



How to Defuse Challenging Behaviour Parent Guide



**Your comprehensive
Parent Guide containing
Emotional Intelligence
strategies to navigate
challenging behaviours
from kids 2-12 years.**

How to Defuse Challenging Behaviour

20 Powerful and Effective Strategies

Hi! I'm Stephanie Pinto

So glad you're here. I created this guide to help you enjoy parenting again.

I support parents just like you to go from chaos to connection using simple Emotional Intelligence strategies.

I'm an award-winning Emotional Intelligence coach, international speaker and best-selling author, so you're in good hands!



Start Here

I am truly grateful that you've taken the time to download this Parent Guide: *How to Defuse Challenging Behaviour*.

I have put this guide together to save you time, frustration, energy and even lost sleep! **This complete guide contains evidence-based and practical strategies that I teach my private clients.**

These strategies will help you know exactly how to navigate big emotions and challenging behaviours from your kids. I want to share it with you so you can start connecting with your kids and taking your whole family's emotional intelligence to a whole new level.

My best wishes,
Stephanie Pinto

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Strategies to Defuse Challenging Behaviour

Checklist

When little people experience intense emotions, it can be so stressful. I've been there with my own kids many times. The good news is that as parents, we have a wealth of strategies to help our children navigate difficult behaviours. Supporting them does not mean giving in to their demands or simply appeasing them.

Rather, it involves guiding them, co-regulating, and upholding our own boundaries with empathy and confidence. These 20 strategies are grounded in child development research, psychology and Emotional Intelligence, offering powerful and effective ways to foster emotional growth in both you and your child. I know you'll find them valuable!

1. First **manage** your own emotions/triggers
2. **Hold space** for your child's big emotions
3. Get down to their **level** rather than standing over them
4. Reduce your **verbal** language
5. Utilise **calm**, centred, open body language
6. **Validate** their emotions
7. Accept their **feelings** (not their behaviour)
8. **Empathise** with what they are feeling
9. Maintain your **boundaries**
10. Decrease **stimulation**, background noise, people, etc.
11. Use **touch** to comfort them - if they allow it
12. Use other ways to say '**no**' (I like candy too, but it's for after dinner)
13. Use **breathing** techniques, calming visual supports, etc
14. Avoid **reasoning**, their rational brain isn't engaged yet
15. **Re-direct** them to another activity or space (when they are ready)
16. Support them to **problem-solve** (when they calm)
17. Use **active** listening
18. Be **silent**! We usually talk TOO much.
19. **Let go** of the need to control the outcome
20. When it's over, **start fresh** and move on with the day!

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Most parents think that when their child is having a meltdown or showing challenging behaviour, they need to be firm, take control, or shut it down fast. But the truth is, those moments are actually powerful opportunities for connection, teaching, and emotional growth.

There is so much we can do as parents to support our kids during times of challenging behaviour or BIG emotions. It doesn't mean giving in to their demands or appeasing them. It means guiding them, co-regulating, maintaining your own boundaries, and helping them move on with the day.



1. Manage your own emotions and triggers.

When we come in guns blazing, shouting or yelling to “fix” the situation, we’re actually showing our kids how to handle stress with frantic, high-energy reactions. And let’s be real, that usually just makes things worse.

The key is learning to anticipate and manage your own triggers so you don’t bring frazzled energy into the mix. When you stay calm and regulated, you set the tone for your child to do the same. Instead of adding fuel to the fire, you become the steady presence that helps put it out.

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2. Hold space for your child's big emotions.

Holding space is a lot to do with 'allowing'. Not allowing any behaviour or aggressive action - but allowing your child to feel and express their emotions, not squashing or shushing them. When kids engage in challenging behaviour e.g. talking back, hitting, etc. it means they are not coping with the situation, and it is so healthy to express this! Hold space for them to release this energy and emotion.

3. Get down to their level - don't stand over them!

This seems like a no-brainer, but the number of times parents forget this is huge. We're in the midst of a challenging behaviour, trying to stay calm, wanting to tear our hair out... it's natural to forget how big and intimidating we can seem when standing over our kids. But when we lower ourselves to their level, physically getting down to eye level, it immediately reduces their sense of threat, fosters connection, and makes it easier for them to listen and engage. Shifting this one habit is a game changer.



4. Reduce your verbal language

Imagine you're in the kitchen, stressed out of your mind, when your partner chimes in: "Calm down, it's not a big deal. Just grab the salt, turn down the heat before it burns—and hurry up, answer the phone!" Instant overload.

Now, think about how that feels for your child in a tense moment. Instead of piling on instructions, break things down into simple, clear steps. Chunking your language makes it easier for them to process, helping to de-escalate the situation and get things back on track much faster.



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5. Utilise calm, centred, open body language.

Children rely heavily on facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language to interpret emotions and communication. By consciously adjusting these cues, you can set the tone and de-escalate tension almost instantly. When you present yourself as calm, centred, and in control, your child is more likely to mirror that state and feel safe in the moment.

6. Validate your child's emotions.

As adults, we feel most calm and supported when we feel truly understood, and the same is true for our kids. Validating their emotions by reflecting back what they might be feeling can instantly diffuse tension and make them feel seen and heard.

This simple shift paves the way for a more cooperative, solution-focused conversation.



7. Agree with their feelings, NOT their behaviour (if it's hurtful or dangerous).

All feelings are valid, but not all behaviours are acceptable. Do your kids truly understand this? When they do, it can help them shift away from hurtful actions and regulate their emotions in the moment. This awareness also empowers you to maintain clear, consistent boundaries, an essential part of raising emotionally healthy and resilient children. Are you squashing your child's emotions without realising? All feelings are okay, but not all behaviours are. Know the difference.

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8. Empathise, empathise, empathise.

"I can see you're really frustrated right now! I hear you, it's not fair that he grabbed the remote off you. I'd be upset too!"

When you empathise with your child, you help them make sense of their emotions and connect feelings to their experiences. This is a crucial step in developing Emotional Intelligence, as it not only validates their feelings but also helps diffuse challenging behaviors and conflicts. When a child feels heard and understood, they are less likely to escalate their emotions and more open to problem-solving calmly.



9. Maintain your boundaries

The research is clear - in order to raise healthy, balanced, successful adults, boundaries are imperative. Does your child know what the boundaries are? Are they clearly communicated to them regularly? And lastly, how are they maintained? You can 100% do this firmly, with love and empathy.

10. Decrease stimulation, background noise, and people.

Overstimulated children can become dysregulated quickly, and the same is true for adults! When this happens, challenging behaviour often follows. Pay attention to your surroundings when your child is melting down. Turn off the TV, put the barking dog outside, and ask siblings to quiet down for a moment. By calming the environment, you'll help your child's emotions settle and create a significant shift in their state of mind. (This is one of my favourite strategies in this list!)

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11. Use touch to comfort them.

For as long as humans have existed, physical touch has been a powerful tool for calming and regulating our sensory systems. Even if your child is no longer an infant, don't underestimate the power of a gentle touch. A back rub, soft hug, or stroke of the hair can immediately help soothe big emotions. However, it's important to remember that some children, particularly those with sensory sensitivities, may find touch overwhelming or uncomfortable. Always be mindful of your child's preferences and cues, and respect their need for space when they're feeling dysregulated.



12. Find other ways to say 'no'.

Kids absolutely need to hear the word 'no', it's a natural part of life and helps prevent self-centred behaviour. However, hearing 'no' repeatedly can trigger resentment, frustration, and anger. Be creative and empathetic when setting limits: "I love ice cream too, but we need to eat dinner first," "Oh dear, that's not what we agreed," or "Now isn't the right time, honey."



13. Use breathing techniques, calming strategies, and visual supports.

I often talk about striking when the iron is COLD. This means that in calm times (not in the heat of the moment!) you can be upskilling your kids in how to manage big emotions. Box breathing is an effective calming technique, asking for help or getting a drink, and also using visual supports (pictures or photos) assist your child in knowing what they can do to regulate in the moment.

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14. Avoid reasoning! Their rational brain is offline.

In the midst of a challenging behaviour, your child's brain is struggling to find a balance. It's stuck in the emotional centre (the amygdala). In a nutshell, their brain's rational thinking is temporarily shut down. Don't get into lengthy conversations and try to reason with them. Wait until they've calmed a little, then you can connect with their rational, logical part of the brain.

15. Teach your child problem-solving skills.

Encouraging your child to problem-solve after a challenging behaviour helps develop a growth mindset. Once their emotions have calmed and their brain is "back online," guide them to reflect on the situation and think of solutions for next time. For example, you could say, "I know that was frustrating. What could you do differently next time to feel more in control?"



16. Re-direct them to another activity or space.

This strategy is highly effective when used at the right moment. First, give your child space to feel, process, and understand their emotions. Once they've calmed, redirect them to a familiar, enjoyable activity that shifts their focus and helps restore balance. Additionally, get to know their triggers so you can anticipate and redirect their frustration before it escalates.

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17. Use active listening

We often rush our kids through challenging moments, eager to move on with our day. But rushing only intensifies the situation. Instead, give them the time and space to process their emotions, and truly listen to what they're feeling. When we pause to validate their emotions, it helps them feel understood and loved, empowering them to navigate the moment with greater emotional resilience.

18. ZIP YOUR LIPS!

Often as parents, we just want to help, fix, solve, calm and get on with things. Overloading an already dysregulated child makes things worse. Silence is powerful! Being quiet means you are not adding to the cyclone. Not to be confused with 'stone-walling', allowing silence is more about being mindful of not bombarding your child!

19. Let go of the urge to control.

I can't emphasise enough how powerful this is! Be aware of your own emotions in the moment, and resist the urge to control the situation or brush it aside. Let go of the need for a perfect or ideal outcome. This mindset allows you to stay present and go with the flow, easing the pressure on everyone involved.

20. When it's finally over, move on!

These final steps are often overlooked when parents feel frazzled and struggle to release their own emotions. After a stressful moment, bring the experience to a positive close by saying something reassuring or engaging in a calming activity. Don't let the mood linger, this can be tough, but the day doesn't have to be ruined. If needed, have a gentle conversation or simply wipe the slate clean. Take a moment for yourself to regulate your nervous system, whether it's through deep breathing or a quick walk. Let go of any lingering frustration so you and your child can both move forward with emotional balance.

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Your Action Plan

Write your reflections here. Be systematic, and take your time. This isn't a race! You got this.

STEPH'S TIPS:

This week, focus on one key area of growth. How can you actively involve your child in the planning process? Consider your child's age, school commitments, fears, and needs when choosing the best strategy to start with. Create a clear action plan that works for both of you and set yourself up for success by taking the first step today.

1. Which one strategy from the list will I begin to focus on this week?

2. How will I begin to work on this strategy? What will I do to stay focused?

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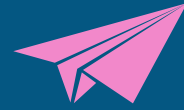
3. What are my strengths, and weaknesses (areas to improve) in relation to this strategy?

4. How will I keep myself accountable? Who can I ask to help me on my journey?

5. What are some affirmations, mantras or reminders I can tell myself when the going gets tough?



Calming Strategies for Kids



When your child experiences big emotions, it can be overwhelming for everyone. A key part of raising emotionally intelligent kids is helping them understand they have control over their feelings.

Teaching them coping strategies empowers them to manage their emotions in healthy ways. Use this list of 20 calming strategies to help your child navigate challenging moments, offering them tools to find calm and regain control.

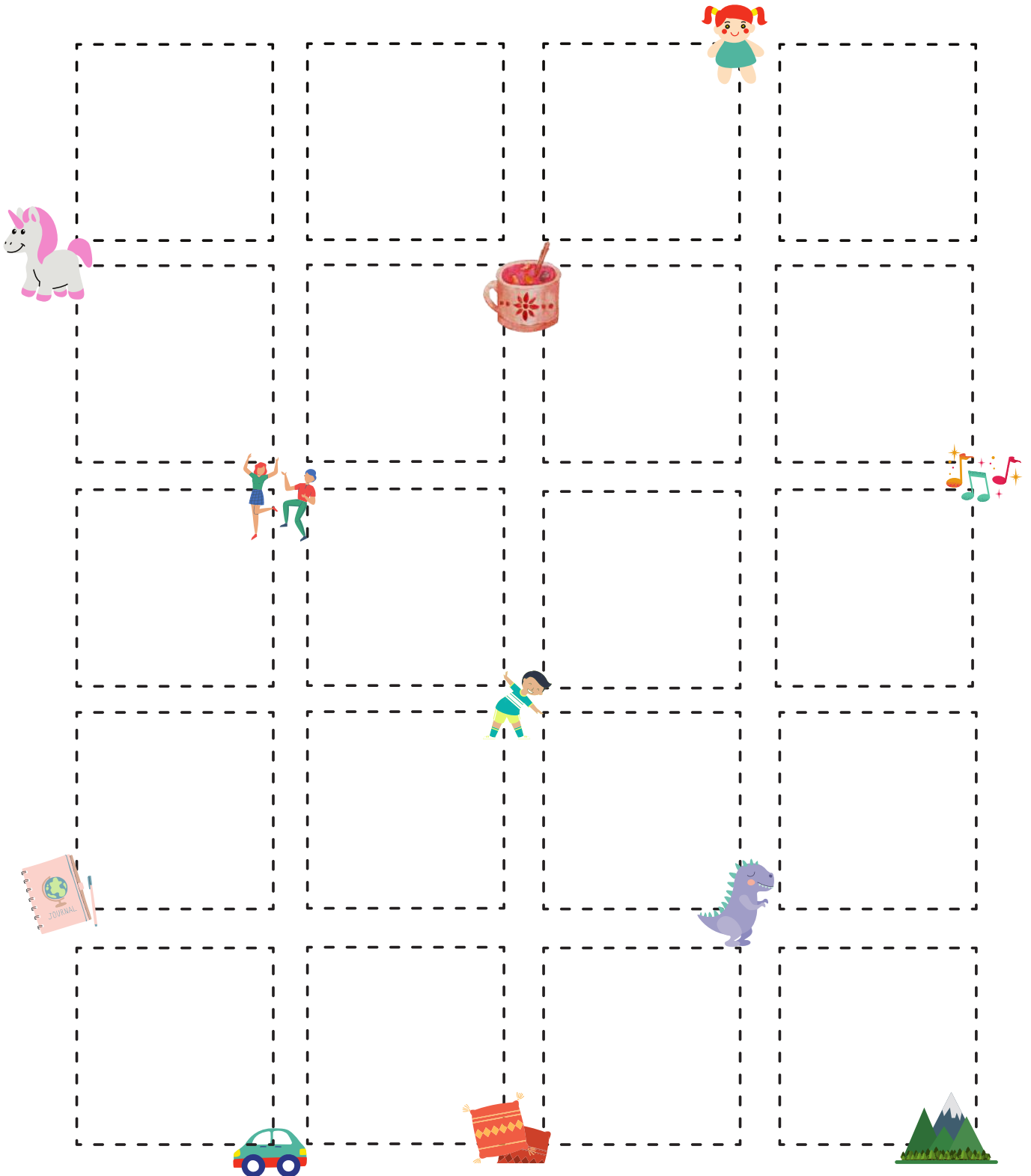




My Calming Strategies



Create your own personalised poster!



MY VOLCANO

THE GUIDE ON USING THE POSTER

Here are a few ways you can use the Volcano Poster to support your child to begin processing strong emotions:

Empower your family with the **Volcano Poster** - a fun and practical tool designed to help you teach your kids that emotions like anger and frustration are normal and healthy.

As a parent, you're the best person to guide your children through these powerful feelings.

By using this poster together, you'll create a safe space for open conversations about anger, showing them how to manage their emotions with confidence.

Remember... you don't have to be a perfect, calm parent all the time - being real is what matters.

Together we can take this step towards raising emotionally intelligent kids.

1. Print and Display: Place the poster on the fridge or a common area where your child can see it daily. This visual reminder helps keep the conversation about emotions ongoing.

2. Bedtime Talks: Use the poster as a tool during bedtime to reflect on the day. Ask your child about their "volcano" - what made them feel frustrated or angry and how they handled it.

3. Storytime Connections: While reading books, point out when characters experience strong emotions. Discuss their "volcano" moments and how they could manage those feelings.

4. Modeling Emotions: Share your own "volcano" moments with your child, showing that even adults feel frustrated or angry sometimes. This normalises these emotions and teaches them healthy ways to cope.

5. Role-Playing: Act out scenarios where the "volcano" could erupt, and practice using the strategies from the poster to calm down. This makes the learning process interactive and fun.

MY VOLCANO

Normalise emotions like frustration and anger by talking about your 'volcano' and model how it feels to your child. When you're calm, what it's doing (it's low), how you feel (calm, cool) and what you're doing on the outside (talking normally, playing, etc)



When you're getting frustrated or something's bothering you, talk about what your volcano is doing (it's bubbling up), how you feel (annoyed, cranky, upset) and what you're doing on the outside (impatient, raising voice, stomping around, etc)

When you're overwhelmed, really upset or mad, explain what your volcano is doing (it's exploding), how you feel (angry, confused) and what you're doing on the outside (yelling, clenching fists, etc).

Remember never to demonise big emotions or shame your child when they experience them.



 **I have a gift for you!** 

“You’ve come this far - well done! But now it’s time to implement it all, and that can be HARD. To make it super easy, I’ve taken all the exact strategies I use with my private clients and put them into this self-paced online course.

DECODING & DEFUSING

Challenging Behaviour

COURSE



I helped so many parents get on track with defusing their child’s challenging behaviours that I created a self-paced course showing people how to do it.

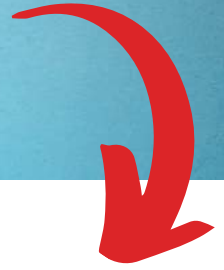
My 10 module course takes you on a journey beneath the surface of your child's challenging behaviours, helping you understand what's really going on inside their developing brain and dysregulated nervous system.

If you’ve ever found yourself feeling triggered, stressed, and reactive, this class will show you how to shift your approach to create a calmer and more connected relationship with your child.

You’ll learn how to effectively respond in those tough moments, fostering lasting change rather than relying on punishment.



As a thank you for downloading this guide, I'm offering you a HUGE discount on one of my most popular self-paced courses.



This Course is for You If You Answer YES to Any of These Questions:

1. Does your child frequently display challenging behaviours like lashing out, hitting, or defiance? Perhaps they shut down, go non-responsive or won't open up.
2. Do you feel overwhelmed or stressed when your child refuses to listen or cooperate?
3. Are timeouts, threats, or punishments no longer working—or even making things worse?
4. Do you want to understand what's happening in your child's brain and body during their emotional outbursts?
5. Are you looking for strategies to help your child regulate their emotions and behaviour in a positive, supportive way?

What's Included in the Course?

- ★ *A deep understanding of why children display challenging behaviours like yelling, hitting, and defiance.*
- ★ *Insight into your child's nervous system and how it contributes to their stress responses.*
- ★ *An individualised approach to recognising when your child is entering fight/flight/freeze/fawn mode.*
- ★ *Tools to help your child calm down and return to a state of emotional regulation.*
- ★ *Clarity on when and how to discuss behaviour, problem-solve, and create solutions for lasting change.*

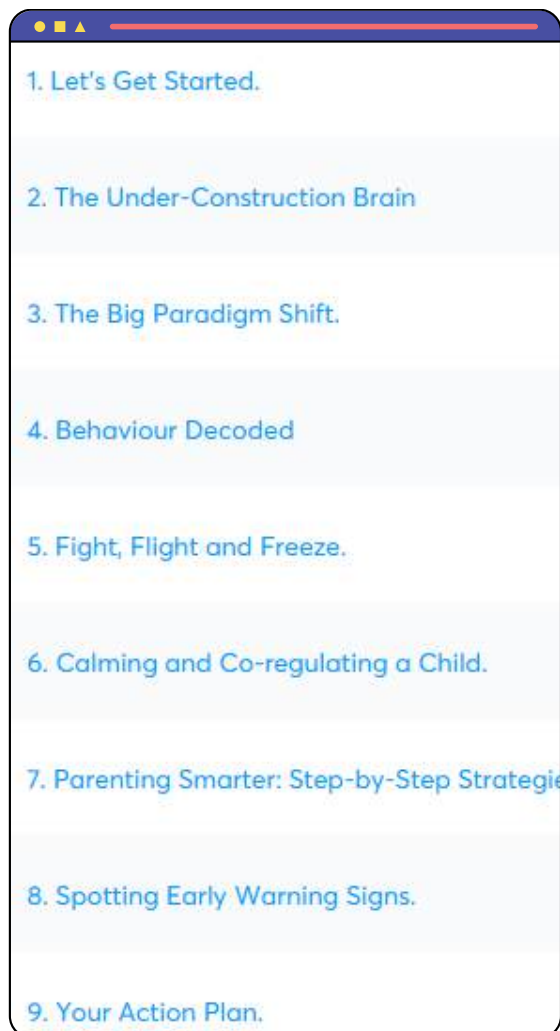


Exclusive Bonus Resource

This course comes with a powerful resource to deepen your learning and support your journey.

You'll receive an exclusive exercise on the nervous system and behaviour, designed to help you apply the course's strategies and support your child in real-life situations.

Course Video Modules:



For a limited time, access
the entire course with an
exclusive DISCOUNT.
You won't find this
anywhere else!

Code: YAY-HALF-OFF

50% off

Don't pay \$97, now only \$48.50

Prices in USD.

Access Here!



"I wish I did this sooner. I had no idea what was causing my son's lashing out, refusal, and mean comments. Learning what triggers him, and how to co-regulate with him made a huge difference in just ONE DAY. My husband is watching the videos now and said it's pretty good too.. woo hoo!"

- Mindy, mother of 2, Ohio.

