



Children who feel overwhelmed at the end of the school day

Many children find the transition from school to home difficult. This can be for a wide variety of reasons

- Feeling hungry, thirsty or tired after a day of learning.
- Sensory overwhelm caused by being in a classroom with many other children (this could be sound, visual, smell, textures).
- They have been busy managing their emotions all day as they navigate the complexities of school life. This is sometimes referred to as 'after-school restraint collapse'.
- Specific difficulties have occurred with friends or learning that day which have unsettled them.

This can result in behaviour which is out of character which could include very high levels of emotion (crying, shouting, being physical), being very energetic and fidgety or very quiet and unwilling to talk.

When they are overwhelmed, children may need help to 'reset' or 'regulate'. With help from school staff and parent carers they will then learn to independently recognise when they are overwhelmed and to practice self care.

How can parent carers support children who feel 'overwhelmed' after school?

If your child's behaviour after school changes or is different to what's usual for them, try and find out if there are things happening during the school day that are affecting them. You may need to speak to their class teacher to find out more. If you believe that your child is experiencing sensory overwhelm or 'after-school restraint collapse' the following steps may help:

1. Observe

All behaviour is communication, think about what their behaviour tells you:

- If they are very **energetic**, they may need a chance to run, climb, jump and play.
- If they appear **quiet or tired**, they may need quiet time alone with no music or no chatting on the way home in the car or bus.
- Some children find it difficult to work out what the feelings inside their body are telling them: they may become very emotional when they feel **hungry or thirsty** so having a snack and drink ready for them can help them to recognise these feelings. This can be the same if they need to go to the toilet.

2. Help them to understand

When your child is showing they are overwhelmed, help them to have the words to express how their body feels: *e.g. 'I can see you are finding it difficult to walk slowly with me. I wonder if you have lots of energy inside you. Perhaps a run around the park will help'*. As they calm, you can also ask them what will help, for example drawing, reading a book or even just relaxing for a bit. Do it with them and help them to see they can do things to support themselves.

3. 'Decompression time' to help them reset

When they come out of school, connect by saying 'I'm happy to see you and hope you've had a good day' but avoid placing more demands on them for conversation. Include some downtime rather than moving straight on to homework or out to a club, so that your child can decompress. This downtime should include the chance to meet the needs you have identified.

4. Choose the best time to chat

Once they have regulated they may want to talk. The question 'how was your day?' can be very general for some children. Think about what you are trying to find out and be specific. Ask about their favourite lesson or their games with their friends. Then offer yourself as being there, offer yourself as someone who wants to help and is interested in what's going on.

SEND and Inclusion Newsletter



What do Southbourne Junior School do to reduce this 'overwhelm'?

All of our class teachers received training as part of our Autism Aware Award. Part of this training focused on strategies to reduce overwhelm including

- sensory audits of classrooms to ensure they do not contain unnecessary sensory distractions
- calm spaces for children to have a sensory 'reset'
- use of the Zones of Regulation to increase pupil's understanding of how they are feeling and a toolkit of strategies to reset
- clear routines and expectations

When putting together individual 'Zones of Regulation Toolkits' pupils will be supported in deciding which regulation strategy, including the use of equipment (see below), is appropriate for them. This develops their understanding of 'equity': fairness doesn't always mean everything is exactly the same for everyone. Instead to make things fair we need to support different people in different ways.

Ear defenders and ear buds

This equipment is often recommended for children who find noise overwhelming. As a school we supply ear defenders to children following conversations with their parent carers to identify the specific types of noise, times and locations which impact them. This helps children become more aware of their body's responses and how they can help themselves. We avoid constant use as this can increase sensitivity when they remove them and cause anxiety when they are unable to access ear defenders (e.g. outside school). We encourage children to think of other independent strategies to support noise sensitivity such as seeking out calm spaces.

Fiddle/Fidget Tools

Fidget or fiddle tools (such as spinners, putties and squishies) can have a positive impact for some children in school. We refer to them as 'tools' rather than 'toys' as they are not for play. The focus is to be calm, attentive and ready to learn. Use of subtle movement and touch input can help calm some children's bodies and keep their minds attentive, alert, and focused. However, some children find such stimulation distracting and unsettling.

The tools recommended by the National Autistic Society and ADHD UK are those that only require the hands, not the eyes or the ears. Pupils should be able to fidget with the item, but not have it cause noise that distracts them or others, or require them to look at what they are doing.

Assessing the need for fidget tools should be based on a discussion with your child's class teachers and external agencies such as occupational therapy if involved. School will supply all fidget tools deemed necessary and will assess the best fidget tool to support a particular need.

For further information about this topic you can contact us both by **telephone: 01243 375878** or **email: senco@southournejuniors.co.uk**

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