A Guide For Parents

I.N. THERAPY BERKSHIRE
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, ASSESSMENT & SUPPORT

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

A practical, neuroaffirming guide to recognising what your child needs and finding ways to support them.

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You know your child in a way that nobody else does.

You know what makes them laugh, what they enjoy, what can take more energy, the signs that things may be becoming too much, and many of the things that help them feel comfortable, connected and themselves.

Sometimes, though, even knowing your child incredibly well doesn't mean it is always obvious what might help in a particular moment.

This guide isn't here to tell you how to parent your child. It simply offers **four psychological ideas** that may help make sense of some of the things you are already noticing.

Your child may be autistic or have ADHD, be waiting for an assessment, or you may simply be looking for ways to support them with things they are finding difficult.

You don't need to read everything at once or work anything out.

Take what feels useful and leave the rest.

1 Look Underneath Behaviour

Behaviour is what we can see. It doesn't always tell us everything about what a child is experiencing underneath.

A child finding something difficult might be managing:

- Sensory discomfort
- Tiredness
- Uncertainty
- Anxiety or other emotions
- Difficulty shifting attention
- Lots of steps to organise
  Overwhelm
- Reduced capacity



There can be many different reasons for the same outward behaviour.

You may already have a good sense of what is happening for your child in some situations. At other times, it may be much less clear.

When something is difficult, it can sometimes help to gently wonder:
"What might be making this harder for my child right now?"

You won't always know the answer.

You don't need to.

Sometimes simply holding that question in mind gives us a different way of understanding what we are seeing.

2 Ability and Capacity Aren't the Same

Something a child manages easily one day might be incredibly difficult on another.
Having the ability to do something doesn't always mean having access to that ability in every moment.
Capacity naturally changes depending on what our brain and body are already managing.

For your child, this might include:
Sleep • Sensory demands • Anxiety • Emotions • Uncertainty • Transitions • Social demands • Executive functioning • Masking • How much they have already managed

Sometimes a child has the skill but needs **more support, more time, fewer demands or an opportunity to recover** before they can access it.
This doesn't take away from what they are capable of.

When things feel too much

When any of us become overwhelmed, it can become harder to think, process language, problem-solve or explain what we need.
At those times, less can sometimes be more.

Some children seek closeness when overwhelmed. Others need space. What helps can also change from one day to another.
There isn't one right way to regulate.
You may already be doing many of these things naturally.
Support and scaffolding can help children access the skills they already have.

Depending on your child, it might help to:

- use fewer words
- reduce demands for a while
- offer space or stay quietly nearby
- reduce sensory input
- allow movement
- use familiar routines
- help with the first step
- give them time to recover

3 Coping Can Take a Lot of Energy

Sometimes what you see at home can look very different from what other people see at school or elsewhere.
You might hear that your child appears settled or seems to be coping well, while at home you see exhaustion, withdrawal, overwhelm, strong emotions or a significant need for recovery.
Both can be true.

A school day can involve managing:
Noise • Social interaction
• Concentration • Transitions
• Instructions • Movement needs
• Uncertainty • Expectations

Some children also use considerable energy adapting themselves to the people and environments around them.
This is sometimes described as masking.

They might watch others to work out what is expected, rehearse what to say, hide confusion, hold back natural movements or work extremely hard to meet expectations.
From the outside, they may appear to be managing well.
That doesn't necessarily tell us how much effort it is taking.

As their parent, you may see the things other people don't: the preparation beforehand, the exhaustion afterwards, the need to withdraw, or emotions that become more visible once your child is somewhere familiar.

What you see at home matters.
It can tell us something important about how much energy your child's day is requiring.

Recovery matters too
After a demanding day, children may need very different things.
Food • Connection • Movement • Screen time • Quiet • A favourite activity
• Time alone • Fewer demands
There isn't a perfect after-school routine.
It is about what helps your child replenish some of the energy their day has required.

4 See the Whole Child

Supporting your child isn't only about the things they find difficult.

You already know there is so much more to them.
Their humour. Their curiosity. Their interests. The things they care deeply about. Their individual way of seeing the world. What makes them light up. What they notice that other people might miss.

Your child might be:
Curious • Funny • Creative • Compassionate • Determined • Knowledgeable • Observant • Imaginative • Analytical • Passionate • Thoughtful • Independent
Or their strengths might look completely different.

The things they love matter

A child's interests can offer comfort, predictability, regulation, confidence, learning or connection.
Making space for the things your child loves and the places where they feel most themselves can be every bit as important as supporting the things they find difficult.
Strengths don't cancel out support needs.
And needing support doesn't take away from strengths.



Both are part of your child.

What You Already Know About Your Child

If it feels useful, this is simply a little space to bring together some of what you already know.

My child seems most comfortable and able to be themselves when...

Things that seem to help when they are overwhelmed or running low on capacity are...

Something I would like other people supporting my child to understand about them is...

You Don't Have to Have All the Answers

Supporting your child can bring lots of questions. Is this anxiety? Is something sensory contributing? Could they be autistic or have ADHD? Are they overwhelmed? Is something else making this harder?
Sometimes there is a clear explanation. Often several things overlap.

You don't need to understand everything immediately.

And you don't need to become an expert in every aspect of neurodivergence to support your child well.
Your knowledge of your child matters.
What they communicate to you matters.
The patterns you notice matter.
What you see before and after situations that other people don't witness matters.
And the things you already do to help your child feel safe, supported and able to be themselves matter too.

Sometimes psychological ideas simply give us **additional language for things you already know and notice.**

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IF YOU'D LIKE

SOME SUPPORT ALONGSIDE YOU

I'm Dr Emma Rigby, a Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist specialising in autism, ADHD and psychological wellbeing.

I offer six-session parent support for families who would value some individual space to think about their child's needs and what might help, building on what you already know about your child.
I also provide autism and ADHD assessments for children and young people where families are looking for greater clarity and understanding.

My approach is compassionate, individualised and neuroaffirming, and is also informed by lived experience of neurodivergence within my own family.



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