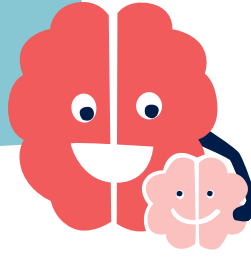


Big Feelings, Different Brains.



Parent Resource

This resource has been developed
in collaboration with clinical
neuropsychologist, Hannah Korrel.

Eight neuro-affirming strategies cover meltdowns and overwhelm, including co-regulation, sensory load, the special interest as a way back, predictability, and keeping an eye on your child's "cup".

When a child is overwhelmed, almost every parenting instinct we have is to move in closer, talk more, and ask what is wrong. For a neurodivergent child, that instinct is usually the opposite of what helps. Their system is already carrying more input than it can process, and every extra question, touch or word adds to the load. These strategies are about turning things down rather than up. They are useful whether or not your child has a diagnosis, and there is no harm in trying them.

A special thanks to Dr Hannah Korrel for her collaboration on these resources. Dr Korrel is a clinical neuropsychologist and the founder of Sydney Neuropsych, where she and her team assess children, adolescents and adults across the neurodevelopmental spectrum.

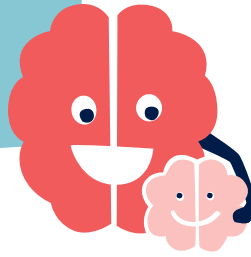
For more information, visit sydneyneuropsych.com.au

Please note: This resource has been developed in collaboration with Dr Hannah Korrell and is intended for general information purposes only. It's not a substitute for professional advice. Gotcha4Life does not offer counselling or crisis support.

If you have concerns about your child's wellbeing, please speak with your GP or a qualified health professional. You can also explore a range of free, trusted supports and information at gotcha4life.org/help-resources.

For direct support, Kids Helpline offers free, confidential counselling for young people aged 5 to 25. Call 1800 55 1800 or visit kidshelpline.com.au.

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1

Do the opposite of your instinct

When you feel like raising your voice, lower it. When you feel like moving closer, take a small step back. When you feel like asking more questions, stop asking and simply stay nearby. Sitting quietly beside a child in the middle of a meltdown is not doing nothing. It is doing the hardest and most useful thing available.

2

Turn down the volume on everything

Music off, air conditioning off, lights down, windows up. Fewer people in the room. A meltdown is often a sensory system that has run out of room, so anything you can subtract will help more than anything you can add. If your child tells you the wind on their face is unbearable, believe them. They are telling you exactly what they need.

3

Reach for the thing they love

The special interest is often the fastest way out of a meltdown. Dinosaurs, trains, a particular song, a favourite character, whatever it is for your child. This is not a bribe and it is not a distraction. It is a route back into a part of the brain that is still working while the rest has gone offline, and it very often shifts things within minutes when nothing else will. Let it work first, and save the conversation about what happened for later.

4

Keep a rescue box, and keep it out of reach

Put together a small box of things your child finds genuinely soothing. Something to squeeze, stroke, fiddle with or chew, a smell they like, headphones, something interesting to look at, and something connected to whatever they love most. Build it together on a calm day, so it holds the things that actually work rather than the things you assume will. The important part is that the box lives out of reach and only comes out when it is needed. A box that is available all day becomes ordinary, and ordinary things do not rescue anybody.

5

Let the body do what it needs to do

Rocking, pacing, hand flapping, humming, fiddling and chewing are how many neurodivergent bodies regulate themselves. Unless it is unsafe, let it happen. And do not ask for eye contact while a child is upset. For a lot of kids, looking away is what makes listening possible.

6

Connect first, teach later

A dysregulated brain cannot take in a lesson, so anything you say in the moment is wasted breath. Reconnect first. The conversation about what happened, and what to try next time, can wait until everyone is calm, and it will land far better then. Quite often, by the time you get there, it is not needed at all.

7

Make the day as predictable as you can

Say what is happening, in what order, and what happens next. Give a warning before transitions rather than announcing them. Where you know a change is coming, flag it early and often. Predictability is not rigidity, it is the thing that frees up enough capacity for your child to cope with everything else.

8

Keep an eye on the cup

Picture your child carrying a cup. School fills it, noise fills it, socialising fills it, holding it together fills it. When the cup overflows, you get a meltdown or a shutdown, and it rarely has much to do with whatever happened last. Fun things fill the cup too. A birthday party, a big day out and a sleepover in one weekend is a full cup, no matter how much they enjoyed it.

What emptying the cup looks like

- Unstructured, low-demand time with nothing to perform and nobody to manage
- Time alone, if that is what recharges them, without it being treated as antisocial
- The special interest, at length, guilt free (this is genuinely restorative, not avoidance)
- A quiet corner they can take themselves to without asking
- At least one part of the weekend with nothing scheduled in it at all

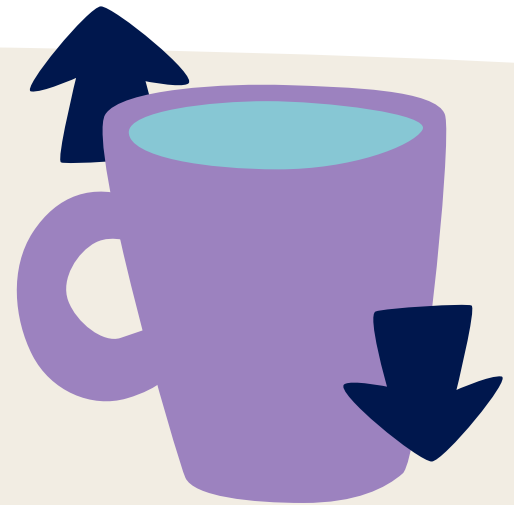


Take Action: The weekly cup check

Sit down together on a Sunday and look at the week ahead. Go through it and mark each thing with a simple arrow:

- An arrow up for things that fill the cup (school, parties, sport, appointments, anything busy or loud)
- An arrow down for things that empty it (quiet time, the special interest, doing nothing much)

Then look at the week as a whole. If there are three arrows up in a row with nothing in between, that is worth knowing in advance. See whether you can move one thing, or protect one afternoon.



Why it works

- Your child starts to notice their own limits, which is the beginning of asking for help
- It gives the whole family neutral language for a hard conversation, so nobody has to be the problem
- It shifts you from reacting after a meltdown to heading one off
- It makes rest something you plan for, rather than something that only happens once things fall apart