



# TERM 01 TOPIC

## Parents Newsletter

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# AFTER-SCHOOL RESTRAINT COLLAPSE

Imagine this scenario: you are waiting for your child to come out of school, ready to hug them, ask them about their day. Your child comes out and does one of these things (or a combination of these): cries, whines, becomes defiant, silent, has a full-blown tantrum or meltdown, or becomes angry and frustrated. Teachers say that your child has been “fine” at school so you start to feel hurt, upset, annoyed, embarrassed, angry, disbelieving... because if they have been “fine” at school, and they are clearly not fine after school with you, then you must be doing something wrong, right? No.

It is most likely that your child is experiencing “after-school restraint collapse”: after spending 6 hours at school, having to be “good”, listen, behave, work hard, control their emotions, by the time (some) children see their parents in the playground, they have already had enough (emotionally) and can’t hold it in anymore. So, all those big feelings and experiences that they’ve been storing up during the school day, come out in a big way. On top of this, when at school, most children don’t feel comfortable enough to share their emotions, but they feel safe with you, making the pick-up time a perfect place to let it all out.

Consequently, your child’s behaviour at the end of school day doesn’t necessarily reflect badly on you and your parenting. It only reflects on your child’s inner struggles to keep it together for too long. While after-school restraint collapse can affect any child, for children with additional needs, sensory difficulties, anxiety and other challenges, it can become acute. Tiredness, hunger and illness can also aggravate the problem, as can global pandemic and toxic stress that we have all been exposed to for a long time now.

Some suggestions for you to try to help your child manage their emotions after school:

- Regardless of how the day has gone, greet your child with a hug and a smile.
- Address their basic needs straight away – a drink and a snack can do wonders.
- Refrain from bombarding your child with questions about their day. They most probably need some time and space to settle their overwhelm.
- Some children might benefit from letting it all out through being physically active. Walking, cycling or scooting home might provide just that.
- If you can’t avoid a car journey back home, play some music or an audiobook.
- Often, children are not ready to do homework straight after school and any attempts to do so might aggravate them so leave homework until later if you can.
- Keep the connection with your child while at school: place notes in their lunchbox, draw a heart on the palm of their hand, spray them with your favourite perfume...
- If picking up becomes unbearable, talk to the school about ways you can all help your child. Maybe you can pick them up a bit earlier or use a different exit.

Finally, make sure to look after yourself. A persistent after-school restraint collapse can make you feel anxious, with your tension levels rising. Do whatever it takes to calm yourself down before you welcome your child. And if everything fails, please do reach out on [marijana@move-more.org](mailto:marijana@move-more.org) – I am more than happy to help you.

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