think about your own life.

How patient are you after several nights of poor sleep?

How flexible are you when you're overwhelmed at work?

How kindly do you respond when you're mentally exhausted?

Children deserve the same compassion we hope others would offer us.

---

## **The Emotional Bucket**

Imagine every child carrying an invisible bucket.

Throughout the day, different experiences either fill it or empty it.

A difficult morning fills the bucket.

Feeling misunderstood fills it.

A loud classroom fills it.

A disappointing test fills it.

Conflict with a sibling fills it.

Being hungry fills it.

Being rushed fills it.

At the same time, other experiences help empty the bucket.

Laughter.

Play.

Movement.

Rest.

Connection.

Predictability.

Feeling understood.

Time outdoors.

A quiet cuddle before bed.

No child can avoid having their bucket filled.

The goal is to make sure it also has regular opportunities to empty.

Children who never have time to recover eventually overflow.

And overflowing often looks like behaviour problems.

---

## **What Overwhelmed Children Need**

When children become overwhelmed, adults often add more demands.

*"Stop crying."*

*"Use your words."*

*"Go and apologise."*

*"Calm down."*

These requests make perfect sense to a regulated brain.

But overwhelm reduces capacity.

Imagine asking someone carrying six heavy shopping bags to carry two more.

The answer is unlikely to be,

*"No problem."*

Overwhelmed children usually need fewer demands before they can meet more.

They need space to breathe.

Time to settle.

An adult who notices what their nervous system is communicating instead of only what their behaviour is expressing.

Sometimes the most helpful question is not,

*"How do I teach this lesson right now?"*

but,

*"Does my child currently have the capacity to learn?"*

Those are very different questions.

## **Prevention Is More Powerful Than Rescue**

Parents often focus on what to do after children become overwhelmed.

That matters.

But prevention matters even more.

A snack before hunger becomes frustration.

A quiet break after school.

Five minutes of uninterrupted connection.

A predictable bedtime routine.

A walk outside after a difficult day.

A calm corner used before emotions become explosive.

Small moments of recovery protect children from reaching emotional overload.

These moments may seem insignificant.

Over time, they become some of the strongest builders of resilience.

Because resilience is not created by pushing children harder.

It grows when challenge is balanced with recovery.

Adults understand this in sport.

Muscles grow during rest as much as during training.

The nervous system works in much the same way.

Children need opportunities to recover if they are going to keep growing.

---

### **Looking at the Whole Child**

When challenging behaviour appears, it is tempting to focus only on what happened in that moment.

But emotionally healthy parenting asks us to widen the lens.

How did they sleep?

Have they eaten?

What happened at school?

Has anything changed recently?

Have they had time to play?

How much noise have they experienced today?

When was the last time we truly connected without correcting?

Behaviour makes far more sense when viewed in the context of a whole day rather than a single moment.

Children are not isolated events.

They are living systems shaped by everything they experience.

The more complete the picture becomes, the more compassionate—and effective—our responses naturally become.

## **Try This Today**

The next time your child seems to overreact, pause before focusing on the behaviour.

Instead, mentally review the day.

Ask yourself:

- **How full might my child's emotional backpack be today?**
- **What has demanded energy from them before this moment?**
- **What might help their nervous system recover?**

You may discover that the behaviour is not asking for stronger discipline.

It is asking for restoration.

---

## **Remember This**

**Children do not always fall apart because something big happened. Sometimes they fall apart because too many small things happened without enough time, space or support to recover. When we recognise overwhelm, we stop asking, "What's wrong with my child?" and begin asking, "What has my child been carrying today?"**

# **PART III — RESPONDING IN THE MOMENT**

## **Chapter 12**

### **First, Regulate Yourself**

#### **How to pause before your own emotions take control**

**Every parent has a moment they wish they could take back.**

Perhaps it happened after the tenth time you asked your child to put on their shoes.

Perhaps it happened after another argument over homework.

Perhaps you were exhausted, running late, worried about work, and your child chose that exact moment to pour cereal across the kitchen floor.

You felt something shift inside you.

Your chest tightened.

Your jaw clenched.

Your voice became louder than you intended.

The words came out before you had time to stop them.

*"I've had enough!"*

The room fell silent.

Your child looked at you with wide eyes.

And almost immediately, another feeling appeared.

Regret.

Not because you don't love your child.

Because the parent you became in that moment wasn't the parent you wanted to be.

If this has happened to you, let me tell you something important.

You are not alone.

And you are not failing.

You are experiencing something every human nervous system experiences under stress.

The difference between reactive parenting and responsive parenting is not that one parent never becomes emotionally overwhelmed.

It is that one parent gradually learns how to recognise it before it takes control.

That journey begins with understanding yourself.

## **You Bring More Than Yourself Into Every Conversation**

When your child asks for help, they are not meeting only the version of you that exists today.

They are also meeting the version of you who had a difficult night's sleep.

The version of you carrying financial worries.

The version of you rushing to finish work.

The version of you who feels guilty for not spending enough time at home.

The version of you who has been patient for twelve hours already.

The version of you who was raised by parents with their own emotional stories.

Parenting never happens in isolation.

Every conversation includes two nervous systems.

Two histories.

Two emotional worlds.

Children are learning how to regulate.

Adults are often trying to regulate while carrying responsibilities children cannot even imagine.

That does not excuse hurtful reactions.

But it explains why they happen.

Understanding yourself is not a distraction from helping your child.

It is part of helping your child.

---

## **Your Child Is Not Your Enemy**

When emotions become intense, the brain naturally begins looking for a problem to solve.

Unfortunately, in difficult moments, that problem can begin to look like the child standing in front of us.

The spilled milk.

The ignored instruction.

The shouting.

The eye roll.

The defiance.

Without noticing, our internal dialogue changes.

*"Why is she doing this to me?"*

*"He's trying to push my buttons."*

*"She knows exactly what she's doing."*

These thoughts make emotional reactions stronger.

Because the moment we believe someone is working against us, our own nervous system becomes more defensive.

Now imagine replacing one sentence.

Instead of asking,

*"Why is my child doing this to me?"*

Ask,

*"What is my child struggling with right now?"*

Nothing about the behaviour changes.

But everything about your emotional position does.

You move from opposition...

to partnership.

From conflict...

to curiosity.

That single shift is often enough to lower the emotional temperature of the entire interaction.

---

### **The Body Speaks Before the Mouth**

Parents often believe they lose patience without warning.

In reality, the body usually sends several signals first.

Your shoulders become tight.

Your breathing becomes shallow.

Your jaw clenches.

Your heartbeat speeds up.

You begin speaking faster.

You interrupt more quickly.

You stop listening.

These are not signs that you've failed.

They are early warning signals.

Think of them as your own emotional dashboard.

Just as your child's behaviour tells you something about their emotional state, your body tells you something about yours.

The earlier you notice those signals, the easier it becomes to change direction.

Waiting until you are already shouting is like noticing a storm only after you're standing in the rain.

Learning to recognise the first dark clouds gives you far more choices.

---

## **The Power of the Pause**

People often imagine emotional regulation as something dramatic.

It is usually much smaller than that.

It begins with a pause.

Not a five-minute meditation.

Not leaving the room forever.

Sometimes the most important pause lasts only three seconds.

Three seconds to notice your breathing.

Three seconds to relax your shoulders.

Three seconds to remember that the child in front of you is having a hard time, not giving you a hard time.

Three seconds to choose your next sentence instead of letting your emotions choose it for you.

Those three seconds rarely change your child.

They change you.

And when you change, the conversation often changes with you.

---

### **Why Self-Regulation Is Not Self-Suppression**

Some parents hear the words *regulate yourself* and imagine they are expected never to feel angry.

Never to feel frustrated.

Never to lose patience.

That is impossible.

Emotional regulation does not mean becoming emotionless.

It means remaining responsible for what you do with your emotions.

Imagine holding a shaken bottle of sparkling water.

You cannot stop the pressure from building.

But you can choose how and when to open it.

Adults experience frustration.

Disappointment.

Stress.

Anger.

These emotions are not signs of poor parenting.

They are signs of being human.

The goal is not to eliminate them.

The goal is to prevent them from becoming the person making your parenting decisions.

---

### **Your Child Is Borrowing More Than Your Calm**

Earlier in this book, we explored how children borrow emotional regulation from trusted adults.

There is another side to that idea.

Children also borrow our recovery.

Think about the moments after a disagreement.

Perhaps you raised your voice.

Perhaps your child shouted back.

What happens next matters just as much as what happened before.

Do you stay distant for the rest of the evening?

Do you pretend nothing happened?

Or do you return?

Repair is one of the greatest emotional gifts we can offer our children.

A simple sentence such as,

*"I'm sorry I shouted. I was frustrated, but shouting wasn't the right way to handle my feelings."*

teaches lessons that no lecture ever could.

It teaches accountability without shame.

Strength without pride.

Humility without weakness.

Children learn that emotions do not have to damage relationships forever.

Relationships can bend without breaking.

## **The Stories We Tell Ourselves**

Every parent carries invisible stories.

*"A good parent should always stay calm."*

*"If my child is shouting, I've failed."*

*"Other families don't struggle like this."*

These stories quietly shape our reactions.

The problem is that many of them simply are not true.

Healthy families argue.

Healthy children cry.

Healthy parents lose patience.

Healthy relationships require repair.

Perfection has never been the goal.

Progress has.

Every time you pause one second sooner than you did last month...

Every time you apologise more sincerely than you did last year...

Every time you choose understanding over automatic reaction...

you are becoming the parent your child needs.

Not because you have stopped making mistakes.

Because you are growing alongside your child.

## **Becoming the Emotional Leader**

Leadership is often misunderstood.

Many people think leaders are the loudest people in the room.

The strongest.

The most confident.

In families, emotional leadership looks very different.

The emotional leader is often the calmest nervous system.

Not the calmest personality.

The calmest nervous system.

The person who can remain grounded while someone else is overwhelmed.

The person who creates safety instead of adding danger.

Children do not need adults who never feel stress.

They need adults who know how to return to steadiness after stress appears.

That ability becomes one of the greatest sources of emotional security a child will ever know.

---

## **The Parent Your Child Will Remember**

Years from now, your child probably won't remember every rule you created.

They won't remember every consequence.

They won't remember every lecture.

But they will remember how it felt to come to you with their biggest emotions.

Did they feel judged?

Or understood?

Dismissed?

Or welcomed?

Afraid?

Or safe?

Children build memories through emotion far more than information.

The emotional climate of your home becomes the emotional blueprint they carry into adulthood.

Not because you were perfect.

But because, over thousands of ordinary moments, you showed them what it looks like to pause...

to repair...

to stay...

and to love someone even when emotions become messy.

## **Try This Today**

The next time you notice yourself becoming emotionally overwhelmed, don't focus on changing your child first.

Pause and ask yourself three questions:

- **What am I feeling right now?**
- **What is my body trying to tell me?**
- **What kind of adult do I want my child to remember in this moment?**

Take one slow breath before saying your next sentence.

Often, that single breath creates enough space for wisdom to catch up with emotion.

---

## **Remember This**

**The most powerful tool you bring to any difficult moment is not the perfect parenting technique. It is your own regulated presence. Children learn emotional regulation not only from what we teach them, but from who we become when emotions are at their biggest.**

# Chapter 13

## Connection Before Correction

### Why children listen better after they feel understood

**Every parent has experienced this moment.**

Your child has just done something they shouldn't have done.

They hit their sibling.

They shouted at you.

They lied.

They threw something across the room.

Your first instinct is immediate.

Correct the behaviour.

Explain why it was wrong.

Give a consequence.

Teach the lesson.

After all, isn't that what good parents are supposed to do?

The answer is yes.

But not always immediately.

Because timing matters just as much as truth.

A lesson offered at the wrong moment is often a lesson that cannot be heard.

One of the greatest misunderstandings in parenting is believing that children refuse to listen because they don't care.

More often, they cannot listen because their emotional brain is still too loud.

Understanding this changes not only *what* we say.

It changes *when* we say it.

---

### **A Child Who Feels Threatened Cannot Learn**

Imagine you are having the worst day of your life.

You have just received devastating news.

Your heart is racing.

Your thoughts are scattered.

Now imagine someone sits beside you and begins explaining all the reasons why you should have handled the situation differently.

Would you be able to absorb their advice?

Probably not.

Not because you disagree.

Because your brain is busy surviving.

Children experience exactly the same limitation.

When emotions become overwhelming, the brain shifts its priority.

Learning moves into the background.

Safety moves to the front.

Until children begin feeling emotionally safe again, correction competes with survival.

And survival almost always wins.

---

### **Why We Rush to Correct**

Parents often fear that delaying correction means allowing unacceptable behaviour.

It doesn't.

Imagine a firefighter arriving at a burning house.

Would they begin by discussing how the fire started?

Or would they first make sure everyone was safe?

Only after the flames are under control does the investigation begin.

Big emotions work in much the same way.

When a child is emotionally "on fire," the first priority is regulation.

Not because behaviour no longer matters.

Because the child cannot meaningfully learn while the emotional fire is still burning.

Correction is important.

Connection simply comes first.

---

### **What Connection Really Means**

Connection is often misunderstood.

It does not mean agreeing with inappropriate behaviour.

It does not mean removing consequences.

It does not mean allowing disrespect.

Connection means communicating one simple message:

**"I am with you, even while I guide you."**

A child can hear,

*"I won't let you throw toys."*

while also hearing,

*"I can see you're really upset."*

One sentence provides safety.

The other provides direction.

Children need both.

When adults skip connection and move straight to correction, children often defend themselves instead of reflecting.

Not because they refuse responsibility.

Because their nervous system still feels under attack.

---

## **Feeling Understood Changes the Brain**

Think about a time when someone truly understood you.

Perhaps they listened without interrupting.

Perhaps they named exactly what you were feeling.

Perhaps they simply said,

*"That makes sense."*

Did your problems disappear?

Probably not.

But something inside you changed.

You relaxed.

You felt less alone.

You became more open to conversation.

Children experience the same shift.

Feeling understood reduces emotional defensiveness.

And when defensiveness decreases, curiosity increases.

Children become more willing to hear guidance because they no longer feel they must protect themselves from it.

Understanding does not weaken discipline.

It prepares the brain to receive it.

---

## **The Difference Between Validation and Agreement**

This is one of the most misunderstood ideas in parenting.

Many adults worry that validating emotions means approving behaviour.

It doesn't.

Imagine your child is furious because their sibling knocked over a tower they spent thirty minutes building.

You might say,

*"I can see how angry you are."*

That sentence validates the emotion.

Now imagine adding,

*"But I won't let you hit your brother."*

That sentence sets the boundary.

Both are necessary.

Validation answers the emotional question.

*"Does anyone understand how I feel?"*

The boundary answers the behavioural question.

*"What happens next?"*

Children need answers to both.

Without validation, they feel unseen.

Without boundaries, they feel unsafe.

Healthy parenting provides both at the same time.

---

## **Listening Before Teaching**

Parents often believe they must have the right words ready.

In reality, children often need something much simpler.

Someone willing to listen.

Listening does not mean conducting an interrogation.

It means creating enough emotional space for children to discover their own experience.

Instead of asking,

*"Why did you do that?"*

—which often produces,

*"I don't know."*

Try asking,

*"Can you help me understand what happened?"*

That small change removes blame.

It invites reflection instead.

Children are far more likely to explore their behaviour when they don't feel they are standing in a courtroom defending themselves.

---

### **The Need Beneath the Behaviour**

Imagine a child who shouts,

*"I hate you!"*

If we respond only to the words, we may miss everything underneath them.

Perhaps the child feels rejected.

Perhaps embarrassed.

Perhaps frightened.

Perhaps deeply disappointed.

Words spoken during emotional overload are often poor translators of what children are actually experiencing.

Connection allows us to hear the message beneath the words.

Correction becomes far more effective once the real problem is understood.

## **When Consequences Teach—and When They Don't**

Consequences are valuable when they help children connect behaviour with responsibility.

They lose their power when they become expressions of adult frustration.

Ask yourself one question before giving any consequence.

**"Will this help my child learn... or simply make them suffer?"**

The two are not the same.

A thoughtful consequence invites responsibility.

A reactive consequence often invites resentment.

Children remember how consequences felt long after they forget what the consequence actually was.

That is why emotional tone matters.

Firm.

Calm.

Respectful.

Predictable.

Those qualities teach far more than anger ever will.

## **Repairing the Relationship**

Even the most connected parents sometimes move to correction too quickly.

You will interrupt.

Raise your voice.

Misunderstand your child.

React before listening.

That is part of parenting.

The important question is not whether mistakes happen.

It is what happens after them.

Returning to your child later and saying,

*"I think I spoke before I really understood what you were feeling. Can we try again?"*

does something extraordinary.

It teaches that relationships are stronger than mistakes.

Children who experience repair learn they never have to choose between honesty and belonging.

They can have both.

---

## **Connection Builds Cooperation**

Many parents notice something remarkable after they begin leading with connection.

Their children become more cooperative.

Not overnight.

Not perfectly.

But steadily.

This is not because children become more obedient.

It is because they become more emotionally available.

Children naturally listen more closely to people who make them feel safe.

The strongest influence in a child's life is rarely authority alone.

It is relationship.

Connection does not replace correction.

It gives correction somewhere to land.

---

## **Try This Today**

The next time your child misbehaves, pause before correcting.

Ask yourself:

**"Does my child need guidance right now... or do they first need to feel understood?"**

Spend one minute connecting before you begin teaching.

You may discover that the conversation becomes shorter, calmer and far more effective.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children are most open to guidance when they no longer feel they need to defend themselves. Connection is not the reward for good behaviour—it is the foundation that makes learning possible.**

# Chapter 14

## What to Say When Feelings Get Big

### Words that calm, validate and guide

#### **Words matter.**

Not because they magically stop tantrums.

Not because there is one perfect sentence that works every time.

But because words can either help a child's nervous system feel safer...

or make it feel even more alone.

Many parents spend years searching for the "right thing to say."

The truth is that children rarely need perfect words.

They need words that communicate three simple messages:

**I see you.**

**I'm with you.**

**We'll get through this together.**

When those messages are present, children become far more able to hear everything that comes next.

---

## **Why Words Sometimes Make Things Worse**

Imagine telling someone about the hardest day you've had in months.

Before you've even finished speaking, they interrupt.

*"It's not that bad."*

*"You'll get over it."*

*"You're overreacting."*

*"Other people have it much worse."*

Did those words reduce your feelings?

Probably not.

More likely, they made you feel misunderstood.

Children experience the same thing.

When adults immediately explain, minimise or correct emotions, children often feel that their inner experience has been dismissed.

They don't stop feeling.

They simply stop feeling understood.

And when children don't feel understood, they usually become louder.

Not because they enjoy conflict.

Because they are still trying to communicate.

## **Before You Speak, Listen**

One of the most powerful parenting skills is surprisingly simple.

Slow down.

Many difficult conversations become harder because adults begin talking before they have fully understood what happened.

Children often need less advice...

and more attention.

Instead of preparing your response while your child is speaking...  
stay curious.

Listen.

Notice their words.

Notice their face.

Notice their body.

Notice what they are not saying.

Sometimes silence is more supportive than immediate  
reassurance.

Children often discover their own feelings while someone quietly  
listens.

---

## **Validation Is Not Agreement**

Validation is one of the most misunderstood words in parenting.

Many people believe validating a child's emotions means agreeing with everything they say or do.

It doesn't.

Validation simply communicates,

**"Your feelings make sense."**

It does not communicate,

**"Your behaviour was acceptable."**

Imagine your child screams because you said they cannot eat ice cream before dinner.

You might say,

*"You're really disappointed."*

That is validation.

You might then continue,

*"And we're still having dinner first."*

That is the boundary.

Both can exist together.

Children need to know two things.

Their feelings are real.

The limits remain.

---

## **The Difference Between Hearing and Feeling Heard**

There is an important difference between listening to words and listening to the person.

A child says,

*"It's not fair!"*

An adult hears,

*"Complaining."*

A curious parent hears,

*"Something feels unfair to my child."*

A child says,

*"I hate school!"*

An adult hears,

*"Drama."*

A curious parent wonders,

*"What happened today that made school feel so difficult?"*

The words children choose are not always accurate.

The feelings underneath them usually are.

Our job is not to react to every sentence literally.

Our job is to understand what the sentence is trying to communicate.

---

### **Simple Words That Help Children Feel Safe**

Children do not need long speeches during emotional moments.

Short, calm sentences are often far more effective.

Instead of trying to solve everything immediately, begin with presence.

You might say:

*"I'm here."*

*"I'm listening."*

*"Take your time."*

*"That looks really hard."*

*"I can see how upset you are."*

*"We'll figure this out together."*

*"You don't have to go through this alone."*

Notice something these sentences have in common.

None of them argue with the emotion.

None of them try to make it disappear.

They simply create safety.

Safety allows emotions to settle naturally.

---

### **Words That Accidentally Increase Distress**

Most parents have used phrases like these.

*"Stop crying."*

*"You're okay."*

*"It's nothing."*

*"Calm down."*

*"Big boys don't cry."*

*"Big girls don't act like that."*

*"You're being dramatic."*

These phrases are almost always spoken with good intentions.

They aim to reduce distress.

Unfortunately, children often hear something very different.

*"Your feelings are too much."*

*"Your emotions are inconvenient."*

*"I should hide what I'm feeling."*

The goal is not to make parents feel guilty.

Every parent has said something they wish they could take back.

The goal is simply to become more aware of the messages our words unintentionally send.

---

### **Sometimes Fewer Words Are Better**

Adults often talk more when children need us to talk less.

Imagine your child falls off their bicycle.

Before saying anything, they look at your face.

Your expression tells them whether the situation feels safe.

If you panic, they panic.

If you stay calm, they are more likely to recover.

Emotional moments work the same way.

Children often read our tone before our sentences.

A calm,

*"I've got you."*

can be far more powerful than a five-minute explanation.

When emotions are big, keep your words small.

As the nervous system settles, conversations can grow.

---

## **Asking Questions That Open Instead of Close**

Questions can either invite connection or shut it down.

Compare these two conversations.

*"Why did you do that?"*

"I don't know."

The conversation ends.

Now try this.

*"Can you help me understand what happened?"*

The child feels invited instead of accused.

Or instead of asking,

*"What's wrong with you?"*

try,

*"Something feels really hard right now. What happened?"*

Children become more honest when they believe they are being understood rather than investigated.

---

## **When Your Child Has No Words**

Sometimes children genuinely cannot explain what they feel.

Their answer to every question is,

*"I don't know."*

Believe them.

Many adults assume children are refusing to answer.

Often they simply lack the language.

This is where gentle observation becomes helpful.

Instead of demanding an explanation, try describing what you notice.

*"Your shoulders are really tight."*

*"I noticed you got quiet after school."*

*"You looked disappointed when the game ended."*

Observation helps children connect feelings with experiences.

Over time, this becomes emotional vocabulary.

---

## **The Goal Is Not Perfect Conversations**

Parents often worry about saying the wrong thing.

The truth is that children rarely remember individual sentences.

They remember patterns.

Did this adult usually make me feel safe?

Did they listen?

Did they stay with me when I struggled?

Did they try to understand before they judged?

Those patterns shape relationships far more than perfectly chosen words.

The goal is not flawless conversations.

It is creating a relationship where children trust that even difficult conversations are safe to have.

---

### **Building an Inner Voice**

Every conversation you have with your child eventually becomes part of the conversation they have with themselves.

One day, they will spill something.

Make a mistake.

Lose a competition.

Feel rejected.

You won't always be there.

But your voice might be.

If, throughout childhood, they repeatedly hear,

*"Mistakes help us learn."*

*"I'm here."*

*"Let's figure it out together."*

*"Your feelings make sense."*

those words slowly become their own.

This is one of parenting's quiet miracles.

The way we speak to our children today becomes the way they speak to themselves tomorrow.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child experiences a big emotion, challenge yourself to do three things before offering advice:

- Name the emotion.
- Validate the feeling.
- Stay present.

Only then begin solving the problem together.

Notice how the conversation changes when understanding comes before instruction.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children may forget the exact words we say, but they rarely forget how our words made them feel. Every calm, respectful conversation becomes part of the inner voice they will carry for the rest of their lives.**

# Chapter 15

## Setting Boundaries Without Shame

### How to be warm, clear and firm at the same time

**Every parent eventually faces the same question.**

**How do I stop my child from doing something without making them feel bad about themselves?**

It sounds simple.

Until you're standing in the supermarket while your four-year-old is screaming on the floor.

Or your eight-year-old has just lied to you.

Or your child has hit their sibling for the third time that afternoon.

In those moments, emotions run high—for everyone.

Children feel overwhelmed.

Parents feel responsible.

And the line between teaching and punishing can become surprisingly blurred.

Many adults grew up believing that discipline meant making children feel bad enough that they would never repeat the behaviour.

But feeling bad about yourself is not the same as learning to make better choices.

One creates shame.

The other creates responsibility.

Healthy boundaries teach responsibility while protecting a child's dignity.

That balance is one of the greatest gifts a parent can offer.

---

## **What Boundaries Really Are**

The word *boundary* is often misunderstood.

Some people hear it and imagine punishment.

Others imagine strict rules and constant control.

In reality, a healthy boundary is much simpler.

A boundary answers one important question:

**"What keeps people safe?"**

Safe physically.

Safe emotionally.

Safe within relationships.

A boundary is not about power.

It is about protection.

When you tell your child,

*"I won't let you hit your brother,"*

you are not trying to win.

You are protecting both children.

When you say,

*"The crayons stay on the paper,"*

you are protecting your home and teaching respect.

When you insist on holding hands while crossing the street, you are protecting life itself.

Children need boundaries for the same reason they need seatbelts.

Not because someone expects an accident every day.

Because safety creates freedom.

---

### **Warmth and Firmness Are Not Opposites**

Many parents believe they must choose between being kind and being firm.

In reality, emotionally healthy parenting combines both.

Imagine a bridge crossing a deep river.

The bridge must be strong enough to hold weight.

But it must also be stable enough for people to trust walking across it.

If the bridge is too weak, it becomes dangerous.

If it is too rigid and begins to crack under pressure, it also becomes dangerous.

Children need adults who are like strong bridges.

Steady.

Predictable.

Reliable.

Not harsh.

Not permissive.

Strong enough to hold the boundary.

Warm enough to hold the child.

---

## **The Difference Between Control and Leadership**

When parents feel overwhelmed, it is easy to slip into control.

Control sounds like this:

*"Because I said so."*

*"Don't argue."*

*"End of discussion."*

Sometimes these phrases stop behaviour.

But they rarely build understanding.

Leadership sounds different.

*"I know you're disappointed."*

*"The answer is still no."*

*"I'll help you through these feelings."*

Notice what changed.

The limit stayed exactly the same.

Only the relationship changed.

Leadership is not softer than control.

It is stronger.

Because it requires adults to regulate themselves while holding the boundary.

---

### **A Child's Worth Is Never the Consequence**

Imagine your child accidentally drops a glass of milk.

One response might be:

*"You're so careless."*

Another might be:

*"The milk spilled. Let's clean it up together, and next time we'll carry the glass with both hands."*

Both responses address the event.

Only one protects the child's identity.

Children make mistakes because they are learning.

If every mistake becomes evidence that they are careless...

lazy...

selfish...

or "bad"...

they slowly begin believing those labels.

Behaviour should have consequences.

Identity should not.

Correct the action.

Protect the child.

Always.

---

### **Boundaries Feel Safe When They Are Predictable**

Imagine driving on a road where the speed limit changes every few minutes for no apparent reason.

Sometimes it's 30.

Sometimes 80.

Sometimes there are no signs at all.

Driving would become stressful.

Not because of the limits.

Because of the unpredictability.

Children experience boundaries the same way.

If hitting is ignored one day and punished harshly the next...

If bedtime changes depending on a parent's mood...

If rules depend on how tired everyone feels...

Children stop feeling secure.

Predictable boundaries reduce anxiety.

Children may protest them.

They may test them.

But deep down, predictable limits help the nervous system relax.

The child no longer needs to wonder,

*"What will happen this time?"*

They already know.

Predictability creates emotional safety.

---

## **Why Children Test Boundaries**

Parents often ask,

*"Why does my child keep testing me?"*

Imagine walking across a frozen lake.

Wouldn't you tap the ice before trusting it?

Children do something similar.

They test boundaries because they are asking,

**"Will this still be true today?"**

**"Can I rely on you?"**

**"Are you strong enough to keep me safe?"**

Testing is not always rebellion.

Very often, it is reassurance.

Each calm, consistent response tells the child,

*"Yes. The boundary is still here."*

Ironically, children usually stop testing boundaries they genuinely trust.

---

## **The Power of Natural and Logical Consequences**

Not every consequence needs to be invented.

Many already exist.

If toys are thrown carelessly, the toys are put away for a while.

If a child draws on the wall, they help clean it.

If homework is forgotten, the teacher—not the parent—may discuss it the next day.

These consequences connect naturally to the behaviour.

They teach responsibility instead of fear.

Whenever possible, consequences should answer one question:

**"What helps my child learn from this?"**

Not,

**"What will make my child suffer enough to remember?"**

Pain can stop behaviour temporarily.

Learning changes behaviour over time.

---

### **Holding the Boundary Through the Tears**

One of the hardest parenting skills is allowing children to be upset without changing the boundary.

Imagine your child desperately wants another biscuit before dinner.

You calmly say no.

They cry.

They shout.

They insist life is unfair.

Many parents begin doubting themselves.

*"Maybe I should just give in."*

Not because they changed their mind.

Because the child's distress becomes difficult to tolerate.

But children's disappointment is not always evidence that the boundary is wrong.

Sometimes it is evidence that the boundary matters.

You can be deeply compassionate while remaining consistent.

*"I know you really wanted another biscuit."*

*"You're disappointed."*

*"Dinner is still in fifteen minutes."*

Empathy softens the experience.

Consistency preserves the lesson.

Children gradually learn that feelings are allowed...

even when the answer remains the same.

---

## **When You Lose the Boundary**

Every parent has moments when they become too harsh.

Or too permissive.

They shout.

Or they give in simply because they are exhausted.

This does not make you a failure.

It makes you human.

The important part is what happens next.

If you became too harsh, repair.

*"I'm sorry I shouted. The rule still matters, but I wish I had spoken more calmly."*

If you gave in too quickly, you can still return to the boundary later.

*"I changed my mind earlier because I was tired. Let's try again tomorrow."*

Children do not need parents who never wobble.

They need parents who know how to find steady ground again.

---

### **Boundaries Are an Act of Love**

Children rarely thank parents for boundaries in the moment.

They complain.

Negotiate.

Argue.

Sometimes they cry.

But years later, many adults describe something remarkable.

They remember the parents who made them feel safe.

Not because they always got what they wanted.

Because someone was willing to lead.

Children do not experience love only through affection.

They experience love through protection.

Through consistency.

Through adults who are willing to make difficult decisions while staying emotionally close.

That is what healthy boundaries communicate.

Not,

*"I am against you."*

But,

*"I care about you too much to let this continue."*

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time you need to set a boundary, challenge yourself to include three things:

- **Acknowledge the feeling.**
- **State the limit clearly.**
- **Stay calm enough to hold both.**

For example:

*"I know you're angry that playtime is over. It's time to leave now. I'll stay with you while you calm down."*

Notice that nothing in the sentence weakens the boundary.

It simply strengthens the relationship.

---

### **Remember This**

**The strongest boundaries are not built on fear. They are built on safety. Children thrive when they know two things at the same time: "My feelings are accepted," and "The adults in my life will lovingly hold the limits that keep me safe."**

# Chapter 16

## **When They Scream, Hit, Bite or Throw Responding safely to aggressive behaviour**

**Few parenting moments feel as overwhelming as aggression.**

Your child hits their brother.

Throws a toy across the room.

Bites another child.

Kicks you while you're trying to help.

Or screams so loudly that everyone around you stops and stares.

Your body reacts instantly.

Your heart races.

Your muscles tense.

You feel a powerful urge to stop the behaviour immediately.

That instinct is completely understandable.

Aggressive behaviour must be stopped.

Children deserve to be protected.

Adults deserve to be safe.

But there is an important difference between **stopping aggression** and **teaching emotional regulation**.

The first must happen immediately.

The second cannot happen until everyone feels safe.

Many parents try to do both at the same time.

That is usually where the struggle begins.

---

### **Safety Always Comes First**

Imagine you are lifeguarding at a swimming pool.

You notice a child struggling in deep water.

You would not begin with a lecture about swimming technique.

You would pull the child to safety first.

Only afterwards would the teaching begin.

Aggressive behaviour requires the same sequence.

First, create safety.

Then create understanding.

Finally, teach.

The order matters.

Children cannot reflect while their nervous system is still in survival mode.

---

## **Aggression Is a Behaviour, Not an Identity**

One of the greatest mistakes adults make is confusing what children do with who they are.

A child who hits is not "a violent child."

A child who bites is not "a bad child."

A child who throws things is not "out of control."

They are children who, in that moment, lacked a safer way to express an overwhelming emotion.

That distinction protects hope.

Because behaviours can change.

Labels become identities.

When children repeatedly hear,

*"You're aggressive."*

*"You're naughty."*

*"You're impossible."*

those words slowly become part of the story they tell themselves.

Instead, separate the child from the behaviour.

*"You're having a hard time."*

*"Hitting isn't safe."*

*"I'm going to help you."*

The behaviour is addressed.

The child's dignity remains intact.

---

### **Why Aggression Happens**

Aggression rarely appears without a reason.

Sometimes it grows from frustration.

Sometimes fear.

Sometimes sensory overload.

Sometimes exhaustion.

Sometimes embarrassment.

Sometimes jealousy.

Sometimes simply not knowing another way to communicate.

Think back to the earlier chapters.

Big feelings.

The developing brain.

The nervous system.

Behaviour as communication.

Aggression sits at the intersection of all of them.

It is not a separate problem.

It is often the final expression of many smaller experiences building over time.

The thrown toy is rarely about the toy.

The hit is rarely about the sibling.

The scream is rarely about the rule.

Something much bigger has usually been happening beneath the surface.

---

### **What Your Child Needs in That Moment**

Imagine your child raises their hand to hit.

Many adults instinctively shout,

*"Stop!"*

Sometimes that works.

Sometimes it adds even more energy to an already overwhelmed nervous system.

Instead, become the calmest person in the room.

Move closer if it is safe.

Lower your voice instead of raising it.

Block the behaviour without shaming the child.

You might gently hold their hands if necessary.

Move another child out of reach.

Remove dangerous objects.

Your message is simple.

*"I won't let you hurt anyone."*

Notice what that sentence communicates.

It protects.

It leads.

It does not threaten.

It does not shame.

It simply establishes safety.

Children need adults who are stronger than the behaviour—not louder than it.

---

## **The Power of Calm Physical Leadership**

Young children often experience emotions physically before they can express them verbally.

Their bodies become restless.

Their movements become faster.

Their muscles tighten.

Sometimes they need physical help before they can regain emotional control.

This does not mean using force.

It means becoming a calm physical presence.

Kneeling beside them.

Moving objects away.

Creating space.

Standing between siblings.

Holding a boundary with confidence rather than anger.

Children borrow our nervous system long before they borrow our words.

Your body often teaches safety before your voice ever can.

---

### **Why Punishment Often Misses the Lesson**

Imagine a child hits because another child grabbed their toy.

They are immediately sent to their room.

They cry alone.

Eventually they come back.

What have they learned?

Perhaps they learned that hitting leads to isolation.

That matters.

But have they learned what to do instead when someone takes their toy?

Probably not.

Punishment often stops behaviour.

Teaching changes behaviour.

Children need both accountability and new skills.

After everyone has calmed, the conversation might become,

*"Next time you feel that angry, what else could you do?"*

*"Could you say, 'Stop'? Could you walk away? Could you ask for help?"*

Children cannot choose skills they have never practised.

---

## **After the Storm**

Many parents believe the difficult moment ends when the child stops crying.

In reality, one of the most valuable moments comes afterwards.

When everyone is calm.

This is when the brain becomes available for learning again.

Not through lectures.

Through conversation.

Keep it short.

Curious.

Respectful.

*"Can we talk about what happened?"*

*"What were you feeling just before you hit?"*

*"What do you think your brother felt?"*

*"What could we try next time?"*

The goal is not to make children feel guilty.

The goal is to help them connect emotions, choices and consequences.

That connection builds emotional intelligence.

---

## **Teaching Repair**

Aggressive behaviour affects relationships.

Repair helps rebuild them.

If your child hit someone, the goal is not forcing an automatic,

*"Say sorry."*

An apology without understanding teaches very little.

Instead, help your child notice the impact of their behaviour.

*"Your sister is crying because she got hurt."*

*"What could help her feel better?"*

Perhaps the answer is an apology.

Perhaps helping rebuild the tower they knocked down.

Perhaps drawing a picture.

Perhaps offering a hug—if the other child wants one.

Repair is not about paying for mistakes.

It is about restoring relationships.

Children who learn repair grow into adults who understand responsibility without being consumed by shame.

---

## **When Aggression Happens Again**

It will.

No child learns emotional regulation after one conversation.

Just as children fall many times while learning to ride a bicycle, they will repeat emotional mistakes while learning self-control.

Progress rarely looks dramatic.

Perhaps yesterday your child threw five toys.

Today they threw one.

Perhaps last month they hit immediately.

Today they shouted first.

Those are signs of growth.

Celebrate progress, not perfection.

Every calmer response from you becomes another lesson for them.

Every repaired relationship becomes another brick in the foundation of emotional safety.

---

### **Protect Everyone**

Responding with empathy never means allowing someone to be hurt.

If one child is being aggressive toward another, your first responsibility is protection.

Move siblings apart.

Block kicks.

Remove dangerous objects.

Stay physically close.

Calmly say,

*"I won't let anyone get hurt."*

Children need to know that home is emotionally safe.

Safety is not the opposite of empathy.

It is empathy in action.

---

### **The Long View**

When parents experience aggressive behaviour repeatedly, they often become afraid.

*"What if my child is becoming violent?"*

*"What if this never stops?"*

Those fears are understandable.

But remember this.

Children are not practising for the rest of their lives.

They are learning.

Every difficult moment is another opportunity to strengthen emotional skills.

Some children need more time.

Some need more support.

Some need professional help.

But very few children benefit from being defined by the worst moments of their development.

See the behaviour clearly.

Hold the boundary firmly.

Protect everyone involved.

Then return to the child with the same message they need to hear over and over again:

*"I won't let you hurt people."*

*"And I won't stop helping you learn a better way."*

That combination of safety, leadership and compassion is where lasting change begins.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child becomes physically aggressive, remember three priorities:

1. **Protect everyone immediately.**
2. **Stay as calm as you can.**
3. **Teach only after the nervous system has settled.**

Ask yourself,

**"What skill is my child missing in this moment?"**

Then help them practise that skill when they are calm.

---

### **Remember This**

**Aggressive behaviour is never a green light for shame. It is a signal that a child needs both**

**firm protection and patient teaching. Stop the behaviour immediately, protect everyone involved, and then return to the child—not with anger, but with the leadership that helps them build the skills they do not yet have.**

# Chapter 17

## When They Refuse, Argue or Say “No”

### Understanding resistance without surrendering leadership

**Few words test a parent's patience more quickly than one simple word.**

**"No."**

*"Put your shoes on."*

**"No."**

*"It's time to leave."*

**"No."**

*"Please turn off the television."*

**"No."**

Sometimes the answer comes with folded arms.

Sometimes with a loud voice.

Sometimes with complete silence.

Sometimes with endless negotiation.

*"Five more minutes."*

*"Why?"*

*"That's not fair."*

*"You never let me do anything."*

For parents, these moments can feel deeply personal.

It is easy to think,

*"My child doesn't respect me."*

*"They're trying to control me."*

*"If I give in now, they'll walk all over me."*

But resistance is rarely about winning.

More often, it is about something much deeper.

The need to be heard.

The need for autonomy.

The need to feel that they matter.

Understanding this does not mean removing your leadership.

It means leading in a way that children can actually follow.

---

## **Every Child Wants Some Control**

Imagine someone else deciding every part of your day.

When you wake up.

What you wear.

What you eat.

Where you go.

When you leave.

Who you spend time with.

When you stop playing.

When you go to bed.

Most adults would find that exhausting.

Children live with this reality every day.

Adults make almost every important decision for them.

Most of the time, children accept this remarkably well.

But every child reaches moments when one thought becomes stronger than all the others.

**"Can I decide something?"**

Resistance is often the language of autonomy.

Not rebellion.

Growth.

As children develop, they naturally begin asking for more influence over their own lives.

That is not a parenting problem.

It is a developmental milestone.

## **Resistance Is Information**

Parents often see resistance as something that must be defeated.

What if, instead, we saw it as information?

When a child says,

*"No!"*

they may actually be saying,

*"I wasn't ready."*

*"I didn't understand."*

*"I wanted more time."*

*"I feel powerless."*

*"This feels unfair."*

*"Something about this is hard for me."*

The word **"no"** tells us almost nothing by itself.

Its meaning depends on what lies underneath it.

Our job is not to react to the word.

It is to understand the experience behind it.

---

## **The Difference Between Defiance and Development**

Defiance is often described as a child deliberately refusing reasonable requests simply to challenge authority.

True defiance exists.

But it is far less common than many people imagine.

Much of what adults label as defiance is actually development.

Toddlers discover independence by saying no.

Preschoolers experiment with influence.

School-age children begin forming opinions of their own.

Teenagers gradually separate from parents as they develop their identity.

The ability to disagree respectfully is not something children suddenly acquire as adults.

It begins here.

A child who never questions anything may appear obedient.

They may also be learning that their own thoughts do not matter.

Healthy parenting is not about raising children who never disagree.

It is about teaching them how to disagree respectfully.

---

## **Why Power Struggles Begin**

A power struggle usually starts with two people trying to regain control at the same time.

The child pushes.

The adult pushes harder.

The child resists more.

The adult raises their voice.

Soon the original issue has disappeared.

No one is arguing about brushing teeth anymore.

They are arguing about who is going to win.

The problem with power struggles is that everyone loses.

Children stop learning.

Parents stop leading.

Both nervous systems become defensive.

The relationship becomes the casualty.

Leadership is not about winning battles.

It is about guiding children through them.

---

### **Calm Leadership Is Stronger Than Loud Authority**

Imagine boarding an aeroplane during heavy turbulence.

Would you feel safer with a pilot who shouted,

*"Everybody sit down right now!"*

Or one who calmly said,

*"The turbulence is uncomfortable, but the aircraft is designed for this. Please fasten your seatbelts."*

Both pilots give the same instruction.

Only one creates confidence.

Children respond in remarkably similar ways.

Calm leadership communicates,

*"I know this is hard."*

*"The answer is still no."*

*"I'll help you through it."*

The limit remains.

The emotional experience changes completely.

Children trust adults who appear confident without becoming threatening.

---

## **Giving Children Appropriate Choices**

Children need opportunities to experience control.

The key word is **appropriate**.

Parents sometimes believe they must either make every decision...

or let the child decide everything.

Neither extreme helps.

Instead of asking,

*"Do you want to leave now?"*

when leaving is not optional,

try,

*"Would you like to walk to the car or hop like a kangaroo?"*

The destination stays the same.

The child gains a sense of agency.

Or instead of,

*"Put your coat on now."*

try,

*"Would you like to put your coat on by yourself, or would you like my help?"*

Choice reduces unnecessary conflict because it respects a child's growing need for autonomy without surrendering adult leadership.

---

## **Listening Does Not Mean Changing Your Mind**

One of the greatest gifts we can offer children is the experience of being heard.

Being heard, however, is not the same as getting what we want.

Imagine telling a close friend how disappointed you are.

They listen carefully.

They understand your feelings.

They still cannot change the situation.

Would you feel unheard?

Probably not.

Children deserve the same respect.

You can fully acknowledge disappointment while keeping the boundary exactly where it is.

*"I know you wanted to stay longer."*

*"I understand why you're upset."*

*"We're still leaving now."*

Children gradually learn an important lesson.

Their feelings influence the conversation.

They do not always determine the outcome.

That lesson prepares them for real life.

---

### **When Your Child Says, "That's Not Fair"**

Every parent hears these words.

*"That's not fair!"*

Sometimes they are right.

Adults make mistakes.

Rules are occasionally inconsistent.

Children deserve apologies when that happens.

But often what children really mean is something different.

*"This isn't what I wanted."*

Fairness and disappointment are not the same thing.

Helping children understand that difference is one of parenting's quiet responsibilities.

Life will not always feel fair.

Waiting turns are not always equal.

Teachers are not always perfect.

Friends sometimes disappoint us.

Learning to tolerate these experiences without becoming overwhelmed is part of emotional maturity.

---

## **Choosing Connection Instead of Competition**

There is a question worth asking whenever resistance appears.

**"Am I trying to win this interaction... or guide my child through it?"**

Winning often creates compliance.

Guidance creates growth.

Children may obey because they fear an adult's power.

Or they may cooperate because they trust an adult's leadership.

The second lasts much longer.

---

### **The Long Game**

Parents often worry that listening too much will create entitled children.

Research and experience suggest something different.

Children who consistently feel respected become more willing to respect others.

Children who feel heard become more willing to listen.

Children who experience calm leadership gradually develop self-leadership.

This does not happen after one conversation.

It happens after hundreds of ordinary moments.

Moments when adults remain steady.

Moments when children discover that disagreement does not destroy connection.

Moments when they learn that someone can understand their feelings without changing every decision.

Those moments quietly prepare children for adulthood.

Because one day they will need to work with teachers...

friends...

partners...

colleagues...

people who will not always agree with them.

The ability to accept limits without losing themselves is one of the greatest emotional skills they can develop.

It begins in conversations like these.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child says "**No**," resist the urge to answer immediately.

Pause and ask yourself:

- **Is my child resisting the limit... or the feeling of having no choice?**
- **Can I offer one appropriate choice while keeping the boundary the same?**

- **How can I stay calm enough to lead instead of compete?**

Sometimes changing *how* you lead changes whether your child chooses to follow.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children do not become emotionally healthy because they always get their own way. They become emotionally healthy because they experience adults who listen with respect, lead with confidence, and hold boundaries without turning every disagreement into a battle for control.**

# Chapter 18

## When They Cry, Shut Down or Push You Away

### Supporting children who turn their feelings inward

**Not every child expresses pain by becoming louder.**

Some become quieter.

They stop talking.

They look away.

They shrug their shoulders.

They whisper,

*"I'm fine."*

even though tears are sitting just behind their eyes.

Others disappear into their bedroom.

They bury their face in a pillow.

They refuse hugs.

They push away the very people they need most.

For many parents, these moments are even harder to understand than tantrums.

At least anger feels visible.

Silence feels mysterious.

You begin wondering,

*"Should I leave them alone?"*

*"Should I keep trying?"*

*"Why won't they tell me what's wrong?"*

The silence can feel like rejection.

But more often, it is protection.

Children who turn inward are rarely trying to push us away.

They are trying to protect themselves while carrying feelings that have become too heavy to hold.

---

### **Not Every Child Cries Out Loud**

Imagine two children experience exactly the same disappointment.

One bursts into tears.

The other quietly stares at the floor.

One wants to be held.

The other walks away.

One talks constantly.

The other says almost nothing.

Which child is hurting more?

There is no answer.

Pain is not measured by volume.

Some children externalise their emotions.

Others internalise them.

Neither response is right.

Neither response is wrong.

They are simply different ways of coping.

Parents often notice the loud child first because loud emotions demand attention.

The quiet child can easily be overlooked.

Yet quiet pain deserves just as much care.

Sometimes even more.

---

### **Silence Is Still Communication**

Adults often mistake silence for the absence of emotion.

In reality, silence is frequently filled with emotion.

Children become quiet for many different reasons.

They cannot find the words.

They worry they will not be understood.

They fear getting into trouble.

They feel ashamed.

They believe their feelings are too big.

Or they simply need time.

Silence is not the opposite of communication.

It is another form of it.

The question is no longer,

*"Why won't my child talk?"*

It becomes,

*"What might my child's silence be trying to say?"*

---

### **"I'm Fine"**

Perhaps the most common sentence children use when they are not fine is this:

*"I'm okay."*

*"Nothing happened."*

*"I'm fine."*

Parents often hear these words and stop asking.

Sometimes that is exactly what the child needs.

Other times, the words are simply a shield.

Think about how many adults answer,

*"How are you?"*

with,

*"Fine,"*

even on their worst days.

Children learn this habit surprisingly early.

Not because they want to lie.

Because saying,

*"I'm fine,"*

can feel safer than trying to explain something they barely understand themselves.

Our role is not to force honesty.

It is to create the kind of relationship where honesty eventually feels safe.

---

## **When Children Push You Away**

One of the most painful parenting experiences is offering comfort...

and having it rejected.

You open your arms.

Your child says,

*"Go away!"*

You ask if they want to talk.

They shout,

*"Leave me alone!"*

It is easy to hear those words as rejection.

Very often, they are not.

Imagine being emotionally overwhelmed while someone repeatedly asks you questions.

Even if they love you, it may feel like too much.

Children sometimes push adults away because they need space to organise their feelings.

Others push adults away because they fear becoming even more vulnerable if they accept comfort.

Some children have never learned what it feels like to receive comfort while upset.

Distance has become their protection.

The rejection is usually not personal.

It is emotional self-protection.

---

## **Respecting Space Without Abandoning Connection**

Parents often feel trapped between two fears.

If they stay close, they worry they are overwhelming the child.

If they walk away, they worry the child will feel abandoned.

There is another option.

Stay emotionally available while respecting physical space.

You might quietly say,

*"I can see you don't want to talk right now."*

*"I'll give you some space."*

*"I'll be right here when you're ready."*

Those simple words communicate something powerful.

**You are free to have your feelings.**

**You are not alone with them.**

Children gradually learn that needing space does not mean losing connection.

Both can exist together.

---

### **Tears Do Not Need to Be Fixed**

Many adults become uncomfortable when children cry.

Our instinct is immediate.

*"Don't cry."*

*"It's okay."*

*"You'll feel better soon."*

These phrases are loving.

They also suggest that tears should end as quickly as possible.

But crying is not a malfunction.

It is one of the body's natural ways of releasing emotional tension.

Imagine telling someone who had just run a marathon,

*"Stop breathing so heavily."*

The breathing is not the problem.

It is part of recovery.

Tears often serve a similar purpose.

Children do not always cry because they are becoming weaker.

Sometimes they cry because their nervous system is beginning to let go of what it has been carrying.

---

### **Some Children Need Time Before They Can Talk**

Adults often process emotions by speaking.

Many children process emotions before speaking.

Imagine shaking a snow globe.

Immediately afterwards, everything inside becomes cloudy.

You cannot see clearly.

But if you place it gently on a table and wait...

the snow slowly settles.

The picture becomes visible again.

Children's thoughts often work the same way.

Immediately after an emotional experience, their inner world can feel chaotic.

Questions asked too early may receive only,

*"I don't know."*

Not because children are refusing to answer.

Because they genuinely cannot see clearly yet.

Time is often part of emotional regulation.

Sometimes the most supportive thing an adult can say is,

*"We don't have to talk right now. We can talk later if you want."*

---

## **Looking Beyond Withdrawal**

Not every quiet child is simply quiet.

Sometimes withdrawal tells us that a child is carrying more than they can manage alone.

If a child who usually enjoys playing suddenly loses interest...

If they consistently withdraw from friends...

If they stop talking about things they once loved...

If sadness or worry lasts for weeks rather than days...

If they seem hopeless, frightened or disconnected much of the time...

those changes deserve gentle attention.

Children have emotional ups and downs just like adults.

But lasting changes in behaviour are often worth exploring with curiosity—and, when appropriate, with the support of a trusted healthcare or mental health professional.

Seeking help is not a sign that you have failed as a parent.

It is another way of caring for your child.

---

## **Presence Speaks Louder Than Questions**

Parents sometimes worry that they are not saying enough.

Often, they are saying too much.

Children who turn inward rarely need a constant stream of questions.

*"What's wrong?"*

*"Are you sure?"*

*"Tell me."*

*"Come on, talk to me."*

Sometimes what they need most is quiet companionship.

Sitting beside them while they draw.

Reading together.

Taking a walk.

Driving in silence.

Sharing a hot chocolate.

Connection does not always require conversation.

Many children begin talking only after they no longer feel pressured to do so.

Safety opens doors that questions sometimes cannot.

---

### **Becoming the Person They Return To**

One day your child will experience heartbreak.

Failure.

Loss.

Disappointment.

You will not always be there when those moments happen.

But they will remember what happened every time they came to you as a child.

Did you rush to solve?

Did you become anxious?

Did you dismiss their feelings?

Or did you quietly communicate,

*"Whatever you're carrying, you don't have to carry it alone."*

That message becomes part of the relationship.

Children return to adults who make difficult emotions feel safe.

Not because those adults have all the answers.

Because they make children feel accepted before they feel understood.

And they make children feel understood before they try to change anything.

That is the kind of relationship children carry with them long after childhood ends.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child becomes quiet, withdrawn or says,

*"I'm fine,"*

resist the urge to keep asking questions.

Instead, try saying,

*"You don't have to talk right now. I just want you to know I'm here whenever you're ready."*

Then let your presence do the work.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is not another question.

It is patient availability.

---

### **Remember This**

**Not all children ask for help with words. Some ask through silence, distance or tears. When we respect their need for space without withdrawing our connection, we teach them one of life's most powerful lessons: they never have to face their hardest feelings alone.**

# Chapter 19

## When Nothing Seems to Work

### What to do when every strategy fails

**There comes a moment in almost every parent's journey when doubt becomes louder than confidence.**

You've read the books.

You've stayed calm.

You've tried validating feelings.

You've offered choices.

You've set boundaries.

You've apologised when you made mistakes.

You've done everything you thought you were supposed to do.

And yet...

Your child still has meltdowns.

Still argues.

Still hits.

Still refuses.

Still cries over things that seem impossibly small.

Eventually, a painful question begins to appear.

## **"What if none of this is working?"**

It is one of the loneliest questions a parent can ask.

Not because it means you have failed.

But because it often feels like you have.

If you have ever reached this point, this chapter is for you.

---

## **Progress Is Hard to See From the Inside**

Imagine planting a tree.

You water it every day.

You protect it from strong winds.

You make sure it gets enough sunlight.

For weeks, nothing seems to change.

The trunk looks the same.

The branches look the same.

The tree appears almost frozen in time.

Would you conclude that watering doesn't work?

Of course not.

You understand something important.

The most significant growth is happening where you cannot see it.

Underground.

Roots are forming before branches begin to spread.

Emotional development works in much the same way.

Parents usually measure progress by behaviour.

The brain measures progress by capacity.

A child who still cries but calms down five minutes sooner is growing.

A child who still hits but apologises afterwards is growing.

A child who still becomes overwhelmed but asks for a hug instead of throwing a chair is growing.

The changes are often invisible until one day they suddenly become obvious.

---

## **Growth Is Rarely Linear**

One of the biggest myths in parenting is the belief that improvement follows a straight line.

Today is better than yesterday.

Tomorrow is better than today.

Real development does not look like that.

Imagine learning to play the piano.

Some days your hands seem to know exactly what to do.

The next day you struggle with a piece you played perfectly yesterday.

Nothing has gone wrong.

Learning has simply taken its natural shape.

Children develop emotional skills in exactly the same way.

A wonderful week may be followed by a terrible afternoon.

That does not erase the progress that came before it.

Growth is messy.

It loops.

It pauses.

It accelerates.

It surprises us.

Looking only at today's behaviour is like judging an entire book after reading one page.

---

### **When Your Child Gets Worse Before They Get Better**

Parents are often shocked by something that therapists and educators see regularly.

Sometimes behaviour becomes more difficult before meaningful improvement appears.

Why?

Because children often begin expressing emotions they previously kept hidden.

Imagine carrying a heavy backpack for years.

One day, someone finally tells you it is safe to put it down.

The first thing you notice is not relief.

It is how heavy it was.

Children sometimes become more emotional when they finally feel safe enough to express what they have been holding inside.

This does not always mean something is wrong.

Sometimes it means trust is growing.

Children reveal their deepest struggles to the adults they believe will not leave.

That is not failure.

It is relationship.

---

### **Every Child Has Their Own Timeline**

Parents naturally compare.

"My friend's child never behaves like this."

"My older daughter was so much easier."

"My son should be able to do this by now."

Comparison creates unnecessary suffering.

Every child develops emotional skills at a different pace.

Some naturally adapt to change.

Others need much more preparation.

Some recover quickly from disappointment.

Others need longer.

Some easily describe their feelings.

Others need years before emotional language feels natural.

Different does not mean delayed.

Delayed does not mean broken.

Development is not a race.

Children are not competing against one another.

They are growing into themselves.

---

### **Ask a Different Question**

When strategies seem ineffective, parents often ask,

*"What else can I try?"*

Sometimes that is the wrong question.

A more useful question is,

## **"What might I be missing?"**

Perhaps your child is exhausted.

Perhaps something difficult happened at school.

Perhaps sensory overload is playing a larger role than you realised.

Perhaps anxiety is sitting underneath the behaviour.

Perhaps the expectations are simply too high for this stage of development.

Strategies work best when they match the real problem.

A beautifully designed solution cannot solve the wrong problem.

Curiosity remains more valuable than certainty.

---

## **Consistency Is Quiet**

Imagine watching someone build a stone wall.

One stone is placed.

Then another.

Then another.

At the end of the first day, the wall barely exists.

At the end of the second day, it still seems unimpressive.

Months later, people admire the finished structure.

No single stone created the wall.

Consistency did.

Parenting works the same way.

One calm response does not transform a child.

One repair does not erase every difficult moment.

One bedtime conversation does not create lifelong resilience.

But thousands of ordinary moments...

thousands of respectful conversations...

thousands of small acts of connection...

quietly build something extraordinary.

Children grow inside relationships long before they grow through advice.

---

### **When You Feel Like Giving Up**

Every parent reaches days when nothing feels effective.

You repeat yourself.

You lose patience.

You question everything.

Those are the moments when many adults begin chasing new techniques.

A different reward chart.

A stricter consequence.

A new parenting method.

Sometimes new tools help.

Often what children need most is not a different strategy.

They need the same safe adult showing up again tomorrow.

Consistency is not exciting.

It is powerful.

Children do not build trust because adults occasionally respond well.

They build trust because adults become predictably safe over time.

---

### **Knowing When You Need More Support**

There is another truth that deserves to be said clearly.

Love does not solve everything.

Sometimes families need help.

Not because parents have failed.

Not because children are broken.

Because human beings were never meant to raise children completely alone.

If your child's emotions are becoming increasingly intense...

if behaviour is causing significant distress at home or school...

if your own stress feels overwhelming...

if you find yourself constantly feeling hopeless or frightened...

reaching out for support is an act of wisdom, not weakness.

Teachers.

School counsellors.

Paediatricians.

Child psychologists.

Family therapists.

Trusted professionals can become valuable partners.

Asking for help is not stepping away from your responsibility.

It is stepping toward it.

---

## **Remember the Child, Not the Behaviour**

When progress feels painfully slow, behaviour can become all you see.

The tantrums.

The arguments.

The refusals.

The setbacks.

Pause for a moment.

Look again.

Can you still see the child behind the behaviour?

The one who laughs until they hiccup.

The one who proudly shows you a drawing.

The one who reaches for your hand while crossing the road.

The one who whispers,

*"Will you stay with me?"*

Behaviour is only one chapter of your child's story.

Do not let it become the title.

---

### **One Day You Will Notice**

One evening, perhaps years from now, something unexpected will happen.

Your child will become frustrated.

They will take a deep breath.

They will walk away instead of hitting.

They will tell you,

*"I'm angry."*

Instead of throwing something.

Or they will comfort a younger sibling using words that sound strangely familiar.

Words you once said to them.

You may not even remember teaching those words.

Because parenting often works like planting seeds.

The harvest appears long after the planting.

That day will not happen because you were perfect.

It will happen because you kept showing up.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Even on the days when you believed nothing was changing.

---

### **Try This Today**

Think back over the past six months instead of the past six hours.

Ask yourself:

- **What can my child do today that they couldn't do six months ago?**
- **What small signs of growth have I overlooked because I was waiting for dramatic change?**
- **What strength do I already see growing beneath the surface?**

Progress often becomes visible only when we widen our perspective.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children do not grow because every strategy works immediately. They grow because loving adults keep showing up with patience, consistency and hope—even when progress is slow enough to be almost invisible. The greatest changes in childhood are often happening long before they can be seen.**

# **PART IV — TEACHING THE SKILLS CHILDREN STILL NEED**

## **Chapter 20**

### **Building an Emotional Vocabulary**

**Helping children recognise, name and describe what  
they feel**

**Imagine trying to solve a problem you cannot describe.**

You know something feels wrong.

Your stomach is tight.

Your heart is racing.

You want to cry.

Or shout.

Or hide.

But you have no words for any of it.

How would anyone help you?

This is where many children begin.

Long before they can explain what is happening inside them, they are already experiencing a rich and complicated emotional world.

They feel disappointed before they know the word *disappointed*.

They feel overwhelmed before they understand *overwhelmed*.

They feel embarrassed before they can say *embarrassed*.

Without language, emotions become difficult to organise.

And what cannot be organised is much harder to regulate.

One of the greatest gifts we can give children is not teaching them how to stop their feelings.

It is teaching them how to understand them.

---

### **You Cannot Manage What You Cannot Name**

Imagine someone handed you a box filled with hundreds of coloured pencils.

Now imagine every pencil had the same label.

*"Blue."*

Dark blue.

Light blue.

Turquoise.

Navy.

Sky blue.

All simply called *blue*.

Finding the exact colour you wanted would become almost impossible.

Many children experience emotions in exactly this way.

Everything uncomfortable becomes...

*"Bad."*

Everything upsetting becomes...

*"Mad."*

Everything difficult becomes...

*"Sad."*

The emotional world is far richer than that.

Anger is different from frustration.

Disappointment is different from sadness.

Embarrassment is different from shame.

Worry is different from fear.

Loneliness is different from boredom.

The more precisely children can identify what they feel, the more accurately they can respond to it.

Naming emotions does not create them.

It organises them.

## **Feelings Become Less Frightening When They Have Names**

Think back to the first time you experienced turbulence on an aeroplane.

If no one explained what was happening, it might have felt terrifying.

Now imagine the pilot calmly saying,

*"This is turbulence. It feels uncomfortable, but it is a normal part of flying."*

The bumps feel exactly the same.

Yet something changes.

The experience has a name.

And names reduce uncertainty.

Children experience emotions in much the same way.

A racing heart without a name feels frightening.

A racing heart recognised as anxiety becomes understandable.

Tight muscles recognised as frustration make more sense than muscles that simply feel "wrong."

Language transforms confusion into understanding.

Understanding reduces fear.

## **Emotional Vocabulary Is Learned Through Conversation**

Children are not born knowing emotional words.

They learn them the same way they learn every other language.

By hearing them used repeatedly in meaningful situations.

Imagine your toddler points at the sky.

You say,

*"That's a bird."*

They point again.

You repeat,

*"Yes, that's a bird."*

Eventually, the connection forms.

The same process happens with emotions.

*"You look disappointed."*

*"You seem proud of yourself."*

*"That sounded frustrating."*

*"I wonder if you're feeling nervous."*

You are not telling children what they feel.

You are offering language they can try on.

Over time, those borrowed words become their own.

## **Guess Gently, Don't Diagnose**

Parents sometimes hesitate to name emotions because they worry about getting them wrong.

That concern is healthy.

None of us can know exactly what another person is feeling.

That is why gentle curiosity works better than certainty.

Instead of saying,

*"You're angry."*

try,

*"I wonder if you're feeling angry."*

Or,

*"You seem disappointed. Am I close?"*

Those small phrases leave room for the child to agree...

or disagree.

Children learn that emotions are explored together rather than decided for them.

That sense of collaboration builds emotional awareness far more effectively than assumptions.

---

## **Beyond Happy, Sad and Angry**

Many children grow up believing there are only a handful of emotions.

Happy.

Sad.

Mad.

Scared.

Real emotional life is far more detailed.

Imagine two children who are both crying.

One feels lonely.

The other feels guilty.

The tears look identical.

The support they need may be completely different.

Expanding emotional vocabulary helps children recognise these differences.

Instead of only saying,

*"I'm mad,"*

they gradually learn to say,

*"I'm frustrated because I keep making mistakes."*

Or,

*"I'm disappointed because I really wanted to win."*

Or,

*"I'm embarrassed because everyone was watching."*

As language becomes more specific, behaviour often becomes less explosive.

Words begin replacing actions.

---

### **Your Own Emotional Vocabulary Matters**

Children learn emotional language by listening to adults.

That means your vocabulary becomes their vocabulary.

Imagine hearing a parent say,

*"I've had a stressful day."*

*"I'm feeling overwhelmed."*

*"I'm disappointed, but I'll be okay."*

*"I'm frustrated, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths before we talk."*

Children learn something extraordinary.

Adults have feelings.

Adults name them.

Adults manage them without pretending they don't exist.

This is not about turning children into your emotional support.

It is about modelling healthy emotional awareness.

When children hear adults naming emotions calmly, they begin doing the same.

---

## **Reading Feelings Beyond Words**

Emotions are communicated through far more than language.

A child may say,

*"I'm fine."*

while staring at the floor.

They may insist they are not angry while slamming every cupboard door.

They may shrug their shoulders while tears quietly fill their eyes.

Help children notice these signals.

*"I heard you say you're fine, but I also noticed your fists are really tight."*

*"Your voice sounds quieter than usual today."*

*"Your face looks worried."*

This teaches children that emotions live in the body as well as in words.

Awareness always comes before regulation.

## **When Children Don't Know**

Parents sometimes become frustrated when children repeatedly answer,

*"I don't know."*

Believe them.

Often, they genuinely don't know.

Imagine asking someone to describe a colour they have never seen before.

Without language or experience, the task becomes impossible.

Emotions work the same way.

Young children are not refusing to identify feelings.

They are still building the map.

Maps take time.

Patience teaches more than pressure ever could.

---

## **Turning Everyday Moments Into Emotional Lessons**

The best emotional conversations rarely happen during meltdowns.

They happen while driving.

Walking the dog.

Reading stories.

Watching films.

Drawing pictures.

Playing games.

A character in a book looks frightened.

Ask,

*"What do you think she's feeling?"*

A football player loses an important match.

Ask,

*"How do you think he might feel right now?"*

These conversations allow children to explore emotions without the pressure of talking about themselves.

Eventually, they begin recognising those same emotions in their own lives.

---

## **The Goal Is Self-Awareness**

Imagine your child at twenty-five years old.

A disagreement happens at work.

Instead of exploding...

or shutting down...

they quietly say,

*"I think I'm feeling overwhelmed. I need a few minutes before we continue this conversation."*

That sentence did not appear overnight.

It began years earlier.

With a parent who patiently named emotions.

Asked curious questions.

Made feelings safe to discuss.

Emotional vocabulary is not simply about learning new words.

It is about building self-awareness.

And self-awareness is the foundation of emotional intelligence.

Children who can recognise what they feel are far more likely to choose what they do next.

That is one of the greatest lifelong skills we can help them develop.

---

### **Try This Today**

Choose one ordinary moment today—not a meltdown.

Perhaps during dinner.

Perhaps in the car.

Perhaps while reading together.

Introduce one new feeling word.

Not to teach.

Simply to wonder.

*"I wonder if that character feels disappointed."*

*"I wonder if you're feeling proud."*

*"I wonder if that looked frustrating."*

One new word at a time is enough.

Emotional vocabulary grows through thousands of small conversations, not one big lesson.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children cannot describe an emotional world they do not yet have words for. Every feeling we gently help them recognise and name becomes another tool they can use instead of tears, shouting or silence. Words give children something powerful: a way to understand themselves before trying to change themselves.**

# Chapter 21

## Teaching Regulation Before the Crisis

### Why emotional skills must be practised when children are calm

#### **Imagine signing your child up for swimming lessons.**

On the very first day, instead of starting in the shallow end, the instructor throws them into deep water and says,

*"Now learn to swim."*

No parent would accept that.

Because we all understand something obvious.

Skills must be learned before they are needed.

Not during the emergency.

Yet this is exactly what often happens with emotional regulation.

A child has a meltdown.

An adult says,

*"Take a deep breath."*

*"Use your calm-down strategy."*

*"Think before you act."*

The problem is that the lesson is arriving far too late.

A child whose nervous system has entered survival mode has very little access to the thinking skills they practise when they are calm.

Emotional regulation is no different from swimming, riding a bicycle or learning to read.

It requires practice.

And practice works best before the difficult moment arrives.

---

### **We Expect Skills We Have Never Taught**

Imagine asking a child to solve a long division problem without ever teaching them how numbers work.

When they fail, you repeat the instruction louder.

*"Come on. Just do it."*

It sounds ridiculous.

Yet emotionally, many children experience exactly this.

*"Use your words."*

*"Calm yourself down."*

*"Control your anger."*

*"Think before you act."*

These are valuable skills.

But they are still skills.

And skills are taught.

They are not demanded into existence.

Children cannot consistently use emotional tools they have never had the opportunity to practise.

---

## **Calm Is the Classroom**

Parents often assume that emotional learning happens during meltdowns.

In reality, meltdowns are tests.

The learning happens beforehand.

Think about firefighters.

They do not learn how to use equipment while standing inside a burning building.

Pilots do not practise emergency landings during real emergencies.

Professional athletes do not learn new techniques during the final minutes of an important match.

They prepare long before the pressure arrives.

Children deserve the same opportunity.

The best time to practise calming strategies is when everyone feels relaxed.

Not because the child needs them at that moment.

Because one day they will.

---

### **The Brain Learns Through Repetition**

Every time children repeat a skill, their brain becomes a little more efficient at using it.

Imagine walking through a forest.

The first time, there is no path.

Each journey makes the trail a little clearer.

Eventually, the route becomes easy to follow.

The brain works in much the same way.

Every time a child practises slow breathing...

every time they notice a feeling...

every time they pause before reacting...

they strengthen the pathways that support emotional regulation.

These pathways do not appear after one conversation.

They grow through repetition.

Small moments.

Repeated often.

That is how emotional habits are built.

## **Emotional Skills Are Everyday Skills**

Many parents think emotional regulation begins when children become upset.

Actually, it begins during ordinary moments.

Waiting for a turn.

Losing a board game.

Building a tower that falls over.

Trying something difficult.

Making a mistake.

These everyday frustrations are emotional practice.

Not because they are enjoyable.

Because they are manageable.

Children learn resilience one ordinary disappointment at a time.

When adults recognise these moments as opportunities instead of interruptions, emotional learning becomes part of everyday life.

---

## **Play Is Powerful Practice**

Children learn best through experience.

Not lectures.

Not long explanations.

Play.

Imagine two children pretending to be astronauts.

Halfway through the game, one says,

*"The spaceship is broken!"*

The other takes a deep breath and replies,

*"Let's solve it together."*

They are not just playing.

They are rehearsing emotional flexibility.

The same happens during pretend restaurants...

building forts...

drawing pictures...

playing with dolls...

or acting out stories.

Children naturally explore disappointment, fear, courage and problem-solving through play.

Play is one of childhood's greatest emotional classrooms.

Adults often underestimate how much learning is happening there.

## **Build a Toolbox Before It's Needed**

Imagine handing someone a parachute after they have already jumped from the aeroplane.

The timing matters.

Emotional tools work the same way.

Children benefit from building a personal toolbox while calm.

Deep breathing.

Stretching.

Drawing.

Listening to music.

Counting slowly.

Squeezing a cushion.

Taking a drink of water.

Going outside.

Using a calm corner.

Talking to a trusted adult.

No single strategy works for every child.

The goal is not finding the perfect tool.

It is helping children discover which tools help *them*.

Every child deserves a toolbox they know how to use before they need it.

---

### **Practise Without Pressure**

Adults sometimes accidentally turn emotional learning into another performance.

*"Show me your breathing."*

*"Do it properly."*

*"You're not trying hard enough."*

Children quickly lose interest.

Emotional regulation should never feel like another test to pass.

Instead, make practice light.

Curious.

Playful.

Breathe together before bedtime.

Stretch together after school.

Notice feelings during story time.

Celebrate effort rather than perfection.

Children return to experiences that feel safe.

Not experiences that feel evaluated.

## **Your Calm Is Part of the Practice**

Children learn emotional regulation long before they learn emotional strategies.

They watch.

How do you react when you spill coffee?

When traffic is heavy?

When dinner burns?

When plans suddenly change?

Every ordinary frustration becomes a lesson.

Not because children are judging you.

Because they are collecting examples.

When they repeatedly see an adult pause...

take a breath...

solve problems calmly...

repair mistakes...

they begin building an internal picture of what regulation looks like.

The most powerful lesson may never be the breathing exercise.

It may simply be the adult who practises it.

## **Small Moments Create Big Change**

Parents often wait for dramatic breakthroughs.

In reality, emotional growth usually happens quietly.

One deep breath before homework.

One pause before shouting.

One successful conversation after a disagreement.

One moment of recognising,

*"I'm frustrated."*

instead of throwing something.

These moments seem ordinary.

They are anything but.

Every one of them strengthens a child's belief that emotions can be managed instead of feared.

Over months and years, these tiny successes accumulate into remarkable emotional resilience.

Not because any single moment changed everything.

Because thousands of small moments did.

---

## **Preparing for the Storm**

We cannot prevent every disappointment.

Every conflict.

Every difficult day.

Children will experience frustration, fear, sadness and anger throughout their lives.

Our job is not to remove every storm.

It is to help them build the skills to walk through those storms with confidence.

That work happens long before the clouds appear.

It happens during bedtime routines.

During games.

During laughter.

During conversations in the car.

During peaceful afternoons when nothing seems particularly important.

Those ordinary moments become the foundation children stand on when life eventually becomes difficult.

---

### **Try This Today**

Choose one emotional skill to practise today while your child is calm.

Perhaps take five slow breaths together before bedtime.

Perhaps ask,

*"What feeling visited you most today?"*

Perhaps practise stretching after school.

Keep it simple.

Keep it enjoyable.

Remember:

The goal is not to prepare for today's emotions.

It is to prepare for tomorrow's.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children do not learn emotional regulation in the middle of emotional storms. They learn it during the quiet moments that come before them. Every calm conversation, playful practice and shared routine becomes another tool they can reach for when big feelings eventually arrive.**

# **Chapter 22**

## **Finding the Right Calming Tool**

### **Matching strategies to the child, the emotion and the moment**

**One of the most common questions parents ask is surprisingly simple.**

**"What should I do when my child is upset?"**

They hope there is one perfect answer.

One breathing exercise.

One calming activity.

One sentence.

One technique that works every time.

There isn't.

And that is actually good news.

Because children are not all the same.

Neither are emotions.

A strategy that helps one child may frustrate another.

A tool that works after school may fail completely at bedtime.

Something that helps with anxiety may make frustration even worse.

Emotional regulation is not about finding the perfect calming tool.

It is about learning which tool fits which child, which emotion and which moment.

Just as you would not use the same key to open every door, you should not expect one strategy to unlock every emotional challenge.

---

### **There Is No Universal Calming Technique**

Imagine visiting a doctor because you are unwell.

Without asking a single question, the doctor hands every patient exactly the same medicine.

A broken arm.

A migraine.

A stomach virus.

An allergic reaction.

Everyone receives the same treatment.

It would make no sense.

Yet many adults unknowingly expect emotional regulation to work this way.

*"Take a deep breath."*

*"Count to ten."*

*"Go to your calm corner."*

Sometimes these ideas help.

Sometimes they don't.

Not because the strategy is wrong.

Because it may not match the situation.

The first question should never be,

**"Which calming strategy should I use?"**

It should be,

**"What does my child need right now?"**

---

### **Every Emotion Asks for Something Different**

Imagine four children.

One is frightened by a thunderstorm.

One is furious because their tower collapsed.

One is heartbroken after losing a pet.

One is overwhelmed after a noisy birthday party.

All four are distressed.

None of them need exactly the same response.

The frightened child may need closeness.

The angry child may need movement.

The grieving child may need quiet presence.

The overwhelmed child may need reduced stimulation.

The emotion points toward the support.

The behaviour alone rarely does.

Understanding the difference changes everything.

---

### **Some Children Calm Through Movement**

Many adults instinctively ask children to sit still when emotions become big.

For some children, this makes regulation harder.

Imagine drinking three cups of strong coffee and then being told,

*"Sit perfectly still until you feel calm."*

Your body would probably resist.

Some nervous systems regulate through movement.

Running.

Jumping.

Dancing.

Stretching.

Swinging.

Throwing a soft ball.

Pushing against a wall.

Animal walks.

Breathing while walking.

Movement allows the body to release emotional energy that words cannot.

These children are not avoiding regulation.

Movement is regulation.

---

### **Some Children Calm Through Connection**

Other children need something entirely different.

Not movement.

People.

A hug.

A hand to hold.

Someone sitting quietly beside them.

Eye contact.

A familiar voice.

A favourite bedtime story.

Gentle reassurance.

Their nervous system settles through relationship.

This is called **co-regulation**.

Before children consistently regulate themselves, they borrow regulation from trusted adults.

Connection is not spoiling.

Connection is biology.

Children are wired to seek safety in relationships long before they can create that safety internally.

---

### **Some Children Calm Through Quiet**

Imagine trying to solve a difficult puzzle while music is blaring, lights are flashing and several people are talking at once.

For many children, this is exactly how emotional overload feels.

These children often benefit from less.

Less noise.

Less conversation.

Less stimulation.

Dimmer lights.

A quieter room.

A blanket.

A comfortable chair.

A few peaceful minutes without questions.

Parents sometimes worry that stepping back means abandoning the child.

It doesn't.

Quiet can be deeply supportive when it is offered with emotional availability.

*"I'll be nearby if you need me."*

Sometimes those words are enough.

---

### **The Timing Matters**

Even the best strategy can fail if it arrives at the wrong moment.

Imagine someone asking you to solve a complex maths problem while your house is on fire.

The task itself is reasonable.

The timing isn't.

Breathing exercises work wonderfully...

when the nervous system is ready.

Reflection works beautifully...

when the thinking brain has returned.

Problem-solving becomes possible...

when the emotional storm has passed.

Parents often conclude that a strategy "doesn't work."

Sometimes the strategy is excellent.

It simply arrived too early.

---

### **Watch the Child, Not the Strategy**

Adults naturally become attached to techniques.

*"This worked yesterday."*

*"The book said this should help."*

*"The therapist recommended this."*

All of those things matter.

But the child in front of you matters more.

Good parenting is flexible.

Notice what actually helps.

Does your child's breathing slow?

Do their shoulders relax?

Do they begin talking?

Do they move closer?

Do they become more playful?

Those changes tell you more than any parenting book ever could.

The goal is not following strategies perfectly.

The goal is understanding your child deeply.

---

### **Build a Personal Emotional Toolkit**

Imagine opening a toolbox that contains only a hammer.

It is useful.

Until the problem requires a screwdriver.

Or a spanner.

Or a measuring tape.

Children deserve emotional toolboxes filled with different options.

Not every tool will be useful every day.

That is exactly the point.

Over time, children begin discovering what helps them.

*"Drawing helps me."*

*"Music helps me."*

*"Swinging helps me."*

*"Talking helps me."*

*"Taking deep breaths helps me."*

*"Sitting with Mum helps me."*

*"Playing outside helps me."*

The greatest goal is not teaching children your favourite calming strategy.

It is helping them discover their own.

---

### **Calm Does Not Always Mean Quiet**

Parents often assume a regulated child looks peaceful.

Sitting still.

Speaking softly.

Smiling.

Sometimes that is true.

Sometimes regulation looks completely different.

A child jumping on a trampoline.

Running laps around the garden.

Dancing in the living room.

Singing loudly.

Digging in the sand.

Building with blocks.

Laughing after crying.

Calm is not about stillness.

It is about returning to a state where the nervous system once again feels safe enough to think, connect and learn.

Different children travel there in different ways.

---

### **Your Presence Is the Most Powerful Tool**

Parents often search for the perfect calming activity.

The newest breathing exercise.

The best sensory toy.

The ideal calm-down routine.

All of these can help.

But research and experience continue to point toward one tool that matters more than any other.

A regulated adult.

Children rarely remember which breathing exercise you taught them first.

They remember the adult who stayed.

Who didn't panic.

Who believed they could recover.

Who made difficult emotions feel survivable.

Techniques are valuable.

Relationships give those techniques their power.

A child who feels emotionally safe is far more likely to use every other calming tool successfully.

---

### **One Day They'll Choose for Themselves**

The true goal is not for children to depend on us forever.

It is for them to gradually recognise their own emotional needs.

One day, your child might say,

*"I need a few minutes outside."*

Or,

*"Can I draw before we talk?"*

Or,

*"I think I need a hug."*

Or even,

*"I'm getting overwhelmed."*

Those moments do not happen by accident.

They grow from years of gentle guidance.

Years of trying different strategies.

Years of discovering that there is no shame in needing support.

That self-awareness is one of the clearest signs that emotional regulation is becoming internal.

And that is exactly where we want it to end.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child becomes emotionally overwhelmed, pause before choosing a strategy.

Ask yourself:

- **What emotion is my child experiencing?**
- **What does their body seem to need right now—movement, connection or quiet?**
- **Is this the right moment for teaching, or simply for helping them feel safe?**

Let your child—not the technique—guide your next step.

---

### **Remember This**

**There is no single calming tool that works for every child, every emotion or every situation. Emotional regulation begins when we stop**

**asking, "Which strategy is best?" and start asking, "What does this child need in this moment?" The right tool is always the one that helps a child feel safe enough to reconnect with themselves.**

# Chapter 23

## Problem-Solving Together

### Moving from emotional recovery to practical learning

**One of the biggest myths in parenting is the belief that emotional regulation is the final goal.**

It isn't.

Regulation is not the destination.

It is the doorway.

When children calm down, many adults feel relieved.

The crying has stopped.

The shouting is over.

The tension has faded.

It is tempting to move on as though nothing happened.

Sometimes that is exactly the right choice.

But often, an important opportunity has just begun.

The moment after emotional recovery is where learning becomes possible.

Not because children are finally ready to be corrected.

Because they are finally ready to think.

This is where emotional intelligence grows.

Not in the middle of the storm...

but in the quiet that follows it.

---

### **Recovery Comes Before Reflection**

Imagine trying to teach someone how to drive immediately after they have been in a car accident.

Their hands are shaking.

Their heart is racing.

Their thoughts are scattered.

Technically, they are sitting in a car.

Emotionally, they are nowhere near ready to learn.

Children are no different.

A regulated nervous system creates space for reflection.

An overwhelmed nervous system cannot.

Parents sometimes begin asking questions too early.

*"Why did you do that?"*

*"What were you thinking?"*

*"Have you learned your lesson?"*

These questions usually produce silence...

shrugs...

or,

*"I don't know."*

Not because children are refusing to think.

Because their thinking brain has only just come back online.

Give the brain time to return before asking it to solve problems.

---

### **Curiosity Is More Powerful Than Blame**

Imagine making a mistake at work.

Your manager immediately says,

*"What were you thinking?"*

Most people become defensive.

Now imagine they ask,

*"Can you walk me through what happened?"*

The second question invites reflection.

The first invites self-protection.

Children respond in remarkably similar ways.

The goal is not to investigate.

It is to understand.

Curiosity sounds like,

*"Let's figure this out together."*

*"What happened just before you got upset?"*

*"What felt hardest?"*

*"What do you think your feelings were trying to tell you?"*

Curiosity opens doors that blame immediately closes.

---

### **Every Behaviour Has a Story**

Imagine watching the final scene of a film without seeing the first ninety minutes.

Almost nothing would make sense.

Behaviour is often the final scene.

The story began much earlier.

Perhaps the child was already tired.

Perhaps they felt embarrassed at school.

Perhaps they were hungry.

Perhaps they misunderstood what someone said.

Perhaps they felt ignored.

Problem-solving begins by understanding the whole story, not only the ending.

Children often discover important insights simply because someone patiently helps them retrace what happened.

Not to assign blame.

To build awareness.

---

### **Looking for the Turning Point**

Many emotional moments have a turning point.

A small moment when the situation shifted.

A sibling laughed.

A game became unfair.

A loud noise startled them.

Someone interrupted.

A favourite toy broke.

Helping children identify that moment teaches them something valuable.

Big explosions rarely begin as big explosions.

They usually begin as small emotions that slowly grow larger.

Recognising the turning point helps children notice future emotions earlier.

And emotions noticed earlier are much easier to manage.

## From "What Happened?" to "What Can We Do Next Time?"

Reflection is only the first step.

Growth comes from planning.

Imagine getting lost while hiking.

Understanding where you took the wrong path is helpful.

Planning the next route is even more helpful.

Once children understand what happened, gently shift toward the future.

*"What could we try next time?"*

*"What might help if this happens again?"*

*"Would you like to think of two or three ideas together?"*

Notice something important.

You are solving the problem **with** your child.

Not **for** them.

Children become confident problem-solvers when they experience adults who think alongside them rather than always thinking instead of them.

---

## **There Is Rarely Only One Solution**

Adults sometimes accidentally teach children that every problem has one correct answer.

Real life is far more flexible.

Imagine a child who became angry because their tower fell down.

Possible solutions might include:

Building it again.

Asking for help.

Taking a short break.

Trying a different design.

Laughing and starting over.

None of these solutions is universally correct.

The goal is not finding the perfect answer.

It is helping children realise they have options.

Emotional flexibility grows when children stop believing there is only one way forward.

---

## **Mistakes Become Teachers**

Many children see mistakes as evidence that they have failed.

Emotionally healthy families teach something different.

Mistakes are information.

Imagine learning to ride a bicycle.

Every wobble teaches balance.

Every fall teaches adjustment.

Without mistakes, learning would stop.

The same is true emotionally.

Every argument teaches communication.

Every disappointment teaches resilience.

Every conflict teaches repair.

The goal is not raising children who never make mistakes.

It is raising children who know how to learn from them.

---

### **Include Your Child in the Solution**

Parents often solve problems before children have a chance to think.

This is understandable.

Adults have experience.

Solutions come quickly.

But every problem solved entirely by an adult is a problem-solving opportunity a child never practised.

Even young children can participate.

*"What do you think would help?"*

*"Which idea feels best to you?"*

*"Would you like to try your idea first?"*

Children are much more likely to follow plans they helped create.

Ownership strengthens motivation.

---

### **Some Problems Cannot Be Solved**

This is one of the hardest lessons in life.

Not every problem has a solution.

Sometimes the pet really has died.

The friend really has moved away.

The football match really was lost.

The holiday really was cancelled.

In those moments, problem-solving changes.

The problem cannot be fixed.

Only supported.

Sometimes the healthiest question is not,

*"How do we solve this?"*

but,

*"How do we get through this together?"*

Children need both kinds of wisdom.

Knowing how to solve problems.

And knowing how to live with the ones that cannot be solved.

---

### **Building Confidence, One Conversation at a Time**

Every calm conversation after a difficult moment teaches something much bigger than the immediate lesson.

It teaches children how to think.

How to reflect.

How to recognise patterns.

How to make better decisions.

How to recover after mistakes.

These are not simply childhood skills.

They are life skills.

One day your child will face challenges without you beside them.

A disagreement with a friend.

A difficult conversation at work.

A disappointment they never expected.

In those moments, they will not remember every rule you taught.

But they may remember the questions you always asked.

*"What happened?"*

*"What were you feeling?"*

*"What can you learn from this?"*

*"What could you try next time?"*

Those questions gradually become their own.

And that is when true emotional independence begins.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child has completely calmed after a difficult moment, resist the urge to lecture.

Instead, have a conversation built around four simple questions:

- **What happened?**
- **What were you feeling?**
- **What helped you calm down?**
- **What could we try next time?**

Keep the conversation short.

Keep it curious.

Remember, you are building a thinker, not simply correcting behaviour.

---

### **Remember This**

**Emotional recovery is not the end of the learning process—it is the beginning. Children grow when calm becomes a time for curiosity, reflection and shared problem-solving. Every conversation after the storm helps them build the confidence to navigate the next one with greater wisdom and resilience.**

# Chapter 24

## Repairing After Conflict

### What to do after you lose your patience

**No matter how much you love your child...**

No matter how many parenting books you read...

No matter how committed you are to staying calm...

There will be days when you lose your patience.

You will raise your voice.

You will interrupt instead of listening.

You will react instead of responding.

Perhaps you will say something you wish you hadn't.

Perhaps you will become the kind of parent you promised yourself you would never be.

And afterwards, when the house finally becomes quiet, another feeling arrives.

Guilt.

You replay the moment again and again.

*"Why did I shout?"*

*"I should have handled that better."*

*"Have I damaged my child?"*

Many parents believe these moments define their relationship.

They don't.

What defines a relationship is not whether conflict happens.

It is what happens after the conflict.

In healthy families, repair is not an exception.

It is a habit.

---

### **Every Relationship Breaks**

Imagine your favourite coffee mug.

If you use it every day, sooner or later it will be knocked over.

Dropped.

Chipped.

Perhaps even cracked.

Relationships are no different.

Whenever two human beings share life together,  
misunderstandings are inevitable.

Parents become tired.

Children become overwhelmed.

Voices become louder.

Feelings get hurt.

Conflict is not evidence that a relationship is unhealthy.

A relationship without conflict simply does not exist.

The real question is not,

**"Can we avoid every rupture?"**

It is,

**"Do we know how to repair them?"**

Children who grow up experiencing healthy repair do not learn that relationships are perfect.

They learn something far more valuable.

Relationships are strong enough to heal.

---

### **Why Parents Fear Apologising**

Many adults hesitate to apologise to their children.

They worry it will weaken their authority.

They fear children will stop respecting them.

Or they believe parents should always appear certain and in control.

But think about the people you respect most.

Are they perfect?

Or are they willing to admit when they are wrong?

Real authority does not come from pretending we never make mistakes.

It comes from taking responsibility when we do.

Children do not lose respect for parents who apologise sincerely.

They learn what accountability looks like.

---

### **An Apology Is Not Losing**

Some parents secretly believe that apologising means the child has won.

Parenting is not a competition.

There are no winners when trust is damaged.

Imagine accidentally stepping on someone's foot.

You would probably apologise immediately.

Not because you intended to hurt them.

Because you recognise the impact of your actions.

The same principle applies in parenting.

Intentions matter.

Impact matters too.

You may have shouted because you were exhausted.

Your child may still have felt frightened.

Both things can be true at the same time.

Repair begins when we acknowledge the impact without defending our intentions.

---

### **What a Real Apology Sounds Like**

Children do not need long speeches.

They need honesty.

A meaningful apology contains four simple parts.

First, describe what happened.

*"I shouted earlier."*

Second, take responsibility.

*"That wasn't the right way to handle my frustration."*

Third, acknowledge the child's experience.

*"I imagine that probably felt scary."*

Finally, offer hope.

*"I'm going to keep practising so I can do better next time."*

Notice what is missing.

Excuses.

Blame.

*"You made me shout."*

*"If you had listened..."*

*"I wouldn't have done it if..."*

Those statements are not apologies.

They transfer responsibility back to the child.

A true apology allows adults to carry what belongs to adults.

---

### **Repair Is Bigger Than "I'm Sorry"**

Words matter.

Actions matter more.

Imagine apologising to a friend every week for the same behaviour while making no effort to change.

Eventually, the apology would lose its meaning.

Children notice this too.

Repair means trying again.

Practising again.

Growing again.

It means allowing children to see that adults are still learning.

When children watch parents actively working on themselves, they learn that growth never ends.

Not at five.

Not at fifteen.

Not at forty-five.

---

### **Children Need to See Healthy Conflict**

Many parents try to hide every disagreement from their children.

Their intention is loving.

But children who never witness healthy repair may quietly develop unrealistic beliefs.

*"Good families never argue."*

*"Healthy relationships never have conflict."*

Neither belief is true.

Children benefit from seeing respectful disagreement followed by respectful repair.

They learn that conflict does not automatically lead to rejection.

People can disagree...

become upset...

take a break...

come back...

apologise...

and reconnect.

That lesson may shape every future friendship, partnership and family relationship they will ever have.

---

### **When Your Child Doesn't Accept the Apology**

Sometimes children forgive immediately.

Sometimes they don't.

Imagine someone hurts your feelings.

Even after they apologise sincerely, you may still need time.

Children deserve that same space.

If your child walks away...

remains quiet...

or says,

*"I'm still angry,"*

respect their pace.

Repair cannot be forced.

An apology is an invitation.

Not a demand.

Your responsibility is to repair.

Your child's responsibility is to heal in their own time.

Trust grows when children discover that adults respect both.

## **Repairing After Your Child Makes a Mistake**

Repair is not only for parents.

It is also one of the greatest skills we can teach children.

Instead of demanding automatic apologies...

help them understand what repair actually means.

If they break a sibling's toy...

repair might mean helping replace it.

If they hurt someone's feelings...

repair might mean writing a note.

If they make a mess...

repair might mean cleaning it together.

Children learn that mistakes affect relationships.

They also learn that relationships can be restored through thoughtful action.

This shifts apologies from empty words to meaningful responsibility.

---

## **The Memory Your Child Will Carry**

Years from now, your child probably won't remember every disagreement.

They won't remember every raised voice.

But they will remember something much deeper.

Did the relationship feel safe enough to recover?

When they were hurt...

did someone come back?

When mistakes happened...

did someone take responsibility?

When emotions became messy...

did love remain?

Children build security not because conflict never happens.

They build security because conflict is followed by repair.

That pattern becomes their expectation of healthy relationships  
for the rest of their lives.

---

### **Repair Begins With Yourself**

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive after conflict is yourself.

Many loving parents carry enormous guilt.

They replay old mistakes long after their children have moved on.

Self-compassion is not about pretending those moments never  
happened.

It is about recognising that growth is possible.

The parent who reflects...

who apologises...

who learns...

who returns...

is already giving their child something profoundly valuable.

Not perfection.

Humanity.

Children do not need parents who never fall.

They need parents who show them how to get back up.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time you lose your patience, don't allow shame to write the ending of the story.

When everyone is calm, return to your child and say something like:

*"I'm sorry I shouted earlier. I was frustrated, but that wasn't the way I wanted to speak to you. You didn't deserve that. I'm going to keep practising, because I want to handle moments like that better."*

Then let your actions over the following days reinforce your words.

Repair is not a single conversation.

It is a pattern.

---

### **Remember This**

**Children do not need parents who never make mistakes. They need parents who show them what courage, humility and love look like after mistakes happen. Every sincere repair teaches a child that relationships are not defined by conflict, but by the willingness to return, reconnect and begin again.**

# Chapter 25

## **Building Resilience Without Hardening the Child Helping children face difficulty while preserving emotional safety**

**Every parent wants the same thing.**

To raise a child who can handle life.

A child who keeps trying after failure.

Who can face disappointment without falling apart.

Who is kind without being taken advantage of.

Who is confident without becoming arrogant.

Who can survive life's inevitable hardships without losing hope.

In other words, we want our children to be resilient.

But resilience is one of the most misunderstood words in parenting.

Some people believe resilient children simply become tougher.

They cry less.

Need less comfort.

Hide their emotions.

Get on with things.

Yet those qualities are not resilience.

They are often emotional survival.

True resilience is something entirely different.

It is the ability to experience life's difficulties without losing the capacity to connect, to hope and to recover.

Children do not become resilient because they stop feeling deeply.

They become resilient because they discover that deep feelings can be survived.

---

### **Resilience Is Not the Absence of Pain**

Imagine watching someone run a marathon.

They are exhausted.

Their legs ache.

Their breathing is heavy.

No one would say,

*"A truly strong runner shouldn't feel tired."*

Strength is not measured by the absence of effort.

It is measured by the ability to keep going despite it.

The same is true emotionally.

Resilient children still feel fear.

They still experience disappointment.

They still become angry.

They still grieve.

They still cry.

The difference is not what they feel.

It is what they believe about those feelings.

They learn,

*"This hurts."*

not,

*"This will destroy me."*

That belief changes everything.

---

### **Hardness Is Not Strength**

Adults sometimes confuse emotional hardness with emotional strength.

A child who never cries is praised.

A child who says,

*"I don't care,"*

is called tough.

A child who hides sadness is described as mature.

But emotional numbness is not resilience.

Imagine breaking your arm.

If you suddenly felt no pain at all, you would not celebrate.

You would worry.

Pain exists for a reason.

Emotions do too.

Children who stop showing emotion are not necessarily coping well.

Sometimes they have simply learned that showing emotion feels unsafe.

Real resilience keeps the heart open.

It does not teach the heart to stop feeling.

---

### **Protection Has Limits**

Every loving parent wants to protect their child.

It is one of our deepest instincts.

We want to remove disappointment.

Prevent failure.

Avoid heartbreak.

Solve every problem before our children even notice it exists.

But imagine trying to teach someone to ride a bicycle while never allowing them to wobble.

Eventually they would become an expert at sitting on a stationary bike.

Not at riding one.

Children cannot develop resilience without experiencing manageable difficulty.

The key word is **manageable**.

Overwhelming stress harms development.

But appropriate challenges strengthen it.

Just as muscles grow through effort followed by recovery, emotional resilience grows through challenges followed by support.

---

## **Confidence Comes From Competence**

Parents often try to build confidence by offering praise.

Praise matters.

But confidence grows from something deeper.

Competence.

Imagine telling a child,

*"You're so brave,"*

while carrying them across every obstacle.

Eventually, they begin believing that bravery belongs to your words, not to their own abilities.

Now imagine something different.

You stay nearby.

You encourage.

You help when needed.

But you allow them to climb the ladder themselves.

When they reach the top, confidence feels real.

Not because someone told them they could do it.

Because they experienced themselves doing it.

Confidence is built through evidence.

Every challenge children overcome becomes another piece of evidence that says,

*"I can handle difficult things."*

---

## **The Difference Between Rescue and Support**

Imagine your child is struggling with a puzzle.

You immediately finish it for them.

The puzzle is complete.

But whose confidence grew?

Now imagine sitting beside them instead.

You offer encouragement.

Perhaps one small hint.

You celebrate their persistence.

Eventually, they solve it themselves.

The puzzle is still complete.

This time, something else has grown as well.

Their belief in themselves.

Support strengthens children.

Rescuing often weakens them.

Not because helping is wrong.

Because children need opportunities to discover their own capability.

Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is stay close without taking over.

---

### **Let Them Borrow Your Confidence**

Children often doubt themselves long before adults do.

*"I can't do it."*

*"It's too hard."*

*"I'm going to fail."*

In those moments, avoid empty reassurance.

Instead of saying,

*"Of course you can,"*

try,

*"I know this feels difficult."*

*"You don't have to know how yet."*

*"Let's take one step at a time."*

*"I'll stay with you while you figure it out."*

These responses do something powerful.

They communicate confidence without denying reality.

Children borrow our belief in them until they are ready to believe in themselves.

Over time, borrowed confidence becomes genuine confidence.

---

## **Failure Is a Teacher**

Imagine if children learned to walk only after succeeding on the first attempt.

No one would ever walk.

Falling is not evidence that learning has failed.

It is evidence that learning is happening.

The same principle applies throughout childhood.

Losing a race.

Forgetting homework.

Getting the wrong answer.

Not making the team.

Having an argument with a friend.

These experiences are painful.

They are also opportunities.

Not because failure is enjoyable.

Because failure teaches lessons success often cannot.

Patience.

Persistence.

Adaptability.

Humility.

Problem-solving.

Resilience is not built by avoiding failure.

It is built by learning what failure cannot take away.

## **The Stories Children Tell Themselves**

Every difficult experience becomes a story.

The experience matters.

The story matters even more.

Imagine two children who both fail the same maths test.

One thinks,

*"I'm terrible at maths."*

The other thinks,

*"I didn't understand this one. I need more practice."*

The event is identical.

The future is completely different.

Parents influence these stories every day.

Not by pretending failure doesn't matter.

But by helping children understand what failure actually means.

Mistakes describe a moment.

They do not predict a lifetime.

---

## **Hope Is Part of Resilience**

Resilient children do not believe life is always easy.

They believe difficult moments are temporary.

Hope is not blind optimism.

It is confidence that tomorrow can be different from today.

Parents quietly nurture hope through ordinary conversations.

*"This feels hard today."*

*"You've overcome difficult things before."*

*"We'll keep trying together."*

Hope does not remove struggle.

It gives children a reason to keep moving through it.

And sometimes, that reason is enough.

---

### **The Childhood They Will Remember**

Years from now, your child will not remember every success.

They may not remember every trophy.

Every high grade.

Every football match.

But they will remember something much deeper.

Did they feel safe enough to try?

Safe enough to fail?

Safe enough to ask for help?

Safe enough to begin again?

Children become resilient not because adults demand strength.

They become resilient because they grow up in relationships that make courage feel possible.

The greatest gift we can offer is not a life without obstacles.

It is the quiet confidence that whatever life brings...

they will not have to face it believing they are alone or incapable.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child struggles with something difficult, resist the urge to solve it immediately.

Instead, ask yourself:

- **Can my child do part of this without me?**
- **How can I support without taking over?**
- **What small success could help them believe in themselves today?**

Remember, your goal is not simply to help your child succeed.

It is to help them discover that they are capable of succeeding.

---

## **Remember This**

**Resilience is not built by protecting children from every difficulty, nor by leaving them to face hardship alone. It grows in the space between challenge and connection—where children discover that life can be hard, emotions can be painful, and they are still capable of finding their way forward.**

# **PART V — BRINGING EMOTIONAL SAFETY INTO EVERYDAY LIFE**

## **Chapter 26**

### **Mornings, Transitions and Daily Battles**

#### **Reducing conflict during the most demanding parts of the day**

**Most families don't struggle because they lack love.**

They struggle because life keeps moving.

The alarm rings.

Breakfast needs making.

Shoes have disappeared.

Water bottles need filling.

Someone cannot find their homework.

The dog needs walking.

The bus is coming.

Work is waiting.

School starts in twenty minutes.

And somehow, your child suddenly decides that today is the day they absolutely cannot wear the socks they wore yesterday.

To an outsider, it looks like the argument is about socks.

You know it isn't.

Within minutes, voices become louder.

Everyone feels rushed.

The day hasn't really started...

and everyone is already exhausted.

If this sounds familiar, you are not alone.

Some of the hardest moments in family life are not caused by extraordinary problems.

They are created by ordinary transitions.

---

## **Why Transitions Are So Difficult**

Imagine you are deeply focused on reading a book.

Without warning, someone closes it, hands you your car keys and says,

*"We're leaving. Right now."*

Most adults would feel frustrated.

Not because driving is difficult.

Because the transition was abrupt.

Children experience this feeling many times every day.

Wake up.

Stop playing.

Leave the park.

Turn off the television.

Come to dinner.

Get in the bath.

Brush your teeth.

Go to bed.

Childhood is filled with transitions.

Each one requires the brain to let go of one activity and adapt to another.

That may sound simple.

For a developing brain, it often isn't.

---

## **The Brain Needs Time to Change Gears**

Imagine driving a manual car.

You wouldn't jump from first gear straight into fifth.

The engine would struggle.

Children's brains also need time to change gears.

When adults suddenly interrupt an activity, children often react before they have had time to adjust emotionally.

This is especially true when they are deeply engaged in play.

To adults, play may seem easy.

To children, it is serious work.

They are creating stories.

Solving problems.

Building worlds.

Exploring ideas.

Stopping suddenly can feel surprisingly difficult.

The stronger the engagement, the harder the transition.

Understanding this helps us stop interpreting resistance as disrespect.

Often, it is simply an unfinished emotional shift.

---

## **Mornings Begin the Night Before**

Parents often think morning routines begin when the alarm goes off.

In reality, they begin much earlier.

A child who went to bed too late...

slept poorly...

or woke several times during the night...

is already carrying a heavier emotional backpack before breakfast even begins.

The same is true for adults.

Think about how patient you feel after five hours of interrupted sleep.

Now imagine expecting your best emotional regulation during the busiest hour of the day.

Sleep does not solve every behavioural challenge.

But lack of sleep magnifies almost all of them.

Before changing your morning routine, ask yourself a simple question.

**Did the morning begin this morning... or did it begin last night?**

---

### **Rushing Changes Everyone's Nervous System**

There is one emotion that quietly fuels many family conflicts.

Urgency.

When adults feel rushed, their voices become quicker.  
Their movements become sharper.  
Their expectations become less flexible.  
Children notice this immediately.  
The adult's nervous system becomes activated.  
The child's nervous system responds.  
Soon everyone is reacting to everyone else's stress.  
No one intended to create conflict.  
Conflict simply grew from shared pressure.  
Children cannot separate your urgency from their own  
experience.  
If your nervous system feels frantic, theirs often will too.

---

### **Predictability Creates Cooperation**

Children thrive on knowing what comes next.  
Imagine arriving at an airport with no departure board.  
No announcements.  
No timetable.  
You would constantly wonder,  
*"What's happening next?"*

Many children experience daily life like this.

Not because parents are doing anything wrong.

Because life is busy.

Predictable routines reduce uncertainty.

Wake up.

Get dressed.

Brush teeth.

Breakfast.

Shoes.

Bag.

Leave.

The more consistent the sequence becomes, the less energy children spend wondering what comes next.

That energy becomes available for cooperation instead.

Children often appear more organised simply because their brains no longer have to predict every step.

---

## **Warnings Are Gifts**

Parents sometimes avoid giving warnings because they fear children will argue for longer.

Ironically, the opposite is often true.

Imagine someone suddenly switches off the lights while you are reading.

Frustrating.

Now imagine they say,

*"Five more minutes, then we'll turn the lights off."*

The ending hasn't changed.

Your brain simply has time to prepare.

Children benefit enormously from predictable warnings.

*"Ten more minutes."*

*"Five more minutes."*

*"One last turn."*

These simple reminders allow the nervous system to begin letting go before the transition actually happens.

Preparation reduces resistance because surprise becomes smaller.

---

### **Daily Battles Are Rarely About Winning**

Think about the arguments that happen most often.

Getting dressed.

Brushing teeth.

Leaving the house.

Homework.

Bath time.

Bedtime.

These conflicts repeat because both adult and child become focused on the immediate task.

The shoes.

The toothbrush.

The pyjamas.

The homework.

But beneath every daily battle is another question.

**Can we stay connected while doing difficult things together?**

Children remember far less about whether they wore the blue jumper or the green one.

They remember how mornings felt.

Whether home felt rushed.

Whether mistakes were allowed.

Whether adults remained emotionally available when life became busy.

## **Cooperation Grows From Participation**

Children naturally cooperate more when they feel involved rather than controlled.

This does not mean they make every decision.

It means they have opportunities to contribute.

A child might choose which jumper to wear.

Which toothbrush to use.

Which song plays during breakfast.

Whether to hop or walk to the bathroom.

Small choices create ownership.

Ownership reduces unnecessary power struggles.

Children still follow adult leadership.

They simply feel included rather than directed.

---

## **Expect Difficult Times, Not Perfect Days**

Even the healthiest routines will not prevent every difficult morning.

Children become ill.

Parents oversleep.

Homework gets forgotten.

Traffic is worse than expected.

Someone spills orange juice across the kitchen table.

Life happens.

The goal is not creating perfect mornings.

It is creating families that recover more quickly when mornings become imperfect.

Children do not need routines that never fail.

They need adults who remain flexible when they do.

---

### **The Hidden Opportunity Inside Daily Routines**

The ordinary moments of family life rarely appear important while they are happening.

Packing lunch.

Finding shoes.

Walking to school.

Driving to football practice.

Yet these moments quietly shape relationships.

Children remember emotional patterns far more than specific events.

Did mornings usually feel tense?

Or connected?

Did transitions feel rushed?

Or predictable?

Did home feel like a place where everyone hurried...

or a place where people helped one another?

These memories accumulate slowly.

One ordinary day at a time.

The routines we repeat eventually become the emotional culture of our family.

---

### **Try This Today**

Choose one transition that regularly creates conflict.

Perhaps leaving the house.

Turning off screens.

Starting homework.

Or bedtime.

Instead of changing your child, change the transition.

Add a warning.

Slow the pace by five minutes.

Create a predictable routine.

Offer one appropriate choice.

Then notice whether the emotional tone changes before the behaviour does.

Small adjustments often produce surprisingly large results.

---

### **Remember This**

**Most daily battles are not really about shoes, homework or bedtime. They are about brains being asked to change direction. When we make transitions more predictable, slow down where possible and lead with calm consistency, ordinary routines become opportunities for connection instead of conflict.**

# Chapter 27

## Siblings, Sharing and Fairness

### Guiding conflict without choosing a “good child” and a “bad child”

**If you have more than one child, conflict is not a sign that something is wrong.**

It is a sign that two developing human beings are learning how to live alongside each other.

One wants the toy.

The other already has it.

One wants more attention.

The other feels ignored.

One follows the rules.

The other pushes every boundary.

One cries.

The other shouts.

Sometimes they laugh together as though they are best friends.

Ten minutes later they are arguing over a pencil.

Many parents secretly wonder,

**"Why can't they just get along?"**

The answer is simple.

Because relationships are learned.

No child is born knowing how to share.

How to negotiate.

How to compromise.

How to manage jealousy.

How to repair after conflict.

Siblings are not simply growing up together.

They are becoming one another's first teachers in relationships.

That is why conflict between them is not only inevitable.

It is valuable.

---

### **Home Is Their First Relationship Classroom**

Think about every relationship your child will have in the future.

Friendships.

Classmates.

Partners.

Colleagues.

Neighbours.

Every one of those relationships will require similar skills.

Listening.

Waiting.

Sharing.

Compromising.

Apologising.

Repairing.

Respecting boundaries.

Siblings practise these skills every single day.

Not because family life is always peaceful.

Because it isn't.

Every disagreement becomes another opportunity to learn how relationships work.

Our role is not to eliminate conflict.

It is to help children move through conflict without damaging one another.

---

### **Not Every Conflict Needs an Adult**

When children argue, many parents immediately step in.

Sometimes that is absolutely necessary.

If someone is being hurt...

if safety is at risk...

if one child is consistently overpowering another...

adults must intervene.

But not every disagreement needs rescuing.

Imagine two children trying to decide who gets the red crayon.

If an adult solves every disagreement, children lose hundreds of opportunities to practise solving problems themselves.

Sometimes the most helpful response is simply observing.

Waiting.

Giving children time to negotiate.

Stepping in only when they genuinely cannot move forward safely.

Confidence grows through practice.

Relationship skills are no different.

---

## **Fair Is Not Always Equal**

Perhaps no sentence is spoken more often between siblings than,

*"That's not fair!"*

Parents naturally try to make everything equal.

The same number of biscuits.

The same bedtime story.

The same amount of attention.

But equality and fairness are not always the same thing.

Imagine one child has a broken leg.

Would giving both children the same pair of crutches be fair?

Of course not.

One child needs something different.

Families work the same way.

One child may need extra reassurance after a difficult day.

Another may need more independence.

One child may require additional support with schoolwork.

Another may need help making friends.

Children gradually learn one of life's most important lessons.

Fairness means everyone gets what they need.

Not necessarily the exact same thing.

---

### **The Trap of Labels**

Families often develop invisible roles.

*"She's the responsible one."*

*"He's the difficult one."*

*"She's the sensitive one."*

*"He's the sporty one."*

*"She's the clever one."*

These labels may seem harmless.

Sometimes they even sound positive.

But over time, children begin living inside them.

The "responsible" child becomes afraid to make mistakes.

The "difficult" child begins expecting rejection.

The "funny" child hides sadness.

The "quiet" child stops believing their voice matters.

Children are constantly changing.

Labels freeze them in place.

Describe today's behaviour.

Never define tomorrow's identity.

---

### **Avoid Becoming the Referee**

Imagine watching a football match where the referee also chooses the winning team.

No one would trust the game.

Children feel something similar when parents rush to decide who is right before understanding what happened.

Sometimes there is a clear answer.

Someone hit.

Someone pushed.

Someone deliberately hurt another child.

Those moments require clear boundaries.

But many sibling conflicts are far more complicated.

Both children feel misunderstood.

Both believe they are right.

Both are carrying real emotions.

Instead of deciding who is good and who is bad...

be curious.

*"Help me understand what happened."*

Ask each child separately.

Listen without interrupting.

Often the goal is not discovering a villain.

It is understanding two different experiences of the same event.

## **Every Child Wants to Feel Seen**

Imagine trying to tell someone something important while they only look at the person beside you.

Eventually, you would stop trying.

Children need to know there is enough emotional space for everyone's experience.

This does not mean every child is equally right.

It means every child deserves to feel heard.

One child may feel angry.

The other frightened.

One disappointed.

The other embarrassed.

Both experiences can be real at the same time.

Acknowledging one child's feelings does not invalidate the other's.

Parents who consistently make room for both emotional experiences reduce competition for attention.

Children no longer need to shout louder to feel seen.

---

## **Jealousy Is Part of Love**

Many parents become worried when siblings express jealousy.

A new baby arrives.

The older child suddenly becomes demanding.

They interrupt feeding.

They ask to be carried.

They behave much younger than their age.

Sometimes they even say,

*"I wish the baby wasn't here."*

These words can feel shocking.

But jealousy is not evidence of a lack of love.

It is often evidence of a fear.

*"Has my place in this family changed?"*

Children rarely need a lecture in these moments.

They need reassurance.

Not reassurance that everything is exactly the same.

Because it isn't.

They need reassurance that love has not become smaller simply because the family has become bigger.

Love expands.

Children slowly learn to trust that truth through experience.

## **Teach the Skill Behind Sharing**

Adults often tell children,

*"Share."*

Sharing sounds simple.

In reality, it requires several complicated skills.

Waiting.

Trusting.

Managing disappointment.

Believing you will eventually get a turn.

Considering someone else's needs.

That is a remarkable amount of emotional work.

Instead of demanding sharing immediately, help children practise the skills underneath it.

Waiting together.

Using a timer.

Taking turns.

Planning what happens next.

Children who understand the process are much more likely to share willingly than children who simply hear the command.

## **Repair Matters More Than Winning**

After a disagreement, parents often focus on one question.

*"Who started it?"*

There is another question that matters far more.

*"How do we help this relationship recover?"*

Perhaps one child apologises.

Perhaps they rebuild the tower together.

Perhaps they help find the broken toy.

Perhaps they simply spend a few quiet minutes reconnecting through play.

Relationships are strengthened not because conflict never happens.

They are strengthened because children learn that conflict does not have to become permanent distance.

Repair teaches siblings something they will carry into every future relationship.

People can hurt one another.

Take responsibility.

Reconnect.

And begin again.

## **Your Children Are Watching You**

The way you handle sibling conflict becomes your children's model for handling conflict with everyone else.

Do they see shouting...

or listening?

Blame...

or curiosity?

Punishment...

or accountability?

Competition...

or cooperation?

Children rarely become skilled at relationships because someone explains relationships.

They become skilled because they repeatedly experience healthy ones.

Home becomes the place where emotional habits are rehearsed long before they are needed elsewhere.

---

## **The Relationship You Are Really Building**

Years from now, your children may no longer live under the same roof.

They may live in different cities.

Different countries.

They may have families of their own.

What kind of relationship do you hope they have then?

That future relationship is not created in adulthood.

It begins now.

In the ordinary arguments over toys.

The disagreements about fairness.

The jealousy.

The apologies.

The repairs.

Every time you help siblings understand one another instead of simply deciding who wins...

you are investing in a relationship that may last for the rest of their lives.

That is far more valuable than winning today's argument.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your children argue, pause before deciding who is right.

Ask each child separately:

- **"What happened from your point of view?"**
- **"How do you think your brother or sister felt?"**
- **"What would help make things better now?"**

Focus less on assigning blame and more on rebuilding the relationship.

That is where the deepest learning happens.

---

### **Remember This**

**Sibling conflict is not a problem to eliminate—it is a relationship to guide. When children learn that every voice matters, every feeling deserves respect and every conflict can be repaired, they build skills that will shape every meaningful relationship for the rest of their lives.**

# Chapter 28

## School, Separation and Social Struggles

### Supporting children through challenges outside the home

**There comes a moment in every parent's journey when they realise something difficult.**

They cannot protect their child from everything.

Sooner or later, children step into a world that parents cannot fully control.

A classroom.

A playground.

A school bus.

A birthday party.

A sleepover.

A sports team.

A friendship that suddenly changes.

For the first time, children begin facing emotional challenges without us standing beside them.

Someone doesn't choose them for a game.

A teacher misunderstands them.

A friend stops talking to them.

They feel left out.

They miss home.

They worry about fitting in.

And every afternoon they return carrying experiences we never witnessed.

Sometimes they tell us everything.

Sometimes they tell us almost nothing.

Yet those experiences quietly shape how they see themselves.

This chapter is about helping children grow strong enough to face the world—without expecting the world to always be gentle.

---

## **The World Gets Bigger**

For the first few years of life, home is almost everything.

Parents know what happened.

Who cried.

Who laughed.

Who needed comfort.

But school changes that.

Children begin spending hours each day in places where parents are not present.

They solve problems without us.

Make mistakes without us.

Experience success without us.

Feel embarrassed, proud, lonely, excited and disappointed without us.

This growing independence is both exciting and frightening.

Not because children are becoming more distant.

Because they are becoming more themselves.

Our role slowly changes.

We stop managing every experience.

We begin helping children make sense of those experiences instead.

---

### **Separation Is a Sign of Growth**

Few parenting moments are more emotional than watching a child walk away for the first time.

The first day of nursery.

The first day of school.

The first sleepover.

The first camp.

Some children wave and run inside without looking back.

Others cling tightly to a parent's hand.

They cry.

They beg to stay home.

They promise they won't be difficult if they can just stay with you.

These moments can break a parent's heart.

It is tempting to believe that confidence means separating without tears.

It doesn't.

A child who cries because they are leaving you is not weak.

They are showing the strength of the bond you have built.

Secure attachment does not eliminate sadness during separation.

It makes separation meaningful.

The goal is not raising children who never miss us.

The goal is raising children who trust that we always come back.

---

## **Goodbye Matters**

Parents often focus on making separation easier.

Sometimes, in an effort to avoid tears, they quietly slip away while their child is distracted.

Although the intention is loving, the message can be confusing.

Children may later wonder,

*"Will Mum disappear again?"*

Predictable goodbyes create trust.

A warm hug.

A familiar phrase.

A smile.

A promise that matches reality.

*"I'll be back after school."*

Not,

*"I'll be back in a minute,"*

when you won't.

Children build security when adults become predictable.

The goodbye may still include tears.

But it also includes certainty.

And certainty is calming.

---

## **Friendships Are Emotional Laboratories**

Adults sometimes think children are "just playing."

Children know something much bigger is happening.

Every friendship teaches lessons about belonging.

Trust.

Kindness.

Conflict.

Forgiveness.

Acceptance.

Rejection.

A child whose best friend chooses someone else to play with may experience genuine heartbreak.

Adults often minimise these moments.

*"You'll make another friend."*

*"Don't worry about it."*

*"It's not a big deal."*

To the child, it is.

Because belonging is one of our deepest human needs.

It begins in childhood.

When we acknowledge the importance of friendships, we also acknowledge the importance of the emotions attached to them.

---

### **Being Left Out Hurts**

Imagine arriving at work and discovering that everyone else was invited to an important meeting except you.

No explanation.

No invitation.

Just silence.

Most adults would feel hurt.

Children experience the same pain.

Perhaps even more intensely.

Not being invited to a birthday party.

Watching classmates whisper together.

Seeing everyone else playing while they stand alone.

These experiences activate one of our oldest emotional fears.

### **"Do I belong?"**

Parents naturally want to solve the problem.

Sometimes we can.

Often we can't.

What we can always do is make sure children never feel they are carrying that hurt alone.

---

### **Confidence Does Not Mean Popularity**

Many parents quietly hope their child will be liked by everyone.

But popularity is not the same as emotional health.

Children do not need dozens of friends.

They need meaningful relationships.

One safe friendship often matters more than ten shallow ones.

Instead of asking,

*"How many friends does my child have?"*

consider asking,

*"Does my child have relationships where they feel accepted for who they are?"*

That question tells us much more about emotional wellbeing.

---

### **Helping Without Taking Over**

When children come home upset about school, parents often feel an immediate urge to fix the situation.

Call the teacher.

Message another parent.

Solve the disagreement.

Sometimes intervention is necessary.

Especially when safety, bullying or serious emotional distress is involved.

But many everyday social challenges are opportunities for growth.

A disagreement over a game.

A misunderstanding.

A friendship that needs repairing.

Children build confidence when adults guide rather than immediately rescue.

Ask questions.

Listen carefully.

Help them think.

Support them in finding their own next step whenever it is safe and appropriate.

Every problem solved together becomes another lesson in resilience.

---

## **When Children Don't Want to Go to School**

Every child occasionally says,

*"I don't want to go today."*

Sometimes the reason is simple.

They're tired.

They have a spelling test.

They'd rather stay home.

Other times, those words carry much more.

Anxiety.

Loneliness.

Bullying.

Feeling overwhelmed.

Academic struggles.

Social worries.

The sentence may stay the same.

The meaning underneath it may be completely different.

Curiosity matters more than assumptions.

Instead of immediately saying,

*"You'll be fine,"*

try,

*"Tell me what feels hardest about today."*

Children often reveal far more when they feel understood before they feel reassured.

---

## **Helping Children Face Difficult People**

One of the hardest truths in parenting is this:

We cannot remove every difficult person from our children's lives.

Sooner or later, they will meet classmates who exclude them.

Children who tease.

Adults who misunderstand them.

Friends who disappoint them.

Our goal is not preparing children for a perfect world.

It is preparing them to move through an imperfect one.

Children need to know they can ask for help.

That they deserve respect.

That they do not have to accept cruelty.

That kindness and boundaries can exist together.

These lessons become lifelong protection.

---

## **Home Becomes the Place They Return To**

School is where children test themselves.

Home is where they recover.

Imagine spending the entire day navigating friendships, expectations, learning and social pressure.

What would you hope to find when you returned home?

Judgment?

Interrogation?

Or safety?

Children may not always talk immediately.

Some need time.

Some need movement.

Some need a snack before words become possible.

What matters most is that home remains a place where emotions are welcomed rather than evaluated.

The world will ask children to perform.

Home should remind them they are loved without performing.

---

## **One Day They Will Walk Into the World Alone**

There will come a day when you are no longer walking your child to school.

No longer waiting outside the classroom.

No longer packing their lunch.

They will step into the world on their own.

You cannot choose their teachers.

You cannot choose their friends.

You cannot remove every disappointment.

But you can give them something even more valuable.

The confidence that wherever they go, they carry within them the emotional safety that was built at home.

A child who knows,

*"I am loved."*

*"I belong."*

*"I can ask for help."*

*"I can recover from difficult days."*

walks into the world differently.

Not because life becomes easier.

Because they no longer face it alone.

The relationship you build at home quietly becomes the foundation they stand on everywhere else.

---

### **Try This Today**

The next time your child comes home from school, resist asking,

**"How was your day?"**

Instead, try one of these questions:

- **"What made you smile today?"**
- **"What felt challenging today?"**
- **"Did anyone show you kindness today?"**
- **"Did you show kindness to someone else?"**

These questions invite conversation rather than one-word answers.

Over time, they help children see home as a place where their emotional world matters just as much as their academic one.

---

### **Remember This**

**We cannot walk beside our children through every classroom, playground or friendship. But we can give them something that travels wherever they go: the confidence that they are**

**loved, capable and never alone in facing life's challenges. Home does not prepare children by protecting them from the world. It prepares them by becoming the safest place to return after meeting it.**

# Chapter 29

## **Creating a Calm Corner That Actually Helps Building a space for regulation, not punishment**

**Walk into almost any parenting website or social media page, and sooner or later you will see the same advice.**

*"Create a Calm Corner."*

It sounds simple.

Add a few cushions.

Some books.

A breathing poster.

A soft toy.

Perhaps a sensory bottle.

Problem solved.

Except many parents discover something surprising.

Their child refuses to use it.

Or only goes there when forced.

Or sees it as another version of the naughty step.

The Calm Corner quietly becomes a place children fear instead of trust.

The problem isn't the corner.

It's the meaning attached to it.

A Calm Corner is not a place where children are sent because they have behaved badly.

It is a place they choose—or are gently invited—to help their nervous system feel safe again.

That difference changes everything.

---

### **A Calm Corner Is Not a Time-Out**

For generations, many children were told,

*"Go to your room until you can behave."*

The message was clear.

**Big emotions make you unacceptable.**

You can come back when you stop having them.

A true Calm Corner communicates something completely different.

**Big emotions are welcome.**

Unsafe behaviours are not.

You do not have to face overwhelming feelings alone.

When children believe the Calm Corner is where they are sent after making mistakes, it becomes associated with shame.

When they believe it is a place where they can recover, it becomes associated with safety.

One isolates.

The other supports.

The furniture may look identical.

The emotional experience is completely different.

---

### **The Goal Is Regulation, Not Obedience**

Imagine arriving home after the hardest day of your life.

Someone points to a chair and says,

*"Sit there until you feel better."*

Would you suddenly become calm?

Probably not.

Now imagine someone says,

*"Would sitting somewhere quiet help right now?"*

You have been offered support instead of control.

Children deserve the same respect.

A Calm Corner should never exist to make children easier for adults.

Its purpose is to help children reconnect with themselves.

Sometimes that happens in five minutes.

Sometimes it takes longer.

The measure of success is not how quickly children become quiet.

It is whether they leave feeling more regulated than when they arrived.

---

### **Safety Comes Before Strategy**

Many parents become focused on filling the Calm Corner with activities.

Breathing cards.

Emotion charts.

Sensory toys.

Fidget tools.

Mindfulness books.

All of these can be wonderful.

But none of them matter if the child does not first feel emotionally safe.

Imagine sitting in the world's most comfortable chair while someone criticises you.

The chair cannot calm your nervous system.

Relationships always matter more than objects.

The most important feature of a Calm Corner is not what is inside it.

It is the emotional atmosphere surrounding it.

Children need to know,

*"This is a place where I am accepted, even when my emotions are difficult."*

That belief makes every other tool more effective.

---

### **Introduce the Calm Corner Before It's Needed**

One of the biggest mistakes parents make is introducing the Calm Corner during a meltdown.

Imagine teaching someone where the emergency exits are after the fire alarm has already started.

The information arrives too late.

Children should discover the Calm Corner on peaceful days.

Sit there together.

Read stories.

Draw pictures.

Practise breathing.

Talk about feelings.

Laugh.

Play.

Let the space become familiar long before emotions become overwhelming.

The brain remembers safe experiences.

When the next difficult moment arrives, the Calm Corner already feels known.

Not unfamiliar.

Not threatening.

---

## **Children Learn by Watching You**

Imagine telling your child,

*"The Calm Corner helps us when we feel overwhelmed."*

Then they never see you use anything similar yourself.

Now imagine something different.

One evening you quietly say,

*"I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed. I'm going to sit quietly for five minutes and take some deep breaths."*

Without realising it, you have taught a powerful lesson.

Adults need emotional recovery too.

Children are far more likely to use calming spaces when they see emotional regulation modelled rather than merely explained.

The Calm Corner is not only for children.

It represents a family belief.

Everyone deserves healthy ways to recover.

---

### **What Actually Belongs in a Calm Corner?**

Parents often ask,

*"What should I put inside?"*

There is no perfect list.

The best Calm Corner is built around one simple question.

### **What helps my child feel safe?**

For one child, that may be a soft blanket.

For another, colouring pencils.

A favourite book.

A sensory bottle.

Noise-reducing headphones.

A weighted cushion.

Stuffed animals.

Breathing cards.

Emotion cards.

A feelings wheel.

A notebook.

Gentle music.

Your Little Calm Club Calm Cards.

The goal is not filling the space.

The goal is choosing tools that genuinely support regulation.

A few meaningful items are far more valuable than shelves full of distractions.

---

### **Less Is Often More**

Imagine walking into a room designed for relaxation.

Now imagine it contains flashing lights, dozens of toys, loud music and overflowing shelves.

It would probably feel stimulating rather than calming.

Some Calm Corners accidentally become playrooms.

Children become distracted rather than regulated.

Keep the environment simple.

Soft colours.

Comfortable seating.

Gentle lighting.

A sense of order.

The nervous system naturally settles in spaces that feel predictable and uncluttered.

Calm environments quietly invite calm bodies.

---

### **Never Force the Calm Corner**

Imagine someone saying,

*"Go and relax right now."*

Most adults would immediately feel less relaxed.

Children are no different.

A Calm Corner loses its purpose the moment it becomes punishment.

Some children will choose it willingly.

Others may need an invitation.

*"Would sitting in the Calm Corner help?"*

*"Would you like me to come with you?"*

*"Would you rather stay here or take a few quiet minutes together?"*

Choice preserves dignity.

Children are much more likely to return to a space that they experienced as supportive rather than controlling.

## **The Calm Corner Is Not the Finish Line**

Many parents believe the work ends once the child becomes calm.

Actually, that is when the next stage begins.

Connection.

Reflection.

Problem-solving.

The Calm Corner is not where emotions disappear.

It is where the nervous system becomes ready for conversation again.

Afterwards, you might simply ask,

*"Are you ready to talk about what happened?"*

Sometimes the answer will be yes.

Sometimes no.

That is okay.

The goal is not immediate discussion.

The goal is helping children return to a state where discussion eventually becomes possible.

---

## **One Day They Won't Need the Corner**

At first, children rely on physical spaces.

A cosy chair.

A favourite blanket.

A breathing card.

A trusted adult sitting nearby.

Over time, something remarkable begins to happen.

The Calm Corner slowly moves inside them.

One day your child takes a deep breath without being reminded.

They ask for a quiet moment.

They recognise they are becoming overwhelmed.

They choose a strategy that helps them recover.

The external space has become an internal skill.

That was always the real purpose.

The Calm Corner was never the destination.

It was the bridge.

---

### **Try This Today**

Look at your Calm Corner—or imagine creating one—and ask yourself these questions:

- **Does this space feel like a place of safety or a place of punishment?**

- **Have we explored it together when everyone was calm?**
- **Would my child choose to go there, or only go because they have to?**
- **Does it contain a few meaningful tools instead of lots of distractions?**

If you can answer **yes** to those questions, you're building far more than a quiet corner.

You're building a place where emotional safety becomes a daily experience.

---

### **Remember This**

**A Calm Corner is not somewhere children are sent because their emotions are too much. It is somewhere they learn that their emotions can be understood, supported and safely regulated. The most powerful calming tool in the room will never be the cushion, the breathing card or the sensory toy. It will always be the message the space communicates: "You are safe here, exactly as you are, and you don't have to find your way back to calm alone."**

# Chapter 30

## Creating a Family Culture of Emotional Safety

### The daily habits that shape lifelong emotional health

**When people think about emotionally healthy families, they often imagine extraordinary moments.**

Long conversations.

Powerful life lessons.

Perfect responses.

Life-changing parenting techniques.

But emotional safety is rarely built through extraordinary moments.

It is built through ordinary ones.

The way you greet your child in the morning.

The way you respond when they spill a drink.

The tone you use when they interrupt you.

The hug before school.

The apology after an argument.

The bedtime conversation.

These moments may seem too small to matter.

They are not.

Children do not build their understanding of love from occasional grand gestures.

They build it from thousands of tiny interactions that quietly answer one question over and over again:

**"What happens when I have big feelings?"**

The answer to that question becomes the emotional climate of your family.

And eventually, it becomes part of your child's identity.

---

### **A Family Is More Than a Collection of Individuals**

Every family has a culture.

Some families laugh loudly.

Some avoid conflict.

Some celebrate every success.

Some rarely talk about emotions.

Some apologise easily.

Some never apologise at all.

Most families never consciously choose these patterns.

They simply inherit them.

Children absorb family culture long before they understand it.  
They notice what adults do when someone is upset.  
They notice whether mistakes are welcomed as opportunities to learn or treated as failures.  
They notice whether people interrupt each other or listen.  
Whether anger becomes shouting or conversation.  
Whether tears are comforted or dismissed.  
Family culture is not created by rules hanging on a wall.  
It is created by behaviours repeated every day.

---

### **The Emotional Climate Matters More Than Perfect Moments**

Imagine walking into two different homes.  
In the first, everything is tidy.  
The rules are clear.  
Children behave well.  
But everyone seems tense.  
Mistakes are met with criticism.  
Emotions are quickly shut down.  
In the second home, life is sometimes messy.

People occasionally lose patience.

But apologies happen.

Laughter returns quickly.

Feelings are spoken about openly.

Children know they are loved even on difficult days.

Which home feels emotionally safer?

Children remember atmosphere far more than perfection.

They remember how home felt.

Safe.

Predictable.

Accepting.

Or uncertain.

That emotional climate becomes the foundation from which they explore the world.

---

### **Safety Is Built Through Predictability**

Imagine crossing a bridge every day.

You trust it because it is always there.

It does not disappear without warning.

Relationships work the same way.

Children feel emotionally safe when adults become predictable.

Not predictable in mood.

Predictable in values.

They know what happens after mistakes.

They know adults return after conflict.

They know feelings are allowed.

They know boundaries remain steady.

Predictability allows children to relax.

When they no longer spend energy wondering,

*"Will Mum explode today?"*

or,

*"Will Dad stop loving me if I get this wrong?"*

they have more energy available for learning, curiosity and connection.

---

### **Emotional Safety Does Not Mean Emotional Comfort**

This distinction matters.

An emotionally safe family is not one where children never feel disappointed.

Or frustrated.

Or sad.

Those emotions are part of life.

Emotional safety means children can experience those feelings without fearing rejection.

Imagine a child failing a test.

They already feel disappointed.

If they now worry,

*"My parents will think I'm a failure,"*

their emotional burden doubles.

If instead they know,

*"My parents will help me learn from this,"*

the disappointment remains.

The fear disappears.

Safety does not remove difficult emotions.

It changes how children move through them.

---

## **The Language of Emotion Becomes the Language of the Family**

In emotionally safe families, feelings are not hidden.

Nor are they dramatised.

They are acknowledged.

Named.

Respected.

Children hear phrases like:

*"You look disappointed."*

*"That was frustrating."*

*"I understand why you're upset."*

*"Let's figure this out together."*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"Thank you for telling me."*

*"How can I help?"*

Over time, these phrases become more than conversations.

They become family values.

Eventually, children begin saying them to siblings.

Friends.

Classmates.

And one day, to their own children.

The emotional language of one generation quietly shapes the next.

## **Small Rituals Create Lasting Security**

Families often search for dramatic ways to strengthen relationships.

The truth is much simpler.

Children remember rituals.

Reading together before bed.

Friday pizza nights.

Goodbye hugs.

A silly handshake before school.

Talking about the best and hardest part of the day over dinner.

A Saturday morning walk.

These routines may seem ordinary.

But they quietly communicate something extraordinary.

*"No matter how busy life becomes, we always come back to each other."*

Rituals create anchors.

And children need anchors in a world that is constantly changing.

---

## **Children Learn How to Treat Others by Watching How They Are Treated**

Parents often tell children,

*"Be kind."*

*"Use respectful words."*

*"Listen carefully."*

Those lessons matter.

But children learn even more from observation.

How do adults disagree?

How do they apologise?

How do they respond when someone is struggling?

How do they speak about people who are not present?

Every interaction becomes part of a child's invisible education.

Long before children consciously choose their values, they have already spent years watching ours.

Home is their first experience of what love, respect and safety look like.

---

## **The Family Doesn't Need a Perfect Parent**

Many parents spend years chasing perfection.

The perfect response.

The perfect consequence.

The perfect bedtime routine.

The perfect childhood.

Children are not asking for perfection.

They are asking for connection.

They need adults who are emotionally available.

Adults who are willing to learn.

Adults who apologise.

Adults who keep showing up.

The pressure to become a perfect parent often prevents us from becoming a present one.

Presence matters far more.

---

### **The Legacy You Leave**

One day, your child will no longer need you to remind them to brush their teeth.

Or pack their school bag.

Or tie their shoes.

Those practical lessons gradually fade into independence.

Something else remains.

The emotional atmosphere they grew up inside.

Years from now, when life becomes difficult, your child may hear an inner voice.

Perhaps it says,

*"I'm allowed to ask for help."*

*"My feelings make sense."*

*"Mistakes don't define me."*

*"I can begin again."*

That voice will not appear by accident.

It will have been built through thousands of ordinary moments in your home.

Every calm conversation.

Every repaired relationship.

Every boundary held with kindness.

Every feeling welcomed without shame.

Every time you chose connection over control.

That inner voice becomes one of the greatest inheritances a parent can leave.

## **This Is the Heart of Little Calm Club**

Throughout this book, we have explored the developing brain.

The nervous system.

Behaviour.

Boundaries.

Connection.

Repair.

Resilience.

Calming tools.

Problem-solving.

Daily routines.

None of these ideas stand alone.

Together, they point toward one simple truth.

Children do not need adults who eliminate every difficult emotion.

They need adults who help them move through those emotions with safety, confidence and hope.

That has always been the heart of Little Calm Club.

### **Gentle tools for big feelings.**

Not because big feelings disappear.

But because children discover they are never bigger than the relationships that hold them.

---

### **Try This Today**

Choose one small family habit you would like to strengthen.

Not something dramatic.

Something sustainable.

Perhaps a bedtime conversation.

A goodbye hug every morning.

Naming one feeling at dinner.

A family apology when someone loses their patience.

A weekly walk together.

Ask yourself:

**"If we repeated this small habit for the next ten years, what kind of family would we become?"**

The answer may surprise you.

Because families are not shaped by extraordinary days.

They are shaped by ordinary ones, repeated with love.

---

## **Remember This**

**A child's emotional wellbeing is not built through one perfect conversation or one perfect parenting strategy. It is built through the emotional culture of everyday family life. Every time a child feels safe enough to be honest, loved enough to make mistakes, and supported enough to begin again, another brick is added to the foundation they will carry for the rest of their lives. In the end, that is the greatest gift any family can give: not a life without big feelings, but a home where big feelings are always met with love.**

# CONCLUSION

## **Becoming the Calm Your Child Can Return To Why progress matters more than perfection**

**If you've reached this page, I want to begin by saying something that perhaps no one has said to you in a long time.**

Thank you.

Thank you for caring enough to keep learning.

Thank you for choosing curiosity over certainty.

Thank you for believing that the relationship you build with your child matters.

Parenting is one of the few jobs in the world where we are asked to do something incredibly important...

without first being taught how.

We bring our own childhood into every conversation.

Our own fears.

Our own hopes.

Our own unfinished stories.

Then we try to guide another human being through emotions that are often just as overwhelming for us as they are for them.

It is beautiful.

It is exhausting.

It is deeply human.

And no one does it perfectly.

---

### **If You Remember Only One Thing...**

Throughout this book, we have explored many ideas.

The developing brain.

The nervous system.

Behaviour as communication.

Connection.

Boundaries.

Repair.

Resilience.

Calming tools.

Problem-solving.

Emotional vocabulary.

Daily routines.

Each chapter offered something practical.

But beneath every strategy lies one simple truth.

**Children do not need perfect parents.**

They need emotionally available ones.

Parents who are willing to pause.

To listen.

To repair.

To keep learning.

To return.

Again and again.

Because what shapes a child most is not perfection.

It is consistency.

---

### **Big Feelings Were Never the Enemy**

When we began this journey, we asked one question.

**What if your child's biggest feelings aren't asking you to stop them... but to understand them?**

Now you know the answer.

Anger is information.

Fear is information.

Sadness is information.

Frustration is information.

Even silence is information.

Big feelings are not interruptions to childhood.

They are childhood.

Every emotion is part of how children discover who they are, how relationships work, and how the world responds when life becomes difficult.

Our task has never been to eliminate those feelings.

It has always been to help children move through them safely.

---

### **Your Child Will Not Remember Every Strategy**

Years from now, your child probably won't remember the name of a breathing exercise.

They won't remember every sentence you carefully practised.

They won't remember every checklist or every activity.

But they will remember something much deeper.

They will remember how home felt.

Did they feel safe bringing you their mistakes?

Did they believe their emotions mattered?

Did they know they could disappoint you without losing your love?

Did they learn that arguments could end with repair?

Did they discover that difficult feelings were something to move through...

not something to fear?

Those memories quietly become the foundation of adulthood.

---

### **The Voice They Carry**

One day your child will stand in a place where you cannot stand beside them.

They will fail at something important.

Lose someone they love.

Feel rejected.

Make a mistake.

Question themselves.

In those moments, they may hear a voice.

Perhaps it says,

*"Take a breath."*

*"You can figure this out."*

*"Mistakes don't define you."*

*"You are still worthy of love."*

*"This feeling won't last forever."*

That voice will sound familiar.

Because, for years, it was yours.

Eventually, the way we speak to our children becomes the way they speak to themselves.

There are few greater gifts we can leave behind.

---

### **You Will Still Have Hard Days**

Even after reading this book...

there will still be mornings filled with rushing.

Arguments over homework.

Bedtime battles.

Moments when everyone is tired.

Moments when you lose your patience.

Moments when your child does.

Nothing in these pages was meant to erase those days.

Life is not meant to be free from struggle.

Neither is parenting.

The difference is that now, when those moments arrive, you have another way of seeing them.

Instead of asking,

*"How do I stop this?"*

you may begin asking,

*"What is my child trying to tell me?"*

Instead of,

*"How do I make this behaviour disappear?"*

you may wonder,

*"What skill is my child still learning?"*

Instead of expecting perfection from yourself...

you may begin choosing progress.

That quiet shift changes more than any parenting technique ever could.

---

## **Progress Happens in Ordinary Moments**

Progress is rarely dramatic.

It looks like taking one deep breath before responding.

Apologising after shouting.

Sitting beside a child instead of sending them away.

Holding a boundary with kindness.

Listening for one extra minute.

Choosing curiosity over judgment.

One calm conversation.

One repaired relationship.

One ordinary evening.

Then another.

And another.

Families are not transformed in a single day.

They are transformed through ordinary days repeated with intention.

---

### **The Legacy You Leave**

Parents often wonder what their children will remember.

Will they remember the holidays?

The birthdays?

The special trips?

Of course they will.

But long before those memories are formed, something quieter is taking shape.

An emotional blueprint.

A belief about relationships.

About themselves.

About the world.

Will they believe that love disappears when people make mistakes?

Or that love grows stronger through repair?

Will they believe emotions should be hidden?

Or that emotions can be understood?

Will they believe they must face difficult things alone?

Or that asking for help is a sign of courage?

These beliefs become part of who they are.

And they begin at home.

Not through perfection.

Through repetition.

---

### **This Is the Heart of Little Calm Club**

When Little Calm Club began, it was never really about calm cards.

Or activities.

Or posters.

Or breathing exercises.

Those are simply tools.

The real mission has always been much bigger.

To help adults become the safe place children return to.

Not because adults always have the right answers.

But because children know they will be met with patience instead of panic...

curiosity instead of judgment...

guidance instead of shame...

and love that remains steady, even on the hardest days.

That is what changes childhood.

And, very often, it changes adulthood too.

Because children who grow up feeling emotionally safe become adults who are more likely to create emotional safety for others.

This is how families change.

This is how generations change.

One relationship at a time.

---

### **Before You Close This Book**

Take a moment.

Think about your child.

Not their behaviour.

Not the challenges.

Not the worries.

Just your child.

Exactly as they are today.

Now ask yourself one final question.

**When my child looks back on their childhood years from now, what do I hope they remember most about the way they felt with me?**

Hold on to that answer.

Not because every day will look like it.

But because it gives you a direction.

Parenting has never been about getting everything right.

It has always been about returning to what matters most.

Again.

And again.

And again.

---

## **One Final Thought**

Years from now, your child will not remember whether you always stayed calm.

They will remember that you kept coming back.

That after difficult moments, you repaired.

That after mistakes, you learned.

That after tears, you stayed.

That after conflict, love remained.

In the end, children do not need a parent who never loses their way.

They need a parent who always finds their way back.

And perhaps that is the simplest definition of emotional safety.

Not a home without big feelings.

But a home where there is always someone calm enough to help us find our way through them.

---

**Children will not remember whether you were a perfect parent. They will remember whether they felt safe being fully themselves with you. If this book has given you even one more moment of connection, one more moment of understanding, or one more moment of hope,**

**then it has done exactly what it was written to do. Because the greatest gift we can offer our children is not a life without storms—it is becoming the calm they know they can always return to.**

# **PRACTICAL RESOURCES**

1. **The Big Feelings Quick-Response Guide**
2. **What to Say: Ready-to-Use Scripts**
3. **Emotion-to-Need Reference Chart**
4. **Calm Tools by Age and Situation**
5. **Family Emotional Check-In**
6. **Repair After Conflict Checklist**
7. **When to Seek Professional Support**
8. **Little Calm Club Resources**
9. **Notes**
10. **Acknowledgements**

# **1) The Big Feelings Quick-Response Guide**

**There are moments when parenting doesn't give you time to think.**

Your child is screaming in the supermarket.

Throwing toys across the living room.

Refusing to get dressed.

Crying uncontrollably at bedtime.

In those moments, you don't need another chapter.

You need a clear starting point.

This guide is designed to help you quickly identify what your child may be experiencing, what they need most, and how you can respond in a way that supports both emotional regulation and connection.

It is not a list of perfect responses.

No guide can tell you exactly what to do in every situation.

Every child is different.

Every family is different.

Every moment is different.

Instead, think of these pages as a compass rather than a rulebook.

When emotions are running high, return to one simple principle that has guided this entire book:

**Behaviour is what we see. Emotion is what we need to understand.**

The more often you respond to the emotion beneath the behaviour—not just the behaviour itself—the more opportunities your child has to build emotional regulation, trust and resilience.

Remember:

**You do not need to respond perfectly.**

**You only need to respond with enough calm, curiosity and consistency to help your child find their way back to safety.**

---

## **SCREAMING**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Your child's nervous system is overwhelmed.

Screaming is often a sign that words are no longer available.

The goal is rarely to upset you.

More often, it is an attempt to release emotional overload or communicate a need that feels impossible to express calmly.

## **What your child needs most**

- A calm adult.
  - Emotional safety.
  - Help regulating before problem-solving.
  - Clear but gentle boundaries.
- 

## **Avoid**

- "Stop screaming!"
  - "Calm down right now."
  - Threats or ultimatums.
  - Matching your child's volume.
  - Long explanations while they are overwhelmed.
- 

## **Try saying**

- "I'm here with you."
  - "I can see you're having a really hard time."
  - "We'll talk when your body feels calmer."
  - "You're safe."
  - "I'm going to help you."
-

## **Helpful actions**

- Lower your own voice.
  - Reduce stimulation if possible.
  - Stay physically close if your child wants your presence.
  - Keep everyone safe.
  - Wait until your child's nervous system settles before teaching or correcting.
- 

## **Remember**

**A screaming child is usually asking for regulation before they are ready for instruction.**

---

## **HITTING**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Your child has reached a level of emotional overload where their body is acting faster than their thinking brain.

Hitting is never acceptable, but it is often a sign that they lack a safer way to express what they feel.

---

## **What your child needs most**

- Immediate safety.
  - Calm leadership.
  - Firm boundaries.
  - Coaching after everyone is calm.
- 

## **Avoid**

- Hitting back.
  - Shaming.
  - Calling your child "mean" or "bad."
  - Long lectures.
  - Asking, "Why did you do that?" in the middle of the incident.
- 

## **Try saying**

- "I won't let you hurt people."
  - "I'm going to keep everyone safe."
  - "You're very angry. I'll help you."
  - "We'll talk about this when you're calm."
-

## **Helpful actions**

- Gently block the behaviour if needed.
  - Move siblings or other children to safety.
  - Stay calm and predictable.
  - Teach alternative ways to express anger later.
  - Encourage repair after regulation.
- 

## **Remember**

**Stop the behaviour immediately—but never stop seeing the child behind it.**

---

## **CRYING**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Sadness, disappointment, fear, frustration, overwhelm—or simply the release of emotional tension.

Not every tear needs to be stopped.

Sometimes tears are part of healing.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Permission to feel.

- Emotional presence.
  - Comfort, if welcomed.
  - Patience.
- 

### **Avoid**

- "Stop crying."
  - "You're fine."
  - "It's nothing."
  - Rushing to fix every problem.
  - Making your child feel embarrassed for crying.
- 

### **Try saying**

- "I'm here."
  - "Take your time."
  - "That feels really hard."
  - "You don't have to go through this alone."
  - "I'm listening whenever you're ready."
- 

### **Helpful actions**

- Stay nearby.

- Offer a hug if your child wants one.
  - Sit quietly together.
  - Let the crying naturally settle.
  - Talk afterwards, not during the peak of emotion.
- 

## **Remember**

**Crying is not a problem to solve. It is often a nervous system finding its way back to balance.**

---

## **THROWING THINGS**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Your child has more emotional energy than they can safely manage.

Throwing often reflects frustration, anger or overwhelm—not a desire to damage things.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Safety.
- Clear boundaries.
- A safer outlet for physical energy.

## **Avoid**

- Yelling across the room.
  - Threatening harsh punishments in the moment.
  - Responding with anger.
  - Assuming the behaviour is intentional defiance.
- 

## **Try saying**

- "I won't let you throw things that can hurt someone."
  - "Let's find something safe for your body to do."
  - "You're having big feelings. I'll help you."
- 

## **Helpful actions**

- Remove unsafe objects.
  - Offer a pillow, soft ball or cushion instead.
  - Encourage movement after the crisis.
  - Return later to repair any damage together.
- 

## **Remember**

**The goal isn't to stop movement—it is to make the movement safe.**

## **SHUTTING DOWN**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Your child may feel overwhelmed, anxious, ashamed, exhausted or emotionally flooded.

Silence does not mean nothing is happening.

Sometimes it means too much is happening.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Time.
  - Emotional safety.
  - Gentle availability.
  - No pressure to speak immediately.
- 

### **Avoid**

- Repeated questioning.
  - "Talk to me right now."
  - Assuming silence means disrespect.
  - Taking withdrawal personally.
-

## **Try saying**

- "You don't have to talk yet."
  - "I'll stay nearby."
  - "Whenever you're ready, I'm here."
  - "You're not alone."
- 

## **Helpful actions**

- Sit quietly together.
  - Reduce stimulation.
  - Offer comforting activities.
  - Wait before asking reflective questions.
- 

## **Remember**

**Some children ask for help with words. Others ask through silence.**

---

## **SAYING "NO"**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

A need for autonomy.

Frustration.

Disappointment.

Difficulty transitioning.

Feeling powerless.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Respect.
  - Leadership.
  - Appropriate choices.
  - Calm consistency.
- 

### **Avoid**

- Turning the moment into a power struggle.
  - "Because I said so" as your only explanation.
  - Taking every "no" personally.
- 

### **Try saying**

- "I hear that you don't want to."
- "The answer is still yes/no."
- "Would you like to do it this way or that way?"
- "I'll help you."

## **Helpful actions**

- Offer limited choices.
  - Give transition warnings.
  - Stay calm if your child protests.
  - Keep the boundary steady.
- 

## **Remember**

**Children often resist feeling powerless more than they resist the limit itself.**

---

## **ANXIETY**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Uncertainty.

Fear.

A nervous system preparing for danger—even when no real danger exists.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Safety.
- Predictability.

- Reassurance without false promises.
  - Confidence borrowed from you.
- 

### **Avoid**

- "There's nothing to worry about."
  - Forcing immediate exposure.
  - Criticising fear.
  - Dismissing worries.
- 

### **Try saying**

- "This feels scary."
  - "We'll face it together."
  - "You're safe."
  - "You don't have to do this alone."
- 

### **Helpful actions**

- Keep routines predictable.
- Break difficult tasks into smaller steps.
- Practise calming skills before stressful situations.
- Celebrate courage, not perfection.

## **Remember**

**Courage is not the absence of fear. It is moving forward while feeling supported.**

---

## **JEALOUSY**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Fear of losing connection.

Fear of being less important.

Fear that love has become limited.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Reassurance.
  - Individual attention.
  - Understanding.
  - Connection.
- 

### **Avoid**

- "Don't be jealous."
- Comparing siblings.
- Making your child feel guilty.

### **Try saying**

- "I can understand why that feels hard."
  - "There's enough love for both of you."
  - "You matter to me."
- 

### **Helpful actions**

- Spend individual time together.
  - Acknowledge the feeling without judgement.
  - Avoid comparisons.
  - Encourage cooperation instead of competition.
- 

### **Remember**

**Jealousy often hides a fear of losing connection—not a lack of love.**

---

## **OVERWHELM**

### **What your child may be experiencing**

Their nervous system has simply reached its limit.

Too much noise.

Too many demands.

Too many emotions.

Too much stimulation.

---

### **What your child needs most**

- Fewer demands.
  - Quiet.
  - Time.
  - Regulation before conversation.
- 

### **Avoid**

- Adding more instructions.
  - Talking continuously.
  - Rushing.
  - Assuming laziness.
- 

### **Try saying**

- "Let's slow everything down."
  - "We'll do one thing at a time."
  - "I'm here."
-

## **Helpful actions**

- Reduce noise.
  - Dim lights if possible.
  - Offer water.
  - Encourage slow breathing or quiet movement.
  - Postpone unnecessary conversations.
- 

## **Remember**

**Sometimes the most helpful intervention is simply reducing what the nervous system is trying to manage.**

---

## **One Final Reminder**

When emotions become overwhelming, return to these five steps:

1. **Pause before reacting.**
2. **Keep everyone safe.**
3. **Connect before you correct.**
4. **Help your child regulate.**
5. **Teach after the storm has passed.**

No child needs a perfect response.

They need an adult who is willing to return to these principles—again and again.

That is how emotional safety is built.

One moment at a time.

## **2) What to Say: Ready-to-Use Scripts**

**When children experience big emotions, parents often know what they want to communicate—but struggle to find the right words in the moment.**

Stress makes it difficult to think clearly.

The goal of these scripts is not to give you perfect sentences to memorise.

Children don't need perfect words.

They need words that communicate safety, understanding and confident leadership.

Use these examples as inspiration rather than a script you must follow exactly.

Speak naturally.

Use your own voice.

What matters most is not saying the exact words.

It is communicating the message behind them.

**I see you.**

**I'm with you.**

**We'll get through this together.**

---

## **When Your Child Is Having a Tantrum**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Stop crying."
- "You're embarrassing me."
- "Calm down right now."

### **Try saying**

*"You're having a really hard time right now."*

*"I'm here."*

*"I'll help keep you safe until your body feels calmer."*

*"We'll talk when you're ready."*

---

## **When Your Child Hits Someone**

### **Instead of saying**

- "What's wrong with you?"
- "Bad boys don't hit."
- "Go away until you can behave."

### **Try saying**

*"I won't let you hurt people."*

*"You're very angry."*

*"I'm going to help keep everyone safe."*

*"We'll figure out a better way together once you're calm."*

---

## **When Your Child Throws Something**

### **Instead of saying**

- "That's enough!"
- "Look what you've done!"
- "You're so naughty."

### **Try saying**

*"I won't let you throw things that can hurt someone."*

*"Your body has lots of big feelings right now."*

*"Let's find a safe way to let them out."*

---

## **When Your Child Says, "I Hate You"**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Don't you dare speak to me like that."
- "Fine. I don't care."
- "Go to your room."

**Try saying**

*"Those are very big words."*

*"I think you're really angry right now."*

*"I'm still here, and I'm going to help you through this."*

*"We'll talk when we're both calmer."*

---

**When Your Child Says, "Nobody Likes Me"****Instead of saying**

- "That's not true."
- "Don't be silly."
- "You'll get over it."

**Try saying**

*"That sounds really lonely."*

*"Can you tell me what happened?"*

*"I'm listening."*

*"We'll figure this out together."*

---

## **When Your Child Is Anxious About School**

### **Instead of saying**

- "There's nothing to worry about."
- "You'll be fine."
- "Just stop thinking about it."

### **Try saying**

*"School feels difficult today."*

*"Tell me what feels hardest."*

*"We'll take one step at a time."*

*"I'm with you."*

---

## **When Your Child Doesn't Want to Leave the Playground**

### **Instead of saying**

- "We're leaving. End of discussion."
- "If you don't come now, you'll never come back."

### **Try saying**

*"You're disappointed because you're having fun."*

*"I understand."*

*"It's time to leave now."*

*"Would you like to hop to the car or race me there?"*

## **When Your Child Refuses to Get Dressed**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Stop arguing."
- "You're making us late."

### **Try saying**

*"You don't feel ready yet."*

*"We still need to get dressed."*

*"Would you like the blue shirt or the green one?"*

*"I'll help if you need me."*

---

## **When Your Child Keeps Saying "No"**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Because I said so."
- "Stop being difficult."

### **Try saying**

*"I hear that you don't want to."*

*"The answer is still no."*

*"I know that's frustrating."*

*"I'll help you through the disappointment."*

---

## **When Your Child Loses a Game**

### **Instead of saying**

- "It's only a game."
- "Stop being a sore loser."

### **Try saying**

*"Losing feels disappointing."*

*"You really wanted to win."*

*"I'm proud of how hard you tried."*

*"Would you like a hug or a little break?"*

---

## **When Your Child Makes a Mistake**

### **Instead of saying**

- "How could you do that?"
- "You should know better."

### **Try saying**

*"Mistakes happen."*

*"Let's figure out what we can learn."*

*"We'll solve this together."*

*"Making mistakes doesn't change how much I love you."*

---

## **When Your Child Is Crying**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Stop crying."
- "You're okay."
- "It's nothing."

### **Try saying**

*"I'm here."*

*"Take your time."*

*"You don't have to stop crying for me."*

*"Whenever you're ready, I'm listening."*

---

## **When Your Child Feels Embarrassed**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Don't worry about it."
- "Nobody noticed."

### **Try saying**

*"That felt embarrassing."*

*"I can understand why you feel that way."*

*"Everyone feels embarrassed sometimes."*

*"We'll get through this together."*

## **When Your Child Is Jealous**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Don't be jealous."
- "Your brother isn't doing anything wrong."

### **Try saying**

*"It feels hard when someone else gets attention."*

*"Thank you for telling me how you feel."*

*"There's enough love for everyone in this family."*

---

## **When Your Child Is Overwhelmed**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Pull yourself together."
- "You're overreacting."

### **Try saying**

*"Everything feels like too much right now."*

*"Let's slow things down."*

*"We'll do one thing at a time."*

*"I'm right here."*

---

## **When You Need to Hold a Boundary**

### **Instead of saying**

- "End of discussion."
- "Because I said so."

### **Try saying**

*"I understand that you're upset."*

*"The answer is still no."*

*"I'll stay with you while you feel disappointed."*

---

## **When Your Child Apologises**

### **Instead of saying**

- "You'd better be sorry."

### **Try saying**

*"Thank you for taking responsibility."*

*"Everyone makes mistakes."*

*"Now let's think about how we can make things better."*

---

## **When You Lose Your Patience**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Well, you made me shout."

### **Try saying**

*"I'm sorry I shouted."*

*"I was frustrated, but that wasn't the way I wanted to speak to you."*

*"You didn't deserve that."*

*"I'm going to keep practising, because I want to do better next time."*

---

## **When Your Child Is Finally Calm**

### **Instead of saying**

- "Now, let me tell you everything you did wrong."

### **Try saying**

*"Thank you for calming your body."*

*"Can we talk about what happened?"*

*"What were you feeling?"*

*"What could we try next time?"*

*"We'll keep learning together."*

## **One Final Reminder**

Children will not remember every sentence you say.

They will remember how your words made them feel.

When you are unsure what to say, return to these four messages:

- **I see you.**
- **I'm with you.**
- **You're safe.**
- **We'll figure this out together.**

Those words—spoken consistently, calmly and with genuine care—will do more to strengthen your relationship than any perfect script ever could.

## 3) Emotion-to-Need Reference Chart

### **Children rarely behave without a reason.**

Behind every behaviour is an emotional need waiting to be understood.

This doesn't mean every behaviour should be accepted.

It means every behaviour becomes easier to guide when we first understand what may be driving it.

The chart below is designed as a quick reference.

It is not a diagnostic tool, and it will not explain every situation.

Instead, it offers a simple reminder:

### **Look beneath the behaviour before deciding how to respond.**

When you understand the need, your response becomes calmer, clearer and more effective.

---

### **ANGER**

#### **What it often looks like**

- Shouting

- Hitting
- Throwing
- Clenching fists
- Arguing
- Slamming doors
- Saying hurtful things

### **What may be underneath**

- Frustration
- Feeling misunderstood
- Disappointment
- Fear
- Embarrassment
- Feeling powerless
- Emotional overload

### **What your child needs**

- Calm leadership
- Safety
- Validation
- Clear boundaries
- Time to regulate

## **FEAR**

### **What it often looks like**

- Clinging
- Crying
- Avoiding
- Hiding
- Refusing
- Freezing
- Asking repeated questions

### **What may be underneath**

- Uncertainty
- Lack of confidence
- New situations
- Separation
- Worry about failure
- Feeling unsafe

### **What your child needs**

- Reassurance
- Predictability
- Connection
- Gentle encouragement
- Confidence borrowed from you

## **SADNESS**

### **What it often looks like**

- Crying
- Quietness
- Wanting to be alone
- Low energy
- Loss of interest
- Seeking comfort

### **What may be underneath**

- Loss
- Disappointment
- Rejection
- Feeling left out
- Grief
- Loneliness

### **What your child needs**

- Presence
- Comfort
- Patience
- Permission to cry
- Someone who listens

## **FRUSTRATION**

### **What it often looks like**

- Giving up
- Complaining
- Yelling
- Throwing objects
- Refusing to continue
- Saying "I can't."

### **What may be underneath**

- A task feels too difficult
- Perfectionism
- Feeling stuck
- Lack of skills
- Tiredness

### **What your child needs**

- Encouragement
  - Small achievable steps
  - Help without taking over
  - Opportunities to try again
-

## **ANXIETY**

### **What it often looks like**

- Nail biting
- Restlessness
- Asking "What if...?"
- Avoiding activities
- Stomach aches
- Trouble sleeping
- Constant reassurance seeking

### **What may be underneath**

- Fear of uncertainty
- Fear of failure
- Fear of separation
- Fear of making mistakes
- Feeling out of control

### **What your child needs**

- Calm reassurance
- Predictable routines
- Honest information
- Emotional safety
- Gentle confidence

## **JEALOUSY**

### **What it often looks like**

- Attention-seeking
- Arguing with siblings
- Interrupting
- Complaining
- Acting younger
- Possessiveness

### **What may be underneath**

- Fear of losing connection
- Feeling overlooked
- Wanting reassurance
- Comparing themselves to others

### **What your child needs**

- One-to-one connection
  - Reassurance
  - Feeling seen
  - Time together
  - Belonging
-

## **SHAME**

### **What it often looks like**

- Hiding
- Avoiding eye contact
- Saying "I'm stupid."
- Blaming others
- Denying mistakes
- Shutting down

### **What may be underneath**

- Fear of rejection
- Fear of disappointing others
- Feeling "not good enough"

### **What your child needs**

- Acceptance
  - Compassion
  - Repair instead of punishment
  - Encouragement
  - Hope
-

## **OVERWHELM**

### **What it often looks like**

- Meltdowns
- Crying suddenly
- Screaming
- Shutting down
- Refusing everything
- Difficulty making decisions

### **What may be underneath**

- Too much noise
- Too many demands
- Too many emotions
- Fatigue
- Sensory overload

### **What your child needs**

- Fewer demands
- Quiet
- Time
- Reduced stimulation
- Co-regulation

## **LONELINESS**

### **What it often looks like**

- Saying "Nobody likes me."
- Staying alone
- Becoming unusually quiet
- Seeking constant attention
- Clinginess

### **What may be underneath**

- Feeling excluded
- Friendship difficulties
- Low confidence
- Missing someone

### **What your child needs**

- Connection
  - Listening
  - Quality time
  - Encouragement
  - Opportunities to belong
-

## **EXCITEMENT**

### **What it often looks like**

- Jumping
- Running
- Loud voices
- Constant talking
- Difficulty sitting still
- Forgetting instructions

### **What may be underneath**

- High emotional energy
- Anticipation
- Joy
- Difficulty slowing down

### **What your child needs**

- Movement
- Play
- Predictable transitions
- Gentle reminders
- Time to gradually settle

## **DISAPPOINTMENT**

### **What it often looks like**

- Sulking
- Crying
- Saying "It's not fair."
- Giving up
- Anger
- Withdrawal

### **What may be underneath**

- Expectations not being met
- Loss
- Unmet hopes
- Feeling unsuccessful

### **What your child needs**

- Validation
- Perspective
- Encouragement
- Hope
- Another opportunity to try

## **EMBARRASSMENT**

### **What it often looks like**

- Hiding
- Looking down
- Nervous laughter
- Becoming defensive
- Refusing to participate

### **What may be underneath**

- Fear of being judged
- Feeling exposed
- Worry about making mistakes

### **What your child needs**

- Dignity
- Privacy
- Reassurance
- Gentle support
- Acceptance

---

## **CONFUSION**

### **What it often looks like**

- Repeated questions

- Freezing
- Frustration
- Avoidance
- Looking overwhelmed

### **What may be underneath**

- Instructions that feel unclear
- Too much information
- New experiences
- Uncertainty

### **What your child needs**

- Simplicity
- Clear explanations
- Patience
- One step at a time
- Encouragement

---

## **GRATITUDE, PRIDE AND JOY**

Not every emotion needs support because something is wrong.

Positive emotions deserve attention too.

When children feel proud...

celebrate the effort behind the achievement.

When they feel grateful...

slow down and enjoy the moment together.

When they feel joyful...

join them.

Positive emotions strengthen relationships just as much as difficult emotions do.

---

### **One Final Reminder**

Whenever your child's behaviour feels confusing, pause and ask yourself these three questions:

**What might my child be feeling?**

**What might my child need right now?**

**How can I respond in a way that builds connection before correction?**

You will not always guess correctly.

And you don't have to.

Children don't need parents who always know exactly what is happening inside them.

They need parents who are willing to stay curious long enough to find out.

## 4) Calm Tools by Age and Situation

**There is no single calming strategy that works for every child.**

Children regulate differently because every nervous system is different.

Age matters.

Personality matters.

The situation matters.

Even the same child may need different tools on different days.

A child who needs movement after school may need quiet before bedtime.

A child who wants a hug after a nightmare may prefer space after losing a game.

The goal is not to find **the perfect calming tool**.

The goal is to build a growing toolbox so children gradually learn:

**"I know what helps my body feel safe again."**

Use this guide as a starting point.

Notice what works.

Stay flexible.

And remember that your calm presence will always be the most powerful tool of all.

---

### **Ages 3–4**

At this age, children rely heavily on **co-regulation**.

They borrow calm from the adults around them.

Keep activities simple, physical and playful.

---

### **When your child is angry**

Helpful tools:

- Bear hugs (if welcomed)
  - Stomping like a dinosaur
  - Blowing bubbles
  - Balloon breathing
  - Pushing against a wall
  - Squeezing a soft toy
- 

### **When your child is sad**

Helpful tools:

- Sitting together quietly
  - Reading a favourite story
  - Gentle cuddles
  - Holding a comfort toy
  - Looking at family photos
- 

### **When your child is anxious**

Helpful tools:

- Holding your hand
  - Slow belly breathing together
  - Singing familiar songs
  - Predictable routines
  - A favourite blanket
- 

### **When your child is overwhelmed**

Helpful tools:

- Quiet space
- Dim lights
- Gentle rocking
- Soft music
- Fewer words

## **Ages 5–6**

Children begin recognising emotions and learning simple self-regulation skills.

They still need significant adult support.

---

### **When your child is angry**

Helpful tools:

- Lion Breaths
  - Wall pushes
  - Jumping jacks
  - Stretching
  - Drawing angry feelings
  - Calm Cards
- 

### **When your child is sad**

Helpful tools:

- Talking together
- Drawing feelings
- Writing simple emotion words
- Reading comforting books
- Listening to calming music

## **When your child is anxious**

Helpful tools:

- Five Finger Breathing
  - Worry Box
  - Visual schedules
  - Practising new situations through play
  - Comfort object
- 

## **When your child is overwhelmed**

Helpful tools:

- Calm Corner
  - Headphones
  - Quiet colouring
  - Drinking water
  - Deep pressure hugs (if welcomed)
- 

## **Ages 7–8**

Children become more aware of thoughts, friendships and social situations.

They can begin choosing regulation strategies independently.

## **When your child is angry**

Helpful tools:

- Physical exercise
  - Journaling
  - Calm Cards
  - Breathing exercises
  - Talking after calming down
  - Throwing soft balls into a basket
- 

## **When your child is sad**

Helpful tools:

- Gratitude journal
  - Drawing
  - Time outdoors
  - Quiet conversation
  - Reading
- 

## **When your child is anxious**

Helpful tools:

- Naming worries

- Grounding exercises
  - Positive coping plans
  - Slow breathing
  - Breaking challenges into smaller steps
- 

## **When your child is overwhelmed**

Helpful tools:

- Screen break
  - Quiet reading
  - Calm music
  - Nature walk
  - Calm Corner
- 

## **Ages 9–10**

Children develop greater self-awareness and can begin creating their own emotional toolkit.

Adults become coaches rather than directors.

---

## **When your child is angry**

Helpful tools:

- Exercise
  - Journaling
  - Talking after regulation
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Problem-solving together
- 

### **When your child is sad**

Helpful tools:

- Time together
  - Creative activities
  - Listening without fixing
  - Nature
  - Reflection
- 

### **When your child is anxious**

Helpful tools:

- Breathing exercises
- Visualising success
- Planning ahead
- Breaking large tasks into small goals
- Calm self-talk

## When your child is overwhelmed

Helpful tools:

- Taking a break
  - Reducing stimulation
  - Prioritising one task at a time
  - Quiet movement
  - Mindfulness activities
- 

## Situation Guide

Sometimes it is easier to begin with **the situation** rather than your child's age.

---

## Before School

Helpful tools:

- Predictable morning routine
  - Visual checklist
  - Five deep breaths
  - Extra connection before leaving
  - Calm music
-

## **After School**

Helpful tools:

- Snack first
  - Free play
  - Outdoor movement
  - Quiet time before questions
  - One-to-one connection
- 

## **Before Bed**

Helpful tools:

- Consistent routine
  - Reading together
  - Gentle stretches
  - Slow breathing
  - Gratitude conversation
- 

## **After an Argument**

Helpful tools:

- Time to regulate
- Repair conversation

- Problem-solving together
  - Reconnection through play
  - Hug (if welcomed)
- 

## **During a Meltdown**

Helpful tools:

- Stay calm
  - Reduce stimulation
  - Keep everyone safe
  - Speak less
  - Stay close if your child wants your presence
- 

## **During Transitions**

Helpful tools:

- Countdown warnings
  - Visual timers
  - Giving simple choices
  - Predictable routines
  - Playful transitions
-

## **During Long Waiting Times**

Helpful tools:

- I Spy games
  - Deep breathing
  - Storytelling
  - Small fidget toy
  - Counting games
- 

## **After Disappointment**

Helpful tools:

- Validate feelings
  - Sit together
  - Reflect later
  - Encourage another attempt
  - Celebrate effort
- 

## **Building Your Child's Personal Calm Toolbox**

As children grow, encourage them to discover what helps **their** body feel calm.

Ask questions like:

- **"What helped you feel better today?"**
- **"Which calming activity worked best?"**
- **"What would you like to try next time?"**
- **"What helps your body feel safe?"**

Over time, your child will begin creating their own personalised emotional toolkit.

That is one of the clearest signs that emotional regulation is becoming an internal skill rather than something directed by an adult.

---

### **One Final Reminder**

Calming tools are not rewards.

They are not consequences.

They are not shortcuts to stopping difficult behaviour.

They are opportunities for children to learn how to recognise what their body needs and respond in healthy ways.

The greatest success is not when your child uses every calming strategy you teach.

It is the day they quietly say,

**"I know what I need right now."**

That is the moment emotional regulation truly becomes their own.

## 5) Family Emotional Check-In

**In many families, one simple question is asked almost every day.**

**"How was school?"**

And almost every day, the answer is the same.

*"Fine."*

*"Good."*

*"Okay."*

The conversation ends before it has really begun.

Not because children don't want to talk.

But because many children don't yet know how to describe what happened inside them.

They remember events.

They often struggle to explain emotions.

A Family Emotional Check-In creates something different.

It creates a predictable moment where every member of the family has permission to pause, reflect and share.

There is no pressure.

No judgment.

No right answers.

No need to solve every problem.

The goal is not to have long conversations every day.

The goal is to build a family where talking about feelings feels as normal as talking about the weather.

Like every healthy habit, emotional awareness grows through small moments repeated consistently.

Five minutes is enough.

Sometimes even one question is enough.

---

## **Daily Check-In**

Choose one or two questions each day.

There is no need to ask them all.

### **Feelings**

- **What feeling visited you most today?**
  - **What made you smile today?**
  - **What felt difficult today?**
  - **Did anything surprise you today?**
  - **What made you feel proud today?**
-

## **Relationships**

- **Who made you feel happy today?**
  - **Did you help someone today?**
  - **Did someone help you today?**
  - **Did anyone make you feel left out?**
  - **Did you make a new friend or strengthen an old friendship today?**
- 

## **Challenges**

- **What was the hardest part of today?**
  - **What did you do that was brave today?**
  - **Did you make a mistake today? What did you learn from it?**
  - **Was there a moment you wish had gone differently?**
- 

## **Gratitude**

- **What are you thankful for today?**
- **What was the best moment of your day?**
- **Who made your day a little better?**
- **What made you laugh today?**

## **Bedtime Check-In**

Bedtime is often one of the safest moments for emotional conversation.

Children are relaxed.

There are fewer distractions.

The pace of the day has slowed.

Keep the conversation gentle and unhurried.

You don't need to fix anything.

Simply listen.

Questions you might ask:

- **What was your favourite part of today?**
- **What was the hardest part?**
- **Is there anything you're still thinking about?**
- **Is there anything you wish had gone differently?**
- **What are you looking forward to tomorrow?**

End with reassurance whenever possible.

*"I'm really glad we talked."*

*"Thank you for sharing that with me."*

*"I love hearing about your day."*

*"I'll always make time to listen."*

## **Dinner Table Conversations**

Family meals provide a natural opportunity for emotional connection.

Everyone—including adults—should take part.

Children learn emotional awareness by hearing adults reflect on their own experiences too.

Try questions like:

- **What made you smile today?**
- **What challenged you today?**
- **What did you learn today?**
- **Who showed kindness today?**
- **How did you show kindness today?**
- **What is one thing you're grateful for tonight?**

The goal is not perfect answers.

The goal is building a family culture where everyone's experiences matter.

---

## **Car Journey Conversations**

Many children talk more easily when they don't feel watched.

Car journeys are often perfect for emotional conversations.

Looking out of the window feels less intense than sitting face-to-face.

Try asking:

- **What was the funniest part of your day?**
- **Did anything feel unfair today?**
- **Did anything make you nervous today?**
- **If you could replay one moment today, which would it be?**
- **What are you hoping tomorrow will be like?**

Don't rush to fill every silence.

Sometimes the most meaningful answers arrive after a pause.

---

## **Weekend Reflection**

Once a week, slow down together.

Ask bigger questions.

Celebrate growth.

Notice progress.

Suggested questions:

- **What was your happiest moment this week?**
- **What was your biggest challenge?**
- **What are you most proud of?**

- **What helped you when things felt difficult?**
- **What kindness did you receive this week?**
- **What kindness did you give?**
- **What would you like to do differently next week?**

These conversations help children recognise that emotional growth happens over time—not just in a single day.

---

### **Helping Children Find the Words**

If your child says,

*"I don't know,"*

don't rush to another question.

Instead, gently support them.

You might say:

*"Would you like me to guess?"*

*"Did today feel exciting, frustrating or a little bit of both?"*

*"Did your body feel busy today or calm?"*

*"Was today a heavy day or a light day?"*

Sometimes children simply need help finding the language.

Over time, they will begin choosing their own words.

---

## **Parents Should Share Too**

A Family Emotional Check-In is not an interview.

It is a conversation.

Children learn emotional openness by watching adults model it.

You might say:

*"Today I felt frustrated when my meeting ran late."*

*"I felt proud because I finished something difficult."*

*"I felt disappointed, but I took a deep breath and tried again."*

Notice what you're teaching:

Adults have feelings.

Adults talk about feelings.

Adults can have difficult emotions without being overwhelmed by them.

That lesson is often more powerful than any question you ask.

---

## **There Are No Wrong Feelings**

One of the most important messages your child should leave every check-in with is this:

**Every feeling is welcome.**

Not every behaviour is acceptable.

But every feeling deserves to be heard.

Joy.

Anger.

Fear.

Excitement.

Embarrassment.

Disappointment.

Jealousy.

Pride.

All emotions are part of being human.

Children who grow up knowing this become far less afraid of their inner world.

---

### **Keep It Simple**

You do not need a perfect routine.

You do not need to ask every question.

You do not need long conversations every evening.

One meaningful question...

asked consistently...

is far more powerful than twenty questions asked once.

The quality of the connection always matters more than the quantity of the conversation.

---

### **One Final Reminder**

The goal of a Family Emotional Check-In is not to get children talking.

It is to help them feel safe enough that, when they are ready to talk, they know someone will always be there to listen.

One day, your child may come to you with something far more important than what happened at school.

The conversations you begin today are quietly building the trust that makes those future conversations possible.

Because emotional safety is not created during life's biggest moments.

It is created in the ordinary moments that tell a child, again and again:

**"Your thoughts matter."**

**"Your feelings matter."**

**"You matter."**

## 6) Repair After Conflict Checklist

**Every relationship experiences moments of disconnection.**

Parents lose patience.

Children lose control.

Voices become louder than intended.

Feelings get hurt.

Mistakes are made.

Conflict is not the opposite of a healthy relationship.

Unrepaired conflict is.

Children do not need families where arguments never happen.

They need families where people know how to find their way back to one another.

Repair is not about pretending nothing happened.

It is about showing children that relationships are strong enough to recover.

This checklist is designed to help you move from conflict back to connection.

You don't need to complete every step perfectly.

Simply use it as a guide whenever emotions have settled and everyone is ready to reconnect.

## **Before You Begin**

Ask yourself:

- ☐ **Is everyone physically safe?**
- ☐ **Have both of us had enough time to calm down?**
- ☐ **Am I ready to listen, not just to speak?**
- ☐ **Can I approach this with curiosity instead of blame?**

If the answer to any of these questions is **no**, wait a little longer.

Repair works best when both nervous systems have returned to a calmer state.

---

## **Step 1 — Reconnect**

Before discussing what happened, rebuild the relationship.

- ☐ Sit beside your child.
- ☐ Lower your voice.
- ☐ Make gentle eye contact (if your child is comfortable).
- ☐ Offer physical comfort if welcomed.
- ☐ Let your child know you are available.

Simple phrases:

*"I'm here."*

*"Can we talk together?"*

*"I'm glad we're together again."*

*"Whenever you're ready, I'd like to understand what happened."*

---

## **Step 2 — Listen First**

Give your child the opportunity to share their experience.

Listen to understand—not to prepare your response.

Ask open questions such as:

- ☐ **Can you tell me what happened?**
- ☐ **What were you feeling?**
- ☐ **What felt hardest?**
- ☐ **What happened just before everything became difficult?**

Avoid interrupting.

Avoid correcting every detail.

Focus on understanding your child's experience before discussing behaviour.

---

## **Step 3 — Take Responsibility**

If you made a mistake, own it.

Without excuses.

Without blaming your child.

A genuine apology includes four parts.

- ☐ Describe what happened.
- ☐ Take responsibility.
- ☐ Acknowledge your child's feelings.
- ☐ Explain what you will try to do differently.

Example:

*"I'm sorry I shouted earlier. I was frustrated, but shouting wasn't the way I wanted to handle it. I imagine that felt scary. I'm going to keep practising so I can respond more calmly next time."*

---

#### **Step 4 — Name the Emotion**

Help your child understand what may have been happening inside.

Not by telling them what they felt...

but by wondering together.

You might ask:

- ☐ **Were you feeling angry?**
- ☐ **Did you feel disappointed?**
- ☐ **Did you feel worried?**

## ☐ Did everything suddenly feel like too much?

Naming emotions helps children organise their experiences instead of feeling controlled by them.

---

### **Step 5 — Reinforce the Boundary**

Repair does not mean removing limits.

Children need both connection and boundaries.

Keep your message warm, calm and clear.

Example:

*"It's okay to feel angry."*

*"It's not okay to hit."*

*"Next time, we'll find a safer way to show those feelings."*

The feeling is accepted.

The unsafe behaviour is not.

---

### **Step 6 — Solve the Problem Together**

Once everyone is calm, begin looking forward instead of backwards.

Ask:

☐ What could help next time?

☐ **What did your body need?**

☐ **What calming tool might work?**

☐ **How can I help you sooner next time?**

Brainstorm together.

There is rarely only one solution.

Children become better problem-solvers when they help create the plan.

---

## **Step 7 — Repair the Relationship**

Sometimes words are enough.

Sometimes actions matter more.

Encourage your child to think about how the relationship can be repaired.

Examples:

☐ Say sorry.

☐ Give a hug (if welcomed).

☐ Help rebuild what was broken.

☐ Draw a picture.

☐ Write a note.

☐ Help the other person feel better.

Repair should never feel like punishment.

Its purpose is to rebuild trust.

---

### **Step 8 — End With Connection**

Do not let the last memory of the conflict be the conflict itself.

Finish with reassurance.

You might say:

*"I'm proud of us for talking about this."*

*"We'll keep learning together."*

*"I love you—even when we have difficult days."*

*"Nothing about today changes how much I love you."*

Children remember how conflict ends far more than they remember how it began.

---

### **If Your Child Isn't Ready**

Sometimes your child will not want to talk immediately.

That's okay.

Respect their pace.

You might simply say:

*"I'm here whenever you're ready."*

*"We don't have to solve everything right now."*

*"I'll keep checking in."*

Repair cannot be forced.

Safety grows when children know the invitation remains open.

---

### **If You Aren't Ready**

Sometimes the adult needs more time too.

That is healthy.

Instead of pretending everything is fine, be honest.

*"I'm still calming my body."*

*"I'd like to talk when I can be the parent I want to be."*

Children learn that taking time to regulate is responsible—not avoidant.

---

### **Remember These Four Truths**

- ✓ Every family experiences conflict.
- ✓ Every parent makes mistakes.
- ✓ Every child makes mistakes.

✓ Every relationship can grow stronger through repair.

---

### **Quick Repair Checklist**

After every conflict, ask yourself:

- ☐ **Did I help everyone become safe first?**
- ☐ **Did I reconnect before correcting?**
- ☐ **Did I listen with curiosity?**
- ☐ **Did I take responsibility for my part?**
- ☐ **Did we talk about the emotion beneath the behaviour?**
- ☐ **Did we reinforce the boundary calmly?**
- ☐ **Did we think about what to do next time?**
- ☐ **Did we end with connection?**

If you can answer **yes** to most of these questions, your family is not simply recovering from conflict.

You are teaching one of the most important life skills your child will ever learn.

---

### **One Final Reminder**

Children do not learn healthy relationships by watching families avoid conflict.

They learn healthy relationships by watching people move through conflict with honesty, humility and love.

Every sincere repair sends a powerful message:

**Mistakes do not end relationships.**

**Love does not disappear after difficult moments.**

**We can always find our way back to one another.**

That lesson may become one of the greatest gifts your child carries into every relationship for the rest of their life.

## 7) When to Seek Professional Support

**One of the greatest misconceptions in parenting is the belief that asking for help means you have failed.**

It doesn't.

In fact, recognising when additional support is needed is often one of the strongest, most loving decisions a parent can make.

Children are constantly growing.

Their emotions change.

Their behaviour changes.

Their needs change.

Many emotional difficulties are a normal part of development.

Tantrums.

Separation anxiety.

Fears.

Big frustrations.

Occasional aggression.

These experiences are often expected as children learn how to understand themselves and the world around them.

But sometimes, a child's emotional struggles become so frequent, so intense or so persistent that extra support can make a meaningful difference.

Seeking professional guidance is not giving up your role as a parent.

It is adding another caring adult to your child's support team.

There is no shame in that.

Just as we would seek medical advice for a broken bone or persistent illness, emotional wellbeing deserves the same care and attention.

---

### **Most Emotional Difficulties Are Temporary**

Every child has difficult days.

Every child cries.

Every child becomes angry.

Every child worries.

No child is calm all the time.

Emotional ups and downs are part of healthy development.

Before becoming concerned, ask yourself:

- **Is this behaviour occasional or happening most days?**

- **Is it becoming more intense over time?**
- **Is it affecting my child's daily life?**
- **Is my child recovering after difficult moments, or becoming increasingly stuck?**

It is the pattern—not a single difficult day—that matters most.

---

### **It May Be Helpful to Seek Professional Support If...**

#### **Big emotions become overwhelming most days**

Your child regularly experiences emotional reactions that seem far more intense than the situation would usually explain.

These reactions happen frequently and are becoming harder to recover from over time.

---

#### **Emotions are interfering with everyday life**

Your child's emotional struggles are making it difficult to:

- Attend school
- Build friendships
- Participate in everyday activities
- Sleep well
- Eat normally
- Enjoy things they previously enjoyed

## **Anxiety is becoming limiting**

Occasional worries are a normal part of childhood.

However, professional support may help if anxiety begins preventing your child from:

- Going to school
  - Sleeping alone
  - Leaving home
  - Joining activities
  - Spending time with friends
  - Trying age-appropriate experiences
- 

## **Your child seems persistently sad or withdrawn**

Every child experiences sadness.

But if your child seems withdrawn, hopeless or emotionally flat for an extended period, it is worth speaking to a healthcare professional.

Pay attention if they consistently lose interest in activities they once enjoyed or seem unable to experience moments of joy.

---

## **Aggressive behaviour is becoming more frequent or more dangerous**

If your child's aggression becomes increasingly severe, difficult to manage or creates ongoing safety concerns for themselves or others, additional support can help everyone feel safer.

Remember:

Aggression is communication.

Professional guidance can help uncover what that communication may be trying to say.

---

## **Your child rarely recovers after becoming overwhelmed**

Emotional storms happen.

What matters is whether the nervous system eventually finds its way back to calm.

If recovery regularly takes many hours, happens only with extreme difficulty or seems to be becoming harder over time, professional guidance may be beneficial.

---

## **You are worried**

Never underestimate parental intuition.

You know your child better than anyone else.

If something consistently feels different...

if you find yourself repeatedly thinking,

*"Something doesn't seem right,"*

it is appropriate to ask for advice.

Seeking an assessment does not mean something is seriously wrong.

Sometimes reassurance is exactly what families need.

---

### **It Is Also Okay to Seek Support for Yourself**

Parents often focus entirely on their children.

But your wellbeing matters too.

Consider reaching out for support if you find yourself:

- Feeling constantly overwhelmed
- Losing patience more often than usual
- Feeling emotionally exhausted every day
- Dreading time with your child because everything feels like a struggle
- Feeling isolated or hopeless
- Unsure how to respond despite trying your best

Supporting yourself is one of the most caring things you can do for your child.

Children benefit when the adults caring for them are supported too.

---

## **Who Can Help?**

Depending on your child's needs, support may come from different professionals.

These may include:

- Your child's paediatrician or family doctor
- A child psychologist
- A child psychotherapist
- A licensed mental health professional with experience in children
- A family therapist
- School counsellors or school wellbeing staff
- Developmental specialists when appropriate

Each professional brings different expertise.

Sometimes one conversation is enough.

Sometimes longer-term support is helpful.

There is no single "right" path.

---

## **Seeking Help Does Not Mean Your Child Is Broken**

Children are not machines that occasionally need fixing.

They are human beings who sometimes need extra support while growing.

Receiving professional help does not change who your child is.

It simply gives them—and you—more tools.

Many children who receive early support develop greater confidence, stronger emotional skills and healthier relationships because their needs were understood rather than ignored.

Early support is not a sign of failure.

It is an investment in your child's future wellbeing.

---

## **Trust Your Relationship**

Even when professionals become involved, remember something important.

You remain your child's most important relationship.

No therapist.

No psychologist.

No teacher.

No programme.

No book.

Can replace the safety of a loving, emotionally available adult.

Professional support works best when it strengthens—not replaces—the connection between parent and child.

That relationship will always remain your child's greatest source of security.

---

### **A Gentle Reminder**

If you are reading this chapter because you are worried about your child, take a slow breath.

You do not have to figure everything out today.

You do not need every answer before asking for help.

You are not expected to navigate every challenge alone.

One conversation with a trusted professional can provide clarity, reassurance and direction.

Asking for help is not the opposite of strong parenting.

It is often one of its clearest expressions.

---

### **One Final Reminder**

Children do best when the adults around them work together.

Parents.

Teachers.

Family members.

Healthcare professionals.

Each person brings a different piece of the puzzle.

The goal has never been to prove that you can do everything on your own.

The goal is to make sure your child has everything they need to grow, learn and thrive.

Sometimes the most courageous words a parent can say are:

**"I think we could use a little extra help."**

Those words are not a sign that hope has been lost.

They are often the beginning of finding it.

## 8) Little Calm Club Resources

**If you've reached this point, you've already taken an important step.**

You've invested time in understanding your child's emotional world.

You've explored how the brain develops.

How emotions work.

How connection builds trust.

How boundaries and compassion can exist together.

Most importantly, you've discovered that emotional wellbeing isn't built through one perfect conversation.

It's built through thousands of ordinary moments.

This book was written to become a trusted companion for those moments.

But learning doesn't end here.

Children grow.

Their needs change.

New challenges appear.

Every stage of childhood brings new opportunities to strengthen emotional skills.

That is why Little Calm Club exists.

Our mission has always been simple:

**Gentle tools for big feelings.**

We create practical, research-informed resources that help parents, teachers and caregivers support children's emotional development in everyday life.

Not through complicated theories.

But through simple, meaningful tools that can be used at home, in classrooms and anywhere children grow.

---

**Free Calm Cards**

**30 Free Calm Cards for Kids**

A collection of printable calming activities designed to help children regulate their emotions through breathing, movement, mindfulness and playful connection.

Perfect for:

- Home
- Classrooms
- Calm Corners
- Therapy rooms
- Childcare settings

A wonderful place to begin if you're introducing emotional regulation to young children.

---

### **101 Calm Down Activities for Kids**

Sometimes children don't need another lecture.

They need something to do.

**101 Calm Down Activities** provides a wide variety of practical ideas that help children regulate through movement, creativity, breathing, sensory experiences and connection.

Designed for different personalities, energy levels and emotional situations, it offers families a rich collection of activities they can return to again and again.

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### **Big Feelings Toolkit for Kids**

The **Big Feelings Toolkit** is a printable emotional learning resource created to help children recognise, understand and express their emotions.

It includes practical materials such as:

- Emotion Cards
- Feelings Posters
- Choice Cards

- Emotion Thermometer
- Body Clue Activities
- Parent and Teacher Guide

These resources make emotional learning visual, engaging and easy to use throughout everyday family life.

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### **Calm Corner Kit for Kids**

A Calm Corner is far more than a quiet space.

It becomes a place where children learn that all feelings are welcome and that emotional regulation can be practised with safety and support.

The **Calm Corner Kit** provides printable resources designed to help families and educators create calming spaces that children genuinely want to use.

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### **Continue Learning**

Every family is different.

Every child is unique.

There is no perfect parenting method.

Only a lifelong process of learning, adapting and growing together.

Continue exploring.

Continue asking questions.

Continue staying curious.

Every conversation matters.

Every repair matters.

Every moment of connection matters.

Even the smallest changes, repeated consistently, can transform the emotional climate of a family.

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## **Stay Connected**

To discover new resources, printable activities and practical tools for supporting children's emotional wellbeing, visit:

**[littlecalmclub.org](http://littlecalmclub.org)**

There you can explore free resources, learn about new releases and continue building your family's emotional toolkit.

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## **Our Promise**

Everything we create is guided by one simple belief:

**Children don't need adults who make their emotions disappear.**

**They need adults who help them move through those emotions with safety, confidence and hope.**

If Little Calm Club can help make even one difficult moment feel a little more manageable...

one conversation feel a little more connected...

or one child feel a little more understood...

then our mission is being fulfilled.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your family's journey.

We are honoured to walk alongside you.

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**Every big feeling is an opportunity for connection. Every conversation is an opportunity for growth. And every child deserves at least one adult who helps them believe that no feeling is too big to face alone.**

**Welcome to Little Calm Club.**

## 9) NOTES

Use these pages to capture the ideas, phrases and moments you want to remember.

You may want to write down:

- A behaviour you want to understand differently
- A phrase you would like to try
- A calming tool that helped your child
- A pattern you have started to notice
- A question you want to explore
- A repair you want to make
- A small moment of progress
- A reminder for difficult days

There is no correct way to use these pages.

They are simply a place to pause, reflect and make this book your own.

# **Things I Want to Remember**

# **What I Am Noticing About My Child**

# **What Helps My Child Feel Safe**

# **Words I Want to Practise**

# **Patterns I Am Beginning to See**

# **Calm Tools That Work for My Child**

# **Moments of Progress**

# Questions I Still Have

# Notes

## 10) Acknowledgements

**No one raises a child alone.**

Behind every emotionally healthy child is a community of people who choose, day after day, to show up with patience, compassion and hope.

This book is dedicated to every parent who has ever wondered if they were doing enough.

To every caregiver who has stayed awake after bedtime replaying the day, wishing they had handled one moment differently.

To every teacher who has looked beyond behaviour and chosen curiosity over judgment.

To every grandparent, foster parent, therapist, educator and trusted adult who has offered a child safety simply by being present.

You may never fully realise the impact of those ordinary moments.

But children do.

They remember the adults who stayed.

The adults who listened.

The adults who repaired.

The adults who believed in them, especially on the days when they struggled to believe in themselves.

Thank you to the researchers, psychologists, paediatricians and educators whose work over many decades has deepened our understanding of child development, emotional regulation and the extraordinary importance of secure relationships. Your dedication continues to improve the lives of countless children and families around the world.

Finally, thank you for choosing this book.

Whether you read every page or simply return to it during life's most challenging moments, I hope it reminds you of one simple truth:

You do not need to be a perfect parent.

You only need to keep showing up with love, curiosity and the willingness to begin again.

If this book helps even one conversation become calmer...

one repair happen sooner...

one child feel more understood...

or one family feel more connected...

then it has fulfilled its purpose.

From all of us at **Little Calm Club**, thank you for allowing us to be part of your family's journey.

We are honoured to walk alongside you.

---

**Every child deserves at least one adult who  
helps them believe that no feeling is too big to  
face alone.**

**Thank you for choosing to be that adult.**

# Thank You for Reading!

## **Your opinion can help another parent.**

If this book has helped you better understand your child's emotions, we'd be incredibly grateful if you shared your **honest review** on Amazon.

Every review—whether it's a few words or a longer reflection—helps other parents discover this book and decide if it's the right resource for their family.

Your feedback also helps us continue creating practical, compassionate tools that support families around the world.

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## **Leave Your Honest Review on Amazon**

**Visit:**

 [Review on Amazon](#)

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## **Thank you for supporting Little Calm Club.**

Together, we're helping more children feel understood, supported and emotionally safe.

Every review helps another family discover this book. Thank you for being part of that journey. ❤️

[littlecalmclub.org](http://littlecalmclub.org)

# Every big feeling is a message.



Behind Big Feelings helps you understand what's really going on beneath your child's behaviour—and how connection, not control, can guide them toward emotional well-being.

Rooted in neuroscience and attachment research, and filled with practical tools, real-life examples and ready-to-use strategies, this book will help you:

- ♥ **Understand** the emotions and behaviours behind your child's struggles
- ♥ **Respond** with confidence in the toughest moments
- ♥ **Build** emotional skills that last a lifetime
- ♥ **Create** a home where every feeling is safe
- ♥ **Strengthen** your connection and raise emotionally healthy children



“ You don't need to be a perfect parent. You just need the right understanding, the right tools and the belief that connection changes everything.

**You've got this. You are not alone.**

