TURNING PAGES,
BUILDING FUTURES

LEARNING WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

When Learning Falls Apart

What to try when your child gets stuck, frustrated, or overwhelmed.

Short on time? Jump to page 3 for the one-page Quick Troubleshooter.

Start Here

You start something together, and it's going fine - then it isn't. The frustration builds, the refusals start, and the plan falls apart. This resource is for that moment. Sometimes the problem isn't that a child doesn't want to learn. The task may have become too difficult, too long, too unclear, too repetitive, or simply too much at that moment. So before adding more help or more pushing, look at what changed between going fine and falling apart. That gap is where the fix usually lives.

The big idea: When learning falls apart, look at the task before asking for more.

Most fall-apart moments aren't motivation problems - they're fit problems. Something about the task stopped fitting somewhere in the middle. Find that part, adjust it, and learning can start again without a battle.

Try This: find the part that's getting in the way

Make it smaller

Try: Fewer problems on the page, fewer steps in the routine, shorter practice before a break. A smaller task isn't a lesser one - it's one your child can finish, and finishing builds momentum. Place a piece of paper over all but the first question or row to make the page look less overwhelming.

Show the next step

Try: Don't explain the entire assignment if all your child needs is what comes right now. "First this one, then we're done with the page" is much easier to face than the whole thing at once.

Make the response easier

Try: Point instead of write. Choose instead of generate. Move the materials instead of completing the worksheet. If the thinking is the hard part, change how the answer gets expressed.

Mix in something easy

Try: If every response is a hard one, effort runs out fast. Mix in easier, familiar steps between challenging ones so the difficult parts don't pile up.

Build momentum

Try: Start with a few quick, manageable steps your child can do successfully before introducing a more challenging part. Keep it encouraging and connected to the task. The goal is to help your child get started, not to push them through something that's too difficult. .

Give a clear finish line

Try: "Three more, then done." Not knowing how much is left can make everything harder; a clear, countable finish makes effort feel more manageable. A First-Then visual can help. For some tasks, a token board may also be useful.

Teach a way to ask for help or a break

Try: If leaving is the only way your child has to say, "I need something," teach a word, sign, picture, or card for help or a break — and honor it when it's used. A break request is communication, not a problem to solve.

Pick one adjustment - not all of them. Then watch what changes.

What to look for

You don't need to collect formal data to notice whether something is helping. Over a week or two, watch for:

- ☐ Recovery happening more quickly
- ☐ Staying with difficult tasks longer
- ☐ Asking for help instead of leaving
- ☐ Completing more of the task
- ☐ Needing fewer prompts to keep going

One small change is information - and a place to build from.

If it doesn't work...

If the fall-apart keeps happening even after you've adjusted, that is not a verdict on your child - it is information. Try:

- Go smaller again - fewer items, fewer steps, and a real break after. You can almost always go smaller.
- Check for a missing piece - sometimes one prerequisite skill, not the whole task, is the hard part.
- Check the timing - a tired, hungry, or overloaded brain pushes through nothing. Try the task after a snack or movement.
- Adjust earlier - Make a change before frustration builds. Prevention is easier than recovery.
- Look at the task itself - if it's far beyond your child right now, no amount of clever packaging fixes that. The work may need adjusting, not the child.

Remember: *The goal isn't to push through everything. It's to find the level where your child can practice being successful.*

Want more practical ideas?

Get practical, doable strategies for teaching your own child at home - what to try next, how to break it down, and how to make it fit your family's routines. Explore PAGE Resources → Or, if you'd like occasional practical ideas delivered by email, **join the PAGE list at pageaba.com.**

Need help figuring out what to try?

Every child is different. If you're trying strategies at home and aren't sure what to change, PAGE can help you identify practical, individualized ways to support learning, communication, participation, and independence in everyday life. **Learn more or schedule a consultation at pageaba.com.**

LEARNING WHERE LIFE HAPPENS

The Quick Troubleshooter

Next time things fall apart, don't start with more pushing - start with a quick diagnosis. Find the row that describes what's happening, and try what's next to it.

This is a note to yourself, not a worksheet anyone will grade.

If the task is...	**Try...**
Too long	Shorten it - fewer items, shorter practice, or split it across the day
Too hard	Add support - go smaller, or make one piece easier
Repetitive	Add variation - change the order, materials, or response
Hard to respond to	Change the response - point, choose, or move instead of write
Overwhelming	Show the first step - not the whole assignment
Missing a way to ask for help	Teach one - a word, a sign, or a card for "help" or "break"

Find the part that's getting in the way - and change only that.

The part that keeps going wrong: _____

One thing I'll try first: _____