

ADHD-liitto & Barnvårdsföreningen



Smooth Everyday Life

– tips for providing positive support for your child

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Foreword

This guide is a collaboration between ADHD-liitto and Barnavårdsföreningen. The first edition of the guide in Finnish was published in 2011 and was well received. It became necessary to publish a revised edition, as information on some of the topics covered in the guide has been updated.

This is the first English edition. We hope that the guide will encourage, provoke thought and provide answers for its readers.

Helsinki, December 2022

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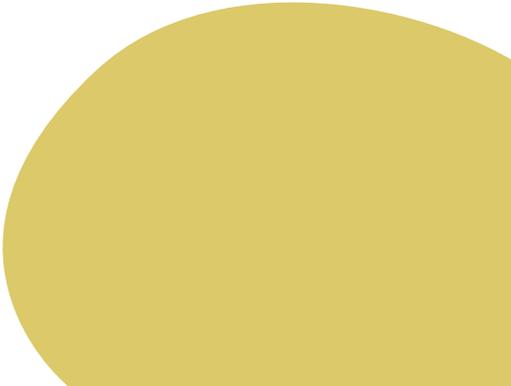


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For the reader

Good interaction and effective parenting and education methods contribute to a child's well-being and smooth everyday life. Small daily accomplishments give children confidence in their own abilities and increase their willingness to learn new things. This is the new edition of the widely acclaimed *Arki toimimaan* guide to creating smooth routines. It will benefit anyone who feels they need tips on how to positively support their pre-school and primary school child.

Bringing up a child is not always a bed of roses – it requires a lot of time, patience, sometimes also a review of your own ways of doing things and being kind towards yourself. A child teaches their parent at least as much as a parent teaches their child. The child's age and temperament, as well as any developmental challenges, have a major impact on their ability to focus and control their own behaviour. Development is individual. Some children need help in regulating their behaviour until a much older age than others.

The approach of this guide is practical and solution-oriented. It provides ideas and methods for everyday situations, such as how to make

getting dressed and mealtimes easier, how to transition from one situation to another without getting stuck, or how to calm your child down in a conflict situation. The guide also offers tips on how to strengthen your parenting resources. It provides practical tips for parents whose children have challenges with self-regulation and learning or neuropsychiatric symptoms. The guide is also useful for professionals working with these children and their families.

When reading this guide, it is important to remember that every child and family is different – therefore, the solutions that work are always individual. Problems that seem complex do not necessarily require complex solutions. I hope you will find yours in this guide!

Helsinki, December 2022

Silve Serenius-Sirve



1



Effective interaction

By being present and understanding the impact of one's own behaviour, an adult can contribute significantly to building interaction.

The feeling of mutual understanding is important in all relationships. It is essential to support the regulation of a child's behaviour. The more direct and clearer the interaction is, the more successful it will be at home, in early childhood education and at school. In everyday situations, interaction often involves giving and receiving instructions, feedback and expressing opinions.

The more a child has challenges with self-regulation of attention and behaviour, self-control and understanding instructions, the more they need adult guidance.

Pay particular attention to the following aspects

- First, make sure that your message can reach its recipient. Go up to the child, make eye contact, stop your child, if necessary, call them out by name and touch them. If you try to communicate with your child from another room, you can never be sure that your message is getting through. In this case, you are usually just wasting your own energy and getting frustrated with the child unnecessarily by having to repeat your message several times.

- Focus on listening and paying attention to what your child is telling you.
- Give unambiguous instructions and use expressions that the child understands. For example, “Sit nicely!” or “Behave!” are too general and vague. It is better to say, “Sit with your bottom on the chair” or “Sit with your legs under the table”.
- Your message will be better understood and carry more weight if your verbal and non-verbal communication is aligned. Reinforce your message by using body language: facial expressions, tone of voice and movement. You should give positive feedback in a warm tone and by expressing genuine delight, not reluctantly with a tight jaw.
- Set an example of how you expect others to behave. For example, if you do not want your child to shout, say it in a calm voice. “Keep your voice down, please” is much more effective than “Do not shout!” Sometimes it is enough to make a hand gesture to show that now is the time to keep one’s voice down.



The importance of a parent's own self-regulation

Self-regulation is the regulation of a person's emotions, thinking and behaviour. It includes the ability to regulate one's own level of alertness and activity and to control one's emotional response to sensations. The development of self-regulation in a child is influenced by the child's still developing central nervous system and by all experiences and interactions between the child and the adults around them.

The ability of parents and close adults to self-regulate, as well as their ability to cope, play an important role in the self-regulation of a developing child. An adult who is able to regulate their own emotions, to receive and accept the child's emotions and to act as a regulatory support for the child is the best support for the child's self-regulation development.

Emotions tend to flare up easily in children with neuropsychiatric symptoms. Rush and sudden changes in routine or plans often cause challenges in everyday life.

It is important for the parent to realise that their child is not acting up out of spite. The child is practising self-regulation, which includes recognising and managing their own emotions. Self-regulation skills are also linked to the development of a child's thinking and language, and to the maturation of the brain, which continues well into adulthood.

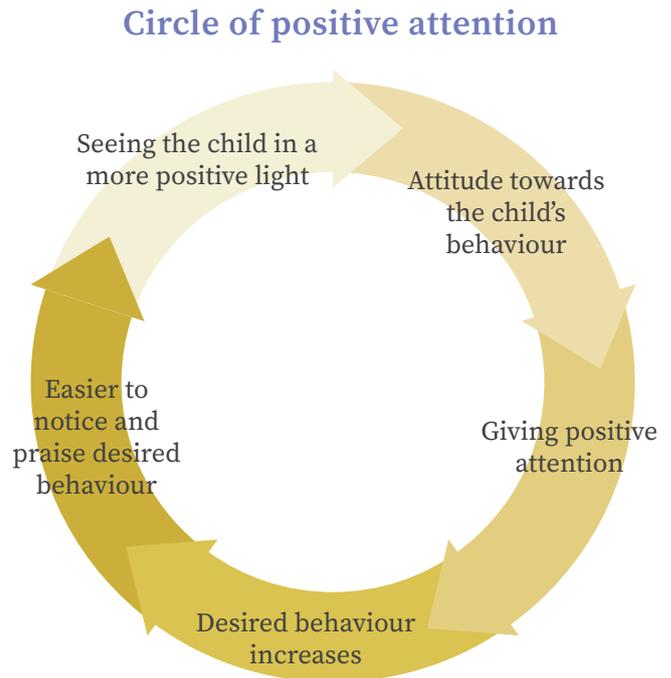
It is important for parents to control their own emotions so that they can help their child to overcome the frustration that comes with major disappointments or imposed limits, for example. It is through challenging everyday situations and

the example that adults set that children learn self-regulation.

We are all allowed to experience different emotions, and it is important to allow emotions for both the child and the parent. The parent can explore the issue with the child and look for the cause of the frustration from the child's perspective. All children need adult help in verbalising their emotions and in accepting and acknowledging them. Emotions should be shown, but no one should be hurt in the process, and nothing should be damaged.

Parents need early support, information and solutions to support their self-regulation. A parent's understanding of the child and realising the importance of self-regulation will help the parent to find a calm way of working with the child. This also gives the parent a sense of accomplishment, which increases their confidence as a parent. A parent who feels able to cope with their child can better deal with difficult situations. Positive

interaction circles further strengthen parenting and the interaction between child and parent.



Important things for a parent to remember:

- Remaining calm is the best way for an adult to help their child.
 - The child benefits from predictable actions by adults and routines.
 - The parent's own well-being and rest are important needs to address.
 - The child learns self-regulation from the adult's example and practices.
 - All emotions are allowed for both the child and the parent.
- ➔ Learn to identify situations that make you tense and find a way to calm yourself down.
 - ➔ Be aware of the impact of changes in routine and rush on your child and yourself.
 - ➔ Acknowledge your child's emotions and verbalise what you see or think your child is feeling.
 - ➔ By verbalising your own emotions and experiences in everyday life, you set an important example for your child.

3



Daily routines

A parent shows affection for their child by taking care of daily routines such as mealtimes, getting dressed and going to bed. The basis of every child's well-being is adequate sleep, a regular and healthy meal schedule, physical activity and outdoor play, and the emotional presence of an adult who gives positive attention.

Daily routines often cause conflict within families, for example because of rush, hunger or tiredness. When children learn and master daily activities and receive positive feedback on them, it reinforces their experience of themselves as competent and developing individuals. This lays the foundation for a positive self-image and the ability to cope independently in the future. It is therefore important to organise these situations in such a way that the child can succeed.

You should agree with your child in advance on the practices and rules. As an adult, you are able

to anticipate situations and regulate your actions better than your child. If your child tends to be sleepy in the mornings, allow enough time for both your own and your child's morning routines. Consistency, regularity and adult guidance are particularly important for your child. Routines are also important to maintain at weekends and during holidays. Children with neuropsychiatric symptoms, in particular, benefit from a consistent daily rhythm.

How to help your child

- consistency
- routines and regularity, i.e. predictability in everyday life
- rules and agreements
- adult help and support
- anticipating and preparing the child for future situations and events
- encouraging and celebrating the positive
- using humour in difficult situations



Mealtimes

Sharing meals as a family strengthens the family's sense of belonging.

Your child will likely be happy to participate in cooking if you provide an encouraging opportunity to do so. Age-appropriate tasks can be given to the child. For example, you can involve your child by letting them chop cucumbers for a salad or set the table. Children enjoy being able to help and hearing from an adult that their help is important.

It is important to agree on a common set of rules so that the whole family can enjoy mealtimes together.

Making mealtime a pleasant moment for the whole family

- Make mealtimes safe and enjoyable shared moments for your child.
- Take a neutral attitude towards your child's eating and behaviour. It is important that mealtimes do not turn into power struggles. You should not force your child to eat.
- Regularity and anticipation are good principles for mealtimes as well.
- Give recognition for good behaviour: "I love it when you offer me bread."
- Remember that a child with special needs requires more practice to learn the customs and rules related to mealtimes, too.

Family rules during mealtimes

- What are your family's rules when it comes to mealtimes? Explain them to your child and remember to stick to them yourself.
- Agree with your child that everyone will wash their hands before eating and at least taste all food being served. Also agree whether using a mobile phone or watching programmes is allowed during mealtimes.
- Consider whether the same mealtime rules apply to everyone, or whether your child with special needs has their own set of rules that are accepted by the siblings. However, remember to be fair between siblings when it comes to rules and agreements.

Movement during meals

Some children have a strong need to be in motion, making it difficult for them to stay still. Sitting at the table, for example until everyone has eaten, is too demanding in this case.

- Find an activity for your child to do during mealtimes that allows them to move around. For example, ask your child to get a milk carton from the fridge or serve everyone dessert.
- Make sitting on the chair easier for your child by using an active cushion or anti-slip mat.
- Consider whether it is necessary to intervene if the meal is going well and there's a nice atmosphere at the table. In this case, it is probably not worth pointing out the way your child is sitting or moving while eating, for example. Choose suitable times for family meals.

- Anticipate hunger. Hunger and a low blood sugar level can increase restlessness and irritability.
- Maintain a regular and healthy meal schedule.
- Allow eating only at the table and during set mealtimes and avoid extra snacks before meals.
- Make sure your child is genuinely hungry before meals.
- Place mealtimes clearly before or after children's TV programmes.
- Avoid extra stimuli during mealtimes. Remove unnecessary objects from the table that might distract your child from eating or turn off the TV, so it does not tempt your child to leave the table in the middle of a meal.
- Think about where your child sits: should they have a seat where they can see everyone and the whole room easily, without having to turn around?



A child's different way of sensing smells and tastes

Some children may avoid foods with a strong smell, very spicy foods or coarse food textures. They may also be very particular about the temperature at which food is served. Some children have a preference for strong flavours.

- You should not force your child to eat food they find unpleasant.
- If your child avoids transitioning to coarser foods, gradually increase the coarseness of their food. For example, you can add biscuit crumbs to their yoghurt.
- Let your child have a thick drink through a straw or chew/suck on a food item before eating the actual meal. Such strong, so-called deep sensations before meals may make it easier to eat other foods.
- Take into account your child's preferences. Many children prefer to keep the different food components separated from each other on the plate. Cucumber or pepper wedges may taste better eaten separately than mixed into a salad. Some children find vegetables tastier raw than cooked.
- It is important to offer your child a wide variety of foods and to introduce new foods gradually. Taste preferences often change as a child tries new foods and gets used to them.
- If your child enjoys strong flavours, you can add your child's favourite spices to foods where they would not normally be used. This will help your child to try new foods and broaden their diet.

Parental consistency supports the child's meal habits

Too many food choices can make a child picky about food. It is important that the adult does not "bargain" over what to eat and what not to eat. This will make mealtimes easier for everyone later on, and the child will learn to eat a variety of foods.

- If your child refuses to eat food prepared for the whole family, you can encourage them to try the food, for example by offering small amounts of food at a time. You can also encourage your child by praising how brave they are for trying new food.
- If your child tries to take over decision-making in setting the family menu, do not engage your child. Avoid offering multiple choices every day – "Would you like strawberry yoghurt, cereal, pudding or pie?" Calmly and without making a big deal of it, tell your child, "We're having yoghurt and bread as an evening snack tonight," or let the child choose between two options – "Would you like ham or cheese on your bread?"
- If your child refuses to eat the food that has been prepared for the whole family, and if they clearly want to eat only their favourite foods or treats, make it clear that today's menu has already been decided. If the child still refuses to eat, offer them food at the next meal. However, make sure that there is always something on your child's plate that they will eat. This is particularly important for children with sensory hypersensitivities.
- Your family can agree that once a day or once a week the child can decide what is on the menu. This agreement must be respected.



Getting dressed

Many children under school age do not yet know how to tie their shoelaces or fasten zips. Getting dressed requires, among other things, planning, body awareness, directional awareness and eye-hand coordination.

Assess your child's dressing skills and abilities. Match your own expectations and assistance to the child's skills and situation. If your child is tired or nervous, you may want to help more than at other times and express this to your child by saying, "You look really tired, let me help you."

If your child has difficulty remembering what to put on and in what order

- Use images (photographs, magazine cut-outs, drawings, images from photo editing software) to guide your child on which clothes to put on and in what order.
- Together with your child, choose the clothes for the next day and lay them out in the right order for putting them on. This will make it easier to start and finish getting dressed.
- When giving verbal instructions to your child, give one instruction at a time.

If your child has difficulty putting on clothes the right way around

- Clearly mark the backs of your child's clothes or use the labels on the clothes as a clue.
- Teach your child dressing techniques – for example, they can place a shirt on their lap in a way that makes it is easy to put it on the right way around.

If your child gets dressed very slowly or gets distracted

- Provide a quiet dressing area for your child and allow enough time for getting dressed.
- Set a clear timeframe for getting dressed. For example, you can use an egg timer or a mobile phone timer to mark the beginning and end of getting dressed time.
- Provide clothes that are easy for the child to put on (such as shoes with Velcro fastening, socks with loose tops).
- Make getting dressed a playful competition and measure the time with a stopwatch. You can keep a record of the results.
- When your child tries their best to get dressed, reward them with a praise, sticker or other small reward. “I can't believe you've already put your shirt on!”
- Remember that haste and rushing your child often make the situation worse. Keep your composure. Helping is allowed!

Choose the right clothing materials and designs for your child

Children can be very demanding and particular about what materials and designs they can tolerate in their clothes. This may be due to tactile hypersensitivity. For many, woollen clothing, tight sleeve cuffs and necklines as well as high polo necks are off-putting.

However, preferences are individual. Some children like skin-tight underwear and may insist on wearing clothes that cover their arms and legs even in warm weather. Some may find walking around barefoot uncomfortable. Some children prefer to always wear as little clothing as possible.

- Respect your child's individual clothing preferences as much as possible.
- When you find a design or material that works for your child, buy several similar items of clothing.
- If necessary, make your own alterations to the clothes: cut off any itchy product and care labels. Underwear seams are more comfortable if you turn the garment inside out.
- Anticipate the changing seasons in time – fetch the clothes for the coming season for your child to see and try on. Make a clear agreement with your child about the transition to the coming season's clothing. For example, the agreement can be that your child will start wearing spring clothes at a certain temperature.
- Let your child go swimming in natural water with water shoes or socks on.

Personal hygiene

Create routines that make personal hygiene easier

- Agree on the time of bedtime personal hygiene routines and how much time your child can spend in the shower or bath.
- Use an egg timer to measure bath time.
- Always carry out personal hygiene routines in the same order. This makes it easier for your child to learn to remember the different steps.
- When guiding your child, give one instruction at a time: “Brush your teeth. – Check the result. – Wash your face. – Dry your face with the towel.”

Make personal hygiene fun

- You can motivate your child to brush their teeth by using an interesting toothbrush or even a dental mirror to check the results.
- Make up a rhyme or a song for washing up or brushing teeth. This will distract your reluctant child.
- Together with your child, choose the hygiene products they prefer: a shampoo with a pleasant scent, bar soap with a shape, and so on.



Take into account sensory hypersensitivities

Some children find washing up and grooming particularly unpleasant. This may be due to hypersensitivity to tactile sensations.

- If necessary, anticipate touch with a look or by verbalising it.
- Find out what kind of touch soothes and feels good to your child and what kind of touch your child finds uncomfortable. By verbalising your child's experience, you are communicating to the child that you notice their reaction and care, and you are articulating the child's experience in words.
- It is easier for your child to tolerate taking a bath or shower if you let them hold the shower head or pour the water themselves. If necessary, allow your child to use earplugs or swimming goggles in the shower.
- Touch and hold your child in a confident, firm but warm manner, using deep sensation touching. Avoid light surface touching, which your child may find uncomfortable.
- It is a good idea to cut your child's nails after a shower or bath, when nails are still soft.
- Massage your child's scalp vigorously before brushing or cutting their hair.

Going to the toilet

Make going to the toilet a regular routine

Sometimes your child may forget to go to the toilet in time or leave it to the last minute, which results in a rushed toilet visit. Your child may forget to flush the toilet and wash their hands.

- Make sure that going to the toilet regularly is part of your child's daily routine. Have your child go to the toilet before going out, when coming home, before eating and taking a nap.
- Motivate your child to go to the toilet with attractive toiletries and products. A toilet freshener that colours the flushing water, for example, may motivate boys to “aim for the bullseye” and flush the toilet.
- You can motivate your child to wash their hands with fun liquid or bar soaps.

If your child has difficulties going to the toilet

- Clarify the steps of going to the toilet with a series of pictures on the wall.
- For a boy, you can mark the correct distance from the toilet bowl on the floor.
- If your child tends to be hasty on the toilet, you can ask them to count slowly to ten.
- Agree on how many pieces of toilet paper is enough for wiping properly but also avoiding clogs.
- If going to the toilet is causing significant challenges in your child's everyday life, you should seek support. There can be many reasons for this, including sensory hypersensitivity, bodily sensations, negative experiences or fears.

Transitions

Transitions are situations in which a child must move from one activity to another. These situations often pose challenges for families. It can be difficult for a child to transition from interesting play to getting dressed or having a meal. The child may become “stuck” in the current activity, situation or object, making it difficult for them to move on to a new activity.

Transitions can be made easier by structuring situations more clearly. This makes it easier for the child to see and understand what is happening, what is required of them and how long an activity will take. If the child has difficulties with transitions, the adult should allow more time for the child to prepare. The adult should remain calm in transitions, as getting upset will not make it any easier to cope with transitions.

Create a regular daily schedule and routines

- When your child knows that an activity, such as going outdoors, is repeated at certain times each day, their resistance to transitions will be reduced and transitions will become smoother.
- Create as unhurried an atmosphere as possible for transitions.

Use pictures and timers to clarify the day's activities

- Use photos, drawings or images from photo editing software to create a schedule for your child, showing what the day's programme will include. Go through the programme together in the morning. If necessary, you can revise the programme during the day. With older children, you can use written checklists.
- It is a good idea to explain to your child what will happen, where, with whom, for how long, what your child will need to do and what will happen afterwards. You can use pictures, timers, task boxes and verbal explanation to clarify what will happen. For example, you can set a timer for 40 minutes and tell your child that they can play until the timer beeps and then they will have to come and eat. Every now and then, it is a good idea to remind your child how much time is left – in this way, the timer beep will not come as a surprise.
- Thoughtful organisation of the child's environment helps to structure activities. When items and activities have their designated places, it is easier for the child to understand activities.
- Waiting situations are often difficult for children. Try to organise these situations so that there is as little queuing and waiting as possible during the day, for example in shops. You can also think of things to do while waiting, for example counting how many yellow things you can see around you.

Preparing for going out

- Check the weather together with your child. Discuss together what kind of clothing is needed.
- Organise designated places for outdoor items and clothing so they are always easy to find.
- Arrange a quiet place for getting dressed, with as few stimuli as possible. If the hallway is busy, you can take your child to another area to get dressed.
- If you have several children, spread out the times when each child goes out. That way, they will not be getting dressed all at the same time.
- Take a photo of your child when they are wearing the clothes and other items needed to go to day care, for example. The photo will help your child to check if they have remembered to put on everything they need. A full-length mirror in the hallway also helps to check the final result.
- See also the section “Getting dressed” earlier in this chapter.

Prepare for the morning hurry

It is a good idea to practice leaving the house in the morning in advance when you are not in a hurry.

- On the previous evening, get your child’s clothes ready in the right place and in the right order for the following morning.
- Practise your child’s routine for leaving the house on quiet weekends first.
- In difficult situations, try to maintain a warm, positive attitude, which usually works better than forcing your child.
- Turn problem-focused talk into talk about learning a skill. In this case, “difficulty getting dressed” is transformed into learning a skill, i.e. practising together the “skill of getting dressed quickly”.
- Remember that helping is allowed. If your child is tired or the situation seems otherwise overwhelming, you can do more than usual for your child.
- Always praise your child’s accomplishments!



Rest and sleep

Adequate rest and sleep are important for everyone's well-being. A short night's sleep and various sleep disorders contribute to daytime fatigue, which in children can manifest as restlessness, increased impulsivity and difficulty concentrating. On the other hand, attention deficit disorders and other neuropsychiatric developmental challenges may be associated with sleep disorders.

The need for sleep is individual. Adequate sleep is the amount of sleep that ensures the ability to function properly the next day. As adequate rest and sleep are fundamental to all learning and overall well-being, it is worth seeking satisfactory and effective solutions to sleep problems for the whole family.

Take into account your child's individual circadian rhythm

Some children naturally sleep until late, while others need to go to bed early. Some children need a considerable night's sleep, while others can manage with a little less. If possible, take into account individual differences in bedtimes and nap needs.

A nap is necessary even for many older children, but it can be difficult to settle down for a rest. A nap does not necessarily have to involve sleep. Relaxing and resting while lying down, perhaps listening to calming music, is refreshing and provides a break from the day's activities.



Anticipate bedtime

A clear daily schedule and regular bedtime rituals support calming down and falling asleep. It is important to settle down well in advance for bedtime in the evening. The methods for calming down are individual, and experimentation will help to find the most appropriate ways for each family.

- Establish regular bedtime routines. Having an evening snack, washing up and reading a bedtime story at the same time every day creates structure and a sense of security.
- Make sure that your child has had the chance to release enough energy during the day by being physically active and spending time outdoors. It is easier for your child to fall asleep when they are genuinely tired in the evening.
- Avoid exciting and stimulating stories, TV programmes and games close to bedtime.
- Create positive images of sleep for your child. You can also explain why sleeping is worthwhile. For example, explain that sleeping helps your child grow, rests the brain and allows it to learn new things again the next day.
- Set aside time in the evening for having a chat together. Do not leave the discussion of difficult matters until just before falling asleep. At bedtime, you can reminisce about the good moments of the day.
- As a parent, you must make sure your child gets enough sleep and decide when they should go to bed.
- Do not prolong bedtime. Agree with your child that there will be no more reading or playing in bed after the bedtime story, that they can only go to the toilet or drink water once after you have

tucked them in, and that you will talk more again the next day.

Make it easier for your child to settle into bed and fall asleep

Some children have the need to release some of the tension and energy they have built up during the day by moving restlessly in bed. For example, finding a comfortable position to fall asleep may require “nesting” in bed.

Soothing sensations

- Massage your child with a calm, warm but firm touch.
- Some children find it soothing and easier to settle into bed when the blanket is a little heavier.
- Rock your child in a smooth motion inside a blanket or in your arms.
- If your child tends to jerk when falling asleep, line the bed with pillows to make a small nest.
- A bedtime toy or other bedtime comfort item can bring security to your child and soothe them for a good night's sleep.

Use images and music

- Put on some quiet, peaceful music in the background.
- Together with your child, practise breathing in and out calmly, like blowing up a balloon.
- Ask your child to imagine themselves as a light cloud floating in the summer sky.
- Go through your child's members one by one and ask your child to imagine them all limp and relaxed. You can use mental images such as a lazy cat, seal, rag doll or any other character your child likes.

Promote peaceful sleep

- Make sure your child's bedding and nightwear are comfortable, the air in the bedroom is fresh and the temperature cool, and that no noise or light can disturb your child's sleep.



If your child is afraid of the dark or has bad dreams

- Provide a dim night light in the room.
- Try to reassure your child that they are completely safe. Together you can check that there are no bogeymen under the bed or in the closet, or you can tame the bogeymen into friendly little elves that guard your child's sleep.
- If your child does not yet have a favourite bedtime toy, get one to protect their sleep.
- If your child's sleep problems persist and you are concerned, talk to your child's health care provider or school nurse.

Take into account your child's way of waking up

- Each of us has our own way of waking up. If your child is sleepy in the mornings, they may need more time than usual to wake up and start the day's activities.
- . Think about the most pleasant way for your child to wake up. Does your child wake up best to stroking or to the sound of an alarm clock? At what point does your child tolerate the lights being turned on?
- . The promise of some nice activity, such as watching cartoons after morning routines, may motivate your child to get up and complete the routines quickly.

Participation in household chores

Encourage your child to do age- and developmentally appropriate chores, such as setting the table, putting away their toys or tidying up their room, taking out the rubbish or chopping cucumbers. Participation in chores will give your child the feeling that their help is important. Doing things together strengthens the child's sense of participation. Also, it is often easier for the adult to do chores successfully when the child is involved and active.

An older child may object to being involved in household chores. Despite these objections, it is important to keep in mind that the development of a child or young person benefits from the fact that not all activities are enjoyable. When a child learns from an early age that there are also unpleasant obligations in life that need to be taken care of, they will also learn to take responsibility for common matters.

Children benefit from having an adult to guide and support them in multi-step and persistent activities that are completed from start to finish. A young child or a child with many challenges will not be able to cope with a task that requires many steps. Even a three-step task can be challenging, such as filling a watering can with water, carrying the watering can and then watering flowers. An older child can complete a task from start to finish, such as making a salad for dinner. For making a salad, the child will wash vegetables, chop them and place them in a bowl for serving.

- Involve your child in household chores, taking into account the child's age and abilities.

- Ensure your child is able to complete the chore by breaking down the multi-part instruction into steps.
- The broken-down instruction will support the child's executive functions. The child will know how to proceed: first – then – finally.



4



Physical activity, play and free time

Physical activity is vital for a child's growth, development, health and well-being. Being physically active strengthens a child's body awareness, balance, coordination of movements, eye-hand coordination, spatial perception and conceptual skills, among other things.

Exercise and outdoor activities

Exercise and outdoor activities help children channel energy in a positive way. When children are able to physically release energy, it is also easier for them to focus on calmer play and activities. Exercise can also give children self-esteem boosting experiences and develop self-expression and social skills.

The need to move is inherent in children. The adult must ensure that their child has varied and

sufficient opportunities for physical activity.

If a child receives positive encouragement from their parent to be physically active, this can create and maintain the child's own motivation to exercise. This predicts the adoption of an active lifestyle.

Give your child time, space and opportunities for physical activity

- Make sure your child gets plenty of vigorous exercise every day. Make outdoor activities a regular part of the daily programme.
- Make sure your child is dressed for the weather outside, so they can jump freely in puddles or play in the snow.
- Agree together on the limits of safe play, what your child can and cannot do. Praise your child when they act according to the agreements.
- Admire your child's physical skills and play. "You're such a fast runner!", "How did you become such a good climber?", "What a great hut you've built!"
- Go outside and be physically active together. Taking a walk together to the supermarket or to the nearby woods will give your child exercise and a nice moment together with an adult.
- Encourage varied physical activity. Good forms of exercise include walking, running, yard games, wrestling, ball games, cycling, forest hikes, skiing, ice skating and swimming.
- A child may need more time and outside support to learn physical activity skills. Do not compare your child's skills with those of other children but praise your child for their own efforts and accomplishments. If necessary, set an example and guide by hand.
- Take into account your child's developmental level and individual characteristics. Some

children will require a lot of familiarisation and adult support to meet new physical challenges, while others will push their physical limits and require more adult supervision to ensure safety. We easily forbid things as too dangerous and thus limit children's physical activity and learning. What if we used the time and effort spent on forbidding to enable safe physical activity for children?

If your child tends to run away

- Make sure your small child is always under adult supervision.
- If your child is outdoors alone, make sure the outdoor area is safe and you can easily check where your child is if necessary.
- Agree with your child where the boundaries of the outdoor area are – for example, whether they can go alone into the nearby woods or into a neighbour's yard. Walk through the boundaries with your child and make sure they have understood the boundaries.
- In case your child gets lost, mark their name and address on their outdoor clothing.
- Reward your child for staying within the agreed boundaries.
- If the reason for your child running away is to get some peace and quiet, agree on a place where your child is allowed to go and not be observed. When you see your child there, you will know that they want to be alone for a moment.

Play

Play and creativity bring joy to children and contribute in many ways to their psychological well-being. It is therefore important that a child's days are not overly programmed by adults, as unhurriedness and feelings of idleness and boredom stimulate the child's own imagination and creativity.

iverse play significantly develops a child's everyday skills – interaction skills, motor skills, concentration, emotional regulation and self-regulation.

Through play, children can strengthen their gender identity and practice the rules and norms of society. It also enables them to process their own experiences and emotions. The themes of play are often related to the ongoing developmental stage and dealing with meaningful issues.

A child with challenges in maintaining attention and executive functions may start many different play activities but find it difficult to stay with any one activity for a longer time. It can be challenging for such a child to follow a planned progression of play, and play can easily turn into aimless running and shouting. It can also be difficult for the child to take turns in roles, tolerate other children's ideas or cope with disappointment in play. On the other hand, the child may have an excellent imagination, and may be bursting with creative ideas. It is important for the adult to give these ideas space to develop.

Allow and limit rough play

Individual characteristics influence the kind of play that children are drawn to. Some children prefer nurturing and interpersonal play, others like

all kinds of movement and noise. Some children seek more intense sensations of movement and deep sensations, and in this case, the adult should provide appropriate opportunities for running, jumping and frolicking. When children can release physical energy through play, it is easier for them to learn self-control, for example, when sitting at the dinner table or doing schoolwork.

- Provide time and space for your child every day for rough play, as long as it is safe to do so. Also help your child to calm down and control themselves when it is necessary. For example, during craft time, at the dinner table and when doing schoolwork, your child must not be allowed to run and shout. Make the rules clear to your child by explaining when rough play is allowed and when calm behaviour is expected.
- It can be difficult for a child to be aware of their own body, range of movement and force control in play. For this reason, the adult must



ensure that the play is safe, for example, to avoid dangerous collisions.

- Provide play situations where your child can gain different experiences of movement control and force control. For example, this can involve first stomping like big bears taking wide and heavy steps, followed by tiptoeing like small

mice taking small, light steps.

- Involve your child in household chores, such as carrying shopping bags or clearing snow.
- Before bedtime, it is a good idea to encourage calm play, building activities, drawing and story time to lower your child's level of alertness.

Physical and rough play for releasing energy

- If your child wants to jump, have a long jump competition using cushions and rugs. A trampoline or bouncing ball are good play equipment. Provide a safe and permitted jumping place for your child, for example by placing mattresses on the floor, and agree with your child how and when to use them.
- The need to run can be satisfied by having a running race where an adult takes the time.
- Wrestling and frolicking with other children under adult supervision or together with an adult are nice ways to release energy.
- Swords can be made by rolling newspapers or using foam tubes. It is fun for a child to sword fight against "dragons" made of balloons, for example, or to have a sword fight with another child or adult.

Play for supporting concentration and waiting one's turn

- Give your child surprising and fun starting commands. For example, your child can only start running when they hear the word *banana*. "One, two, three... *banana!*"
- The "land, sea, air" game. Choose a large enough space, with one end being land and the other sea, and the middle area being air. At the beginning of the game, all children are on the same line. When the game leader shouts "sea", the children must run/walk/tiptoe/crawl to the sea end. When the game leader shouts "air" they move back to the air space. You can take turns being game leader. This is a fun game for children to play in a group, but it can also be played among family members.
- The telegraph game, where the players sit in a circle holding hands. The telegraph message is carried forward by gently squeezing the hand of the next person once. Two squeezes mean that the direction of the telegraph message must change.

The adult as the child's playmate and supporter of play

Children need their own time and freedom for spontaneous, self-directed play and creativity, but adults can enable, support and encourage play. Some children need more guidance to develop play skills. Shared play time with adults supports children's social and emotional development and helps them to learn many new skills.

In play situations, the adult can naturally give their child positive attention and share emotional experiences. In particular, the child will internalise the sharing of feelings of joy and pleasure as their own ability to experience joy and happiness, which is important for psychological well-being. The adult does not always need to come up with the ideas for play – rather, the adult should notice and take advantage of the child's initiatives to do things together.

- If possible, provide a quiet space for play. Remove distracting visual and auditory stimuli. Turn off the TV and other devices.
- Provide the child with age- and development-appropriate equipment and play situations. Make sure that play is not too challenging and demanding for the child.
- Provide your child with play materials that stimulate their creativity. Your child can come up with the most imaginative uses for toilet paper tubes or empty yoghurt pots. They can be used to make miracle machines, and blankets and pillows can be turned into wonderful huts. If necessary, the adult can help with ideas and support the completion of play.
- Try to set aside time each day for play time or other activity that you both enjoy.

- Before you play, make sure that you and your child have the time, will and energy to play together.
- Agree with your child on common rules – where and what to play, and how much time there is for play.
- Remember that play is for the child and proceed according to your child's wishes. As the adult, you ensure that play is safe and provide new ideas, purposefulness and planning when necessary.
- During play, tune in to your child's thoughts and feelings by listening and watching carefully. What does your child get excited about and enjoy? What excites or frightens them? What is your child angry about or wondering? If necessary, you can help your child identify and deal with these feelings.



- Listen to your own feelings caused by the play. What kind of play do you find difficult to tolerate and why? Do you find the hut your child has made in the living room a disturbing chaos or a celebration of creativity? What if you look at it from your child's perspective?
- Before play, try to consciously forget about your role as the "serious adult". Adults are also allowed to be playful and silly – and it is recommended! At the same time, you are setting an example for your child that life is not just about performing well, but that it is okay to be silly and to laugh at yourself. With such an attitude, your child will also be able to deal with disappointments more easily.
- Board, card and rules games teach a range of useful skills, such as waiting your turn, following instructions, concentration and tolerating disappointment. Games also develop mathematical skills and concepts. When children first play games with a safe adult and gain pleasant experiences, it will be easier for them to participate in games in a group with other children. You should adhere to the agreed rules consistently from the start.

Thinking out loud in play situations

A child's skills of directing and planning activities are built up little by little. Some children need more support to develop them than others.

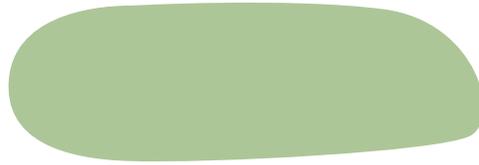
A lot of what we do is driven by internal monologue. We go through planning processes in our own minds.

A child with age-related delays in executive functions benefits from an adult guiding the development of internal monologue through the steps of thinking out loud.

1. Do something in front of your child – for example, build a hut. Tell them what you are going to do. Think out loud about what your plan and goal is and in what order you will proceed. Finally, evaluate how you succeeded, what was difficult, what was easy and how you felt.
2. Let your child guide you verbally in a task. In between steps, ask your child what to do next.
3. Have your child complete a task by themselves and explain what they are doing.

Guiding group play situations

- When children are playing in a group, the adult is often needed to structure the play situation to make it easier to understand for the child with special needs. For example, the adult can limit the number of children participating in play and provide a quieter space for play.
- The adult can stay close to the play situation and offer help if needed to ensure that everyone is able to participate.
- If your child's behaviour becomes too restless for the current play, you can come up with ideas to transform the play so that the restlessness is channelled in a positive way. For example, your child can transform into a crawling circus dog learning new tricks.
- If necessary, your child can go to another room to calm down. Explain to your child in advance the purpose of the quiet place and make sure that they do not perceive it as a punishment.
- If a play situation gets out of hand, you can redirect it with an unexpected command or task, which allows you to maintain control of the situation.
- Pictures can be used to support play, providing ideas and calming play down when necessary. For example, you can use pictures of the police, roadworks, emergency vehicles and traffic lights in car play.



Hobbies

Children under school age and young school children do not necessarily need hobbies. A day at childcare or school may be so stressful for a child that all they need afterwards is rest and time together with a parent. The same can be true for older children if they already have neuropsychiatric challenges that add to the stress.

If your child has physical difficulties or is particularly physically active, a basic physical activity such as

fairy tale gymnastics, athletics, wrestling or judo will support their physical development and help channel their energy. On the other hand, for a young child, physical and outdoor activities with a parent can achieve the same goal.

From the age of 3-4, a child in home care will need contact with other children, such as club activities, a few days a week. This allows the child to practise social and group skills in the company of peers.

Some children need a stronger adult presence to learn to cope in social situations with their peers.

Children with special needs often prefer to play with children younger or older than their own age. They may not get along with their peers, which is why they feel that they are more equal to younger children. Older children, on the other hand, are more flexible and more accommodating.

For a schoolchild, a hobby can be at its best a relaxing, fun activity that helps develop a range of skills. A hobby should be chosen based on the child's own interests.

It is necessary to remember that a child with special needs may struggle more with an activity than other children. In this case, the child may need more support and guidance to experience feelings of accomplishment in their hobby. A suitable hobby may offer the child the opportunity to shine, gain important experiences of accomplishment and strengthen the child's self-esteem. A hobby started as a child and the friendships it nurtures can be long-lasting and even protect against the turbulences of later life, such as adolescence.

A child's free time should be just that – free. It is important that the child has enough time and space every day to just be, to experience idleness. It is important for a child's self-regulation development to learn to tolerate boring moments. When the child is not constantly subjected to external guidance, stimulation and demands, they can use their own imagination to create and play. This strengthens the child's sense of control. It is important for the

child to see that the adult also enjoys simply being present and close without the constant pressure to perform.

Books and reading together are a good way to spend time together. Listening to or reading books helps the child to articulate their own experiences and feelings, as well as developing and enriching their language and literacy skills.

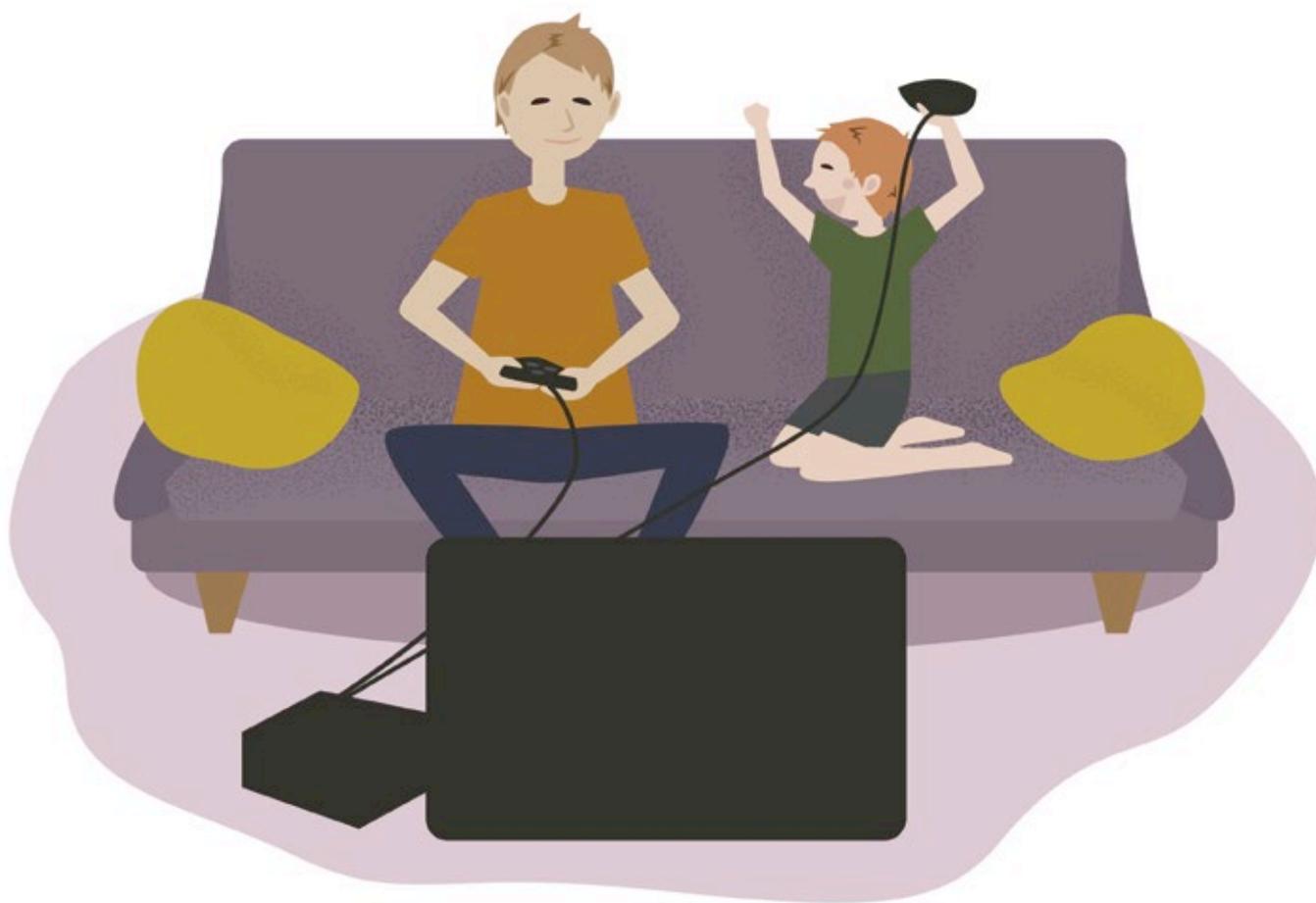
Examining photographs or images from magazines and books can help the child to explore a wide range of issues, such as the expression of emotions, family relationships, objects and their properties, and different events and situations.



Media environment

Children are surrounded by a wide range of media, including the Internet, social media, electronic or e-games, films and other programmes, and advertising. It is important to note that a child with a smartphone, for example, has access to all these environments. Age and developmental level are key factors in determining what kind of media use is recommended. The adult's role is to

protect the child's developing brain from excessive information overload and stress. In addition, the adult's role is to protect the child from harmful media – however, media content can also be used to support education. It is worth remembering that smart devices and games can also be important channels for children to form and maintain friendships. For many, they are also a way to relax.



- Set clear rules about what material is appropriate for your child's development. Define what programmes or games your child can watch and what games they can play.
- Set limits for screen time, i.e. digital media use. Human, reciprocal interaction is important for a child's brain development and well-being. This supports the development of language, emotional skills, self-regulation, etc. The younger the child, the less time they should spend in front of the screen. Even for schoolchildren, screen time should be limited. It is worth considering how screen time relates to your child's other everyday activities. It is also important to be aware of the example that you as a parent set for your child.
- Age ratings for games, films, TV programmes and social media are defined on the basis of the age at which the content is appropriate for children. However, children have different information processing abilities. For a sensitive child, a programme may be harmful even if the recommended age limit allows the child to watch the programme. Therefore, you should do your own careful research into games and programmes so that you know what they are like.
- Take an interest in your child's interests. Children enjoy being able to show things that are important to them to their parents. At its best, the digital media environment offers a shared pastime for children and parents.
- Make sure your devices are not always on and show by your own example that screen time is just one part of your free time. Keep an eye on your child's stimulus environment, as a constant stream of sounds and images is stressful for your child.
- Observe your child's play. What does it tell you about your family's media environment? For example, has your child been exposed to upsetting material, or do they get ideas for their play from an inspiring character in a children's programme?
- There are motivational and educational e-games that can help your child to practice skills such as perception, eye-hand coordination, attention, reading, writing or maths. This is an excellent way to use media to support your child's learning.



Early childhood education and school

For many children, group activities are challenging. Especially for children with neuropsychiatric symptoms, understanding and structuring new situations can be difficult because of their poor situational awareness. These children require a lot of adult attention and often appear self-centred. In reality, however, they are trying to figure out what things mean and how they should act in different situations.

A child with neuropsychiatric symptoms often acts against the expectations of the environment and situation. This is usually because the child does not know what is expected of them or is unable to meet the demands of the situation. Attentional dysregulation makes it difficult for the child to pick out relevant information and act as desired. In a group setting, such situations are more pronounced. To regulate their behaviour in a group, the child may need stronger support from the adult, verbalisation and visualisation. Many also benefit from pictorial support.

The child's brain is overloaded by too much information and too many stimuli. As a result, the child's restlessness and challenging behaviour tend to increase in a large group. Appropriate support

should be considered before the child starts day care or school. Even small arrangements can improve the child's ability to function, which will benefit the whole group.

In a group or classroom, each child has their own challenges. Information about your child's individual support needs should also be shared within the group. Other children will understand when it is explained to them why one child is given exemptions or their own set of rules.

In particular, the attitude of the adult plays an important role in creating a positive and accepting atmosphere. This reduces the stress experienced by the child and helps them to function better.

Cooperation with the family

It is important that the same practices are used consistently by all adults working with the child. Close cooperation between the child's family and early childhood education or school is particularly important for children with challenging behaviour.

Parents are the best experts on their child's daily lives. It is a good idea for both the family and the education providers to communicate the methods

that have been found to work and, where possible, to apply them in both places.

It is the parents' responsibility to ensure cooperation and communication between the potential childcare provider, day care centre or school. To ensure that this communication takes place, it is advisable to agree on a practical method and regular meetings between the adults.



Early childhood education and care

In day care, a child faces many new expectations and different situations that can be stressful. In particular, drop-off at day care and pick-up can be challenging. Staying is made more difficult by the separation from the parent and the transition to a different environment, with different rules from those at home. This is particularly difficult for a child with neuropsychiatric symptoms. The shift of responsibility from parents to staff and vice versa is confusing for the child. Clear rules and practices should be agreed for drop-off and pick-up situations.

Drop-off at day care – act in a determined manner

Go through the drop-off situation with your child beforehand. Tell your child how you will act and how you expect your child to act in the moment of separation. Agree with staff on a recurring ritual, such as a hug from the parent, then going into a carer's arms or waving through the window. This

will provide a sense of security for your child. Act in a firm and determined manner yourself. Do not prolong the situation – leave and go to your next activity, even if your child stays behind crying. There is nothing more you can do to help. The responsibility falls to the staff, who will be able to deal with the situation when you give them the chance by leaving yourself.

Pick-up from day care – focus on your child

For a child, the arrival of their parent is usually the best and most anticipated moment of the day. The tension and stress of the day may erupt in a temper tantrum or restlessness when the parent arrives. Take a moment to breathe before picking up your child. Anticipate the pick-up situation. Prepare mentally for possible temper tantrums and defiance when you pick up your child. Stay calm yourself and plan your response to the situation. Focus on your child.

Let your child vent, help them cope with the emotion and show that you understand your child's reaction. This will often make the situation pass quickly.

You should also be swift in the pick-up situation. Focus on your child and, in the presence of your child, exchange only the most necessary, positive news briefly with the staff. If adults start engaging in a conversation that excludes the child, the child's attention-seeking and disturbing behaviour will increase.

Repeat the same ritual every day, such as holding hands to say goodbye to the carer. Do not burden the child by asking whether they want to go home, but be firm, give direct instructions and show that you decide what to do and when to leave. Do not pay attention to possible tantrums but act in a calm and determined manner.

Often the question "How was your day?" is also too difficult for many children to answer, or some children may interpret it in a negative way, as in "You didn't behave badly today, did you?" So instead, try saying, "It is nice to see you again!"

A day at childcare is hard for a child. When your child comes home from day care, it is a good idea for the family to spend some quiet time together before starting everyday activities. Calming down and concentrating fully on your child for a moment will make the rest of the evening much easier.

Tips for the early childhood educator

Play situations

- The best play setting for a child with neuro-psychiatric symptoms is usually in a small group.

- A child with attention deficit disorder often needs an adult to play with them.
- If the child is not able to play with other children, let the child begin by playing with an adult. Gradually, the child can move into small groups for short periods of play.
- Start with short play sessions and gradually increase the time.
- It is difficult for a child to concentrate on one play situation for a long time. An adult can help by taking play forward and giving new ideas.
- Although it may be difficult for a child to concentrate on play, their development still requires daily playtime.

Situations requiring sitting or standing still

- Do not ask for the impossible: waiting and standing still are demanding tasks for an overactive and motorically restless child. Provide activities for the child to do while waiting in line, such as counting and guessing games.
- Restless movement can be channelled in such a way that it does not disturb others. Do not insist on complete stillness but let the child rock in their chair or swing their legs, for example.
- Arrange the possibility to leave the situation for a moment. For example, while waiting for mealtime to start, you can give the child tasks that allow them to leave the table with permission.
- Always praise the child for following the rules.

Rest

- Even a little rest during the day is beneficial to the child.
- Anticipation and regularity help the child to settle down to rest.
- Start with a short rest, for example five minutes. The important thing is that the child will have a pleasant experience of the moment, which will make it easier to settle down and allow the time to be extended.
- Give the child something to do while lying down, such as a book or a toy. It is good to have something to fidget with.
- The child may need adult support to calm down. The adult can acknowledge the child's feelings by verbalising them, which will help calm the child and, in the longer term, support the child's self-regulation development. The child may benefit from soothing touch, such as a hand on the shoulder or a back rub. The adult can also teach the child calming breathing techniques.

Tips and tools for structuring the environment and tasks, dealing with situations that require concentration and giving instructions are discussed in the “School” section in this guide.

Daily feedback for the parents

- Focus your feedback on the child's strengths and observed positive development. There is something positive to say every day!
- Be truthful about the child's challenges, but agree with the parents on a policy for when and how to discuss these issues. Keep the pick-up situation brief and positive, so that the parent can focus on the child and on going home.
- Regular meetings should be arranged with parents of children with challenging behaviour to work together on ways to support the child.



School

In school, there is an increasing number of expectations and demands concerning a child's abilities. The older a child gets, the more they are expected to be self-directing and self-regulating.

Motivation is a key driver of a child's behaviour and willingness to try. Motivation plays a particularly important role when a child is experiencing challenges in regulating their alertness level and learning. When aiming for a change in the child's behaviour and attitudes, it is important to make the child understand the benefits for them personally. Adults should pay attention to what motivates the child and use their interests in teaching as well.

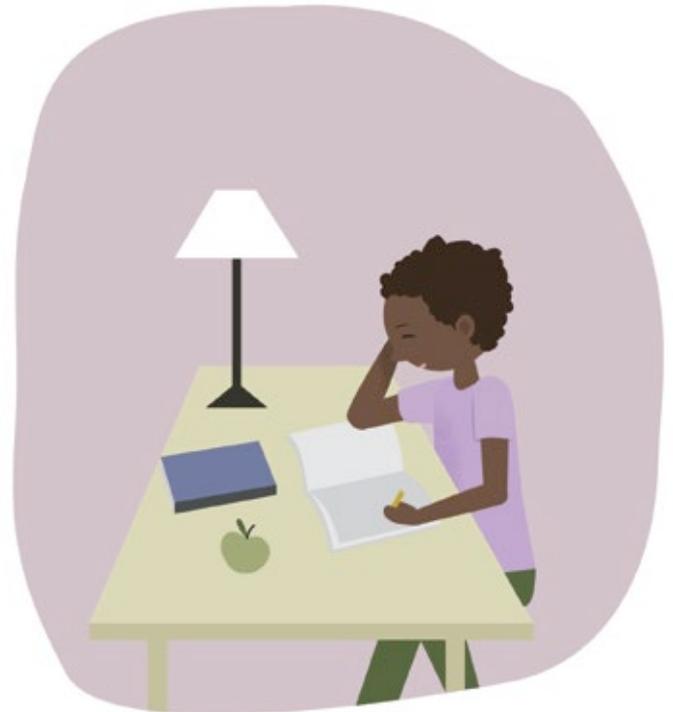
Working independently, concentrating, listening and following instructions can be particularly demanding for a child with neuropsychiatric symptoms. To support the child, cooperation between home and school, a well-structured environment and clear teaching methods are needed.

A structured daily schedule, minimising distractions and guiding studies with immediate feedback are important forms of support for a child who has difficulty regulating their attention and behaviour or controlling their impulses.

Many children benefit from a consistent daily schedule, keeping study equipment in familiar places and having routines for studying. Additional

clarity can be provided by pictorial daily schedules and checklists. Instructions and tasks should be given one at a time, with a clear start and finish.

See the table at the end of this chapter for more details on how to support the child's ability to function by taking into account situational and task-related factors.



Maintain and increase motivation

At school

- Give immediate feedback on the child's work.
- Remember that it is better to guide the child beforehand than to make them fix something afterwards.
- Provide opportunities for feelings of accomplishment and smoothness: give easy tasks to start with and, as the tasks get harder, encourage and praise the child for even trying.
- Use a reward system to help the child learn new and difficult things.

At home

- The aim is that the pursuit of external rewards will gradually turn into internal motivation as the child experiences feelings of accomplishment. For example, "I will do my homework right away, so I do not have to listen to someone reminding me all the time" and "Since I made a study schedule for my tests and followed it, I had more time to do other things."

Maintain alertness

At school

- Provide clear step-by-step instructions. The child's alertness decreases and restlessness increases easily if they cannot keep up with the activity.
- Use varied tasks. Long periods of listening and reading decrease alertness, increasing inattention. Alternate these with functional tasks.
- Use colours, labels or pictures to highlight important points in tasks and texts. The child's attention is automatically directed to the stimulus that stands out.
- Minimise waiting time and maximise active time.
- Acknowledge progress: give immediate feedback and encouragement.
- Take into account the competing stimuli around the child – provide tasks that are as attractive and activity-demanding as possible.
- Fidgeting with Blu-Tack, drawing in a notebook or listening to music during an activity will help some children to concentrate or channel extra energy.
- Remember to provide breaks and an opportunity to calm down if the child seems to become stressed.

At home

- Measure the amount of time your child can study continuously, and schedule agreed breaks. Some children will benefit from a timer, such as an egg

timer, to time their study periods. For example, after ten minutes of studying, there will be a short break. For some, following a timer diverts too much attention away from the task itself. In such cases, it is worth agreeing to take breaks, for example, every five maths exercises or after each paragraph of text read.

- A suitable break is very short, for example a short walk and a glass of water. Save the entertainment use of smart devices for after homework or studying for tests. Checking messages during homework or studying for tests is too distracting, and this risks breaks becoming prolonged.
- Make sure that the tasks are varied: your child can alternate between maths and science homework, or between another academic subject and language homework.
- If necessary, agree with the teacher on a reasonable amount of homework.

Reduce distractions in the environment

At school

- Pay attention to structuring the environment and tasks. Keep as little non-task-related equipment on display as possible and have the child do one task, section or area at a time. Keep visual and written daily schedules visible.
- Give short, clear instructions.
- Consider seating on an individual basis: often inattentive pupils should be in the front of the classroom, close to the supervising adult. For a child who is constantly paying attention to what others are doing and is sensitive to stimuli, the best seat is often at the back of the classroom, so they do not have to keep turning around to see where voices and sounds are coming from.

- Define the child's own working space clearly. A "restricted area" around their desk, for example marked on the floor with tape, can be a solution.

At home

- Pay attention to structuring the environment and tasks. Keep the necessary equipment on display and in good condition, and as few other items as possible on display at the same time. This will also speed up task initiation.
- Have the child do one thing at a time.
- Use hearing protection or music to help the child concentrate. These can help to block out other sounds coming from inside and outside the home. The music should be familiar so that your child does not concentrate too much on the lyrics.
- Reading the task out loud and thinking out loud helps your child to concentrate and progress in the task.

How to give instructions

At school and at home

- Proceed one task or step at a time. Give the child time to respond or act on the instruction before you move on.
- When giving instructions, focus only on the essentials. Use direct instructions instead of explaining what is forbidden.
- Only give instructions when you are sure that the child is listening to you.
- Verbal instructions alone are not always enough: use pictures, checklists, show an example and/or think out loud.



Tips for the student

Preparing for tests

- Divide the study content into sections and make a concrete study plan. For example, “Read chapters 3 and 4 on Tuesday, chapter 5 on Wednesday and revise all chapters on Thursday.”
- Before you start studying the actual content or doing the exercises, you should familiarise yourself with the topic by looking at the table of contents, headings and pictures. Think in advance about the questions you will need to answer. This will guide you in finding the essentials in the text.
- After reading the chapters, prepare questions for yourself for revising. For example, you can use subheadings to help you prepare the questions. Revise the content by answering the questions you have prepared. Pick out keywords from the text and questions. Practise making concept maps.

- Coming up with your own examples makes it easier to learn and remember things.

Writing a test answer

- Read the question or exercise carefully and take time to understand it.
- In maths tests, pay attention to the mathematical concepts: should you subtract, add, divide or multiply? What information is given, what should be answered, what numbers are used to calculate, what are the intermediate steps and what is the actual result?
- In tests covering theoretical subjects, write your answers using the questions who, what, when, where and why.
- Use an extra sheet of paper for notes. After reading the question, write down the things that come to mind immediately on this sheet, either as individual words or as a list. Cross out items as you include them in your test answer.

Environmental factors that often exacerbate symptoms

Environmental distractions (sounds, objects, movement, etc.)

Large group

Non-structured situation

Complex instructions

Sustained, effort-intensive tasks

Feedback only after the task is completed

Repetitive, boring or difficult tasks

Several simultaneous things requiring attention

General instruction to the whole group

Expectation of sitting or standing still

Physical discomfort (environment is too hot or cold, tiredness, hunger, pain)

Mental discomfort (tension, waiting)

Environmental factors that often alleviate symptoms

Calm environment, appropriate stimulus level

Small group, one-to-one

Structured situation

Short, step-by-step instructions

Tasks divided into short sections

Immediate, encouraging feedback

Interesting tasks, high motivation

Doing one thing at a time

Individual instruction

The possibility to move without disturbing others (e.g. sitting on an exercise ball, fidgeting with an object, etc.)

Conditions that help to regulate alertness (possibility of taking a moment to rest, snack)

A permissive, calming atmosphere

Finnish Current Care Guidelines for ADHD, 2019

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Situations outside the home

For many families, situations outside the home mean extra pressure because of the unpredictability and tension they bring. Challenging behaviour is more manageable when you learn to anticipate it and plan how to act in different situations as carefully as possible in advance. Think about which situations are the most difficult for your family and which factors in these situations tend to trigger unwanted behaviour in your child. Here are some good practices from other parents for situations that most find most challenging.

Going to the supermarket

- Pay attention to your child's alertness level and other basic needs. A visit to the supermarket will go better when your child is not hungry or tired and does not need to go to the toilet.
- Prepare your shopping list at home. If you are going to a familiar supermarket, write down your shopping list in the order you will pass the items.
- Explain to your child how you expect them to behave in the supermarket. You can also agree on a reward that the child will get if they behave according to expectations.
- Keep your child involved in the shopping: have them collect and weigh items, cross out items from the shopping list or carry their own shopping basket. Having your child carry their own basket is a better way of controlling the need to move around than giving them their own children's trolley.
- Come up with a back-up plan or agree with your child in advance what to do if they get tired in the middle of shopping or misbehave.
- Take advantage of supervised child-minding services or play areas in large supermarkets, department stores and shopping centres.

Getting around in traffic

- Establish rules in advance and remind your child of them along the way: when crossing the street, the child must hold hands with you; when cycling, the adult always rides in front or behind; and in the car park, the child must hold hands with you.
- Learn together the rules of the road and the meaning of traffic signs and traffic lights.
- Remind your child to check and be careful in traffic, even when there is a green light for pedestrians.

Travel

- Take into account your child's alertness level and other basic needs (going to the toilet, eating and drinking, naps) when considering the timing and length of your trip and the breaks on the way.
- Keep your child active. Counting stops, spotting certain things like yellow cars, doing riddles, listening to an audio book or other similar activities that you can come up with according to your child's age and interests can help.

Visits to other people's homes

- Establish in advance the rules of the visit. Explain to your child what kind of behaviour you expect from them and what they are allowed to do in the place you are visiting.
- Bring your child's own toys or other activities with you, if necessary.
- Focus on positive behaviour through praise and encouragement.
- Anticipate the end of play or other activities and the time to go home.
- If you're visiting a home that is not prepared for children, you may want to ask the hosts to place any breakable items on the top shelves, so you can relax during the visit.

Parties and festivities

- Explain to your child in advance what will happen at the event and what kind of behaviour is expected of them.
- Bring with you some activities for your child that they can do quietly without disturbing others.
- In a seated event, choose seats that are comfortable and easy to get out of when you need to.
- Make a back-up plan for having to go outside. If both parents are present at the event, decide in advance on who will go out with the child or to another room from time to time.
- If necessary, bring your own food for your child.

Appointments and examinations

- Be as specific as possible beforehand about what will happen and how the child should act.
- Try to be as calm and determined as possible – your own nervousness will make your child even more anxious.
- Focus your own and your child’s attention as much as possible on the positive and praise your child when they act according to expectations.
- Also, give positive encouragement in advance. For example, “You seem to be in such a good mood that this will go very well!” During a vaccination or other procedure, divert the child’s attention away from the needle or other medical device.
- If your child is undergoing a new procedure, you can use books and role play to prepare for it, as well as discussing it with your child.
- Let the medical staff know in advance if your child is afraid of going to the doctor.
- When asked by your child, be truthful and say that the blood test or vaccination will hurt a little. The next time may be even more difficult if the child feels like they were cheated the last time.
- Bring your own activities and a “safety toy” for your child if there are long waiting times.





Friendships and social situations

A child with neuropsychiatric challenges will often find it difficult to make friends with their peers. They may find the rules of complex games difficult to follow. The child may also find it hard to wait their turn and can easily lose their temper when faced with adversity.

Difficulty in controlling impulses makes the child quick-tempered and emotional, and they may react strongly to the actions of others. As a result, disputes can easily arise, and the child may develop a reputation as a troublemaker. Others may not want to play with the child, causing the child to be frequently left out.

The resentment and frustration arising from being left out can increase the child's negative attitudes towards others, and their self-esteem suffers.

For these reasons, it is important that adults pay attention to interactions and friendships between children.

Help your child to understand social situations

- Go through social situations with your child. Explain how to approach other people, how to ask others to play and how to deal with conflict situations.
 - Verbalise unpleasant experiences and feelings: “Oscar is sorry he broke your toy. He didn’t mean to be rough with it. I understand that you’re upset now.”
 - You can go through social situations with the help of pictures. Together with your child, you can also draw cartoons about real-life situations that have taken or will take place.
- Guide your child to use speech instead of touch.
 - Teach your child how to communicate positively with facial expressions and gestures. Remember to talk about smiling!
 - In situations of conflict, find an alternative approach: “Sometimes these things are decided by drawing lots. Let’s draw lots to see who gets to go first this time.”
 - Consistently show support to all parties and prevent anyone from being left out or bullied.
 - Remind your child of common boundaries and rules and what to do when rules are broken: “We have a rule of not throwing things at the dinner table, Jenna will clean up after herself and apologise to William.”

Help your child make social contacts

- Arrange opportunities for your child to spend time with children of their age also during free time. For some children, an interesting hobby may provide a natural opportunity to meet peers. For children who are stressed by social situations and/or sensory stimuli, the social contacts in early childhood education and school are often sufficient. Children with special needs often prefer to play with children who are younger or older than their age. Interaction with their peers may cause more conflict because of differences in the stage of development.
 - Adults should monitor children’s play and, if necessary, support children who are still practising self-regulation skills.
 - Set an example for your child in social situations: “When I meet a new person, I go up to them, say hello and tell them who I am.”
- Ask your child to tell you about the day’s events. Talking will help them to go over any upsetting or thought-provoking situations on their mind.



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The child's emotional regulation



It is important to pay attention to the recognition and regulation of your child's emotions. The strong emotions of your child and their fluctuations are stressful for both the child and the adults around them. The impact of emotions is particularly evident in children whose self-regulation skills are not yet fully developed. The ability to regulate one's own emotions and actions is important in social relationships.

It is good to help your child become aware of their own emotions, the bodily sensations associated with the emotions and how your child tends to react when a particular emotion arises.

- Verbalise what you observe: "I can see that you are disappointed that you had to stop playing." When your child's emotions are given a name and understanding, they become more manageable and recognisable. Teach your child to express their feelings verbally.
- Set an example for your child by talking about your own feelings.
- All emotions are allowed and accepted. It is the action that follows from them that can cause problems in everyday life.
- Emotions and actions are two different things. Learn together how to tell if you need to act at all or what would be the appropriate way.
- Agree and discuss with your child beforehand what to do when they become angry instead of verbally or physically hurting someone. Should your child release the emotion physically, for example by jumping or tearing up a newspaper? Or could you create a safe nest where your child can calm down and perhaps draw for a while? Would deep breathing with a safe adult help?
- Your child will need a lot of adult support in recognising situations and choosing the right approach for each situation. Acknowledge even the smallest accomplishments and verbalise them for your child – for example, "You were upset, and you knew how to express it. Good job getting out of the situation!"
- Seek outside help if the approaches suggested in this guide are insufficient and your child's behaviour is repeatedly aggressive.

Conflict situations



Conflicts arise when there is a mismatch between the expectations of the environment and the child's ability to act accordingly. There are several reasons for undesirable behaviour – for example, the child does not know how to act differently, is unable to control their behaviour, or the situation is too stressful for the child.

For children, attention deficit disorder and language disorders in particular make it difficult to receive and understand instructions and rules. Difficulties in executive functions, hyperactivity and impulsivity also pose challenges in following rules.

In addition, difficulties in interpreting the facial expressions, gestures and emotions of others, sensory sensitivities and difficulties in perceiving social situations often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

To be able to act constructively, the adult needs to understand the child's experience of the situation and the reasons for their behaviour. After a conflict, it is useful to stop and look at what happened from the child's perspective, and why it happened. This will help to anticipate similar situations in the future. It also provides valuable information about

the child's experience and the reasons for their behaviour and how to do better next time.

A more permanent change in behaviour in a positive direction is possible. Forbidding and limiting alone may temporarily stop unwanted behaviour in a difficult situation but may not help the child to behave in the desired way next time.

If you want to permanently change your child's behaviour in a more positive direction, you will also need to teach the desired ways for your child to act and how to apply these in the future. In addition, you should consciously acknowledge your child's good behaviour whenever possible.

Try to steer behaviour in the desired, positive direction by giving direct and appropriate instructions.

How to calm your child

The younger the child, the more impulsive their behaviour, or the less skilled the child is in self-direction and situation management, the more dependent the child is on outside guidance.

Unwanted behaviour

- Ignore unwanted behaviour whenever you can and try to divert your child's attention.
- Give attention, praise and reward your child immediately when they change their behaviour in the desired direction.
- In group situations, acknowledge, praise and reward children who behave in the appropriate way.

Temper tantrums

- Stop aggressive and destructive behaviour immediately. Prevent harm to others or to the child themselves and damage to property.
- Handle your child in a firm and determined manner without hurting the child.
- Do not hold on to your child tightly if it only makes them wriggle more. Stay close by, do not leave your child alone or lock them in a separate room.
- Try to maintain your own calm. This will model desirable behaviour for your child – issues are resolved by talking, and anger is not an uncontrollable and insurmountable emotion.
- In a prolonged tantrum, offer your young child

a way out of the situation: take them to a quiet place to calm down. Once your child has calmed down, give positive feedback.

- Explain to your child that feelings of anger and resentment are allowed – as is the whole range of emotions. Give your child options for what they can do when they are angry, and hitting others is forbidden.
- Learn to recognise situations where tantrums occur. This will help you to anticipate them.
- Verbalise your child's emotions and the situations that led to them: "I can see that you are upset because you didn't get the toy you wanted." This will help your child to identify and verbalise their different emotions, making them more manageable.
- Agree with your child beforehand what to do in the event of a tantrum. It is also a good idea to ask an older child what they want the adult to do in such a situation. This way, in the midst of the emotional turmoil, you will know what to do and the child will have the experience of being heard.
- Teach an older child how to channel emotions and reactions in an acceptable way and how to self-soothe proactively. Give positive feedback they calm down.
- With a group of school-age children, you can work together on different ways of self-control or helping others to control themselves. When dealing with conflict situations, it is also important to discuss how provoking another person can contribute to a conflict.

- After the conflict has calmed down, you can draw a cartoon of what happened. This will help the child to better understand the causes and effects of the situation. This will also help you, the adult, to find out what happened and resolve it fairly. You can also draw expressions on the characters

to support the child's emotional skills. You can also use the cartoon to explain how to put an unpleasant situation right. There is no need to take on too much pressure about your artistic skills, as even stick figures will do the trick!

Adult self-control

- Learn to recognise the emotions you feel in different situations and how you react to them.
- All emotions are allowed, but they must be expressed without hurting or offending others.
- Remember that you cannot fight fire with fire. Getting upset and angry yourself will not teach your child how to manage conflict situations any better but is more likely to reinforce negative behaviour.
- If possible, try to anticipate difficult situations and think of alternative ways of dealing with them. Think about what triggers aggressive behaviour in a situation and whether the trigger

can be influenced. What is keeping the unwanted behaviour going and how can you influence it?

- Learn aggression management techniques:
 - Count slowly backwards from ten to zero.
 - Guide yourself out loud, for example by saying, "We can work this out" or "I'm going to sit here and think for a moment and then we'll work this out."
 - Leave the situation.
- If you lose your temper and hurt your child verbally or physically, once you have calmed down, verbalise to your child what happened and apologise. Seek professional help to manage your aggression.

10... 9... 8... 7...
6... 5...





Taking the whole family into consideration

A child is always part of a larger community and network, the most important unit of which is the family. The way a child acts and reacts affects the whole family: parents, siblings as well as close friends and relatives. A child who needs a lot of help from others to regulate their behaviour takes up a lot of attention and time from parents and other people close to them. In many cases, adults are also driven to act on the child's terms in order to avoid constant conflict and to make everyday life easier. This can result in siblings in particular feeling discriminated against, and their friendships being challenging as well.

Parents

Parent-child interaction can be under strain early on if the parent finds that the baby is difficult to take care of. The parent can easily feel guilty and think that they are not good at parenting if the baby cries a lot and is difficult to soothe. Often the baby's sleep and feeds are also very irregular, and the parent feels that the daily rhythm is difficult to predict.

The parent may become exhausted and their self-esteem as a parent suffers. The baby, in turn, notices and senses the parent's insecurity, which makes the baby more difficult to care for. The baby interprets the parent's insecurity as the baby not being good or lovable. The baby's self-image and self-esteem are compromised. This easily creates a negative interaction cycle.

Parents of a child with a behavioural or mood disorder, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or oppositional defiant disorder, are under considerable stress.

If the child is very hyperactive, impulsive and/or defiant as a toddler and before starting school, parents often feel that their parenting skills are inadequate. The environment often also reinforces this idea by providing constant negative feedback on the child's behaviour. For example, many parents report that they are nervous about picking up their child from day care because they already know they will receive negative feedback.

Raising a child with challenging behaviour can also put a strain on the parents' relationship, especially

if the child is oppositional, defiant or aggressive. The family may become socially isolated because it is too stressful to go anywhere with the child. The child's challenging behaviour can also make it difficult to get a babysitter or carer.

This causes the parents to have less couple time together, and disagreements about how to raise the child are common.

The development of neuropsychiatric symptoms and the presentation of symptoms are influenced by hereditary, interactional and environmental factors.

Many studies show that the best way for an overactive child to learn is to succeed. Harsh punishments and physical discipline do not teach the child how to behave – on the contrary, these increase the risk of behavioural problems. Physical punishment increases a child's insecurity and clearly undermines their ability to learn to solve problems in an acceptable way without violence. Equally, psychological violence, such as humiliation and constant negative feedback, is harmful to the child.

Supporting a child's behaviour through positive means strengthens their self-esteem and abilities. Positive parenting practices contribute to a child's coping skills in life. Recognising and highlighting a child's accomplishments in everyday life will bring about lasting changes in their behaviour. This also helps the child to see the good in themselves and to have confidence in their own ability to cope.

Sibling relationships

Sibling relationships often come under strain in families where one of the children presents challenging behaviour. The child may be prone to

arguing, disruptive play, shouting at their siblings and sometimes even inciting their siblings to misbehave or do bad things.

Often the other children in the family notice the difference in their challenging sibling very early on. Older siblings also notice their parents' exhaustion and fatigue, which can lead them to try to compensate for their sibling's bad behaviour with their own behaviour. These siblings do not want to cause their parents any more trouble or distress and may become over-indulgent and over-achievers.

A child who needs special attention and support can easily take up parents' time and energy. Siblings are vulnerable to feeling neglected by their parents, and sometimes even develop physical or psychological symptoms to get attention. It is also common for siblings to try out the role of "difficult child" at some point in their development. Often, the hyperactive and impulsive child will find themselves different from their siblings who are doing well. This can lead to jealousy and resentment.

It is also common for the siblings to feel shame. They may not want to invite their friends to the family home or go out with the family. They may be afraid of how their challenging sibling will behave. Friends may tease them because of a different sister or brother. They may blame their poorly self-regulating sibling for disrupting normal family activities.

Parents may think that because of the child's special needs, the child cannot be expected to take on the same responsibilities and respect the same boundaries as other siblings. Such perceptions can lead to different treatment of children in the family and increase conflict between siblings.

What you can do as a parent

Consistent boundaries are particularly important for all family members when one of the siblings has challenging behaviour. Common ground rules can be agreed, for example in joint family meetings.

- Explain to the other siblings what is going on and what is causing the challenging behaviour.
- It is important to talk about common ground rules and habits in the home with all family members and to explain why, in some situations, there may be different practices for each child.
- Make it clear which things children are not allowed to touch and where they are not allowed to go. This could include a sibling's mobile phone, school supplies and room.
- Infringing on the rights of others, such as breaking their things, must have consequences. The child may be ordered to replace the broken object or to give something of their own to replace it. However, it is a good idea to think about the consequence in advance, so that it is fair to the child and they can understand cause and consequence.
- Acknowledge whenever your children show consideration for each other and behave well.
- Make sure that the time and attention of parents and other close relatives is shared as equally as possible between all children in the family.
- Try to organise pleasant family moments that everyone in the family enjoys.
- Highlight the strengths of all children and mention them every day.
- Do not compare children with each other or your family's situation with that of others.



Resources for parenting

A child's well-being is strongly influenced by parental support. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the parents' own coping resources. When parents are tired or stressed, even normal play or activities can feel stressful for them. When the parents themselves are well, they are able to take their child's needs into consideration and genuinely enjoy time together.

Being a parent is not just about joy, but also about conflict, coping with disappointment, worrying and fulfilling responsibilities. Taking care of your

own wellbeing will have a positive impact on the wellbeing of your family and your ability to cope with everyday life.

Take care of yourself

- What are your own resources and what do you enjoy? What do you need to feel well? Make a list of these things and think about how many activities that renew your resources are included in your current weekly schedule. How could you include more of these activities in your life?
- Agree on a division of labour between the adults in the family and the possibility of a night off or similar break at least once a week. Consider equity in the use of personal time.
- If there is no other adult to share your daily routines, could a neighbour, grandparent, good friend or other adult give you a hand with childcare so that you can have some time to yourself from time to time? You can also ask the municipality, organisations or businesses for help with childcare.
- Think about the small everyday things that bring you joy and focus on enjoying these moments. For example, “I enjoy having my morning coffee in peace and quiet before the others wake up” or “Today the sun was shining beautifully on my walk.”
- Recognise and accept your limits. Be kind to yourself and, if necessary, give up excessive demands and obligations. What could you give up for your own well-being? One aspect of valuing yourself is ensuring that your limits are respected.
- A healthy lifestyle, including proper and regular meals, rest and exercise, reduces fatigue, improves general fitness and mood, and increases stress tolerance.
- Are your wishes and demands in balance with those of your environment? How could you improve this balance? Could you reduce your working hours or overtime to make more time for your family?
- What would give you a boost in life – learning something new, taking up a hobby or conscious idleness? Identify your wishes and take action towards them.



Negative mindset

My child never remembers, no matter how many times I repeat myself.

My life is what it is, it is not going to get any better.

My child is so annoying, no one can stand a child insisting that much. He/she gets into a terrible rage if he/she doesn't get his/her way.

I'm so exhausted that I don't have the energy to do anything.

Positive mindset

I help my child to remember by putting up a picture or other clue for support.

Life has its ups and downs, and I can have an impact on myself moving towards positive changes.

My child is strong-willed, and I need some time to myself every now and then to support my child in dealing with disappointments.

I'm allowed to feel exhausted. Today I'll skip the chores, go to bed early and tomorrow I'll wake up refreshed for another day.

Strengthen your positive thinking

Mindsets and beliefs have a significant impact on our well-being. Negative thoughts and a focus on problems undermine well-being, while positive thinking reinforces experiences of joy and happiness, increases life satisfaction and reduces the risk of burnout.

- Reflect and examine your own thoughts: do you feel dissatisfied with yourself, your loved ones and the things around you? Try to consciously change your perspective – what are you satisfied with in yourself and your loved ones? Find the good things that you value and want to keep in your life.
- Write down your strengths and positive traits. Place the list somewhere visible in your home to remind yourself every once in a while what a great person you are.
- Every day, think of five things you are grateful for.
- Work with those around you to eliminate negative thinking and reinforce positive thoughts and solution-oriented approaches.
- Do not worry about what you have done wrong or what you should have done. Focus on how you can better guide and support your child in the future. Instead of dwelling on failures, you can try thinking, “What have I learned from this and how can I do better next time?”
- Trust yourself as a parent. You possess a lot of unique knowledge and experience about your child that you can use in parenting. You are your child's most important support! Think about what your child will thank you for in 20 years' time and act in such a way that you will be proud to receive these thanks in the future.

Recognise and channel your negative feelings

Life is full of emotions. Parents are allowed to feel insecure, angry, frustrated, guilty, disappointed and sad. Recognising and accepting your own emotions, and expressing and channelling them constructively, will have a positive impact on your well-being and that of your family. Talking about your feelings will also help your child to process and structure their own feelings.

- Listen to your body – where do you feel the emotion? Is it gripping your heart, tensing your muscles, making you breathe faster? By becoming aware of and observing your body's reactions, you can learn to regulate your experience and find alternative ways of acting in different emotional states.
- Think to yourself and together with your family about how to express negative emotions so that you will not dwell on them. You can

release emotions by talking, going for a run or meditating in the sauna. Everyone has their own way of dealing with emotions. What is yours?

- If there is a risk of negative emotions being channelled into harmful actions, use the Stop – Think – Act strategy. You can calm yourself down by counting from one to ten in your mind and then thinking of a better way to act. By paying conscious attention to your breathing and taking slow, calm breaths, you can also calm your body's state of agitation.
- Observe your internal monologue. What does it tell you? Develop solution-oriented internal monologue. For example, in anger, you might say to yourself, “I am angry, but I need to calm down because nothing good comes from being angry.”

Seek information and outside help

- Seek information about your child's development and how to support your child. The fact that you have picked up this guide already indicates that you are ready to seek support for your family's everyday life.
- Are there people close to you who could help with childcare or who you could talk to? Good relationships are an important resource.
- If you feel that you are at the end of your tether and your methods are no longer sufficient, do not hesitate to seek professional help. It is important to recognise in time when your own resources are waning. It can be helpful to analyse your life situation and talk to someone outside your family. You can seek help from a psychologist at

the health centre, a family counsellor, mental health services, mental health associations, Barnavårdsföreningen or ADHD-liitto, for example. If you are suffering from a long-term, severe burnout or depression, it should be treated appropriately.

- Many parents find that peer support – mutual support between people in the same situation – is often useful. Join a discussion, training, holiday or recreational activity for parents of children with special needs, where you can meet other parents and share experiences of everyday challenges and how to cope with them.

Lessons from Life

- A child that lives with ridicule learns to be timid.
- A child that lives with criticism learns to condemn.
- A child that lives with distrust learns to be deceitful.
- A child that lives with antagonism learns to be hostile.
- A child that lives with affection learns to love.
- A child that lives with encouragement learns confidence.
- A child that lives with truth learns justice.
- A child that lives with praise learns to appreciate.
- A child that lives with sharing learns to be considerate.
- A child that lives with knowledge learns wisdom.
- A child that lives with patience learns to be tolerant.
- A child that lives with happiness will find love and beauty.

Ronald Russell



This guide offers ideas and practices for everyday situations, such as how to help your child get dressed, transition from one situation to another and how to resolve conflicts. The guide also includes tips on how to strengthen your parenting resources.

The guide is particularly helpful for parents whose pre-school or primary school-age child has challenges related to self-regulation or neuropsychiatric symptoms. It will also benefit professionals working with these children and their families.

Problems that seem complex do not necessarily require complex solutions.