



# CONNECTION BEFORE COMPLIANCE

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Simple Games to Ease The Battles



Some children experience **demand-avoidance**, where ordinary requests trigger anxiety or resistance. It's rarely about defiance, but the need to feel safe and in control.

Traditional reward or consequence systems increase pressure and stress. Instead, approaches built on **connection, humour, and autonomy** help lower defences and build trust.

The following activities are simple, playful ways to ease tension and re-engage through collaboration. Follow your child's lead, keep it light, and remember, a calm connection is where real progress begins.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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- 02 “You Be The Boss” Game
- 03 “The Lazy Robot”
- 04 “The Mystery Choice”
- 05 “Yes, But...” Story Game
- 06 “Calm Together” Cards
- 08 Reflect and Reset

or





# YOU BE THE BOSS

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**Goal:** Reduce anxiety about adult-led tasks by reversing the roles

**How:** The child gets to “assign” you simple tasks (“You have to hop three times,” “Pretend to be a cat”)

**Therapeutic value:** Gives the child safe control and models flexibility.  
You can gently introduce turns later (“Shall I try to give one too?”)

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# THE LAZY ROBOT

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Removing pressure and adding humour...



**Goal:** To encourage participation in different tasks without the pressure and including humour.

**How:** You pretend to be a robot with faulty instructions. “Robot doesn’t know how to put on socks. What does a robot do first?”

**Therapeutic value:** This turns the demand into a game, with the child naturally taking the lead.



# THE MYSTERY CHOICE



**Goal:** To build tolerance for small demands using choice and curiosity.

**How:** Present two covered options (“we can start with this one or this one - you pick!”)

**Therapeutic value:** The focus shifts from compliance to curiosity, reducing anxiety-driven avoidance.

# “YES, BUT...” STORY GAME



**Goal:** Support cognitive flexibility and reduce black and white thinking.

**How:** Take turns telling a story, but each person must start with “Yes, but” (e.g. “Yes, but the dragon didn’t like mornings.”

**Reframing Behaviour Tip:**  
When your child resists or shuts down, try to see the stress behind the behaviour, not the behaviour itself. Ask, “What feels hard right now?” instead of “Why won’t they do it?” It turns conflict into curiosity and connection.

**Therapeutic value:** This builds tolerance for change and predictability, gently challenging rigidity in a fun way.



# CALM TOGETHER CARDS

Co-regulation and Connection



**Goal:** Co-regulation and sensory grounding through playful prompts

**How:** Use the cards as prompts to act out the actions to create calm and mindful moments when a battle may be approaching.

**Therapeutic value:** These quick sensory breaks are used to regulate before returning to the required tasks.



# CUT OUT AND KEEP

“LET’S BREATHE  
LIKE A  
DRAGON” 

“CAN WE FIND  
FIVE GREEN  
THINGS?” 

“LET’S STRETCH  
LIKE SLEEPY  
CATS” 

BLOW YOUR  
FEATHER, KEEP  
IT FLOATING.  


PRESS FEET INTO  
THE GROUND,  
FEEL FIVE  
THINGS. 

LET’S HOLD ICE  
AND STAY  
COOL. 

LET’S LISTEN FOR  
FIVE QUIET  
SOUNDS. 

LET’S HIDE LIKE  
TURTLES, THEN  
PEEK. 

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## REFLECT AND RESET

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### The Pause and Reset Checklist:

- Take one slow, deep breath together
- Lower your voice and soften your tone
- Step back, is anyone hungry, tired, or overwhelmed?
- Offer a simple choice or a quiet space
- Reconnect before you restart

# REFLECT AND RESET

Use the space below to make a note of what has worked and what has not, alongside what your child's distress signals were.

Taking time to reflect and reset helps both you and your child pause, regulate, and approach challenges with a calmer, clearer mindset.

