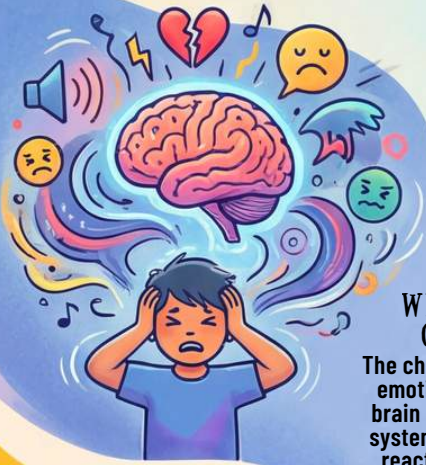


# WHAT A CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR IS REALLY TELLING YOU

Children behave in certain ways because something inside them needs attention. Their behaviour is a signal, not a choice.

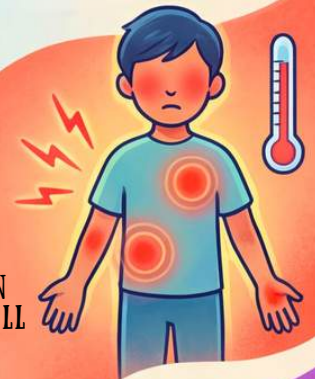
## WHEN A CHILD IS OVERWHELMED

The child is taking in more noise, emotion, or activity than their brain can manage. Their stress system switches on. Their body reacts before they can think. This can look like shouting, crying, running away, or refusing.



## WHEN A CHILD IS IN PAIN OR FEELS UNWELL

The child cannot explain the pain or discomfort. Their behaviour becomes the way they show it. This may look like irritability, aggression, or refusing to take part.



## WHEN A CHILD IS EXPERIENCING SENSORY OVERLOAD

The child's senses are taking in too much sound, light, touch, or movement. Their brain cannot filter it out. This leads to distress, covering ears, hiding, or having a meltdown.



## WHEN A CHILD IS HUNGRY OR THIRSTY

The child has low energy. Their brain cannot stay steady. Small problems feel big. They may become tearful, angry, or restless.



## WHEN A CHILD IS SEEKING SENSORY INPUT

The child needs movement, pressure, or touch to feel balanced. Their body feels unsettled. This can look like climbing, jumping, fidgeting, or rough play.



## WHEN A CHILD IS TIRED

The child's brain is struggling to keep control. They cannot manage strong feelings. They react quickly and cannot think about consequences.



## WHEN A CHILD DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WANT

The child feels confused or unsure about the task. They fear getting it wrong. This can look like refusal, avoidance, or acting silly.



## WHEN A CHILD DOES NOT FEEL SAFE

The child feels unsure, threatened, or unsupported. Their brain goes into protection mode. This can look like clinginess, anger, shutdown, or trying to escape the situation.



## WHEN A CHILD NEEDS CONNECTION

The child feels disconnected from their caregiver. They need reassurance that the adult is present and safe. Their behaviour becomes louder or more intense to get that closeness.



## WHAT TO DO



Look at the need, not just the behaviour.



Help the child settle through calm presence and simple words.



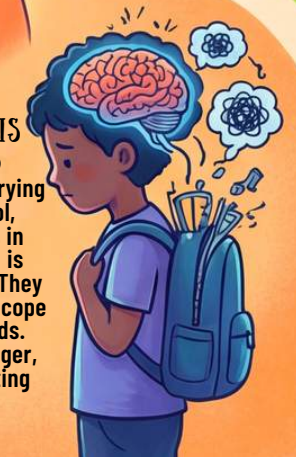
Meet the need when you can.



Teach skills only when the child is calm.

## WHEN A CHILD IS UNDER STRESS

The child may be worrying about home, school, friends, or changes in routine. Their brain is busy with the worry. They have less capacity to cope with normal demands. This may show as anger, withdrawal, or shutting



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# About this Resource

What a Child's Behaviour Is Really Telling You is a clear, trauma informed visual resource that helps adults understand the meaning behind children's behaviour. It explains that behaviour is communication, not defiance, and supports a needs based approach to children's emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

This printable poster breaks down common behaviour such as shouting, refusing, withdrawing, aggression or meltdowns, and links them to underlying needs including overwhelm, tiredness, hunger, stress, sensory overload, pain, lack of safety, confusion, or a need for connection. It helps parents, carers and professionals move away from punishment and towards understanding what a child's nervous system is responding to.

The resource is especially useful for supporting children, kids and young people who struggle with emotional regulation, sensory processing, anxiety, attachment difficulties or trauma related stress. It supports reflective practice and helps adults respond with calm, safety and connection rather than control. This downloadable PDF is suitable for use in homes, schools, social work, foster care, adoption support, therapy, counselling, early help services and mental health settings. It works well as a wall display, training prompt or discussion tool for parents, carers, teachers, social workers and other professionals working with children and families.

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