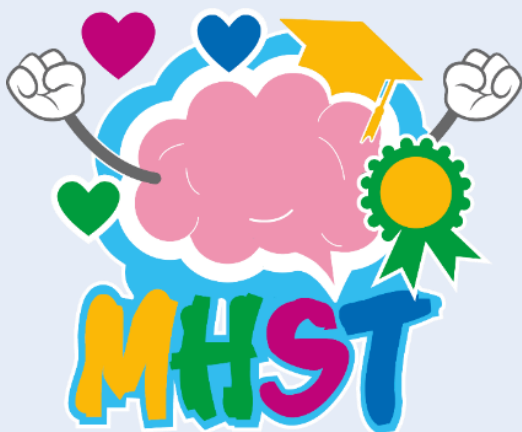


Autism in Schools

Resource



Source: atlasofemotions.org/



Herts & West Essex
Mental Health Support Teams

From The MHST
Mental Health Support Team in SEN Schools
Hertfordshire and West Essex (Hosted by PALMS) © 2021

Introduction

This resource has been designed as part of the Autism in Schools Project, to provide tools for education staff, whilst they are working with children and young people to explore emotions.

We hope this resource provides some useful ideas to school staff when thinking about ways they can engage children and young people and build understanding around emotions. It includes brief explanations on the rationale behind each strategy and includes example activities that can be completed with the child or young person you are supporting.

Disclaimer

This resource is not designed to replace any formal therapeutic interventions or to be used as a manual. Instead, it can be used as a tool to start a conversation around emotions. We appreciate that some of these ideas may not fit for some children and young people.

If at any point you feel that the child requires more specialist support, please follow your school protocols to explore appropriate referrals.

Understanding my emotions



Naming emotions can help us understand what might be happening for us.



Communicating our emotions helps us to show others how we are feeling.



Emotions can be uncomfortable at times.



There are no right or wrong emotions.



We can feel more than one emotion at a time.

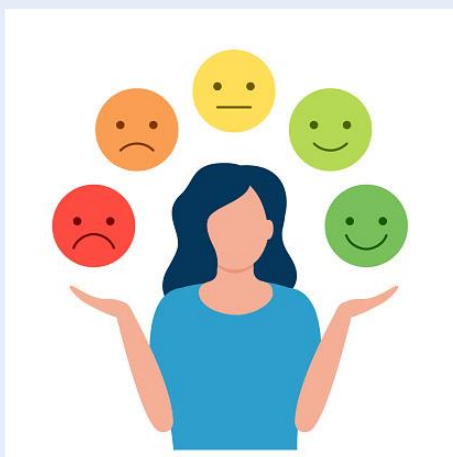


Image source: Yulia Sutyagina/Getty Images

Recognising Emotions

Activity Idea: Ask the child or young person to identify the emotions displayed. As an extension, ask the child or young person to share a situation where they felt that emotion.



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Zones of Regulation check-in

The 'Zones of Regulation' check-in is a communication tool used to support children and young people to self-identify and communicate emotions they are experiencing in that moment. The use of the Zones of Regulation check-in can help children to better notice their feelings and then potentially consider what might help them to regulate.

Each 'Zone' represents different groupings of emotions:

Blue – Low on energy

Green – Neutral or positive emotions

Yellow – Emerging challenging emotions

Red – Difficult to manage emotions.

The Zones of Regulation also helps to normalise all emotions and highlights that there is nothing wrong with being in a zone which is not the green zone.

Activity Idea:

Ask the child or young person to identify which colour zone they are currently in. Then ask them to expand on what specific emotion they are feeling within that zone.

BLUE ZONE		GREEN ZONE		YELLOW ZONE		RED ZONE	
I FEEL...	✓	I FEEL...	✓	I FEEL...	✓	I FEEL...	✓
SAD		HAPPY		FRUSTRATED		ANGRY	
SICK		CALM		WORRIED		TERRIFIED	
TIRED		OKAY		SILLY		DON'T WANT TO WORK	
BORED		READY TO LEARN		OVER EXCITED		OUT OF CONTROL	

Deep Belly Breathing

Deep Belly Breathing is a relaxation strategy that supports a child or young person to feel calmer and regulate their emotions in times of upset or overwhelm.

Encouraging a child or young person to engage in this breathing relaxation strategy when calm will support them in accessing it during times of stress.

Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 counts.

Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 4 counts.

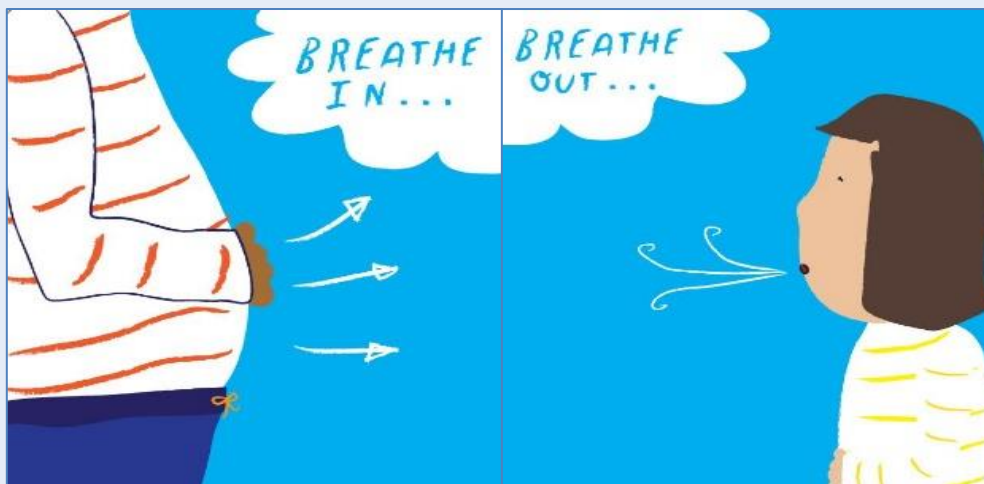
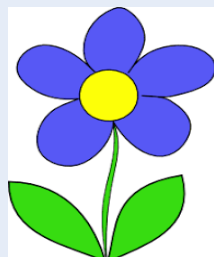


Image source: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/practice-mindfulness-with-belly-breathing>

The following visuals can also be used to support breathing activities:



Blowing Bubbles

Smell the flower.

Blow out the candle.

Cool down the hot chocolate.

Emotions – Early Warning Signs

Recognising the stages of emotional escalation can support in identifying what we might be feeling and can also help us to pick a strategy that might help us best manage that emotion.

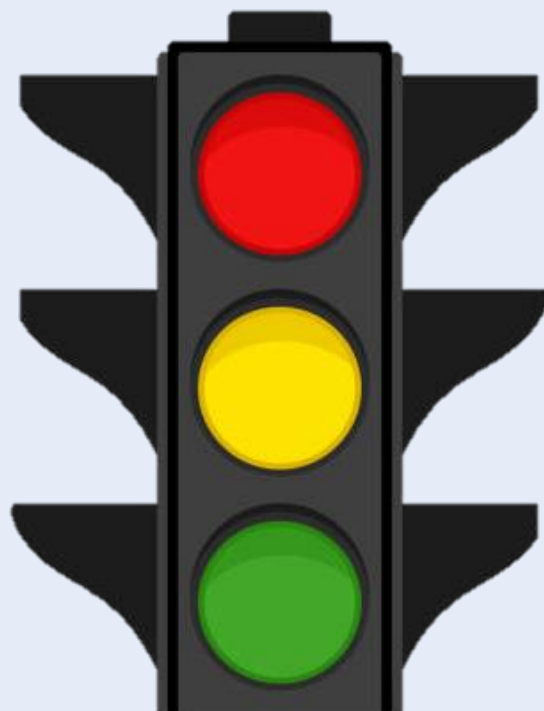
It is important to remember that helpful strategies are different for everyone.

Using the traffic light analogy, we can support understanding of how our emotions escalate if left unchecked.

Red = Difficult Emotions
Out of control, Stressed,
Angry

Amber = Emerging difficult
emotions
Frustrated, Worried, Sad

Green = Neutral or baseline
emotions
Calm, Happy, Content



It is important for children and young people to notice when we are in the amber zone, as this can be used to identify emerging difficult emotions.

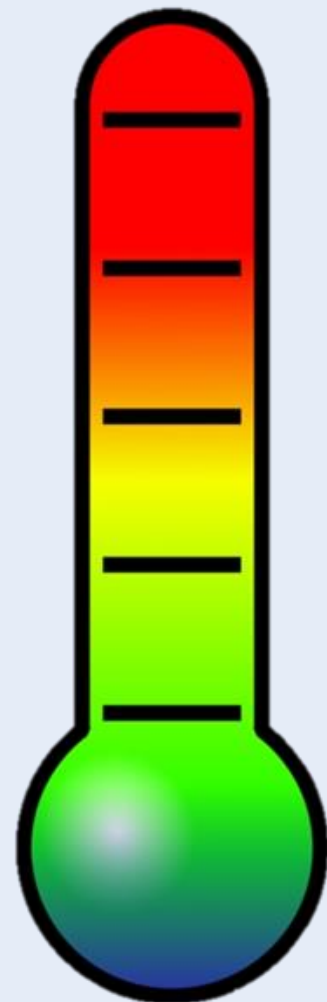
Explain that it is easier to return to calm and positive emotions from the amber zone than it is when we are experiencing big, difficult emotions.

Feelings Thermometers

Using a feeling thermometer is a great tool to help us learn and understand what we might be feeling. Identifying what we might be feeling can also help us to pick a strategy that might help us best manage that emotion.

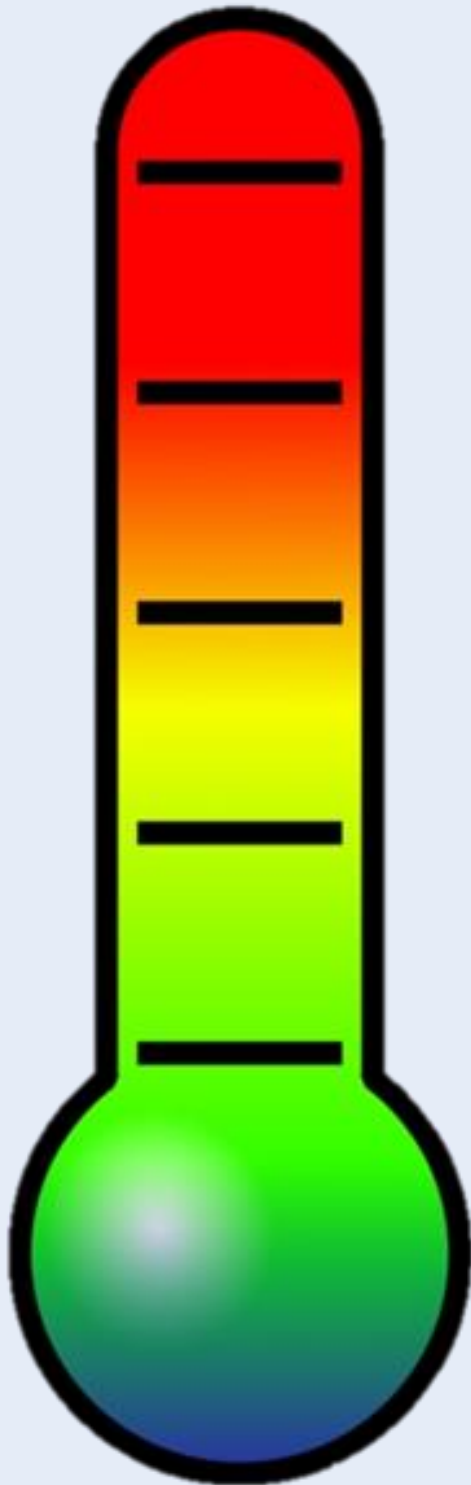
It is important to remember that helpful strategies are different for everyone.

Highlighting the importance of noticing when we are in the yellow or orange zone to children and young people, as this can be used to identify emerging difficult emotions which can be easier to manage and regulate before it gets to red zone.



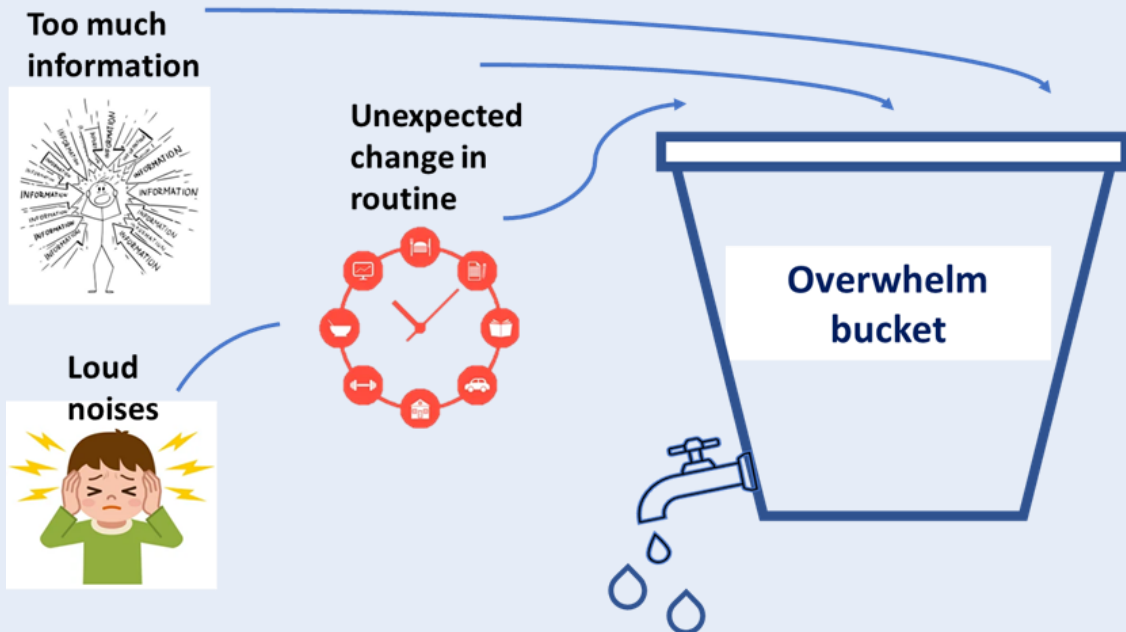
My Feelings Thermometer

Activity Idea: Rate the intensity of an emotion that the child or young person may be feeling.

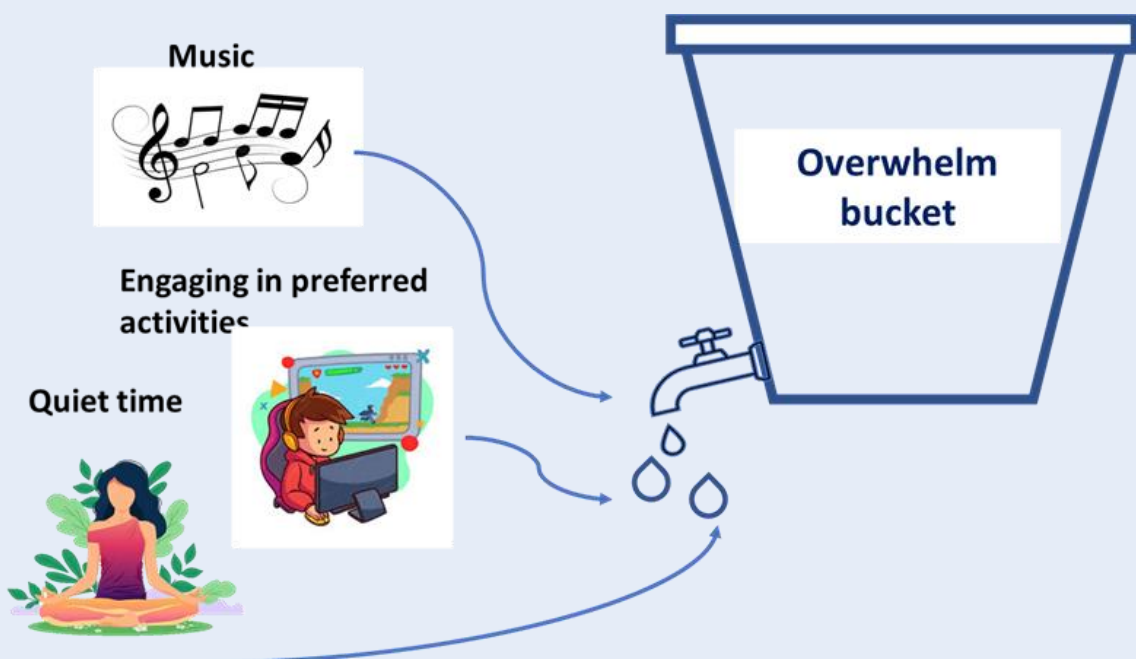


The Overwhelm Bucket

When thinking about overwhelm, we like to think about us all having an 'overwhelm bucket'. Lots of small triggers in everyday life can cause our overwhelm bucket to fill up, such as loud noises, busy places, or unexpected change. If this bucket overflows, we may find it difficult to cope and feel overwhelmed.

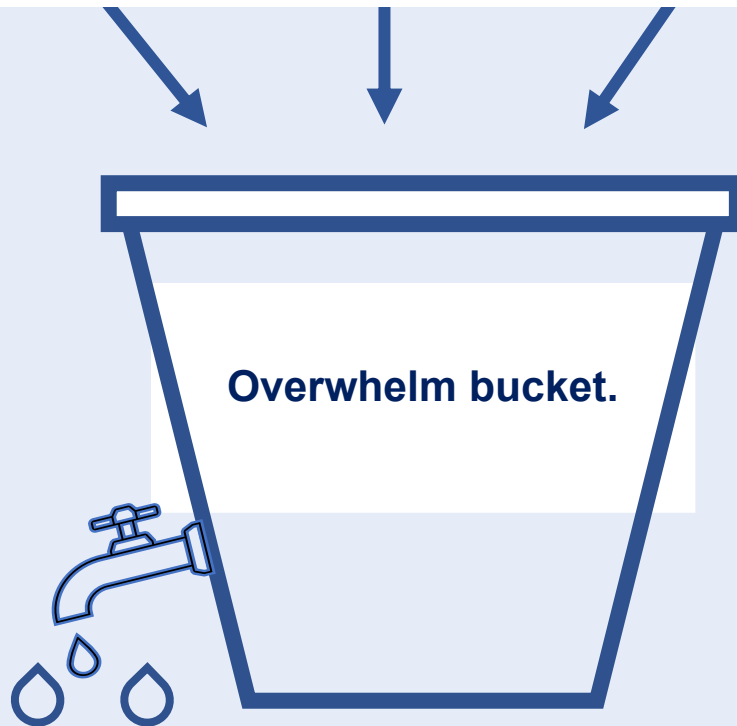


There will be things that can empty our bucket, reducing feelings of overwhelm. These may include quiet time, movement or listening to music.



My Overwhelm Bucket

What fills up your bucket?



What empties your bucket?

My Energy Battery

The Energy Battery activity can support understanding on emotional resilience and capacity. Activities that are demanding to the child or young person will drain their battery, whilst activities or situations that the child or young person enjoys or finds relaxing will charge their battery.

By giving an amount that an activity drains or charges, we are able to support the young person in communicating the value in which they hold that activity to.

E.g., a low % means it has less impact on their capacity, whereas a larger % means it will have a significant impact.



For Example:

What Drains My Battery	%	What Charges My Battery	%
Answering a question in the classroom	5%	Listening to Music	20%
Having an argument with a friend	15%	Walking my dog	10%
Social Events	20%	Quiet Time	10%

Activity Idea: Identify things that drain and charge the child or young persons battery and ask them to give a % level that it charges or drains their battery.

What Drains My Battery	%	What Charges My Battery	%

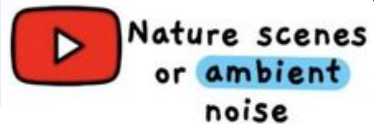
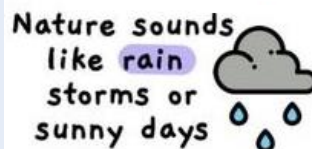
What helps me with my senses?

Understanding a child or young person's sensory profile is key in being able to support their learning and wellbeing within a school environment. By proactively deciding to adapt the environment to suit the needs of the individual, it allows the child or young person to thrive and may contribute to avoiding situations that lead to heightened emotions, masking or behaviours that challenge.



Strategies that support a child's sensory needs may include:

Hearing



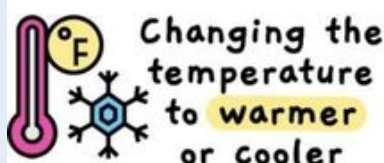
Smell



Sight



Touch



What helps me with my senses?

Activity Idea: Identify what sensory needs and strategies support the child or young person.

Hearing



Smell



Sight



Touch



Taste



5 Senses Grounding Activity

The 5 Senses Grounding Activity supports in allowing the child or young person to reconnect with the present by focusing on a number of sensory stimuli when emotionally dysregulated. It is important to also practice this grounding activity when the child or young person is calm.

Activity Idea: Along with the child or young person, complete the activity below.

Some variations include identifying 5 things of a certain colour, noticing 3 nature related sounds etc.

5

4

3

2

1

SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN

FIRST- TAKE 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS!

5

List 5 things you can SEE



4

List 4 things you can FEEL



3

List 3 things you can HEAR



2

List 2 things you can SMELL



1

List something you like to TASTE



FINISHED? - TAKE ANOTHER 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS

The Fizzy Bottle

A useful analogy to explore difficult emotions and triggers with a child or young person is the 'fizzy bottle'.

Big emotions can make children and young people feel stressed out. It can be like taking the lid off a fizzy drink after the bottle has been shaken.

On the surface the bottle appears stable, but it is only when the lid is opened that we see the extent that it has been shaken previously.



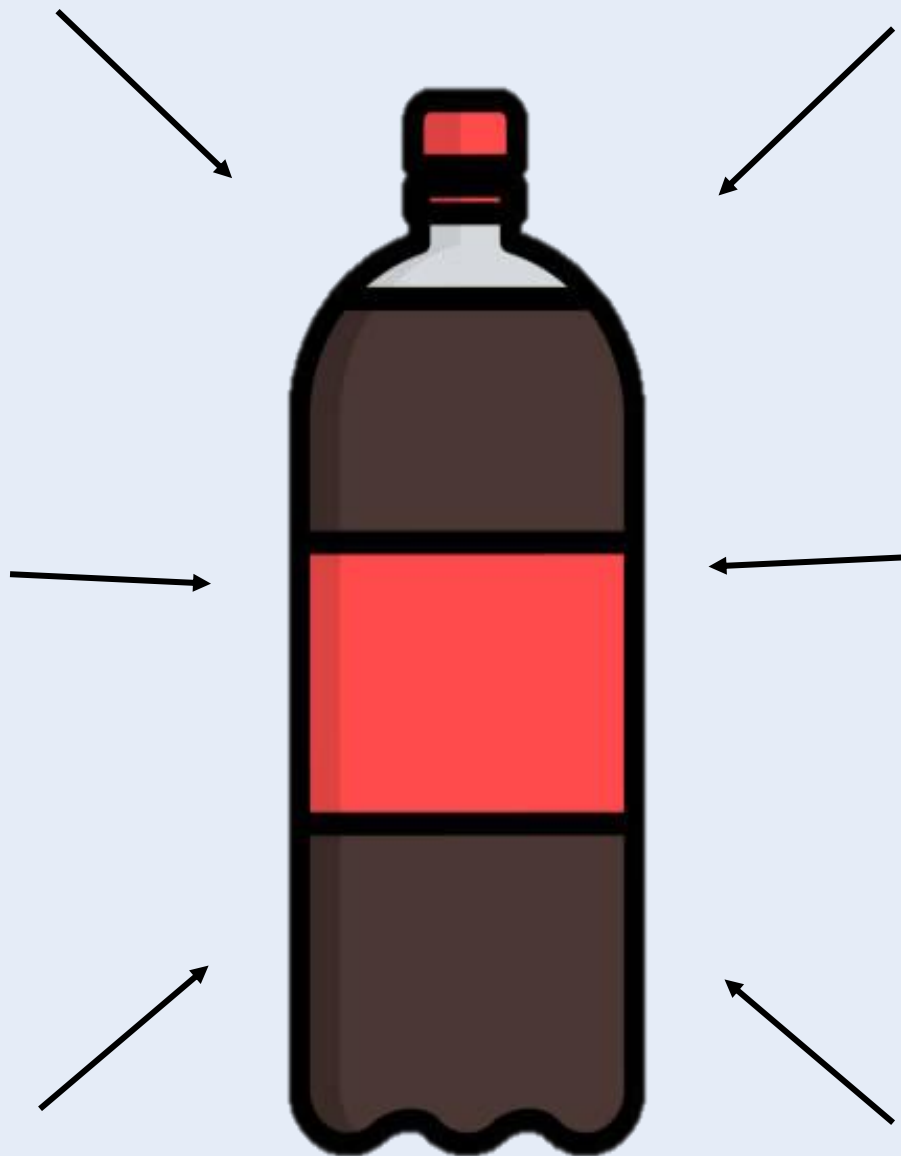
It can be helpful to be aware of what 'triggers' shake a child or young person's fizzy bottle so that strategies may be implemented in an attempt to manage and prevent them from occurring.

Some common 'triggers' that may shake a fizzy bottle are:

- *Basic Needs – hunger, tiredness, too hot/cold.*
- *Boredom.*
- *Lack of 1:1 attention.*
- *Lots of changes and unpredictable routine.*
- *Not having sensory needs met (too loud, bright etc.).*
- *Not having enough processing time or breaks from learning.*
- *Inability to communicate needs.*
- *Challenging social interaction (argument with friend).*

My Fizzy Bottle

Activity Idea: Write or draw things that may shake your fizzy bottle.



5 Ways to Wellbeing

Wellbeing is how we look after ourselves, how we stay happy and being able to cope and overcome the challenges that we face.



Example: 5 Steps to your wellbeing plan

Be Kind

Help someone with something.

Stay Active

Play in the garden or park.

Learn new things

Make a paper airplane.

Friends and Family

Have a chat or play a game.

Focus on the present

Practice some yoga poses.

5 Ways to Wellbeing

Activity Idea: Fill in activities that can fit in each of the 5 ways to wellbeing.

Be Kind

Stay Active

Learn new things.

Friends and Family

Focus on the present.

My Helping Hand

The Helping Hand is a visual used to identify the support network and protective factors in a child or young person's life.

A child or young person can identify and write 5 key people who support them on each finger and thumb. This can include **family, friends, school staff, leaders in the community etc.**

The child is then asked to write a number of strategies or activities that help them to regulate their emotions in the palm of the hand. E.g., **playing sports, talking to adults when upset, drawing / colouring etc.**



This resource was made in collaboration with:

