

Parenting Exceptional Children

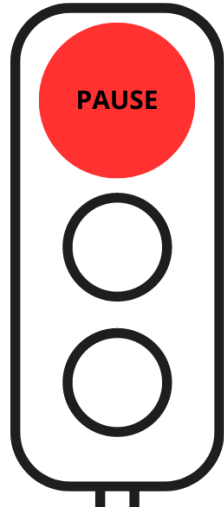
A strengths-based approach to raising autistic, adhd and other neurodivergent children.

John Sharry

Session 3



Solving Childhood Problems

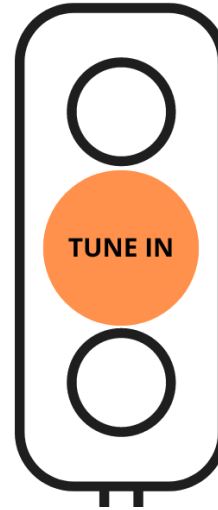


Pause

How am I **reacting** to the problem?

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



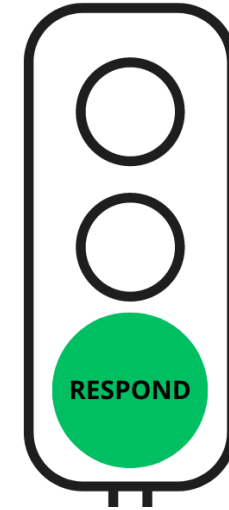
Tune In

What is going on for my **child**?

What needs is my child **communicating**?

What is going on for me as a **parent**?

What are **my needs**?



Respond

What is the best way to **respond**?

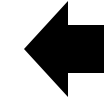
How can I address my **child's needs**?

How can I address my **own needs**?

Your Priorities as a Parent



Enforcing Rules



Keep to a minimum

Setting rules/ Boundaries
(e.g. safety)

Teaching and coaching my child

Co-problem solving
Empowering my child to make their own choices

Supporting my child's passions, interests and sensory needs

Building a warm and connected relationship with my child

Looking after my own wellbeing and needs

Agenda for this Session

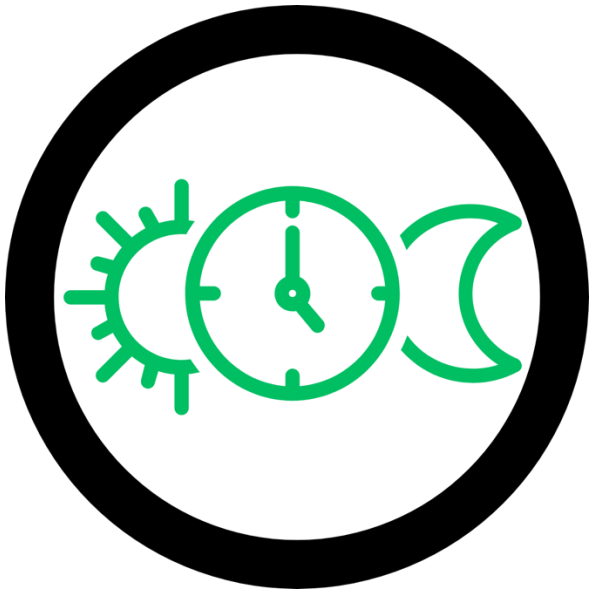
- **Co-problem solving** with children
- **Advocating** for your child
- Building your child's **well-being**
- Supporting **Friendships**
- Managing **energy levels** and reducing **stress**
- **Questions** and going forward

Co-Problem Solve with Your Child



Co-Problem Solve with Your Child:

3 Steps



1 Pick a
Good Time



2 First Listen
and Understand



3 Encourage Your
Child's Solutions

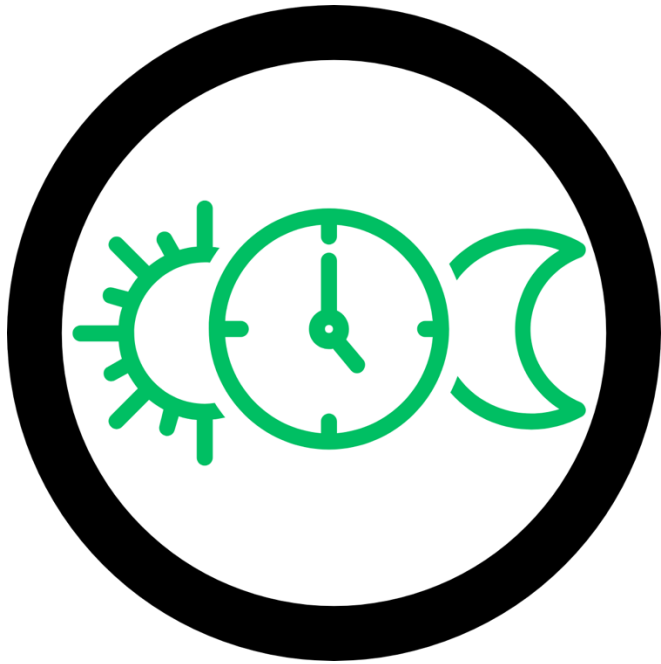
Co-Problem Solve with your Child



ND children communicate differently so you might have to adapt how you communicate about problems. They might...

- be less verbal and prefer **other ways of communicating**.
- have executive function differences making it more difficult to **plan** and **follow through**.
- have alexithymia and experience and **process feelings differently**.
- be PDA where they might initially experience co-problem solving as a **threat to their autonomy** and you have to work hard to ensure you are focusing on **their** own goals and preferences.

1. Pick a Good Time



- During the problem or in the **heat of the moment**.
(though may need to co-regulate first).
- A **scheduled time**.
“Let’s talk after dinner or when we go for a walk.”
- When **child comes to you** about problem.
(You choose to drop tools and listen).
- **Spontaneous opportunity**.
(e.g. when a dilemma comes up during a TV show you are watching).

2. Listen First

Often the different perspective of ND children is misunderstood and not validated.



- Be careful about about **mis-labelling**
‘You must be anxious’, when in fact they are experiencing sensory overload.
- Be **curious** and invite your child to **describe their experiences**
‘Your face looks tense, I wonder what that means.’
- Be **curious** about **positive experiences**
‘You love wearing that tee shirt, I am wondering what makes it so comfortable.’
- Help them find **language** for what they need.
‘I see you are upset, what do you need?’ or ‘I see you are upset, I am here for you on the bed.’
- Use your **child’s language** to describe what is going on.
A child saying his *‘brain went fizzy’* to describe a meltdown.

3. Encourage Your Child's Solutions

Lots of different approaches might work...



- **Good Questions** - *‘What would you like to happen now?’ or ‘How do you first notice stress building in your body?’*
- **Being Indirect** - *‘I wonder how you managed in school’ or ‘it might be good to figure out how stress builds in the body’.*
- **Non-verbal techniques** - visual worksheets or using text / email.
- **Third party conversations** - discussing friendship dilemmas between the characters in a movie or video game as you play together.
- **Creative approaches** - quizzes, social stories or comic strips about problem scenarios.
- **Sensory games** - to explore sensations in the body and to discuss how feelings are experienced.
- **Role-playing** different ways of responding.
- **Collaborating/Asking for Help** – *“I need to get some rest today, can you help me?” or “Your brother is a little upset, how can we look after him together?”*

Advocate For Your Child

Be your child's ally and advocate.



- **Explain your child's needs** to others in a way that creates understanding.
- **Collaborate with schools** to create a learning environment to suit your child.
- **Anticipate challenges** to minimise any disadvantage they experience.
- Support your child how to **advocate for themselves** and to ask for what they need.
- Join with others to **campaign** for a more neurodiversity affirming world.

Advocating With a Teacher



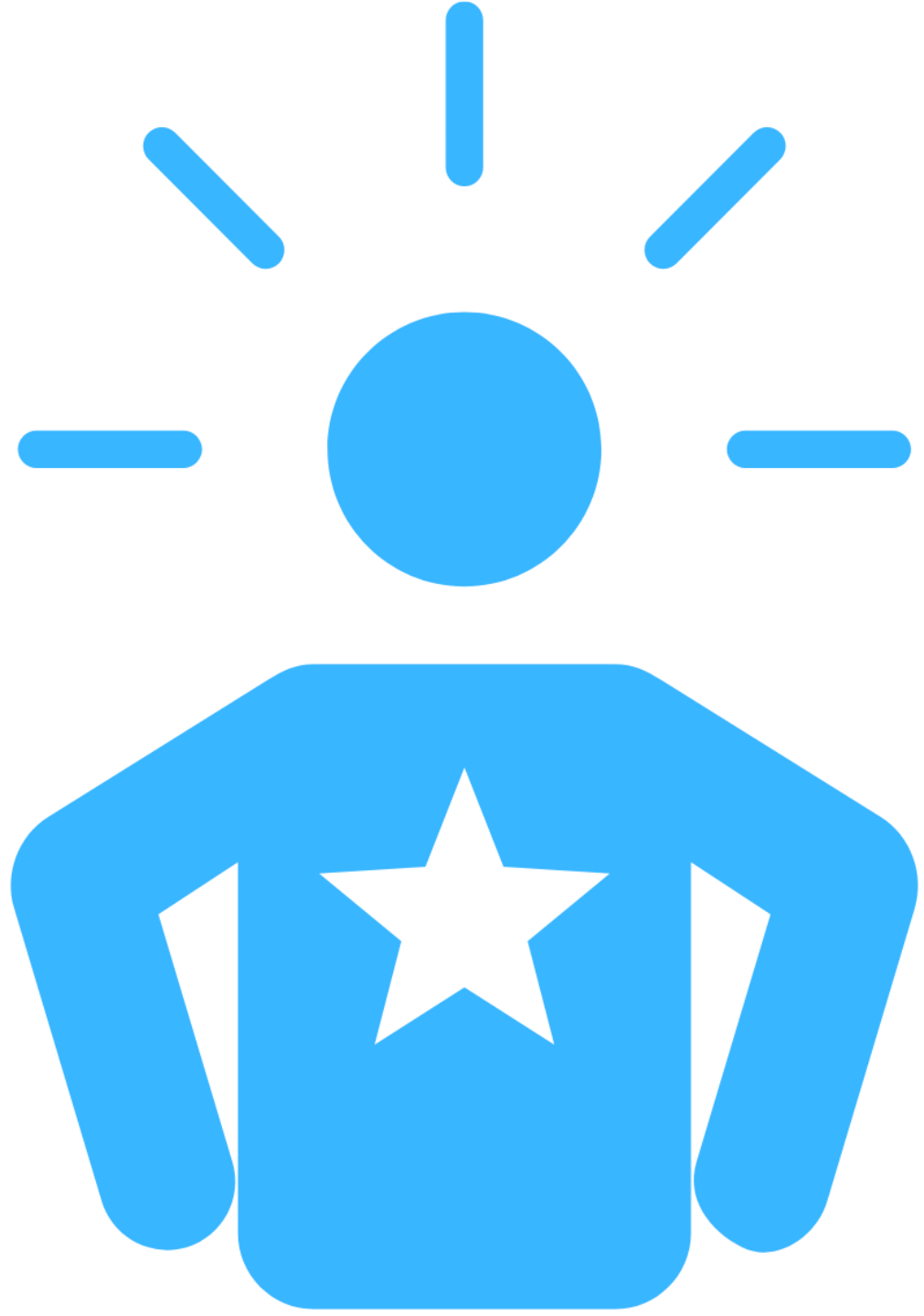
1. **Affirm what the teacher is doing right:** ‘J likes the learning project you set up’
2. **Listen to the teachers concerns:** ‘How is J doing in your class?’
3. **Explain your child’s needs:** ‘J can find it hard to sit for long periods.’
‘J has sensory needs when he is eating lunch’
4. **Agree a positive goal with teacher:** e.g. Helping J settle in class.
5. **Share what works:** ‘How I help J attend at home is ...’
6. **Explore teachers ideas:** ‘What can you do to help J in class?’
7. Ask for **specific accommodations:** ‘Can J have a pass if he needs a break?’
‘Can we set a project for homework’
8. **Agree a plan** and how you will communicate again.



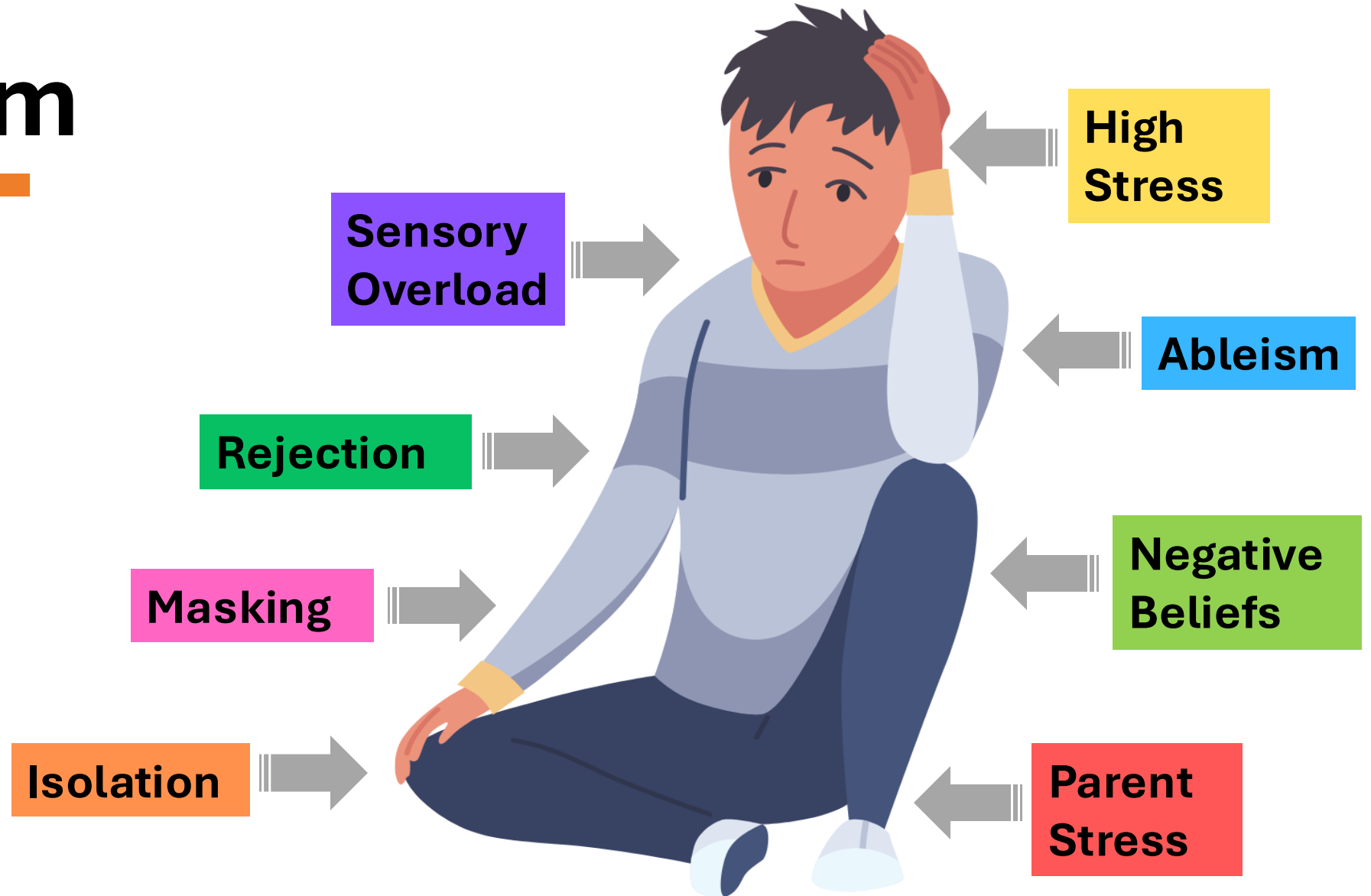
Take a Break...

- How can you **co-problem solve with your child** at home?
- How can you **advocate for your child** in school or elsewhere?

Building Wellbeing and Self-Esteem



Blocks to Self-Esteem



What You Can Do As a Parent



**Become An
Affirming Parent**



**Nurture Your
Child's Passions**



**Help Your Child
Find Their Tribe**



**Manage Stress
and Energy Levels**



**Advocate For
Your Child**



**Co-Problem
Solve**

Become An Affirming Parent

- Prioritise **relationships, connection** and **fun**.
- Create a **safe place** for your children in the **home**.
- Talk **positively** about their **differences** and **compassionately** about **challenges**.



“ Your ADHD brain gives you loads of great ideas, though sometimes it makes it difficult to pick the best one. ”

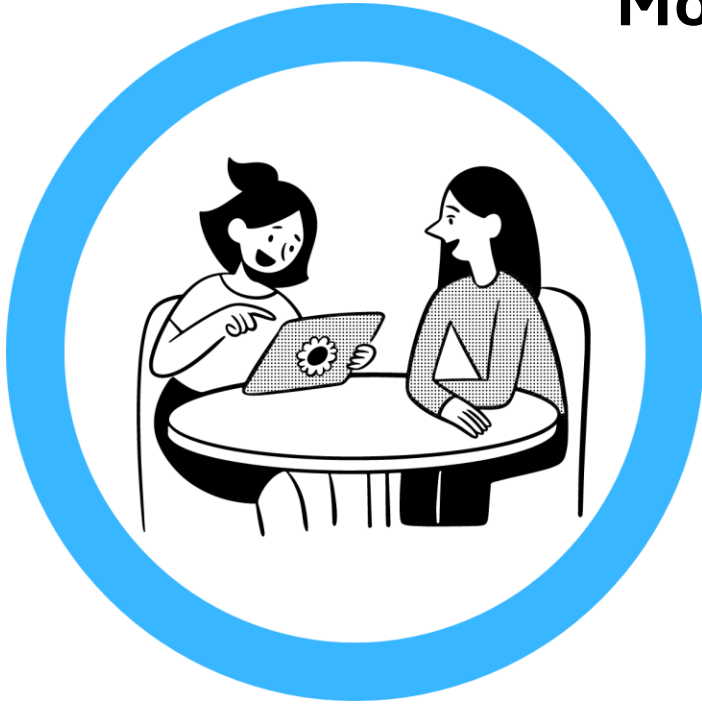
“ Being highly sensitive means you sometimes become overwhelmed, but also means you are empathetic to others when they are. ”

“ Your autistic brain, means you really focus when you are in your routine, though sometimes it can be stressful when things change unexpectedly. ”

Nurture Your Child's Passions

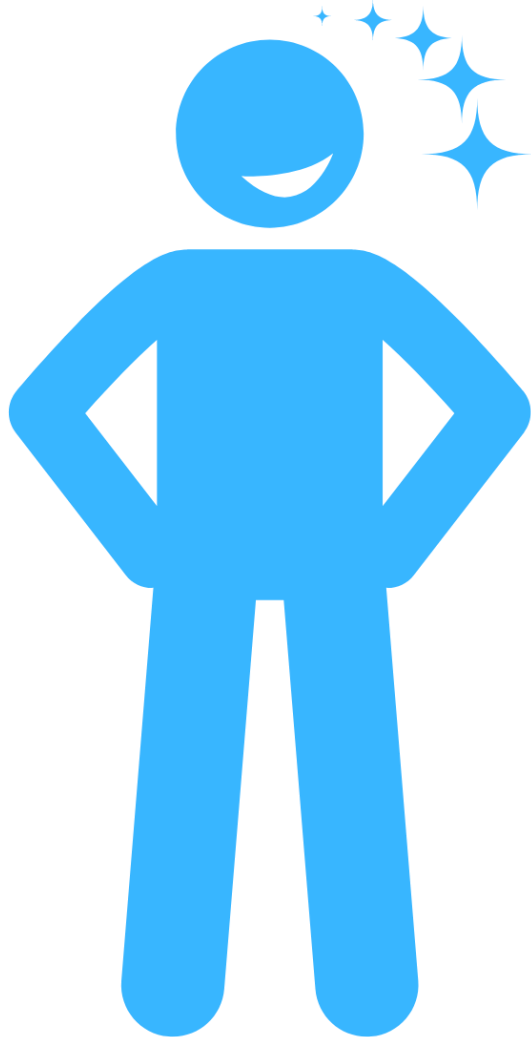
The antidote to stress is passion and enjoyment.

Most ND children have passions and special interests that:



- Are a source of **joy**.
- Provide **rest** and **recreation**.
- Allow them **escape** and get into a '**state of**
- Help them **recuperate** and **recover**.
- Let them **learn new things** them.
- Provide **meaning** and **long-term purpose**.
- Can be a future **employment!**

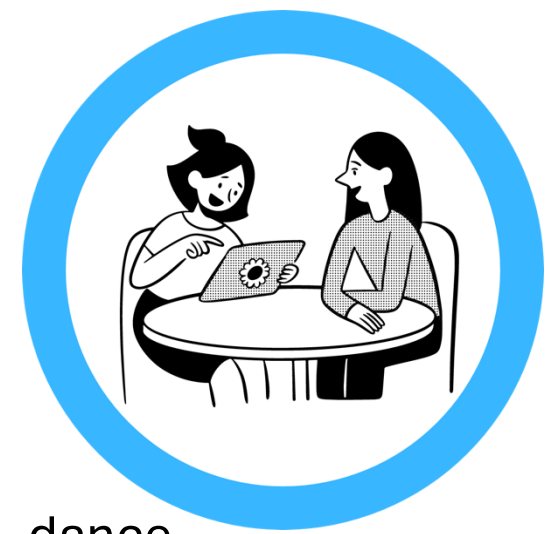
Reflection



What are your child's passions?

1. What activities bring them **joy**?
2. What activities do they get completely **absorbed in**?
3. What activities do they **learn** most from?

Encouraging Passions



- Can take time to find your child's passions.
- Remember some children change passions regularly

Action: running, cycling, kickabouts, skateboarding, martial art, team sport, hikes, dance.

Learning: quizzes, competitions, new languages, dog training, politics, documentaries.

Planning: budgets, holidays, special events, family projects, day trips.

Creative: journaling, crafts, photography, DIY, drawing, choir, cooking, creative writing

Social: scouts/girl guides classes, community groups, helping vulnerable people, mentoring in sport/homework.

Nature: watching/photographing nature, identifying plants and insects, projects, citizen science, raising awareness about an issue they are passionate about.

Entertainment: films, books, following music, sports fan.

Digital: podcasting, graphic design, video editing, organizing photos.

Help Your Child Find Their Tribe



ND children can make friendships differently...

- **small** rather than big group (1:1 or 3-4).
- formed around a **passion** or **interest**.
- can prefer **structured** groups (e.g. girl guides, team sport or community group).
- be **intermittent** or **intense**.
- friends can be **different ages** or **family members**.
- tend to get on better with **other ND children like them**.

Help Your Child Find Their Tribe



➤ Julie supported her daughter's decision not to go the school disco even though she was under a lot of FOMO pressure. She hated the idea of having to dress up, the loud music and the busy social situation. As an alternative, they planned a **board games night** at home with her **cousin** and **aunty** which she loved.

➤ Peter's son used to visit his **elderly neighbour** daily. He would do her shopping and spend time **chatting** with her and playing with her **dog**.

➤ Julia's son spend hours learning **hurling** skills in the garden and as a result was always selected for the GAA team. His team-mates respect him and he this **social group easier** as focused on his passion

➤ The structure of the **scouts** group really worked for Alice's daughter. She thrived mixing with children of **different ages** and having a **specific role** in her patrol. She particularly got on well with one of the young adult leaders who shared her love of hiking in the mountains.

➤ When Sean got his 10-year-old son into his **singing** and **drama** group it made a huge difference to his life – he loved the **performance** on the stage and really got on with the other children – he loved going each week and it became a long-term passion.

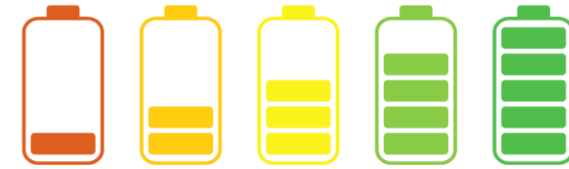
Manage Stress and Energy Levels



Neurodivergent children are prone to burnout, exhaustion and shutdown.

- An ADHD child might be **hyperactive** during the day and then crash in the evening with a **meltdown**.
- An autistic child might be in a **high state of stress** during the school day and then **shutdown** and be unable to speak.

Keeping Your Battery Charged



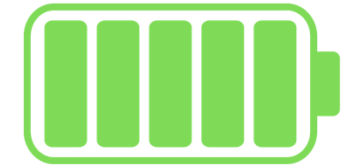
Understand your child's capacity and energy levels during the day.

Some activities are **stressful** and **deplete** your child's battery...



- **Sitting** at desk in school.
- **Yard time**, worried about how to fit in.
- **Homework**.
- **Talking about** the school day.
- **Tidying up** at home.

Some activities are **enjoyable** and **recharge** your child's battery...



- **Sensory break** at lunch.
- **Stimming**.
- **Chatting** to a friend.
- **Reading** in a quiet room for ten minutes.
- Engaging in a **passion** or **special interest**.

Reflection

Take a moment to reflect about your child's energy levels during the day...

YOUR CHILD



— What activities **stress** and **deplete** your child's energy during the day?

+ What activities **replenish** and **restore** your child's energy levels during the day?

YOURSELF AS A PARENT



— What activities **stress** and **deplete** your energy during the day?

+ What activities **replenish** and **restore** your energy levels during the day?

Some Final Points

- Understand your child's **individual needs** (rather than just diagnosis).
- Get the **right supports** to address needs (OT to help sensory issues, SLT to support communication, or physio to help with hypermobility/ fibromyalgia) etc.
- Prioritise your **connection and relationship** with your child.
- Embrace **neurodiversity in the family**.
- **Learn and inform yourself** about ND needs (lived experiences through books, interviews, talks, social media)
- Address your **own needs** and focus on parent self care.
- **Reach out** and get support (social forums online, meet ups, parent groups).
- **Leave your email in feedback form** if you would like to stay in touch with this group
- Email me if you would like a **short follow up individual session**

Going Forward

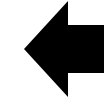
Getting Support

[www.solutiontalk.
ie](http://www.solutiontalk.ie)

Your Priorities as a Parent



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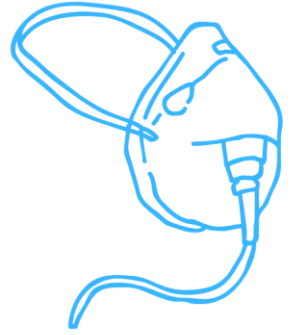
Empowering my child to make their own choices

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Parent- Self Care



In case of emergency put on your own oxygen mask first.

- Focus on your own **care** and **relaxation**.
- Get your **own needs met**.
- Let go expectations **that don't work** for you.
- Prioritise **one** or **two daily things** that relax and recharge you such as:
ringing a friend for a chat, listening to a podcast you love, walking the dog, cooking a meal you like, spending time in nature, doing ten minutes meditation.
- Seek **support**, counselling, parenting group and neuro-affirming professional support.
- Identify what you need and find out what **works for you**.

Supporting Your Child's Friendships



- Get to know your child's **current friends** and groups.
- Get to know their **social networks** (e.g. which children are potential friends in school).
- Help them **join groups** around **passions** and **interest**.
- Facilitate them to meet other **ND children**
- Reach out to parents of **potential friends**.
- **Facilitate** social contacts (setting up play dates or trips with other children).
- Be **creative** (involve cousins and other family members).
- **Co-problem solve** with your child around friendship issues (how to approach children, how to maintain friendships..)