



LITTLE BIG MINDS

When a Child Says 'I Don't Know'

A gentle support pack for overwhelmed
children, teens and the adults beside them

COMMUNICATE WITHOUT PRESSURE

Check-ins | Safety and support plan | Adult guidance

Created by Steve Fox, mental health support worker

littlebigminds.uk

FOR THE ADULT

Use this pack slowly - not as another demand

A child may genuinely not know what is wrong, may need longer to process, or may be unable to access words while overwhelmed. Offer choices and reduce pressure rather than trying to obtain an immediate explanation.

1 Choose

Offer one relevant page, not the whole pack.

2 Pause

Let them point, tick, draw, write or return later.

3 Notice

Treat answers as clues and check your understanding.

Helpful words to begin

You do not have to explain everything right now.

Would pointing or ticking feel easier than talking?

I believe that something feels hard, even if we do not know what it is yet.

We can pause and come back to this later.

Regulation and safety come first.

Do not insist on completing a page during distress. Use the sheets later, when the child has more capacity.



THERE IS NO WRONG ANSWER

It is hard to explain

Tick anything that feels close. You can leave it blank, add your own words, or show this page to someone without talking.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ I know something feels wrong, but I cannot name it. | ☐ There are too many thoughts at once. |
| ☐ My mind feels blank. | ☐ Talking feels too difficult right now. |
| ☐ I am worried I will say the wrong thing. | ☐ I need more time before I can answer. |
| ☐ I do not want advice yet. | ☐ I want help, but I do not know what help. |
| ☐ I would rather write, point or text. | ☐ I am not ready to share this yet. |

Something else:



NOTICE, DO NOT JUDGE

What is my body telling me?

Body clues can sometimes be easier to notice than emotion words. Tick anything you notice now or when things are becoming too much.

HEAD & THINKING

- ☐ Headache or pressure
- ☐ Thoughts racing
- ☐ Mind has gone blank
- ☐ Hard to focus

CHEST & BREATHING

- ☐ Heart beating fast
- ☐ Chest feels tight
- ☐ Breathing feels different
- ☐ Need to sigh or yawn

STOMACH & ENERGY

- ☐ Sick or butterflies
- ☐ Stomach ache
- ☐ Very tired or heavy
- ☐ Restless or full of energy

SENSES & MOVEMENT

- ☐ Noise feels louder
- ☐ Light feels brighter
- ☐ Clothes or touch bother me
- ☐ Need to move, hide or be still

Another body clue I notice:



LOOK FOR THE LOAD

What might be making things harder?

Several small things can build up together. You do not need to choose just one.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ School, lessons or homework | ☐ Friendships or feeling left out |
| ☐ Being asked lots of questions | ☐ A change, surprise or uncertainty |
| ☐ Noise, light, crowds or touch | ☐ Being hungry, thirsty, tired or in pain |
| ☐ Having to hide how I feel | ☐ Worrying about disappointing someone |
| ☐ An argument or difficult interaction | ☐ A thought that keeps returning |
| ☐ Expectations feel too high | ☐ I do not feel safe or understood |

Something else that may be adding to the load:



SPOT THE BUILD-UP

My overwhelm scale

Your signs may look different from someone else's. Add what is true for you.

1 - STEADY

I can think, talk and manage ordinary things.

MY SIGNS

2 - BUILDING

Small things feel harder. I may become quieter, tense or restless.

MY SIGNS

3 - STRUGGLING

Words and decisions are difficult. I need fewer demands.

MY SIGNS

4 - OVERWHELMED

I may shut down, panic, cry, escape, freeze or lose control.

MY SIGNS

5 - RECOVERING

The moment has passed, but my body still needs time and care.

MY SIGNS



SUPPORT IS PERSONAL

What helps me feel safer?

An adult can offer choices, but you can say no or ask for something different.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Less talking and fewer questions | ☐ A quieter or dimmer space |
| ☐ A familiar person nearby | ☐ Time alone, with someone checking later |
| ☐ Headphones or reduced noise | ☐ A blanket or familiar object |
| ☐ Water, a snack or help with pain | ☐ Movement, pacing, rocking or stretching |
| ☐ Writing, texting, drawing or pointing | ☐ Knowing what will happen next |
| ☐ A clear pause from demands | ☐ No touching unless I ask |
| ☐ Reassurance without trying to fix it | ☐ Help leaving the situation |

Something else that helps:

WORDS ARE ONLY ONE OPTION

How I can communicate

Choose any ways that make communication easier. These can change from day to day.

POINT

Point to a word, picture, number or choice.

WRITE

Write a note, list or a few words.

TEXT

Message someone, even if they are nearby.

SHOW

Show this page or something that explains it.

SCALE

Give a number from 1 to 5.

WAIT

Return to the conversation later.

A sentence I can use

I cannot explain yet, but I need...

Please give me until...

Can I show you instead of telling you?

I need you to listen, not solve it yet.



COMPLETE WHEN THINGS ARE CALM

My support plan

This belongs to the child or young person. Review it together and keep a copy somewhere easy to reach.

My early signs that things are building:

Things that may be adding to the load:

What helps me in the moment:

What usually makes things harder:

People I can go to

NAME

HOW TO CONTACT / FIND THEM

NAME

HOW TO CONTACT / FIND THEM

NAME

HOW TO CONTACT / FIND THEM

IN THE DIFFICULT MOMENT

Connect before you investigate

The child's nervous system may need safety, predictability and reduced demand before reflection is possible.

WHAT MAY HELP

Reduce the load

Lower noise, language, decisions and expectations.

Use fewer words

Try one calm sentence, then allow processing time.

Offer, do not insist

Give two simple options or allow no answer.

Believe the distress

Respond with care before you know the full story.

WHAT MAY ADD PRESSURE

Avoid rapid questions

Repeated 'why?' questions can add pressure.

Avoid consequences mid-crisis

Focus first on safety and regulation.

Avoid forced eye contact or touch

Ask before touching and accept different listening.

Avoid demanding quick recovery

The body may need longer than the visible moment.

Try: 'You are not in trouble. We can make things smaller. You do not have to explain until you are ready.'

AFTERWARDS

Repair, learn and make the next time gentler

Wait until everyone is regulated. The goal is shared understanding and a more supportive plan, not a perfect debrief.

1 Reconnect

Offer warmth without immediately revisiting the event.

2 Stay curious

Ask what helped and what added pressure.

3 Make one change

Choose one realistic adjustment for next time.

4 Notice patterns

Record triggers, early signs and recovery needs.

When to seek more help

Speak to a GP, school pastoral or SEND team, or an appropriate mental health professional if distress is persistent, escalating or affecting everyday life. If you are worried that a child may harm themselves or someone else, seek urgent professional help rather than relying on this pack.

UK urgent support

Immediate danger: 999 | NHS 111 | Samaritans: 116 123 | Shout: text SHOUT to 85258

KEEP WHAT HELPS

Notes

Use this space for patterns, helpful phrases, adjustments or questions you want to remember.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Created by Steve Fox, mental health support worker and founder of Little Big Minds. This pack is educational and supportive; it is not a diagnostic tool and does not replace personalised medical, therapeutic, safeguarding or crisis support.