



CONNECTION BEFORE COMPLIANCE

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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YOU BE THE BOSS

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?”)

THE LAZY ROBOT

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



Reframing Behaviour Tip:

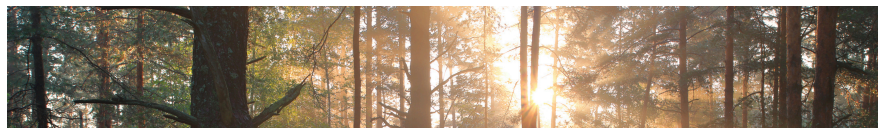
When your child resists or shuts down, try to see the stress behind the behaviour, not the behaviour itself. Ask, “What feels hard right now?” instead of “Why won’t they do it?” it turns conflict into curiosity and connection.



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

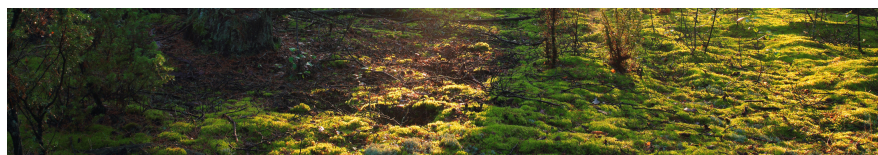
How: Take turns telling a story, but each person must start with “Yes, but” (e.g. “Yes, but the dragon didn’t like mornings.”)

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. 

REFLECT AND RESET

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.

