



HOT TOPIC AFTER SCHOOL COLLAPSE

Q I am the special guardian for the son of a family member. He is eight and has lived with me since he was 18 months old.

He has had a tough time but we get on and he is settled with me. However, we really struggle at the end of the school day. From the moment I pick him his behaviour deteriorates. He will be a bit silly in the playground and when we walk home he will run about, charging into me, or trying to trip me up. As soon as we get home he will demand something I can't give him or be really argumentative and this often leads to a meltdown. It can be several hours before he is calm.

It's getting to the point where I dread collecting him from school. How can I approach his return home to help him cope better with the transition?

School restraint collapse, or masking, is one of the most common yet upsetting problems for children and those who care for them. The events are loaded with deep feelings and often seem unmanageable for the upset child and the parent or carer who wants to help. The key words here are danger and safety.

Let's start by thinking about your child. As you say in your letter, he has had a tough time, although you haven't gone into details about this, I can imagine some of the things he has been through. He has been separated from his immediate family at an age where he would not have fully understood what was happening. He may have stored these early memories of feeling unsafe and perhaps powerless and there could be something in school that is triggering these feelings again. Perhaps he doesn't like being told what to do, or he is worried about his work not being good enough, or maybe there are some friendship issues, or even a worry about home. The list can be endless and we will never know what truly goes on in the minds of our children.

When he experiences those feelings of unsafety and powerlessness again, he is becoming reactive and falling apart when he sees you after school. I often think that when our children are not with us, they carry an imaginary attachment-rucksack on their backs throughout the day. The rucksack can get filled with all of the worrying thoughts they have and by the end of the day, it is too heavy to carry. When they see their safe person, they hand over this heaviness and it sometimes comes out in physical aggression, negative words and emotional upset. He feels safe with you and knows he can put all of his negative thoughts on to you. This doesn't feel good for you though, but there are ways to manage it.

I am also wondering how you are feeling. It can feel rejecting as a parent or carer when your child does not want to interact with you in a positive way, especially as you may have been looking forward to seeing him and genuinely be interested in how his day has been. Alongside this, you have the 'normal' worries of being an adult in the world and there may be some residual anxious thoughts around the special guardianship process. Who do you turn to for support? Who can help you empty your rucksack when things are hard at home? I ask these questions because when we feel supported by people around us, we feel more emotionally resilient and able to manage difficulties and I think it might help you to have someone to rely on too.

Tips

- When collecting your child from school or childcare, always offer a smile and a hug – even if the day hasn't gone to plan.
- Help your child to make a trusting relationship with a key adult in school, someone they know will listen and care for them.
- Avoid lots of questions on the way home from school – maybe ask one or two to gauge their mood and work from there.
- Keep in mind your child's basic needs: food, tiredness or perhaps needing the toilet (some children do not like to use the school bathroom and this can cause massive sensory issues at home time). Once these needs have been met, homework and chatting will be easier.
- Give your child time to decompress once they return home – a craft activity, some quiet reading, Lego or music making – whatever they enjoy doing.
- Be consistent in your routines, in your approach to your child, in how you manage yours and your child's emotions.
- Make sure you look after yourself as a parent. Your wellbeing is at the heart of your family's wellbeing, so find ways to look after your emotions and health. Dealing with a sensitive child and regular meltdowns takes a lot of emotional space and can be physically exhausting so, as well as keeping your child in mind, keep yourself there too.



Are you happy for your child to receive a large cash inheritance?

If you die without leaving a will, following your death (if you are single or co-habiting) or following the death of you and your spouse, your adopted child will inherit your estate equally with any siblings once they turn 18. At 18 they will become entitled to the whole estate which could be a substantial sum.

Many of our clients tell us that due to the emotional and other challenges their children face, that they do not feel that it is in their child's best interests for them to inherit everything at 18.

We are specialists in advising adoptive parents about the most effective ways of ensuring that their estate passes to their children in the most suitable way for their child and their needs.

We are offering free initial consultations to all adoptive parents to discuss their specific circumstances and requirements.

Call us on 0800 860 6265 and quote 'Adoption UK' to receive your free consultation.



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Chroma continues to offer online therapy services for adoptive families

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We have developed an online therapy service in response to COVID19

We are taking new referrals, so please get in touch



If you or your children need our support contact us on:

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