

Understanding Behaviour Through the Brain: A Parent's Guide

Sometimes what looks like "difficult behaviour" is really your child's brain struggling with skills called executive functions (like memory, organisation, or managing emotions). This guide links common challenges to what might be happening in the brain, and gives you simple, practical ways to support your child at home.

Behaviour / Challenge	What's going on in the brain?	How you can help at home
Often late for school or activities	Time management	Use visual timers; give countdowns; keep a consistent routine
Struggles to finish homework / chores	Planning & getting started	Break tasks into small steps; agree a first step together; use check-in
Interrupts or blurts things out	Self-control, remembering	Encourage writing/drawing ideas; practise "pause and breathe"
Avoids starting tasks	Motivation, task initiation	Make it fun "first step together"; use praise for getting started
Loses belongings (PE kit, lunch box, toys)	Organisation, memory	Use labelled boxes/bags; create a "ready to go" spot by the door
Can't follow multi-step instructions	Working memory	Give one step at a time; write down or draw the steps
Seems to "switch off" or daydream	Attention	Build in short breaks; use hands-on or movement-based activities
Gets upset or frustrated quickly	Emotional regulation	Offer calm space; help name feelings; use breathing or sensory tools
Walks away or leaves situations	Overload / self-regulation	Allow safe breaks; agree a "signal" they can use when overwhelmed
Wants everything perfect	Flexibility, self-monitoring	Set "good enough" expectations; model making small mistakes
Struggles with changes to plans	Flexibility	Give warnings in advance; use visual schedules or calendars
Worries in social situations	Anxiety, self-awareness	Practise in small groups; role-play together; give lots of reassurance
Overwhelmed by noise, light, or crowds	Sensory processing	Offer headphones, sunglasses, or a quiet space to reset