

Daniel's Diaries™

A FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS

FOR PARENTS OF
NEURODIVERGENT AND BIG
FEELING KIDS



A DAILY RITUAL · 30 SECONDS · MORNING AND EVENING

The Traffic Light Check-In.

A daily check-in that takes thirty seconds.

Two moments a day. Three colours. Three prompts. The shortest, lowest-effort emotional check-in your family will ever do — and the one most likely to *actually stick*.

CREATED BY

Aimee
Behaviour Support Practitioner · NDIS
Founder · Daniel's Diaries

COMPANION TO

The Daniel's Diaries platform
danielsdiaries.com.au
Where your child becomes the planner

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The shortest check-in **you'll ever do.**

Most family check-in rituals fail for the same reason: they ask too much. *How was your day?* requires a child to retrospectively narrate hours of experience, sort the emotional weather, find the words, and deliver the answer to the person they most want to please. Half of that work is offline by the time the question arrives. The answer, predictably, is *fine*.

The Traffic Light Check-In asks for none of that. The child points. The grown-up acknowledges. The ritual is over in thirty seconds. It works because it lowers the cost of honesty until the cost is essentially zero — and because the metaphor (roads, traffic, the brain as a town the child is planning) is doing all the heavy lifting underneath.

WHY THIS MATTERS CLINICALLY

This is a **co-regulation tool**, not an assessment tool. The colour your child points to is data. It is not a grade, a score, or a window into their character. The whole design depends on you treating it that way.

1

Naming reduces overwhelm.

When the brain attaches a label to a feeling — even a simple one like **red** — the amygdala quiets. Pointing is naming. The act itself is regulating.

2

Predictability builds safety.

Same time, same card, same three options. The brain learns the ritual is safe and the cost of being honest is low. Honesty starts to come without prompting.

3

Small daily acts compound.

Sixty seconds a day, twice a day, becomes ten minutes a week of nervous-system attunement. Across a school term, that's the difference between knowing your child and guessing.

Daniel will guide you through. Two pages on the brain story behind each colour. One on the morning and evening windows. One on what to say back. Then the mechanics, the patterns to watch for, and a way in.

Six pages. One ritual. A whole new instrument in the house.



WHAT EACH COLOUR MEANS

Three roads. Three nervous systems.

Each colour corresponds to a real physiological state. Your child isn't choosing a mood — they're naming where their nervous system actually **is**. Once you can read the colours this way, the ritual stops being a script and starts being a map.

 GREEN <i>Good road</i> "The traffic is moving."	 YELLOW <i>Bumpy road</i> "The traffic is slow today."	 RED <i>Roadblock</i> "The road is closed."
REGULATED AND READY The prefrontal cortex is online. Heart rate is settled. Curiosity is available. Your child can handle nuance, transitions, and small disappointments without tipping. Green is not happy — it's capable. They have margin.	MOBILISED BUT HOLDING The system is running hot. Sensory input is louder. Emotions sit closer to the surface. Capacity is thinner. They can still function — but the margin is gone, and the next demand will land harder than usual.	PAST CAPACITY The system has flooded. Speech, logic, and flexibility are all expensive in this state. They are not being difficult — they are dysregulated. Asking them to perform regulation right now is asking them to do something their brain cannot currently do.

A CLINICAL NOTE WORTH KEEPING

These three states are not character. They are physiology. A child who is yellow at 3pm did not *become moody* between lunch and pickup — their nervous system spent a budget. The card is how they tell you what's left.

TWO WINDOWS · TWO PURPOSES

Morning sets the road. **Evening** clears it.

The card lives on the fridge for a reason. Two of the most predictable, naturally occurring transitions of the day — **leaving the house** and **coming home** — become anchors for the ritual. You don't have to remember to do it; the fridge does the remembering for you.

MORNING · SETTING THE ROAD

Co-regulation before the day starts.

A **green** morning means the day starts at full capacity. A **yellow** morning means the day starts with less in the tank — which lets you pre-adjust before anyone leaves the house. Drop the after-school playdate. Soften the morning's expectations. A **red** morning is a signal that something needs attention before the school gate, not after it.

EVENING · CLEARING THE ROAD

Repair and integration after the day ends.

A **green** evening confirms the day landed well. A **yellow** evening flags that today drew on reserves and tonight should be soft. A **red** evening is the most important data point you'll get all day — because what happens in the next hour decides whether the day metabolises tonight or compounds into tomorrow's anxiety.

DON'T SKIP THE EVENING ONE

Especially after a hard day. A red evening that gets witnessed is a red day that gets metabolised. A red evening that gets ignored becomes Tuesday's stomach ache, Wednesday's school refusal, and Thursday's meltdown over a missing sock. The thirty seconds you don't have tonight is the thirty minutes you will spend on Tuesday.

If you only have time for one window, choose evening. Mornings can be patched mid-day with a quiet word at pickup. Evenings cannot be patched — what doesn't get processed before sleep gets carried into the next day's nervous system, and the body keeps the receipts whether you remember to read them or not.

THE WORDS THAT GO WITH EACH COLOUR

Your job isn't to fix the colour.

When your child points to a colour, they have done the work — they've named where they are. Your job is to acknowledge what they've named. Not to negotiate it, fix it, soften it, or interpret it. The acknowledgement is the whole intervention.

GREEN · WHAT TO SAY

"Glad to hear it. Anything you want to tell me about?"

Open the door. Don't push through it. If they have something to share, they'll share it; if not, the green stays green and that's the whole point.

YELLOW · WHAT TO SAY

"Okay. I'll keep it soft today."

Name the adjustment out loud. The child hearing you change the day in response to their colour is the moment the ritual becomes worth using. They told you. You changed something. Trust gets built right there.

RED · WHAT TO SAY

"Got it. I'll come find you in a bit."

No questions. No why. Red is past words; words are expensive in red. The reassurance that you'll come back without making them perform anything first is the gift.

THREE THINGS NEVER TO DO WITH A COLOUR

The card is fragile. *Treat it that way.*

Never ask why. *"Why is it red? What happened?"* They picked a colour because they didn't have words for the why. Asking forces them to find the words anyway, which is the thing the card was supposed to spare them.

Never celebrate green. *"That's wonderful! What a great day!"* Green is normal. Making it a victory turns yellow and red into failure, and the child will start choosing green to give you the gift you wanted. Then you've lost the data.

Never negotiate the colour. *"Are you sure it's red? It looked like a fine day to me."* Even once. That sentence breaks the ritual permanently. The colour is theirs. Your view is irrelevant to the data point.

HOW TO ACTUALLY USE IT

Thirty seconds. Twice a day. That's it.

The temptation, once you start, will be to add layers. More questions. A daily debrief. A spreadsheet. **Resist all of it.** The whole power of this ritual is that it is too small to fail. The minute it grows, it dies.

1**Thirty seconds. No follow-up.**

Child points. You acknowledge. The ritual is complete. If they want to say more, they will. If they don't, they don't. **Follow-up questions undo the whole point.**

2**The colour is theirs.**

You don't disagree, override, or correct the colour. Even if you saw a great day. Even if you saw a hard one. **The colour is a measure of their internal state, not your view of their behaviour.**

3**Use it on yourself too.**

Point to your own colour each morning, out loud. The card stops being something done *to* the child and becomes something the family does *together*. **This is the move that makes it stick.**

Introduce it once, then stop explaining it. Tell them: *"I want to try something. Twice a day, just point to a colour. Green if it's a good road, yellow if it's bumpy, red if it's a roadblock. No talking required. I'll do it too."* Then put the card on the fridge. Don't bring it up again. Let the ritual emerge — usually within the first week, your child will start pointing without being asked, often when you're not looking. That's when you know it's working.

THE SINGLE RULE THAT PROTECTS EVERYTHING

This only works if you don't **weaponise** it. The colour cannot become leverage. *"You said you were green this morning, so why are you behaving like this now?"* The moment that sentence appears, the ritual is dead — and you've lost the most useful instrument in the house. The card is a window the child opens. Don't climb through it.

WHEN THE COLOUR REPEATS

Patterns are **information**, not problems.

After two weeks, you'll start to see shapes. Always-yellow Mondays. Red every Thursday afternoon. A run of three reds across a fortnight. These are not failures of the ritual. They are the ritual **working**. The card is showing you what was always there — you just didn't have the data before.

WHEN RED REPEATS**Don't fix the redness.
Find the load.**

Five red days in a row is real. It's telling you something is genuinely too much — at school, in the body, in the home. Your job isn't to **cheer up** a red pattern. Reduce the load. Talk to the school. Drop the activity. Get the ENT appointment. Believe what the pattern is telling you.

**WHEN GREEN IS
CONSTANT****Always-green can be
wonderful — or masking.**

If the colour is always green and the body is showing other signals (sleep changes, gut symptoms, weekend collapses, big emotions on Sundays), the green may be performance, not state. Gentle invitation: *"It's okay if today wasn't a green day. I'd rather know."*

WHEN YOU DISAGREE**The gap is the data.**

You think it was yellow; they're calling it green. They are right. The colour measures their **internal experience**, not your observation of their behaviour. Disagreement isn't error — it's information about the gap between how they look and how they feel. The gap is often the most important thing the card tells you.

Keep the card going through the patterns. The temptation will be to intervene — to talk about the pattern, to ask the child what's wrong, to make the ritual heavier in response. Don't. The card stays exactly the size it is. The conversation about the pattern happens elsewhere — in the car, at bedtime, with a clinician — and it happens because the data made it possible, not because the data demanded it.

IF SOMETHING FEELS BIGGER THAN THE CARD

If the pattern is severe — sustained red, sleep collapsing, school refusal, signs of self harm or hopelessness — the card has done its job by surfacing it. **Now bring it to a clinician.** The Traffic Light Check-In is an attunement tool, not a treatment plan.

A NOTE FROM AIMEE · BEFORE YOU GO

If thirty seconds a day sounds doable — **start tomorrow.**

The card works whether you use it for a week or a year. Most families find that **within two weeks**, the kid starts reaching for it before being prompted. That's the moment you've been building toward — when the ritual stops being something you're running and starts being something the family *has*.



The Traffic Light Check-In is one tool from one corner of a much bigger framework. There are seven major roads being built across childhood and adolescence, and the work of supporting your child is the work of helping them become the **town planner** of their own brain. That's what Daniel's Diaries is. A platform built on the same brain-as-town language, where your child works through cycles of skill-building across emotional regulation, resilience, behaviour, social mapping, and future planning — at their own pace, on their age band, with the metaphor doing the heavy lifting. If you'd like to bring it home, here are two ways in.

MOST PARENTS START HERE

The full Daniel's Diaries platform

Your child's first cycle through the framework — guided by Lenny, Coco, Kip, Pepper, Eddie, Kai, and Billie (the seven character guides). **From \$19/month**. Self-guided through to practitioner-supported tiers.

→ [DANIELSDIARIES.COM.AU](https://danielsdiaries.com.au)

IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ MORE FIRST

More free tools like this one

The Parent's Decoder, Does This Sound Like Me?, the Bedtime Sleep Road, and more — built by the same clinician, all designed to be tried in **under ten minutes**.

→ [VISIT OUR GUMROAD LIBRARY](#)

A SMALL REQUEST

If this guide was useful, the most powerful thing you can do is **share it with one other family**. The decoding work is lonely. It gets less lonely when more parents have the language for it.

CREATED WITH CARE BY

Aimee · Behaviour Support Practitioner (NDIS) · B.Psych.Sci (Honours candidate) · Founder of Daniel's Diaries · aimee@foundationalminds.com.au