

Parenting Exceptional Children









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

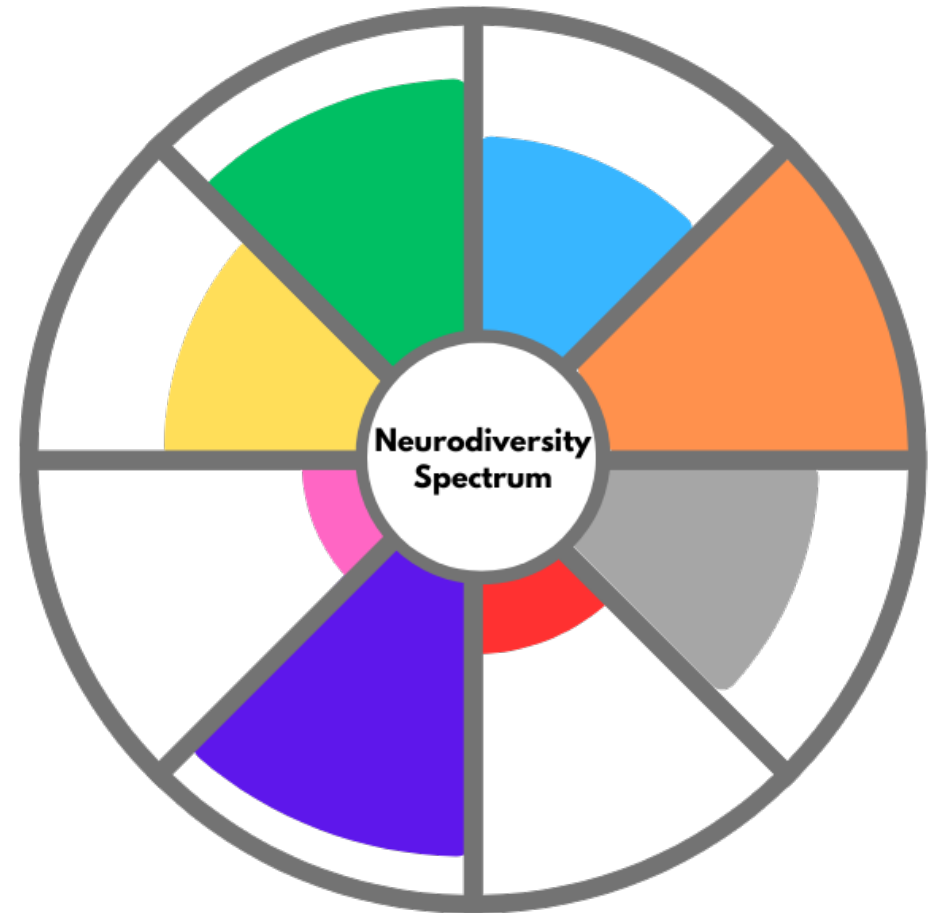
John Sharry

Session 2



A Spectrum of Needs

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Communication and Social |  Sensory Differences |
|  Executive Function |  Repetitions/Tics/Stims |
|  Attention and Interests |  Emotional Processing |
|  Impulsivity and Energy |  Health and Physical |



The Importance of Connection

Good parenting is primarily about establishing warm connected relationships and this is no different for neurodivergent children.



You want your child to feel:

- **understood, affirmed and loved** by you.
- **listened to** and that they can **communicate** with you about anything.
- that you are their **ally**, on their side and there for them no matter what.
- that you are a **safe** person for them.

Homework



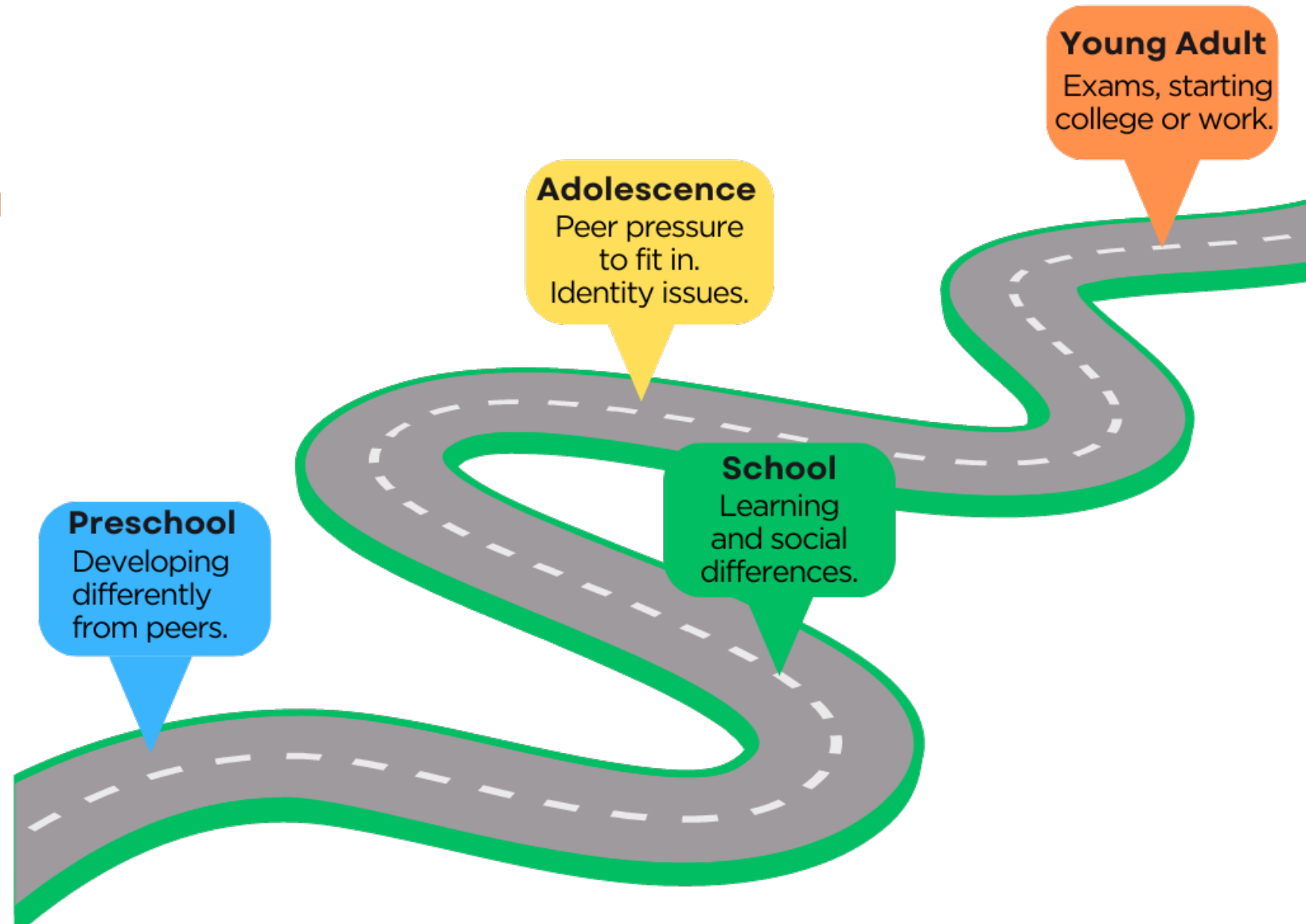
- Prioritise the times you **already enjoy** with your child. Be more available at these times.
- Try to identify **one new way to connect** with your child.
- Build a **'map' of your child's needs**. You can use the worksheet in the handout.

Managing Challenges and Problems

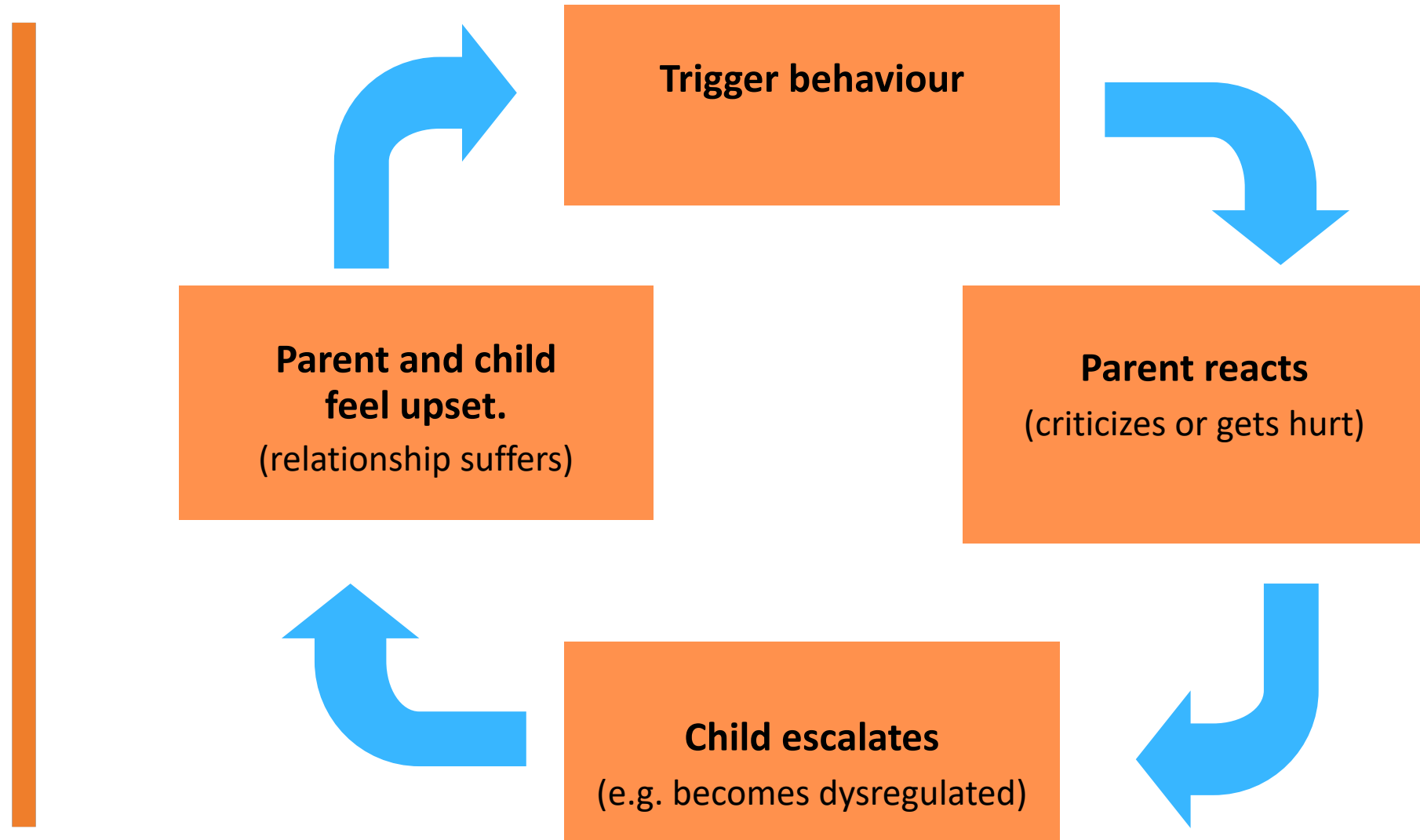


The Parent Journey

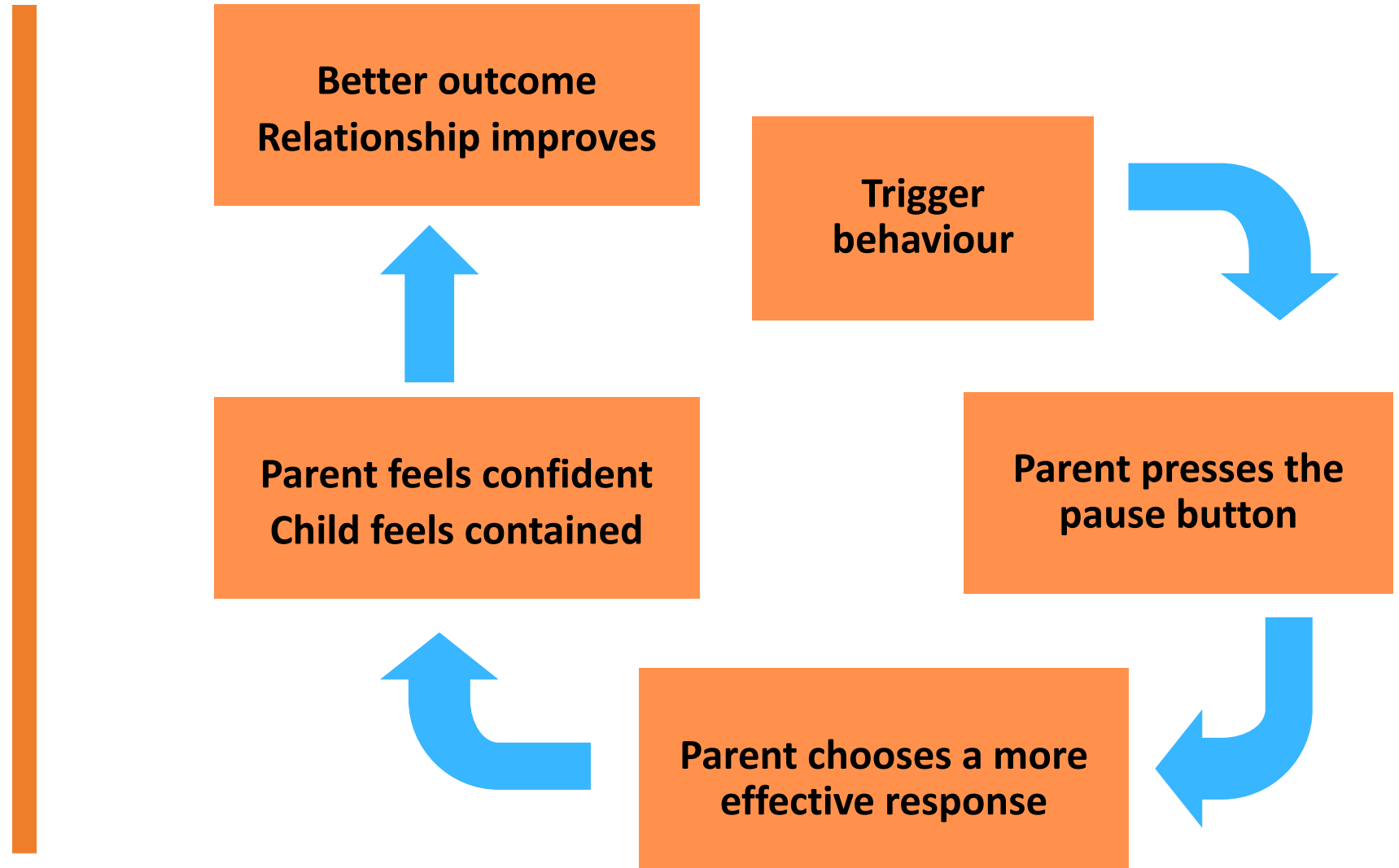
Raising a neurodistinct child can feel like a journey with many milestones...



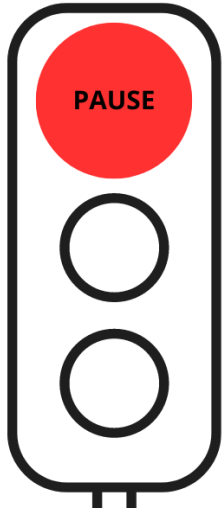
Classic Problem Pattern



Pressing Pause



Solving Childhood Problems

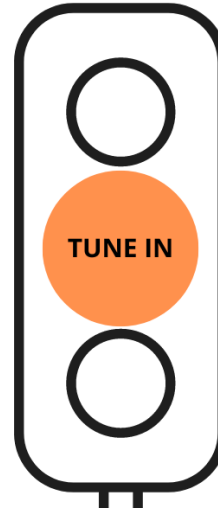


Pause

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

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



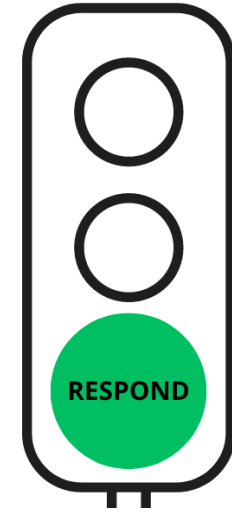
Tune In

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

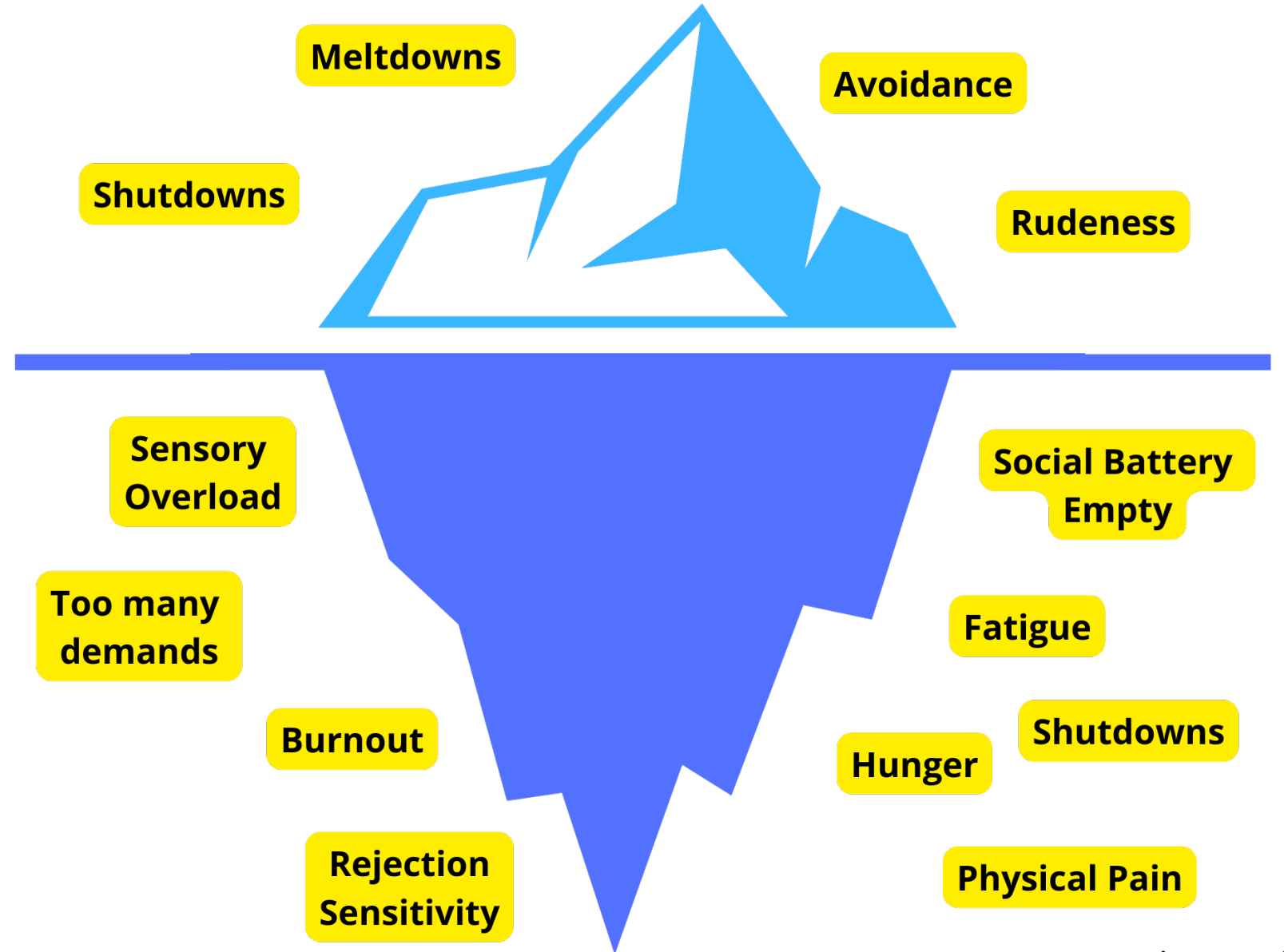
What is the best way to **respond**?

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

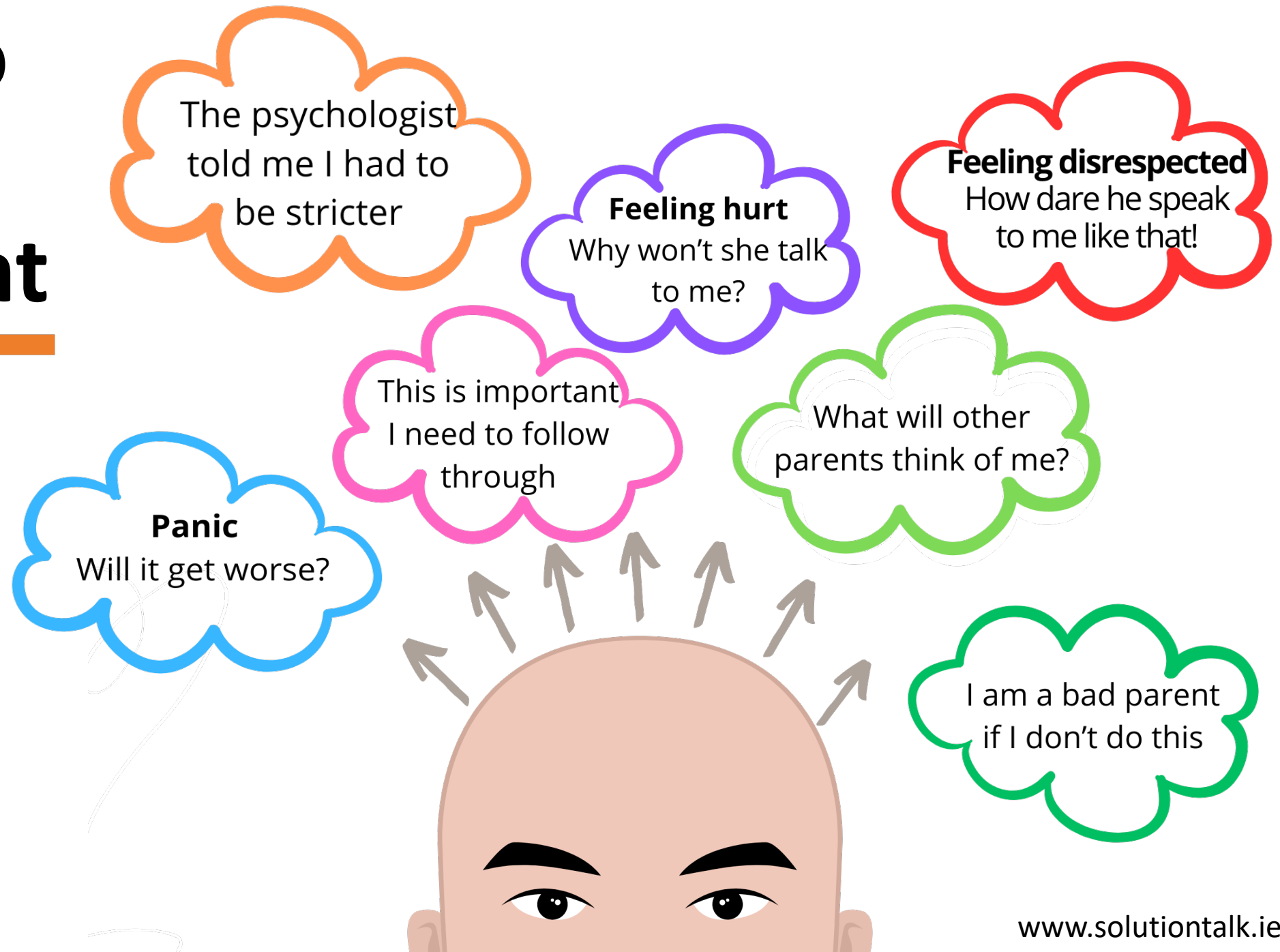
How can I address my **own needs**?

Tune In to Your Child

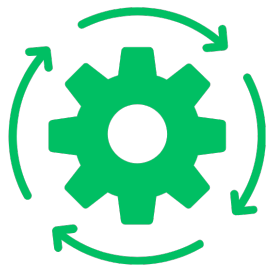
Tip of the Iceberg



Tune In to Yourself as a Parent



Respond



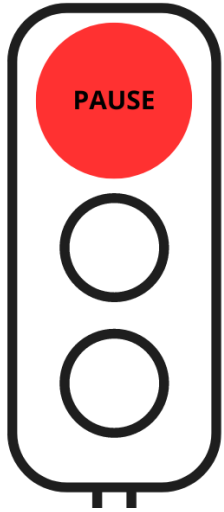
The Best Response is....

- the response that works **for you** and **for your child**.

Response Rules

- Find out **what works** and do more of it.
- If it is not working, do something **different**.
- Focus on **connection** and **relationships**.

Solving Childhood Problems

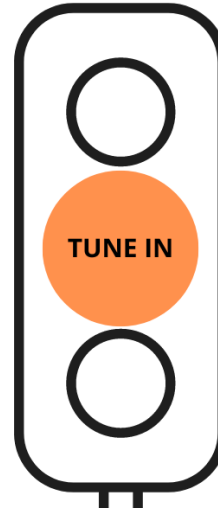


Pause

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

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



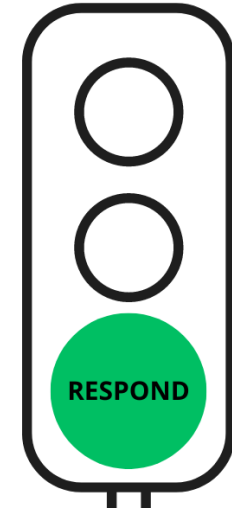
Tune In

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**?

Specific Challenges



Case Example: Struggling in School

Paul is struggling in school.

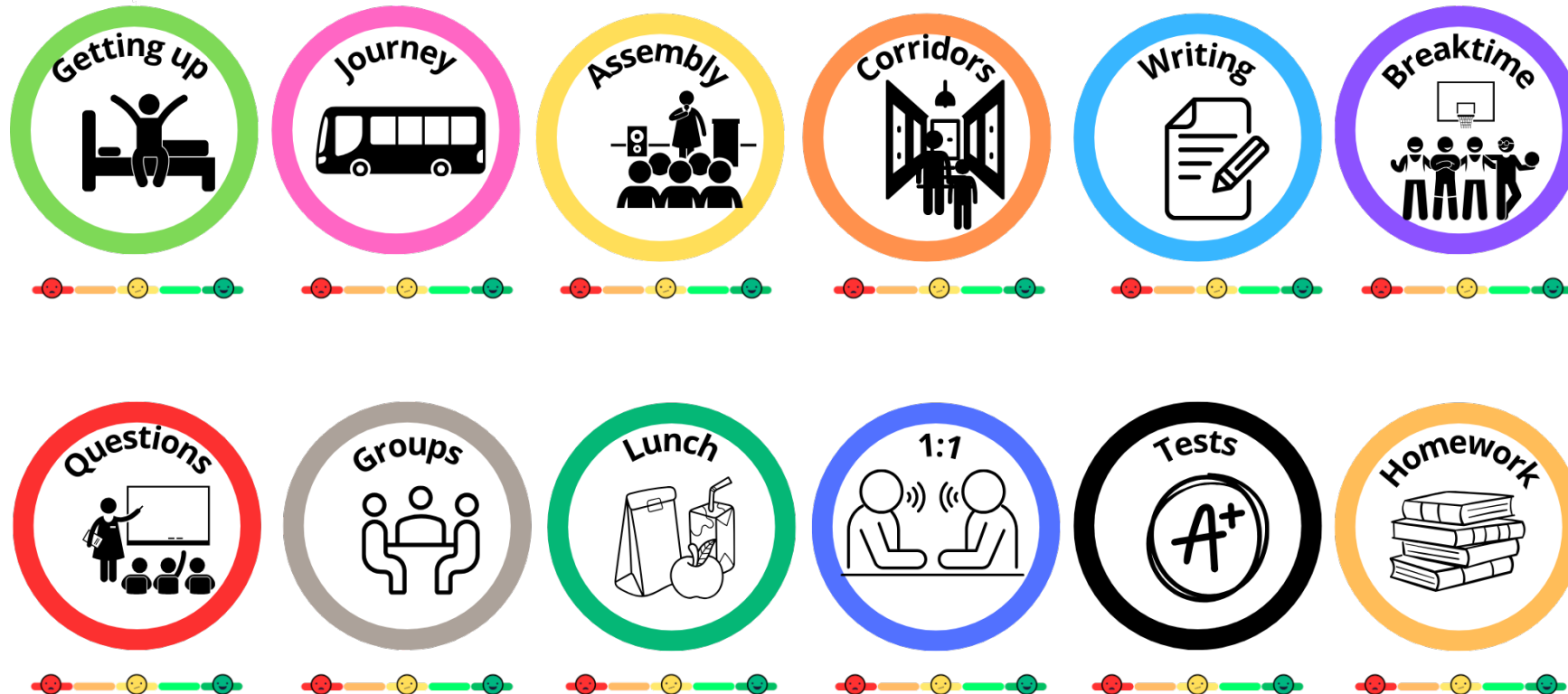
He is agitated and anxious and often refuses going.

His parents manage to cajole him to go most times but wonder for how much longer.

The teachers say he is quiet in school, keeps up academically but is isolated at other times.

When he comes home, he can be very dysregulated and has frequent meltdowns.

How is each part of the school day?





Corridors



- **Transitions can stressful**
- **Fear of bullying**
- **Executive function**
finding next class...
- **Sensory issues**
noisy, fear of brushing against others, smells...

Breaktime



- **Sensory issues**
noise, open space...
- **Lack of structure**
no defined activities.
- **Social challenges**
joining in groups, prefer 1:1...
- **Rejection sensitivity**
rather than talk, isolates themselves...

Homework



- **Executive function skills**
getting started, prioritising, finishing...
- **Sensory issues**
need to move to concentrate, background music...
- **Emotional considerations**
bright kid being bored with rote learning...
- **Dyslexia** or other specific learning difficulties.

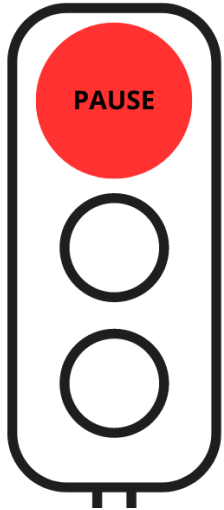
Responses: School Challenges



Co-problem solve with child how to address causes of worry

- **Brainstorm** with child about ways to make going to school easier (*arrival, plan for when anxious..*).
- Work with school to create a **plan**.
- Identify **safe place** in school.
- Identify **safe person** in school.
- Give child **meaningful role** in school.
- Emphasise child **strengths** and favourite **activities** in school.
- Set up a **buddy** system in school.
- Give child a **pass** so they leave lessons if need be.
- Meet teachers **outside** school.
- Invite **friends** home to help with schoolwork.
- **Friends walk** to school with child.
- Devise a timetable that **starts small**, builds gradually.
- Seek **professional support** (EWO, NEPS,CAMHS).

Solving Childhood Problems

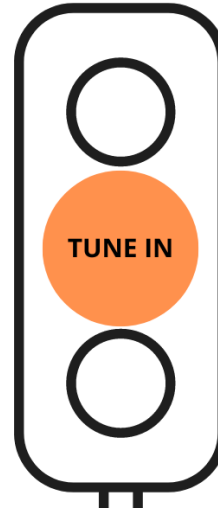


Pause

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

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



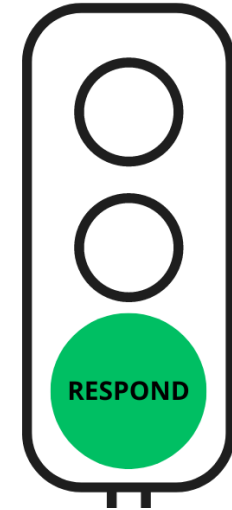
Tune In

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**?

Three Types of Responses



Change Yourself
as a **Parent**



Change the
Environment



Support
your **Child**

Understanding PDA

Many ND children have a profile of PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) which can be more empathically framed as a Persistent Drive for Autonomy.

- Being PDA means children can experience **demands, requests** and even **questions** as **stressful** and **anxiety** provoking.
- More accurately, PDA children experience **repeated demands as a threat to their autonomy** and this invokes a strong ‘fight, flight or freeze’ trauma reaction.
- A **fight** reaction could be resisting or arguing back, a **flight** reaction could be refusing or avoiding and a **freeze** reaction could be shutting down or becoming mute.
- Remember there are many **strengths** to being PDA (*independent, authentic, assertive, intrinsic motivation...*).

Be Collaborative

In guiding children, be collaborative and give them space to decide.

Rather than:

“Please get dressed now”

“Show your video games to your cousin”

“What did you do in school today?”

Giving ‘over the top’ praise.

“Stop annoying your brother”

“Please tidy up today”

Try:

“I left your favourite clothes on your bed.”

“Look, your cousin has arrived to play.”

“I see some of the kids were wearing football jerseys today” and pause.

Give them a thumbs up or a hug they like or say a soft “thank you”.

“Your brother is a little upset, how can we look after him together?”

I can’t get all the jobs done...can you help me?’

Adjusting Expectations and Rules

Reducing demands and adjusting your expectations based on your child's needs, can reduce unnecessary stress and create a much more harmonious home.

Rather than battling with his daughter to eat more varied foods, John accepted her more limited diet and gave her a vitamin supplement so he was less worried about nutrition. He realised that her eating the same favourite foods daily, helped her feel safe and contained.

In the morning routine, Alice decided to dress her son in front of TV where he was more relaxed and less aware of the sensory irritation putting on his clothes on.

Julie and Dave decided to travel separately to extended family social events so one could leave with their autistic son before he got too agitated and the other could remain with their other children so they did not miss out.

Tom relaxed his rules about video games as he could see this was when his son really relaxed after school. Tom joined in the video games at the weekends and his son loved to teach him how to play them.

Paul realised that his son was completely burnout by school and now need a complete break to recover and recuperate.

Tilly adjusted her expectations about household chores and let go her resentment that he daughter would not do them, recognising this was not the priority at the moment. Instead, changed household routines to make it easier for all.



Take a Break...

- Which expectations are **difficult** for your child due to their ND needs?
- Where do these expectations **come from**?
- Which expectations can you **drop** or **adjust** (at least for the short term) to meet their needs?

Change Yourself as a Parent



- Adjust your **expectations** to match your child's needs and preferences.
- Focus on what is **most important** to you and let go the rest.
- Be **collaborative** and **creative**.
- Understand your stress levels, prioritise your **self-care** and address your own needs.

Three Types of Responses



Change Yourself
as a **Parent**



Change the
Environment



Support
your **Child**

Change the Environment

Focusing on changing your child's world rather than changing your child in the world.



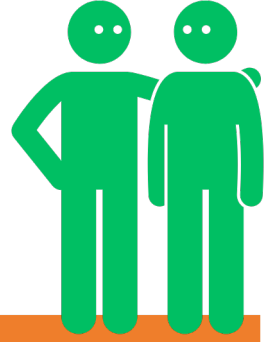
- Build better **routines** that suit your child.
- Include relaxed **sensory spaces** in the day so children can relax, unwind, and feel safe.
- **Sensory props:** noise cancelling headphones, tasteless toothpaste, crash pad, weighted blanket and vests, seamless clothes.
- **Collaborate** with teachers and activity leaders to create the right environment for your child.
- Seek **neuro-affirming services** (e.g. OT or SLT) to provide extra support to address your child's specific needs.
- Provide your child with opportunities to follow their **passions** and meet **other ND children**.
- Encourage others to learn about neurodiversity and to **appreciate different communication and learning styles**.

Support Your Child



- Co-regulate with them when they are **distressed**.
- Co-problem solve with them and coach them in **how to manage**.

Co-Regulation



- Being a **warm** and **calming** presence.
- Being **close by** or **giving space** depending on what your child needs.
- Showing you understand by your **body language**, tone of voice and what you say (*or don't say*).
- Touching or **physically comforting** your child in a way that soothes them (*or not touching them if that works better*).
- Reducing **sensory triggers** in the environment (*dimming lights, turning TV off*).
- Creating a **safe environment** that relaxes your child (*sitting on bean bags, listening to music, giving them a drink or a snack*).

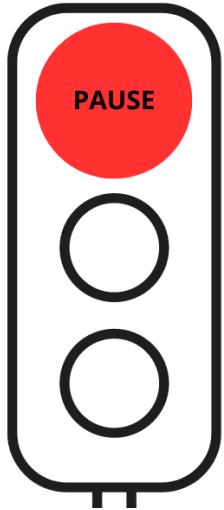
Co-Problem Solving



Take time to talk through problems with your child and to come up with solutions together.

- Pick a **good time**.
- First **listen** and **understand**.
- Encourage your **child's solutions**.

Solving Childhood Problems

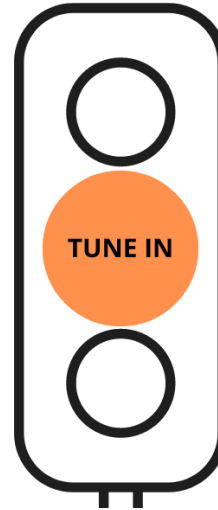


Pause

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

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



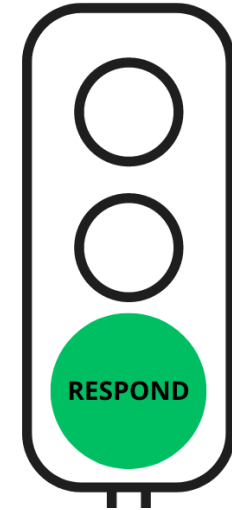
Tune In

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**?



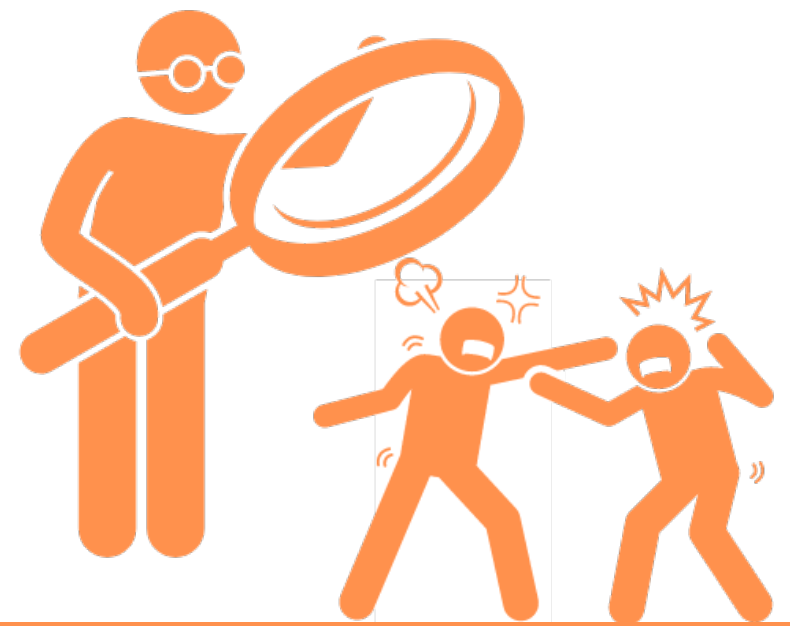
Respond

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

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

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

Common Challenges



Case Example: Siblings Fighting

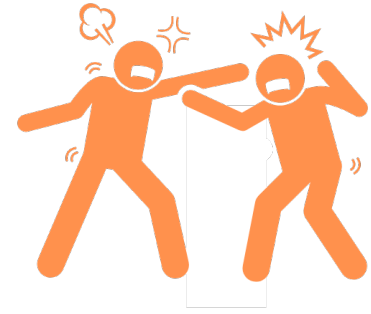
Paul 8 is autistic and likely ADHD.

His needs to absorb lots of his parent's time to the neglect of his older brother Pete (11).

Recently there has been lots of fights between the two which is very stressful.

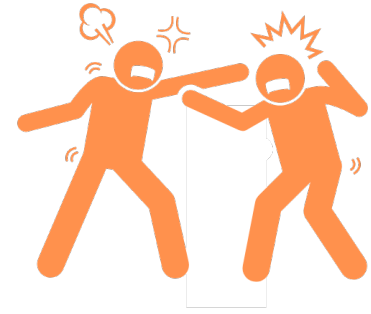
His mother has also observed Pete slagging and putting his brother down, and when she corrected him, he exploded and said he wished his brother had not been born.

Tuning In: Siblings Fighting



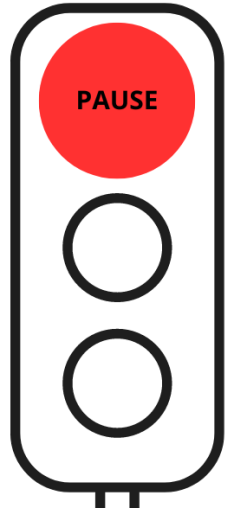
- When there are ongoing sibling challenges, the **core issue** is usually that one child feels that the parent loves the other child more.
- Many parents inadvertently reinforce this belief by **taking a side** in disputes.

Responses: Sibling Rivalry



- **Don't take a side.** Understand both of their perspectives equally.
- **Co-regulate with both.** *“Let's all calm down. Let's take a break for a minute.”*
- **Co-problem solve together.** Sit down with both children and help them discuss ways they can get on. The focus is on finding a solution rather than analysing who is wrong.
- **Problem-solve individually.** Sit down with each child, without taking sides, listen to their perspective and help them find a solution. *“How can you get on with your sister?”* or *“I need your help managing your brother.”*
- **Build your relationship with each child.** Set aside one-to-one time with each child, to enjoy their company and listen to them alone.
- **Support their relationship with each other.** Set up play/connecting time with both children supporting them playing cooperatively together e.g. put them on the same team.
- **Encourage and affirm together.** *“You are great brothers sharing like that.”*
- **Always encourage both.** *“I put out the plates and B you did the cutlery.”*

Solving Childhood Problems

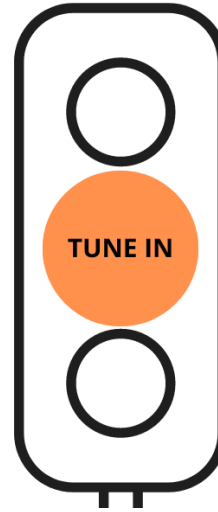


Pause

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

What responses **work well** already?

What responses make things **worse**?



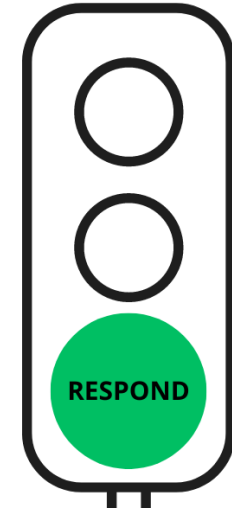
Tune In

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**?

Homework

- Take time to review your **expectations** and **rules** for your children.
 - Which ones are important right now?
 - Which ones meet yours and your child's needs?
- Use the Pause, Tune in, Respond problem-solving model to **create a plan** for a challenge you are dealing with.