

UNMET CHILDREN'S NEEDS CHECKLIST

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When a child is struggling, ask: what might they need right now?

1 SAFETY

Do they feel physically safe?
Do they feel emotionally safe with me?
Has something changed or feel unpredictable?

You might see:
Clinginess – fear of avoiding situations
– hypervigilance



2 CONNECTION

Do they feel noticed and important?
Have we had positive time together today?
Are they looking for attention, but not asking directly?

You might see:
Attention-seeking behaviour – interrupting – testing limits



3 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Do they feel understood?
Do they have words for how they feel?
Have their feelings been dismissed or ignored?

You might see:
Big reactions – shutting down
– frustration – tears



4 PREDICTABILITY AND ROUTINE

Do they know what is happening next?
Have there been sudden changes?
Are expectations clear?

You might see:
Anxiety – resistance – difficulty with transitions



5 AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

Have they had any choices today?
Do they feel overly controlled?
Are they trying to have a say?

You might see:
Saying “no” – power struggles – refusal



6 SENSORY NEEDS

Are they overwhelmed by noise, light, or touch?
Do they need movement or quiet?
Are they overstimulated or understimulated?

You might see:
Restlessness – irritability – covering ears – withdrawal



7 REST AND PHYSICAL NEEDS

Are they tired?
Hungry or thirsty?
Unwell or uncomfortable?

You might see:
Irritability – low tolerance – sudden emotional outbursts



8 ACHIEVEMENT AND COMPETENCE

Is the task too hard or too easy?
Do they feel capable?
Are they worried about failing?

You might see:
Avoidance – giving up – frustration – low confidence



KEY MESSAGE

Behaviour is communication.

Look for the need,
not just the behaviour.



WHAT HELPS

- Stay calm and curious
- Name what you notice
- Offer support before correction
- Keep responses predictable
- Build connection first

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