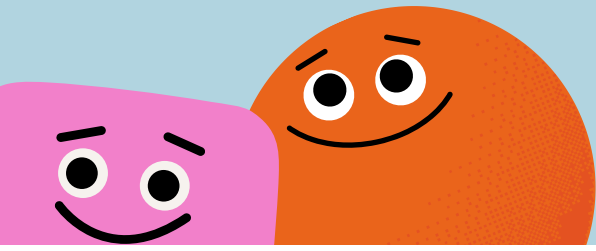


# Calm in the Chaos: A Nervous System Starter Guide for Parents



By The OT Collective

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Prepared for parents needing some guidance and support for their busy child.

## Introduction: Finding the Calm in the Chaos

Parenting young children can be overwhelming, especially when a child experiences challenges with emotional regulation, sensory processing, or attention. Whether a child has a diagnosis such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or ADHD, or simply struggles with big emotions and unpredictable behaviour, the daily demands can feel relentless. This guide offers understanding, reassurance, and practical strategies to help create calm amidst the chaos – without adding more pressure or unrealistic expectations.

## Start Here...

*You do not need to change everything at once!*

If this guide feels like a lot, start here:

1. Choose **ONE** chaos point in your day (morning, after school, or bedtime)
2. Add **ONE** regulation support (movement, deep pressure, quiet reset time, visual routine)
3. Try it consistently for 3 days.

Then ask yourself:

- Did transitions feel slightly easier?
- Was there less escalation?
- Did I feel more prepared?

Regulation builds through small, repeated supports – not massive overhauls.

Start small. Stay consistent.

## Disclaimer

*This guide provides general education about nervous system regulation. It is not individual medical or therapeutic advice. If you have concerns about your child's development or wellbeing, please consult a health professional.*

# Chapter 1: Understanding What's Going On Beneath the Surface

## The Nervous System and Regulation

Every child's nervous system is unique. Some children experience the world as too loud, too bright, or too fast, while others may seek more stimulation to feel engaged. These differences influence how they respond to everyday situations.

Sensory System Jargon Defined:

- **Over-responsive nervous system:** The child's brain interprets sensory input as overwhelming. They may cover their ears, avoid touch, or become distressed by changes.
- **Under-responsive nervous system:** The child may not notice sensory input easily. They might seem "in their own world," slow to respond, or crave intense movement or pressure.
- **Sensory seeking:** The child actively looks for strong sensations – jumping, crashing, spinning, or touching everything.
- **Sensory avoiding:** The child withdraws from sensory experiences – avoiding crowds, textures, or loud environments.
- **Low arousal state:** The child appears tired, unmotivated, or disengaged.
- **High arousal state:** The child is hyper-alert, impulsive, or easily triggered.

Understanding these patterns helps explain why certain behaviours occur. They are not signs of defiance or poor parenting – they are signals of a nervous system trying to find balance.

## Chapter 2: Giving yourself Grace

Parenting a child with additional challenges requires immense patience and resilience. It's easy to feel guilt or frustration when things don't go smoothly. Remember:

- A dysregulated adult cannot regulate a child. Taking care of personal emotional needs is not selfish, it's essential.
- Progress is not linear. Some days will feel calm; others will feel chaotic.

- Connection matters more than perfection. A child needs a calm, safe adult more than a flawless routine.

Simple grounding practices – deep breathing, stepping outside for a moment, or taking slow sips of water, can help restore calm before responding to a child’s distress.

## Chapter 3: The Sensory Systems and Regulation

### The Eight Sensory Systems

1. **Visual (sight)** – how the brain processes what is seen.
2. **Auditory (hearing)** – how sounds are interpreted.
3. **Tactile (touch)** – how textures and physical contact are experienced.
4. **Olfactory (smell)** – how scents affect comfort and alertness.
5. **Gustatory (taste)** – how flavors and textures influence eating.
6. **Vestibular (movement and balance)** – how the body senses motion and spatial orientation.
7. **Proprioceptive (body awareness)** – how muscles and joints sense pressure and position.
8. **Interoception (inside-body sense)** – noticing hunger, thirst, needing the toilet, feeling hot/cold, a fast heartbeat, butterflies, etc. Many kids miss these signals until they’re intense – then behaviour escalates.

### The Power of the Vestibular and Proprioceptive Systems

- **Vestibular input** (movement) helps regulate alertness and balance. Activities like swinging, rocking, or gentle spinning can calm or energise depending on the child’s needs.
- **Proprioceptive input** (deep pressure and heavy work) provides grounding and stability. Pushing, pulling, carrying, or squeezing activities help organise the nervous system and promote calm.

These two systems are key to helping children feel safe and in control of their bodies

# Chapter 4: Realistic Strategies for Emotional Regulation

## 1. Create Predictability - Children Thrive on Routine.

Visual schedules, consistent transitions, and clear expectations reduce anxiety and help the nervous system stay regulated.

## 2. Build Connection Before Correction

When a child is dysregulated, logic and discipline are ineffective. Focus first on calming the body and emotions – through a hug, quiet presence, or sensory activity before addressing behaviour.

## 3. Offer Sensory Breaks

Short, structured sensory activities throughout the day can prevent meltdowns. Examples:

- Jumping on a trampoline or bed
- Carrying groceries or pushing a laundry basket
- Swinging or rocking in a chair
- Deep pressure squeezes or a weighted blanket

## 4. Use Co-Regulation

Model calm breathing, gentle tone, and slow movements. A child's nervous system mirrors the adult's state. Calm presence helps them return to balance.

### What to say in the moment (if anything at all)

When a child is dysregulated, logic won't land. Connection will.

Instead of:

“Calm down.”

“Stop it.”

“You're fine.”

Try:

“You're safe. I'm here.”

“Your body is having a hard time. Let's help it.”

“That felt really big.”

“We'll figure this out together.”

“Let's help your body first.”

You don't need perfect words.

You need a regulated presence.

Connection before correction builds long-term skills.

## 5. Adjust the Environment

Reduce sensory overload by dimming lights, lowering noise, or creating a quiet corner with soft textures and calming visuals.

# Chapter 5: Creating a Sensory Diet

A sensory diet is a personalised plan of sensory activities that help maintain regulation throughout the day. It's not about adding more tasks – it's about weaving sensory support into daily life.

Example Sensory Diet

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Morning	Jumping jacks, brushing teeth with electric toothbrush	Wake up and increase alertness
Before School	Carry backpack, walk to car	Proprioceptive input for focus
After School	Swinging or scooter ride or swimming	Release built-up energy
Evening	Warm bath, deep pressure massage	Calm and prepare for sleep

## How To Make This Practical

A sensory diet doesn't mean filling your entire day with activities.

Start with:

- One morning regulation anchor
- One afternoon regulation anchor

Example:

Morning → Heavy work (carrying school bag, wall push-ups)

After school → 10-minute movement reset

Notice what shifts.

If something escalates behaviour instead of settling it, adjust.

Not all movement calms every child.

Some sensory input activates instead of regulates.

Observe. Adjust. Repeat.

Regulation is individual.

## Chapter 6: A Realistic Daily Timetable

<b>Time</b>	<b>Routine</b>	<b>Sensory/ Regulation Support</b>
7:00AM	Wake up and get dressed	Stretching, firm hugs, upbeat music
8:00AM	Breakfast and school prep	Crunchy foods, calm background sounds
9:00AM-3:00PM	School or playtime	Movement breaks, fidget tools
3:30PM	After-school snack	Quiet time, dim lights, weighted toy
4:00PM	Outdoor play	Running, climbing, swinging
6:00PM	Dinner	Predictable seating, low noise
7:00PM	Bath and bedtime routine	Warm water, soft lighting, deep pressure
8:00PM	Sleep	White noise, weighted toy

This structure can be adapted to suit each family's rhythm. The goal is not perfection but consistency and flexibility.

## Chapter 7: When Things Feel Hard

There will be moments when nothing seems to work. In those times:

- Pause and breathe before reacting.
- Remember that behaviour is communication.
- Seek support from professionals if needed – occupational therapists, psychologists, or parent support groups can provide guidance.
- Celebrate small wins. Every moment of connection counts.

### Conclusion: Calm is Possible

Parenting a child with sensory or emotional regulation challenges is demanding, but it is also deeply meaningful. Understanding the nervous system, offering sensory support, and practicing self-compassion can transform daily struggles into opportunities for connection and growth. Calm is not the absence of chaos – it's the ability to find steadiness within it.

## What If You Want To Go Deeper – What Next?

If this guide helped you see behaviour differently – that's the beginning.

The next step is learning how to:

- Reduce daily chaos points
- Build consistent regulation routines
- Understand your child's sensory profile
- Use scripts confidently in hard moments
- Create a personalised regulated home plan

That's exactly why I created  
**The Regulated Home Blueprint.**

It's a self-paced course designed for families who want practical nervous system tools – without needing a diagnosis.

If you'd like to be the first to know when it opens, join the waitlist.

Because regulation isn't a diagnosis privilege.

It's a human need.

## References and Resources

### Books and Publications

- Ayres, A. J. (2005). *Sensory Integration and the Child: Understanding Hidden Sensory Challenges*. Western Psychological Services.
- Kranowitz, C. S. (2005). *The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder*. Perigee Books.
- Delahooke, M. (2019). *Beyond Behaviors: Using Brain Science and Compassion to Understand and Solve Children's Behavioral Challenges*. PESI Publishing.
- Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2011). *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. Delacorte Press.

### Professional and Educational Resources

- The STAR Institute for Sensory Processing: [www.sensoryhealth.org](http://www.sensoryhealth.org)
- Kid Sense [www.childdevelopment.com.au](http://www.childdevelopment.com.au)
- Understood.org – Resources for learning and attention differences: [www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org)

### Research and Articles

- Dunn, W. (1997). *The Impact of Sensory Processing Abilities on the Daily Lives of Young Children and Their Families: A Conceptual Model*. *Infants & Young Children*, 9(4), 23–35.
- Schaaf, R. C., & Mailloux, Z. (2015). *Sensory Integration*. In Case-Smith & O'Brien (Eds.), *Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents* (7th ed.). Elsevier.

## Additional Support

For parents seeking further guidance, consider connecting with:

- A paediatric occupational therapist specialising in sensory processing/integration.
- Parent support groups for families navigating sensory or emotional regulation challenges.
- Mindfulness or self-care programs designed for caregivers.

Understanding, compassion, and connection are the foundation of calm. With knowledge and grace, families can find balance – even in the most chaotic moments.