



# How to help your distracted, impulsive & high energy child



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# Introduction



**Do you live with a child who ...**

Doesn't seem to listen to you?

Flits like a butterfly from activity to activity?

Is impulsive and lives in the moment?

Has little understanding of time?

Is on the go all day?

Is full of energy?

**Yes to most of these?**

**Then this booklet is for you!**

Living with a child like this can be a rollercoaster of fun and excitement and hugs. There can also be a huge impact on family and home life when you have a tornado in the house!

Things may get stressful, and tensions can run high. Every family has its ups and downs, but living with an "on the go" child who struggles to focus can add to this because they are likely to be disorganised, messy, noisy, forgetful and emotional.

Every child is different and every situation is different, so there's no 'one size fits all' solution or advice. But the following ideas and approaches should help bring some calm and harmony back to home life.



# Routines



- Routines can really help children who are forgetful and impulsive as they are a way to avoid having to use their working memory to process information as new every time.
- Establishing a routine can help with potential battleground times such as bedtime, and if you involve your child, they will feel part of the solution, not the problem.
- So work out (and write down) the routine with your child so they can have input and buy in to it. Keep it simple to start with, because once you have the basics working, you can add more.



# Having House Rules and Making a deal

It's a good idea, when you are both calm, to talk to your child about the right way to behave. Then you can agree a plan together, with rewards for them when they do what they are asked. You can write your deal down. Involving your child is key – if they think it is their idea they are far more likely to stick to it.

Agree the reward you are going to give to your child in advance and make sure it is appropriate to the change you want and that your child is motivated by the reward. Ideas for “deals” could include getting up on time five mornings in a row, tidying their room every day, doing their homework for ten minutes every night and so on.

Remember to keep your deals clear, brief, and if possible visual/written down so your child knows what is expected and there is no misunderstanding. It's best to not try too many contracts going at any one time, and the contracts must not have a negative consequence. It is very important for your child that you look for the positives and acknowledge the good things they do.

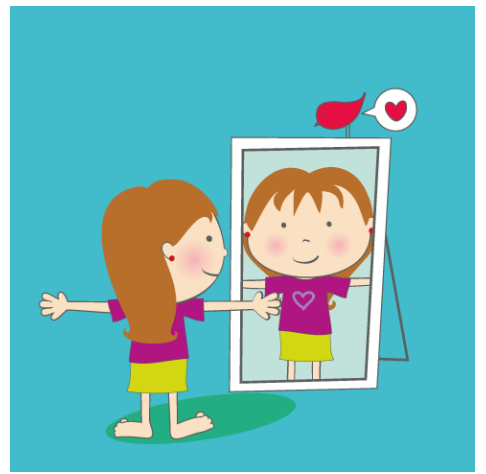


# Catch them being good

- Praise your child's strengths and reward them to encourage further good behaviour and increase their sense of self-worth.
- You will need to criticise from time to time, but try to distinguish the behaviour from the child. Rather than saying "I've told you a million times not to leave your shoes there!" focus on the behaviour and it's natural consequences: "It was annoying to trip over your shoes again and I spilled my coffee and could have broken the mug. Now I have to clear it up and we are going to be late leaving for the cinema."
- Always try to look for things to praise. Negative consequences or criticism should be used far less than positive consequences – otherwise it just makes them feel bad about themselves and encourages further bad behaviour. Your child can be more forgetful than most – if you picked up on everything they did wrong you would be doing it all day and that is all they will hear after a while. Praise the good things and try to ignore the bad unless it is dangerous to do so. If you're going to have a battle, then pick your moment!



# Identity, self esteem and wellbeing



- You have an amazing, energetic, enthusiastic creative child- enjoy them!
- Encourage creativity in your child as an outlet for impulsiveness.
- Don't say or do things that will make your child feel badly about their way of doing things. You want them to develop tools they can use to help themselves, and it is ok if it is not how you would do it.
- Set your child up to make progress on something that matters to them. This builds confidence and motivation.
- Big tasks become much easier when broken down into small steps – especially homework.
- All children need escape valves. Try to bring some physical activity into anything they are doing.
- Spend time together doing the things they enjoy and excel in – let them be the expert at somethings and teach you!
- Above all, look for positive reinforcement at every opportunity! This always works better than noticing negatives.



# Press Pause



- Use this phrase in family life for yourself and the children. It's your new mantra!

## **For you .....**

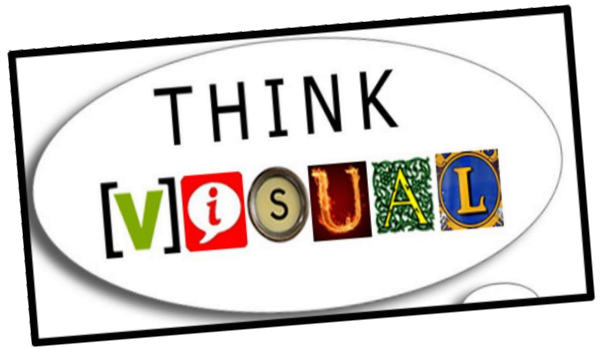
- It will help you take a moment to manage your own emotions. Some seemingly low level behaviours can push your buttons 20 times a day, and normally when you are trying to get somewhere!

## **For your child .....**

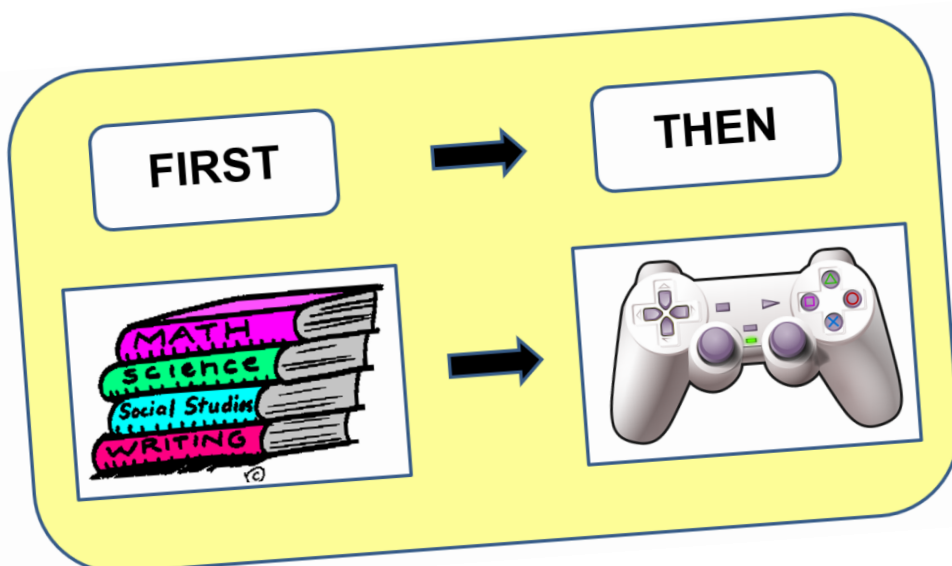
- An impulsive child might know the right thing to do but they need some thinking time to do it. Give them time to process changes and instructions.
- Give countdown reminders from about 10 minutes before you need to change activity, leave the house, stop gaming, stop playing with toys.



# Using Visuals & Prompts



- Having visuals to support your words is helpful for children who are inattentive and forgetful. Pictures, particularly for younger children, are worth a thousand words, so think about using drawings, symbols or photographs to show what you want done and what is expected.
- Create a 'visual timeline' for common routines or hotspots in your family life. You can google pictures, or take photos of your child doing every different stage then get them to put them in the right order.
- Get a family calendar for the kitchen and model using it yourself. Add in after school activities, changes to school pick up, school holidays etc
- Use a checklist. Put it where your child can see it easily and maybe even tick the activity as it's finished. It's a great habit to develop as a life skill and will help them organise information at school too.
- Use "first/then" phrases and visuals if needed.





# Understanding their emotions



Being with an impulsive child is often like seeing just the tip of an iceberg – they are behaving in a certain way for a reason, but the reason is beneath the surface.

Listening to them, without talking but acknowledging their anger, can sometimes calm them down and avoid making the situation worse. It's also a good way of finding what's under the surface. Quite often your child will have coped all day at school and will be exhausted, and their underlying emotions spill over when they come home.

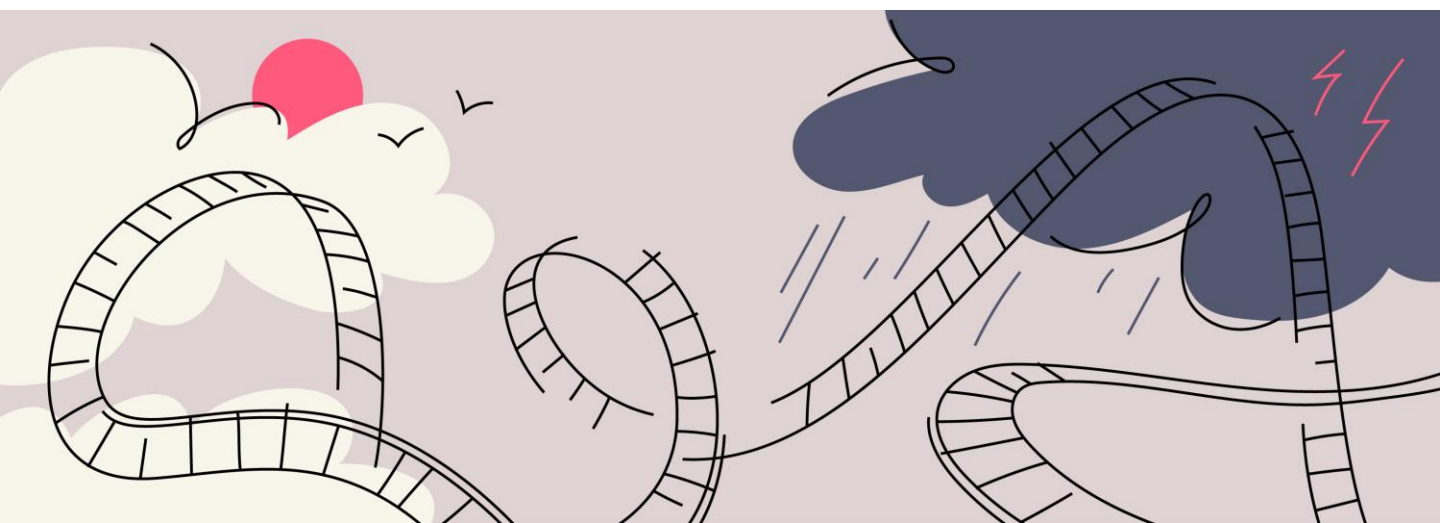
It's really important for you to listen and be a bit of a detective. Some children use challenging behaviours to communicate something they can't find the words for.

For a tricky conversation, try sitting side by side with your child rather than in front of them. It can take the pressure off and make them more likely to talk. Car journeys are sometimes a good way to connect with your children for this reason.

# Planning for Up and Down Emotions

Try this plan to even out your child's emotions though the day

- **1.** Keep them balanced. Make sure they get enough sleep, eat regular and healthy meals, and have enough 'down time' 'quiet time' or 'me-time' to reduce stress.
- **2.** Make time for exercise and time outdoors. Some energetic children are like dogs and need to be walked twice a day to burn off energy and help them sleep!
- **3.** Pick your battles and be clear to your child– and yourself – about your expectations.
- **4.** Follow a routine. Your child needs structure. Their behaviour will be less erratic if they know what they're expected to do and when they're expected to do it. Eg decide whether homework is done before or after dinner. Then stick to your routines as much as possible.
- **5.** Set expectations. Before it's time for a change – such as turning off the Xbox and getting ready for bed or stopping a game and coming in for dinner – give your child a count-down warning. The same comes when leaving the house – warn them 10 minutes beforehand.
- **6.** Stay calm. If your child does have a 'meltdown', it may be hard for you to stay calm, especially if it's in a public place. But it won't help the situation if you're both worked up. Try to talk quietly to your child; don't shout – seeing you acting normally may help your child calm down.
- **7.** Be understanding. If you see that your child is getting upset, ask what's wrong. Acknowledge their feelings and explain that you can understand their point of view. Thoughtfully repeating what they said may help – children can find it reassuring that someone understands their concern.
- **8.** Encourage deep breaths. Deep breathing can be relaxing and can help relieve the stress that caused the 'meltdown' in the first place.
- **9.** Set rules for 'meltdowns'. No matter how hard you try to avoid them, angry outbursts are bound to happen. When it's over and calm is restored, you and your child should discuss what happened, and agree what to do if they get upset or angry in the future. Then when there is an emotional outburst, carry out your agreement. Your child is more likely to come out of it more quickly if they know what to expect.



# Managing their big feelings- and your own!



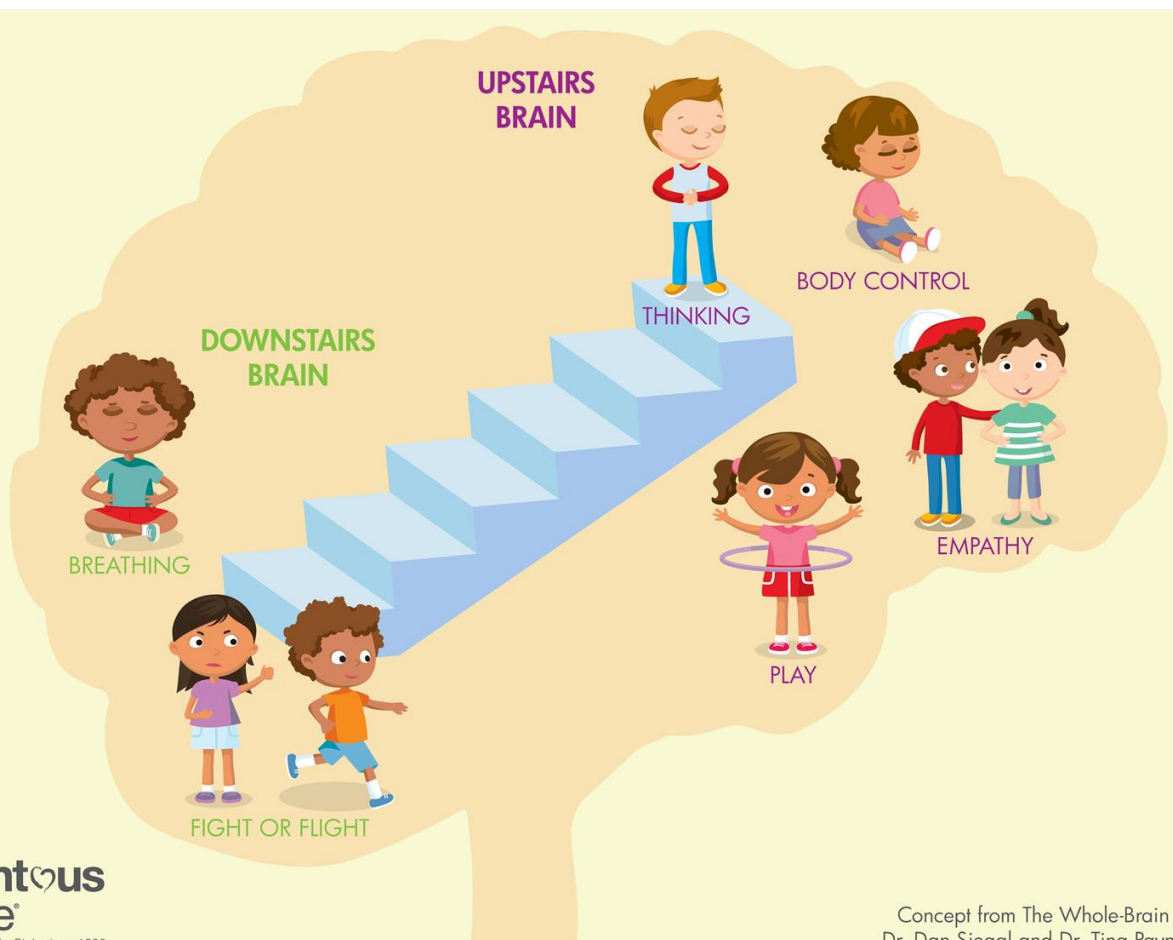
Neuroscientists have studied what is going on in our brains when we lose control of our emotions. Imagine the brain as having an upstairs and a downstairs. The downstairs is where all our feelings and impulsive reactions come from – think caveman and survival mode! The upstairs part is the cortex where our problem solving, thinking, playing and social skills come from. When we lose control of our emotions (flip our lids) then the downstairs brain is in charge and we are in fight or flight mode.

## THERE IS NO THINKING GOING ON AT ALL, JUST FEELINGS!

Trying to talk to someone when they are overwhelmed like this is pointless and will make things worse. They need their lid back on again before they can think again.

### Press Pause!

Of course this doesn't just happen to children. We all flip our lids from time to time, and it really helps to be aware of this. The main thing to remember is to control your own emotions first. This is hard. But remember - you can fake it! Take a deep breath and PRETEND that you are calm. This buys you some time while you think of what to do next. Remember on a plane, you would have to put your oxygen mask on first before your child's. You need to have your thinking brain in charge first to be able to help them.



# Emotion Coaching

Try these steps to guide you through a child's outburst. Have a go first with a smaller outburst of frustration rather than extreme anger, and you will find it works more and more with practice.

## Step 1 –Empathise with them and name the feeling

I can see that you got angry when that happens . I would feel angry too. It's normal to feel like that.

Oh no that sounds really rubbish . I think I would feel really embarrassed and sad if that happened to me.

## Step 2 –Set limits and boundaries

It's OK to feel angry but not OK to hit

We can't do that here because we need everyone to be safe

We have rules we all have to follow don't we so you know that doing that is not OK

## Step 3 Problem Solve

Let's think what we could do if this happens again

We can think of a new way to do this together.

Can you remember a time when you coped with this ? What did you do ?

Your child's school may be using a programme called "Zones of Regulation" . If they are, it can be useful to chat to them about how you could use the same techniques at home.

# Sleep



- Increasing your child's sleep by as little as half an hour can dramatically improve their mood in general and their ability to focus at school.
- Remember, your child needs routine and predictability more than other children.
- Stick to that schedule. Decide ahead of time with your child what their night-time routine will be, and include when to bathe, brush teeth, read, etc.
- Set a bedtime alarm or Alexa reminder. This means your child associates their bedtime with a clock or timer instead of feeling like sleep is a parental demand. Ensure the alarm sound is quiet and settling. Eventually, your child will naturally associate it with sleepiness.
- Use blackout curtains.
- Using white noise or nature sounds to block street or household sounds can also be helpful.

## What to do when your child won't go to sleep

### Rapid Return

After putting your child into bed and kissing them goodnight, the last thing you are going to say to them is "Sleep Time".

Then, leave the room, wait outside the bedroom, and as soon as your child goes to get out of bed or stands in their cot, return immediately to the bedroom, give no eye contact or conversation except "Sleep Time". Put your child back into bed, or lay them back down in the cot and leave the room again.

Repeat this until your child is asleep.

At first, you may have to repeat this many times, but gradually, as long as you follow the instructions, your child will learn to self-settle and go to sleep quickly.

If your child wakes in the night, repeat as before.

Remember, consistency is the key, keep going and you will see results.

### Gradual Retreat

After putting your child into bed and kissing them goodnight, sit next to the bed, resting your hand on your child. Give them no eye contact or conversation. If your child tries to sit up or get out of bed, lay them back down, again making sure you give them no eye contact or conversation, except say "Sleep Time".

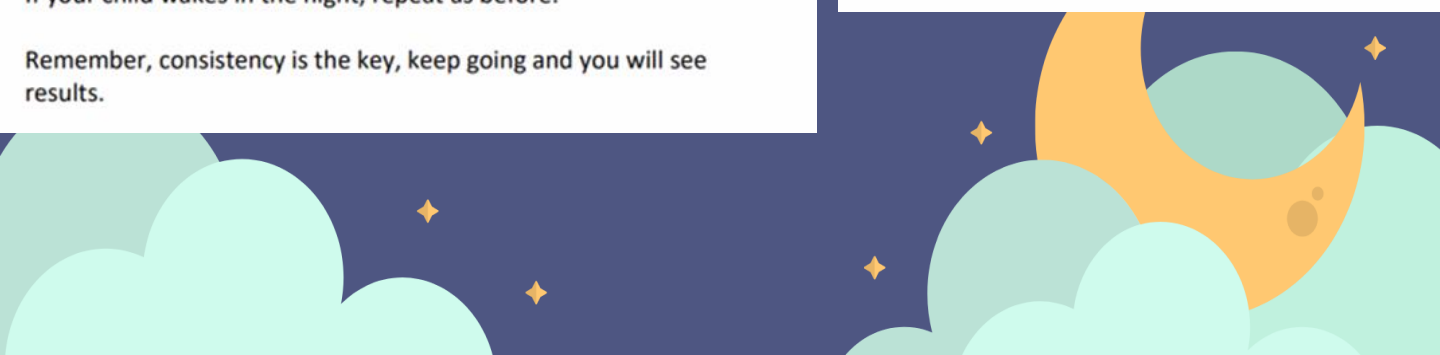
Keep doing this until your child is asleep, sit there until your child has dropped into a deep sleep, approx 15 to 20 mins. This is stage one.

Once your child is comfortable settling like this, stage two, is to do the same but do not rest your hand on your child, just sit by the bed. Not leaving your child until they are deeply asleep.

Gradually, move further from the bed in stages until you are out of the room, and your child will settle themselves and fall asleep without you there.

If your child wakes in the night, repeat as before.

Remember, consistency is the key, keep going and you will see results.



# Sleep



- Try aromatherapy. Essential oils like lavender, chamomile, sandalwood or vanilla can be calming for many people. Let your child choose one and then dab a little oil on their pillowcase.
- Some children struggle to understand where their bodies are in space. A heavy, weighted blanket or just an extra duvet can apply deep pressure to muscles and joints throughout the night, helping to support the body's natural ability to fall asleep.
- Anxious children, like anxious adults, often have too much on their minds to fall asleep at night. Try some calming apps such as Headspace or Relax Kids stories.

## Help for Stockport families

Sleep Success -half day course

Sleep Better- 5 week course

1:1 clinics also available after the above courses  
have been completed

-Contact [outreach@seashelltrust.org.uk](mailto:outreach@seashelltrust.org.uk)

-<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>



# Helping your child thrive at school



School can be hard going for someone who struggles to focus and has a need to move, but with patience and a good plan, your child can thrive in the classroom.

As a parent, you can work with your child and their teacher to put practical strategies into place to promote learning both inside and out of the classroom. With the right support, these approaches can help your child thrive and experience success.

Your school might suggest you complete a One Page Profile with them. This will record your child's interests, strengths, things that help your child focus and settle to learn. There are some ideas below to get you started.

Give clear, written and verbal directions



Schedule an organization check-in time



Give extra opportunities for movement



Consider flexible seating options



Chunk long-term projects



Provide fidgets (and teach how to use them)

Set up a work station in each class



Use a thought journal to share ideas



Teach and practice predictable routines



Teach executive functioning skills



Use a timer for work sessions



Spend time building confidence