

APPROVED FOR NDIS FUNDING

A Practical Guide for Families Supporting Children Experiencing School Distress, School Can't, and School Refusal



**Supporting families to turn NDIS funding into meaningful,
coordinated support at home and at school**

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This guide provides general information and practical guidance for families with approved NDIS plans.
It does not replace individualised advice or funding decisions.



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YOU ARE NOT ALONE

WELCOME

**IF YOUR CHILD HAS
NDIS FUNDING**

—

**BUT SCHOOL IS
STILL A STRUGGLE**

—

YOU'RE NOT ALONE.



Many families reach this point with funding in place, supports involved, and professional advice on board — yet school attendance remains inconsistent, mornings are exhausting, and their child is struggling to cope.

This guide focuses on what happens after approval.

Not how to get funding.

Not quick fixes.

But how to use approved NDIS funding in ways that genuinely support a child experiencing school distress, school can't, or school refusal.

In practice, the difference is rarely the amount of funding available.

It is how that funding is prioritised, coordinated, and aligned with what the child actually needs during the school day.

This Guide Is For Families Who:

- Families with an approved NDIS plan
- Children and young people experiencing:
 - school distress
 - school can't
 - school refusal
- Parents wanting to use funding strategically, not reactively



What This Guide Is (and isn't)

This guide:

- Offers practical guidance to support decision-making
- Helps families avoid common missteps
- Supports more coordinated outcomes across home, school, and NDIS

It is not:

- Diagnostic
- Legal or funding advice
- A replacement for individualised support

HOW NDIS FUNDING FITS WITH SCHOOL

NDIS FUNDING IS SUPPORT — NOT A SOLUTION ON ITS OWN

NDIS funding can play an important role for children experiencing school distress, school can't, or school refusal. But it works best when its role is clearly understood.

NDIS funding can:

- Support disability-related needs
- Fund therapies, behaviour support, and parent support
- Reduce barriers that make coping at school harder

NDIS funding does not:

- Replace the school's responsibility to make reasonable adjustments
- Guarantee school attendance
- Automatically resolve distress on its own

When NDIS supports are used effectively, they work alongside the school — supporting regulation, understanding, and practical adjustments within the school day.

This guide focuses on how to use NDIS funding to support real change at school, not just support around it.

USING NDIS FUNDING WELL WHAT MATTERS MOST?

It's not about more supports — it's about the right focus.

When a child is experiencing school distress, it can be tempting to add more services and hope something clicks.

But in practice, NDIS funding works best when it is:

focused on the right needs, used intentionally and aligned with what actually happens during the school day

The most common challenge families face is not a lack of funding — it's trying to do too much, too quickly, without a clear direction.

NDIS funding is most effective when it supports:

- Regulation and emotional safety
- Understanding why school is hard- what is the behaviour telling us
- Practical adjustments that schools can use
- Parents to feel confident and supported

Small, targeted changes often make a bigger difference than large, unfocused plans.

WHAT FAMILIES OFTEN TRY

Booking lots of therapy hours
Adding multiple providers
Hoping school attendance improves over time

WHAT TENDS TO HELP MORE

Clarifying what the child is struggling with at school
Prioritising regulation and predictability
Supporting the adults around the child to respond differently

NDIS funding works best when it follows clarity — not urgency.

REDUCE THE LOAD FIRST BEFORE YOU TRY TO FIX SCHOOL

Why the first use of funding matters

When school is hard, many families feel pressure to use their NDIS funding to push for improvement as quickly as possible.

In practice, funding is often most effective when it is used first to reduce the load on the child and the adults supporting them.

This doesn't mean giving up on school.

It means using funding to make daily life more manageable — so progress becomes possible.

When the load is too high, even well-intended supports can add pressure rather than help.

Using NDIS funding to reduce the load often involves:

- Lowering daily escalation around school
- Increasing predictability and routine
- Reducing sensory, emotional, or cognitive overload
- Supporting parents to respond consistently and calmly
- This phase is about creating breathing space, not increasing expectations.

NDIS-funded supports at this point often focus on:

Behaviour support to understand triggers and patterns

OT input to address regulation and sensory load

Parent support and guidance

Practical adjustments that reduce stress during the school day

USING NDIS FUNDING TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS

Clarity saves time, money, and energy

Once the immediate load has been reduced, the next best use of NDIS funding is often understanding what's actually driving the difficulty with school.

Many children experiencing school distress show similar outward signs — avoidance, shutdowns, meltdowns, refusal — but the reasons underneath can be very different.

Using funding to build clarity early helps families:

- Avoid trial-and-error spending
- Choose the right supports
- Focus on what will actually make a difference at school



Without clarity, families often end up:

- Trying multiple supports without knowing what's helping.
- Receiving conflicting advice.
- Feeling unsure how to explain their child's needs to school.
- Approaching plan reviews without clear evidence.
- Clarity turns funding from activity into strategy.

WHAT NEEDS UNDERSTANDING	WHO SUPPORTS THIS	WHAT FAMILIES GAIN
Behaviour patterns and escalation	Behaviour Support Practitioner	A Functional Behaviour Assessment with clear explanations for behaviour that feels confusing or unpredictable. Find the WHY behind the “No”.
Sensory load and regulation demands	Occupational Therapist	Insight into why school is exhausting or overwhelming. Get a Sensory Profile to see if the school environment is physically Painful
Emotional responses and stress	Psychologist (when relevant)	Better understanding of anxiety, shutdowns, or refusal. Counselling and therapy.
Communication profile	Speech Pathologist	Look at social communication. Less misunderstanding, fewer blow-ups, clearer supports for school
Impact across home and school	Combination of professionals, with parent and school input	A shared picture that supports planning and school communication

USING NDIS FUNDING TO COMPLETE ASSESSMENTS

Understanding is only helpful if it leads to action

Once families have a clearer understanding of what is driving school distress, the next question is:

What do we do with this information?

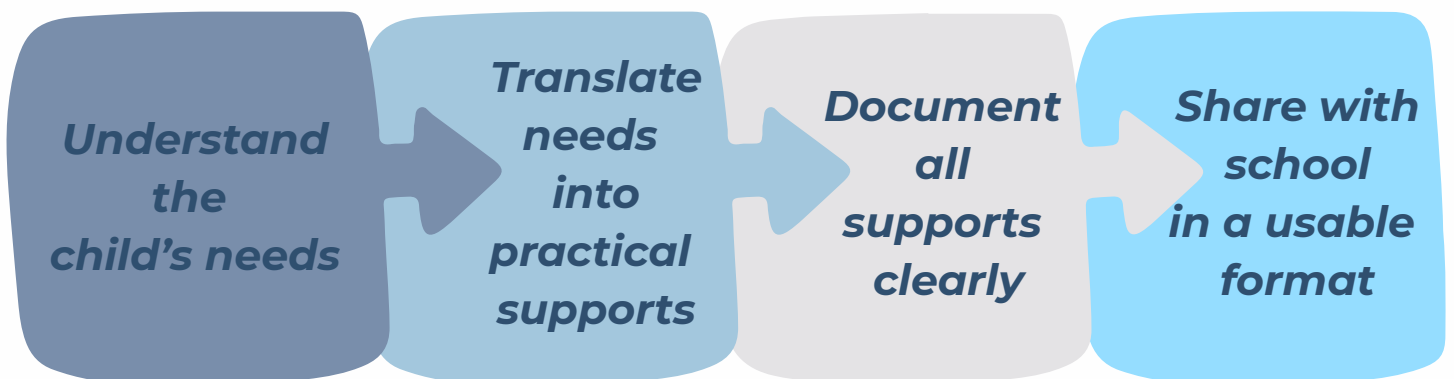
This is where NDIS funding is often most powerful — when it is used to turn insight into practical, school-ready support.

Schools are far more likely to respond to:

- Clear explanations
- Realistic adjustments
- Practical guidance they can use day to day



How funding supports this step



WHAT THIS OFTEN LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE?

- Clear explanations of what makes school hard
- Practical adjustments that match the child's capacity
- Guidance teachers can implement without extra workload
- Consistent approaches across home and school

WHAT THIS PREVENTS?

- Repeated meetings without change
- Recommendations that sit on a shelf
- Confusion about roles and responsibilities
- Frustration for families and schools

NDIS funding is most effective when it helps schools understand what to do — not just what is difficult.

USING NDIS FUNDING TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS

Funding works best when schools are part of the picture

When children are experiencing school distress, NDIS funding is most effective when it supports **shared understanding and consistent responses** across home and school.

This doesn't mean asking schools to "do more".

It means using funding to make it easier for schools to know what helps and how to respond.

NDIS funding can support	Schools remain responsible for
Understanding a child's needs	Teaching and curriculum
Regulation and coping capacity	Attendance processes
Behaviour support and guidance	Classroom expectations
Parent support and coaching	School policies and procedures
Planning supports schools can use	Day-to-day classroom practice
Reducing barriers to participation	Educational adjustments

WHAT DOES A STRONG NDIS PLAN LOOKS LIKE?

Why plans look so different

Two children can both be experiencing school distress and have completely different NDIS plans because the NDIS is built around:

- Functional impact (how disability affects daily life)
- Goals (what the plan is trying to build)
- Evidence (reports and examples)
- How needs are described (language matters)
- How well supports are sequenced and coordinated

You may not get everything you ask for, but you are far more likely to get a plan that works when you can clearly describe:

1. The child's day-to-day difficulties
2. The risk points and stress points
3. What support would actually change outcomes
4. Ways you will know it's working

The five pillars of a plan that supports school participation

A strong plan for school distress usually has these five pillars covered in some form.

What needs to be included in the plan

Capacity building for the child

Funding that builds regulation, coping skills, communication, and stamina so school becomes more achievable over time – not forced.

Capacity building for parents and caregivers

Support that helps parents respond consistently, reduce escalation cycles, and build routines that hold, especially on hard days.

Practical supports that make participation possible

Short-term scaffolding that reduces load and increases access to daily life, therapy, and community participation while capacity is being built.

Communication and translation into school-friendly supports

Funding to translate a child's needs into clear, practical supports that school staff can actually use day to day.

Coordination so everyone is aligned

Support that reduces mixed messages and creates consistency across home, school, and providers – so parents aren't carrying it alone.

What to ask for in your plan (detailed menu)

The sections on the next pages are not a checklist or a list of services to request. They are a way of thinking about what needs to be funded so your child can build capacity, reduce distress, and participate in school and daily life over time.

In planning meetings, families are usually advocating for:

- *the right level of Capacity Building funding, and*
- *the right focus for that funding, rather than asking for specific therapies or hours.*

NOT EVERY PLAN WILL INCLUDE EVERY AREA.



This section is designed to help families describe needs clearly — not to request services line by line.

1) Behaviour Support (Capacity Building)

Best for: understanding patterns, triggers, escalation, and what helps; turning this into a plan others can follow.

Ask for when your child:

Escalates quickly around school demands

Has meltdowns/shutdowns that impact family life

Becomes aggressive, absconds, refuses, or becomes unsafe when overwhelmed

Needs consistent approaches across adults at home and school

What to ask for (plain language):

“Support to understand what drives escalation and what helps prevent it.”

“A practical support plan teachers can actually use.”

“Parent coaching so we can respond consistently at home.”

“Support to collaborate with school and translate strategies into school-friendly language.”

What it should produce:

Clear summary of triggers and early signs

Strategies for prevention and de-escalation

Scripts adults can use

Environment/routine supports that reduce stress

A “what to do when” guide (teachers love this)



2) Occupational Therapy (Capacity Building)

Best for: sensory load, regulation demands, stamina, fatigue, environment adjustments.

Ask for when your child:

Is exhausted by school

Shuts down or melts down after school

Struggles with noise, crowds, transitions, uniform, classroom demands

Needs movement, breaks, or sensory tools to cope

What to ask for:

“Support to understand sensory load and regulation needs across a school day.”

“Practical changes that reduce overwhelm (not just generic advice).”

“A regulation plan that can be used at home and school.”

What it should produce:

A clear sensory/regulation profile

Practical strategies for routines and transitions

Recommendations for tools/environment (visuals, breaks, movement, quiet spaces)

A school-friendly summary of “what helps”



3) Speech Pathology (Capacity Building) — Communication Profile

Best for: receptive/expressive communication, pragmatic language, and communication under stress.

Ask for when your child:

Struggles to explain needs or feelings
Escalates when misunderstood
Appears “fine” but melts down later
Struggles to follow instructions or interpret social situations
Becomes non-verbal / reduced speech when overwhelmed

What to ask for:

“Support to understand how my child communicates—especially under stress.”
“Strategies the school can use when my child can’t find words.”
“Supports to reduce misunderstandings that trigger distress.”

What it should produce:

A simple communication profile (how the child understands and expresses)
Supports for communication breakdown (visuals, prompts, scripts, choices)
Teacher tips (how to give instructions, how to check understanding)



4) Psychology (Capacity Building) — when appropriate

Best for:

Building emotional regulation, coping skills, and resilience where emotional distress significantly impacts daily functioning and participation (including education).

Ask for when your child:

Experiences high levels of emotional distress that affect participation
Becomes overwhelmed, shuts down, or escalates under school-related stress
Struggles to use coping strategies independently
Needs support to build emotional resilience over time

What to ask for (NDIS-aligned language):

“Capacity building support to develop coping strategies for emotional distress that impacts daily functioning and school participation.”
“Support to build emotional regulation and resilience to support gradual re-engagement with school demands.”
“Guidance for parents to support emotional regulation and reduce escalation patterns at home.”

What this support should produce:

Practical coping strategies matched to the child's profile
Parent guidance to reinforce strategies consistently
Functional recommendations that translate to school supports



5) Parent Coaching / Parent Capacity Building (Capacity Building)

Sometimes embedded within Behaviour Support/Psychology, but worth explicitly asking for.

Ask for when:

Mornings are a battle
Family stress is high
Sibling impact is significant
You feel stuck in repeated cycles

What to ask for:

“Support for us to implement consistent routines and responses.”
“Coaching to reduce escalation and build brave steps gradually.”

What it should produce:

Clear routines, scripts, and response plans
Realistic goals and tracking
Strategies for “hard days” so progress doesn’t collapse

6) Support Work (Core) — short-term scaffolding

Best for: participation and access while capacity is being built.

Ask for when:

The child needs support to attend appointments or community activities
Transitions are hard and the child needs a regulated adult to scaffold
Parents are stretched thin and the child needs structured support to practise skills

What to ask for:

“Targeted support to practise routines and skills outside school.”
“Support to access community safely while we build coping capacity.”

Important framing:

Core is strongest when it supports practice and participation, not avoidance or dependency.

7) Assistive Technology (AT)

Best for: tools that support communication, regulation, independence.

Examples:

Visual schedules and routine supports
Noise reduction tools
Communication supports (apps, visuals)
Timers, prompts, regulation tools

What to ask for:

“Tools that support communication and regulation so school demands are more manageable.”



8) Transport

Best for: access when disability impacts safe/independent travel.

Ask for when:

You as the parent struggle to get the young person in the car

The child cannot travel independently due to distress/regulation/communication needs

Transport barriers prevent participation in supports and education

What to ask for:

"Transport support because disability significantly impacts safe and reliable travel."

9) Coordination (Support Coordination, when relevant)

Not everyone gets it, but if your child's situation is complex, it can be high value.

Ask for when:

Multiple providers are involved

The school relationship is complex

You are doing all the organising and communication

What to ask for:

"Support to coordinate providers and reduce duplication."

"Support to help align home, school and therapy plans."



Stage 1: Reduce pressure

stabilise routines

reduce escalation

protect communication

Stage 2: Build understanding

regulation profile

communication under stress

triggers and patterns

Stage 3: Build capacity

coping skills

parent confidence

stamina for school demands

Stage 4: Translate to school

school-ready strategies

clear guidance teachers can use

CHOOSING PROVIDERS

A Simple Filter That Saves Time, Money, and Stress

Not all providers work well for supporting School distress.

Before you book, use this filter to help you choose supports that actually make a difference at school — not just in sessions.

✓ **Green Flags** (Look for These)

A good provider for school distress will:

Ask about home and school

They look beyond diagnosis to understand your child's strengths and challenges across the day.

Provide practical, written guidance

Clear summaries, plans, or scripts — not just verbal advice.

Understand schools

Strategies are realistic and usable for teachers.

Focus on prevention

They identify triggers and early signs, not only respond after escalation.

Support parents to respond consistently

You're given clear guidance, not left guessing between sessions.

🚩 **Red Flags** (Pause Before Continuing)

Be cautious if a provider:

Says **"we don't work with schools"**

Provides advice but **no written summaries or plans**

Focuses only on behaviour in the session room

Keeps adding sessions **without a clear goal** or review point

Uses **generic strategies** that don't match your child's daily school experience

More therapy hours doesn't automatically mean better outcomes.

? **One Question to Ask Every Provider**

"What will this support produce that will help my child cope better at school?"

A strong answer will mention:

-Practical strategies -Written guidance -School-ready recommendations -Or improved understanding that leads to specific adjustments

If the answer is vague, that's useful information.

A Helpful Tip

Many families find it useful to identify one lead professional (often Behaviour Support or OT) to help coordinate strategies and keep everyone aligned — so parents aren't carrying it alone.

NDIS funding works best when:

-Supports are chosen intentionally
-Providers are aligned
-Schools receive clear, usable guidance

THE RIGHT PROVIDER MIX OFTEN REDUCES THE NUMBER OF SERVICES NEEDED — WHILE IMPROVING OUTCOMES.



USING PLAN REVIEWS TO STRENGTHEN SUPPORT OVER TIME

First — a reassurance

NDIS plans are not meant to be perfect the first time.

When a child is experiencing school distress, understanding develops over time.

Reviews exist to adjust support as things become clearer — not to judge whether families have “done it right”.

Questions parents often worry about

“What if we didn’t use the plan properly?”

If funding was used to reduce distress, build skills, or improve participation, it has been used appropriately.

“What if things didn’t improve?”

That doesn’t mean the plan failed. It usually means you now have better information about what your child needs next.

“What if school is still hard?”

That is common. Reviews are about refining supports, not proving school is suddenly easy.

What actually helps at review time

You don’t need perfect data.

What helps most is being able to explain:

- what is still hard for your child
- what has helped (even a little)
- what you understand now that you didn’t before

This is what review conversations are built on.

A helpful way to think about reviews

Instead of asking:

“Did we get this right?”

Try asking:

“What do we understand now that we didn’t before?”



One final reminder

**REVIEWS ARE ABOUT LEARNING AND ADJUSTING
— NOT SUCCESS OR FAILURE.**

You've Got Funding — Now Make It Work Where It Counts

You Don't Have to Navigate This Alone

Accessing the NDIS isn't always straightforward. But we've seen time and time again — families who understand the system and how to describe their child's needs, can and do succeed.

You are not failing. You are not exaggerating. You are not alone.
And you don't have to do this perfectly.



✓ What You Can Do Next:

Check these 4 things in your plan today: plan end date, plan management type, Capacity Building budget, Core budget (if you have it).

1. Choose your first focus (pick one):
 - Reduce the load first (mornings, escalation, exhaustion)
 - Build clarity (why school is hard + what helps)
2. Book your "cornerstone supports" first (for most families):
 - Behaviour Support to map patterns and produce a school-ready plan
 - OT to identify sensory/regulation load and practical adjustments
3. Ask every provider for one thing:
 - A one-page school summary: "What helps/what to avoid/what to do when things escalate."
4. Create a simple progress record (for reviews):
 - 3 bullets each fortnight: what's still hard, what helped a little, what you understand now. (That's enough.)

✨ Let's Walk This Path Together

At The Guided Path, we work with families just like yours every week — building realistic, neuroaffirming support plans that schools can follow and children can thrive within.

We begin with Behaviour Support — and we'll be by your side, helping you build the team your child deserves.

Use the QR Code to book a free 20-minute call with The Guided Path team.

EMAIL- admin@theguidedpath.com.au

We'll help you take the next step with confidence.

