

After School

Understanding the transition home, and what your child may need before the rest of the afternoon begins.

A child who has apparently managed well throughout the school day can arrive home exhausted, irritable, withdrawn, restless or unable to cope with a relatively small request.

Both can be accurate accounts of the same child.

Parents may wonder why school isn't seeing what they're seeing. Teachers may hear about difficult afternoons and genuinely not recognise the child being described.

Children respond to the demands, supports and conditions around them. A school day can involve academic work, noise, movement, transitions, instructions, social interaction, uncertainty, sensory information and the effort required to concentrate and organise. Some children also spend considerable energy adapting themselves to the expectations around them.

The school day doesn't end at the bell

SCHOOL learning people demands	PACK UP belongings instructions switching	EXIT noise movement waiting	TRAVEL traffic heat conversation	HOME less structure? more choices? new demands?
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Hunger and tiredness may be entering the picture too. Looking at the whole school-to-home transition can be more useful than focusing only on what happens once a child walks through the front door.

What does your child seem to need?

01	Less input	quiet, headphones, solitude
02	Movement	outside time, walking, jumping, activity
03	Connection	sitting near you, talking, a shared activity
04	Predictability	a familiar routine, programme, game or interest
05	Physical needs	food, water, comfortable clothes, rest

There is no single correct decompression routine. Notice what your child naturally moves towards and what seems to leave them more settled and available afterwards.

When home and school see different things

A different presentation at home is useful information. It does not mean one setting has the 'real' child and the other has it wrong.

SCHOOL	SAME CHILD	HOME
More external structure Social and sensory demands Adult support Academic load	Different demands Different supports Different capacity	Recovery Family demands More choices Possibly less external structure

A child may work hard to meet expectations during the day and have less capacity left afterwards. Home may also be somewhere they feel able to relax that effort. For some neurodivergent children, masking may form part of the picture, but it should not automatically be assumed whenever school and home see different behaviour.

Compare what each environment is asking of the child: the support available, the sensory and social load, when difficulties occur, when the child is coping well and what happens immediately beforehand.

Some things can wait

"How was your day?"	"What homework have you got?"	"Why didn't you eat your lunch?"	"Your teacher emailed me."	"Please unpack your bag."
Timing may be the issue None of these is an unreasonable question or request. If your child regularly arrives home with very little capacity left, try moving non-urgent questions, homework discussions and chores to a later point and see whether it changes the afternoon.				

A one-week snapshot

A short record can help reveal patterns. Look at recovery as well as difficulty.

DAY	ANYTHING DIFFERENT?	FIRST 30 MINUTES	WHAT HELPED?	LATER
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				

If a pattern emerges, share it. A teacher may be able to add something the parent cannot see, and the parent may be seeing something school cannot. Together, that gives everyone a fuller picture of the child's day.