

# Recognise

A suggestion for implementing the strategy  
'Respond in challenging situations' from the  
Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

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- Includes:**
- Identify and understand distress
  - Ask what helps
  - Notice the signs
  - Build a kete of options

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Strategy: [Respond in challenging situations](#)

Suggestion: [Recognise](#)

Date

18 June 2026

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/recognise](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/recognise)

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## Identify and understand distress

Some ākonga may experience daily stressors that can overwhelm them if not understood and addressed.

For example:

- certain sounds and sights
- being asked to do something they cannot do
- fear of disappointing or upsetting others
- perceived loss of control
- being excluded from a group or activity
- not having access to assistive technology or other supports
- unexpected events or situations
- unsettling interactions between peers.

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## Ask what helps

Discuss possible supports and make these available to all students.

Tate from Onslow College explains what works for him in the classroom.



Video hosted on Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/100662200>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Ministry of Education, inclusive education videos \(NZ\)](#)

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/2950799>

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## Notice the signs

Ākonga often show noticeable signs when they are experiencing stress or distress. This includes those who may have witnessed or been involved in the distressing situation.

Signs can include:

- disengaging, lack of concentration or avoiding work tasks
- restlessness
- making noises and disrupting others
- talking fast, excitedly or loudly
- repeating other people's words or sentences
- rocking or pacing
- hand movements, clenching fists and jaws
- breathlessness or flushed face
- hurting themselves
- arguing or swearing.

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## Build a kete of options

Build a kete of strategies and options with ākongā and whānau to use when ākongā begin to feel dysregulated.

The suggestions in this list were gathered from ākongā Māori and Pasifika, disabled ākongā and their whānau in response to the question “What helps me feel calm/helps me when I’m stressed?”

- ✓ Kaiako staying calm and reassuring me.
- ✓ Kaiako letting me do something different or fun, or offering me things that will help me.
- ✓ Giving me responsibility for something, or asking me to help so I can focus on that.
- ✓ Using fidget toys, squeeze balls or other tactile objects.
- ✓ Chilling out in the sensory room, or going somewhere cosy and quiet for a power-nap.
- ✓ Using noise-cancelling headphones.
- ✓ Going outside for fresh air or a run around the field.
- ✓ Talking to friends that I trust, or calling my whānau if I need to.

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