

# CASE STUDY CARDS

4 typical school situations – analysis and tools. Each case is analysed through 3 lenses.

## CASE 1: “The Little Professor” and the Tactless Remark

Area: Theory of Mind, Pragmatics, Literal Thinking

### SITUATION

During form time, Ms Roberts arrives with a new hairstyle. Twelve-year-old Jacob raises his hand: “Why did you do that? You look much older and it doesn’t suit you.”

### WHAT THE TEACHER SEES

Rude, ill-mannered, deliberately trying to embarrass me in front of the class.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PUPIL’S MIND

Theory of Mind difficulty: Jacob cannot predict his words will hurt. Literalism: this is an exchange of facts. Honesty is the highest value; ‘white lies’ are illogical.

### TOOLS AND STRATEGY

- ✓ Regulate YOUR emotions (Hand Model): This was not an attack.
- ✓ Calmly: “Jacob, that’s your opinion. In our culture, we don’t comment aloud on someone’s appearance unless it’s kind.”
- ✓ After the lesson (1:1): Teach the algorithm: Think – will this hurt someone? If yes → do not say it.

## CASE 2: Outburst During Group Work

Area: Sensory Overload, Stress, ‘Flipped Lid’

### SITUATION

Group work on posters. Noise, movement. Ten-year-old Michael suddenly covers his ears, throws his pencil case, shouts “Everyone be quiet!” and hides under his desk, crying.

### WHAT THE TEACHER SEES

Aggression, hysteria, inability to work in a team, attention-seeking.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PUPIL’S MIND

Sensory overload: classroom noise may feel like a jet engine. Flipped lid: the amygdala has taken over; the thinking brain is offline. Michael is not choosing his behaviour – he is in survival mode. Energy depletion (1:2 Rule): group work drained his reserves.

### TOOLS AND STRATEGY

- ✓ Be the Neurotypical Translator: “I can see it’s too loud. Let’s go somewhere quieter.”
- ✓ Safe space: library or noise-cancelling headphones.
- ✓ Prevention (Traffic Lights): agree on a signal in advance. Amber = “I need a break” BEFORE reaching red.

## CASE 3: The Genius Without Homework

Area: Executive Functions, Organisation

### SITUATION

Sophie (Year 9) is outstanding at history. But she repeatedly fails to submit written work, loses worksheets and keeps a chaotic exercise book. The teacher threatens a failing grade.

### WHAT THE TEACHER SEES

Laziness, lack of effort, carelessness. “She’s bright but can’t be bothered.”

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PUPIL’S MIND

Executive function difficulties: Sophie has the knowledge, but her prefrontal cortex struggles with planning. Initiation difficulty: she sits in front of a blank page and cannot start. Working memory: she forgets the assignment the moment she leaves the classroom – a ‘bucket with holes.’

### TOOLS AND STRATEGY

- ✓ External Executive Support: ensure the task is on the online platform or that Sophie photographs the board.
- ✓ Small steps: “Today, write just three opening sentences.”
- ✓ Block system: 20 min history → 10 min special interest (reward block).
- ✓ Radical routine: a dedicated history folder in a specific colour, checked on the same day each week.

## CASE 4: “Rigid Spaghetti” and a Room Change

Area: Cognitive Rigidity, Anxiety, Routine

### SITUATION

Maths is moved from Room 12 to Room 45. The class adapts easily. Tom (Year 4) stops outside Room 12 and refuses to move: “Maths is in Room 12! That’s wrong! I won’t go!”

### WHAT THE TEACHER SEES

Stubbornness, overreaction, manipulation.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PUPIL’S MIND

Anxiety (Stressor No. 1): the room change means the loss of safety. Broken spaghetti: his mind works on a rigid rule – Maths = Room 12. When reality contradicts the rule, the system crashes. No internal script: Tom has no procedure for ‘What to do when the classroom changes.’

### TOOLS AND STRATEGY

- ✓ Logic and contingency plan: “Usually maths is in Room 12. BUT when there’s a problem → we go to Room 45.”
- ✓ Assumption Box: “Tom, Room 45 also has desks. I’ll be there. We’ll still do maths. Nothing bad will happen.”
- ✓ Prevention: give advance notice of changes; create a Plan B for unexpected events.

In every case, the key was not punishment, raised voices or forcing normality. The key was the teacher’s shift in interpretation: from “Why is he doing this TO ME?” to “**What mechanism is at work – and which tool should I use?**”