



CENTRE FOR AUTISM  
MIDDLETOWN

# AFTER SCHOOL RESTRAINT COLLAPSE

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## AFTER SCHOOL RESTRAINT COLLAPSE

Many students experience extreme anxiety when they return home from school. This is sometimes called 'After School Restraint Collapse', and has been likened to a Coke bottle exploding after it has been shaken. Children and young people are bombarded with social demands, academic demands and sensory stimuli all day in school, and while they may suppress these anxieties during the school day, they often have an extreme response when they return home.

This is because they can no longer contain their emotions, and because they view home as a safe space to release their stress. They may engage in externalising responses, such as shouting or hitting out, or they may withdraw to a quiet space and avoid all interactions.

The suggestions below may help to reduce the risk of children and young people reaching this point of an extreme stress response.

1. Communication between home and school is essential. Parents/caregivers can inform school staff that their child is having extreme emotional responses after school so that anxieties can then be addressed in school.
2. The student should be able to access regular calm breaks throughout the school day to maintain emotional regulation and to prevent a build-up of anxieties. These should be a consistent part of the daily routine, even when the student appears to be calm.
3. Supports should be in place which the student can use to communicate emotions, such as an emotions thermometer.
4. If the student has difficulties recognising emotions, supporting adults should be observant of the indicators that the student is becoming stressed, and encourage them to access regulating strategies.
5. Regulating strategies should be easily accessible to the student. These will be individualised to their needs, but may include a calm area, fidget items, headphones, movement activities and heavy work activities (e.g. lifting, pushing, pulling).
6. Reduce academic demands if the student is experiencing heightened anxiety. Differentiate the work and reduce the number of assigned questions or tasks. Ensure there is plenty of familiar work which they can complete easily.
7. Reduce social demands. This may involve reducing groupwork activities and offering supports to help them participate in peer interactions. A quiet space can be offered at break and lunch times.
8. Provide a calm break at the end of the school day so the student is returning home in a regulated state.
9. When the student gets into the car or returns home, family members should not overwhelm the child or young person with questions and conversation. Allow them to lead the interaction; they may need some quiet time before they are ready to interact.
10. Provide a quiet space and calming activities as soon as the student returns home. This will depend on individual preferences but may include physical exercise (e.g. jumping on a trampoline), listening to music, drawing or a favourite snack. If collecting the child or young person from school, it will be useful to have some calming resources in the car, such as fidget items, stress ball or a favourite comic.

