

Managing Stress in Children and Families

Reducing overwhelm and restoring balance



bright path
THERAPY

Bright Path Therapy

CBT informed support for children and young people

This resource is for information and reflection. It does not replace personalised therapeutic support.



What is Stress?

Stress builds when demand exceeds capacity. Every child has a different capacity level, and that level changes depending on sleep, health, environment, and recent experiences.

For many neurodivergent children:

- Transitions require more energy
- Social interaction uses significant mental effort
- Sensory input can drain quickly
- Masking increases fatigue
- Unexpected changes increase cognitive load

Stress is cumulative. It does not automatically reset at the end of the day

“Meltdowns are often the result of accumulated stress, not isolated events”

Stress can be invisible

Children may appear to cope well at school while using significant internal energy to do so.

When they return home, where it feels safer, that accumulated stress may surface.

Signs Stress is Building

Stress rarely appears suddenly. It often builds gradually. Early signs may include:

- Increased irritability
- Reduced tolerance for minor frustrations
- Physical complaints (tummy aches, headaches)
- Sleep disruption
- Withdrawal
- Increased anxiety

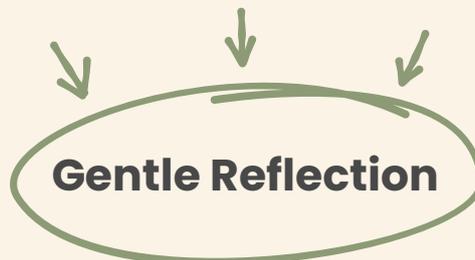


Later signs may include:

- Emotional outbursts
- Shutdown or refusal
- Avoidance
- Tearfulness
- Heightened sensory sensitivity



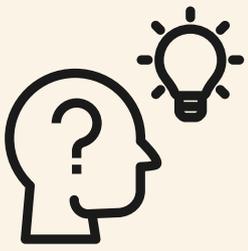
These are signals that capacity has been exceeded.



You might notice patterns around:

School days
Busy weekends
Transitions
Changes in routine

Recognising patterns allows proactive support



Reducing Stress Proactively

Stress management is often about adjusting the environment, not the child.

Practical Supports



- Reduce unnecessary demands
- Break tasks into smaller steps
- Build predictable routines
- Protect decompression time after school
- Limit over-scheduling
- Offer visual supports where helpful
- Allow flexibility During high-stress periods

Small environmental adjustments often reduce stress more effectively than behavioural consequences.

Supporting regulation during stress

When stress is already high:

- Lower expectations temporarily
- Focus on connection before correction
- Reduces verbal input
- Offer quiet space
- Prioritise safety over solutions

Regulation precedes problem-solving.



Supporting the Whole Family

Stress impacts the entire family system.

Children regulate more easily when the adults around them feel supported and grounded

Consider:

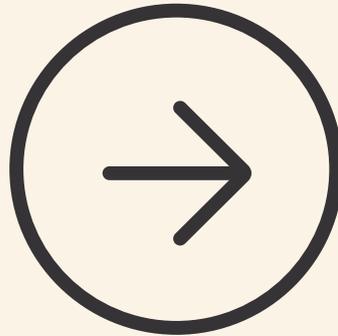
- 1 Adjusting expectations during difficult phases
- 2 Sharing responsibilities where possible
- 3 Protecting parent recovery time
- 4 Seeking external support if stress feels persistent or overwhelming

Compassion is a stress reducing intervention for children and adults alike.

Resilience does not develop through constant pressure. It develops through cycles of challenge followed by recovery.

Children build capacity when stress is manageable, not constant.

When Might Additional Support Help?



It may feel useful to seek additional support if:

- Stress is affecting school attendance
- Emotional overwhelm is frequent
- Recovery time is increasing
- Family life feels dominated by managing distress
- You feel unsure what adjustments might help

Early support can reduce long-term stress patterns.

If you are considering whether therapeutic support may be helpful, you are welcome to get in touch for a FREE 15 minute consultation.



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