

Practical Energy Accounting Strategies for Neurodivergent Children

Managing energy levels is a critical skill for neurodivergent children. The concept of energy accounting involves recognising what activities, interactions, or environments boost energy versus those that drain it. Here, I explore the idea of energy accounting and provide strategies for balancing boosters and drainers, helping to create supportive environments that aid in emotional regulation.

Understanding Energy Accounting

Energy accounting is based on the idea that we all have a limited amount of energy or emotional resources to get through the day. Just as we keep track of our finances, we can also monitor what builds up our energy and what depletes it. This concept is especially useful for neurodivergent children, who often face additional challenges such as sensory overload, social stress, and disrupted routines.

Boosters are the things that add to the child's energy piggy bank. These can be enjoyable activities, supportive people, or calming environments. Drainers, on the other hand, are what takes energy away. These can include loud noises, crowded spaces, or stressful tasks. One person's booster is another person's drainer so it's important that every child is supported to explore these concepts for themselves.

Balancing boosters and drainers can lead to improved emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and a more positive daily experience for neurodivergent children.

Strategies for Encouraging Boosters

Boosters play a crucial role in maintaining a child's energy and emotional wellbeing. Here are some practical strategies to increase boosters in a child's life:

1. Identify Favourite Activities

Help the child identify activities that bring them joy and energy. It could be anything from playing a musical instrument to building with blocks. Make time for these activities throughout the day to keep their energy levels high.

2. Create Sensory-Friendly Spaces

Sensory environments can have a significant impact on a child's energy. Create areas that are calming, with soft lighting, minimal noise, and comforting textures. Sensory-friendly tools like fidget toys, weighted blankets, or noise-cancelling headphones can also be helpful.

3. Foster Positive Relationships

Positive social interactions are powerful boosters. Encourage the child to spend time with people who make them feel valued and understood. This could be a teacher, a family member, or a close friend. Social connections can help neurodivergent children feel more at ease. We tend to feel boosted when we have a feeling of genuine belonging.

4. Schedule Regular Breaks

Incorporate breaks into the child's routine to allow them time to recharge. These breaks can be used for relaxing activities like drawing, listening to music, or simply having some quiet time. Frequent breaks help prevent energy depletion during the day.

Strategies for Managing Drainers

While boosters are essential, managing drainers is equally important. Here are some strategies for minimising their impact:

1. Reduce Stressors

Identify the sources of stress and work to reduce them. If loud noises are a significant drainer, consider using noise-cancelling headphones or creating quieter spaces. If social interactions are challenging, provide the child with tools to navigate them, like a social script or a designated buddy.

2. Teach Coping Skills

Equip the child with coping strategies to manage stress when it arises. Deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, or having a safe space to retreat to can help them regain their composure. Teaching the child to recognise when they're becoming overwhelmed is key to emotional regulation.

3. Modify Routines

If certain parts of the day are particularly draining, consider changing the routine. This could involve shifting activities to different times or allowing more flexibility in the schedule. Customising the day to suit the child's needs can significantly reduce energy drain.

4. Advocate for Support

If the child is in a school setting, don't hesitate to advocate for accommodations. This could involve allowing sensory breaks, modifying tasks, or providing additional support during challenging activities. Communication with teachers and school staff is crucial in creating a supportive environment.

Energy accounting is a valuable tool for neurodivergent children and those who support them. By recognising what boosts energy and what drains it, you can create a balanced environment that aids in emotional regulation and overall well-being. The strategies discussed here offer practical ways to increase boosters and manage drainers, helping neurodivergent children thrive. With patience, understanding, and consistent support, these children can lead fulfilling lives in environments that respect and accommodate their unique needs.

--

Please feel free to use and share this resource with an appropriate credit. For enquiries about working with Pooky, please contact the wonderful Ellie Powling:

Ellie@speakingofbooks.co.uk.