THE EFFORT WE DON'T SEE: INVISIBLE DISABILITIES & NEURODIVERGENCE

Mind Matters | Bihar Lok Bhavan | 2026

by Kavya Kathpalia, Mental Health & Social Impact Consultant

ASSUMPTIONS & LABELS: THINGS WE OFTEN HEAR BUT AREN'T TRUE

Lazy.

Careless.

Not serious about studies.

She'll grow out of it.

He's always in his own world.

She's just shy, nothing else.

He needs to concentrate more.

Trying harder helps when the problem is motivation.

It doesn't help when the problem is how the brain takes in and uses information.



The same moment in a classroom can cost two children very differently, even when it looks identical from outside.



It's rarely just one line, ahead or behind. Some things come easily, some don't, often in the same child.



None of this is a character flaw. It's simply how a brain is wired.

a broken arm gets a cast. a cast gets noticed, and **noticed gets patience**

this does not come with a cast, a wheelchair or **anything tangible to point to**

what shows up, may not be steady. calm in one class, stuck in another. **misunderstood as "mood'**

these experiences may not get the same patience as a physical disability. not because no one cares, but because often there is nothing to see.

Children sometimes struggle quietly. Sometimes, they work hard to make it look like they are not struggling at all.

Memorising instead of reading aloud

Laughing along at a joke they did not follow

Staying up late just to keep with everyone else's pace

Staying calm on the outside while panicking underneath

It is protection, from embarrassment, being singled out, and being found out as "different"

By the time it is noticed, the child has usually been managing it alone for a while



Reading aloud, one by one. Most students read the words straight away. One student has to sound out each letter first. By their turn, they're already behind, and tired before they even start.



The teacher writes on the board, then wipes it clean. Most students need just one look. One student is still copying, loses their place again and again, and is too tired from copying to even hear what's being taught.



Same test. Same thirty minutes. One student finishes early, with time to check their answers. Another is still on question four. Not because they don't know it. Because reading the question twice, just to be sure, uses up time no one else needs.



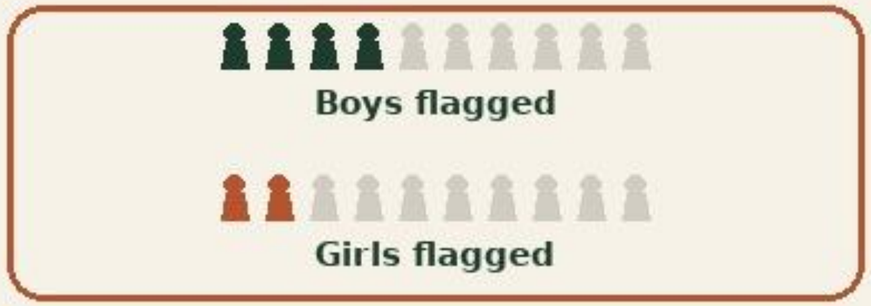
A friend says something. It could be a joke. It could be a real dig. Hard to tell in the moment. Most students decide quickly and move on. One student is still thinking about it at the end of the day, first working out what it meant, then sitting with how it feels.

Same room. Same minute. Not the same cost.

RECOGNISING WHAT WE MISS

Boys are more likely to be identified. Girls' difficulties are more likely to go unnoticed, especially when their struggles are quiet or hidden.

Not being noticed does not mean not struggling.



1. Where does it happen?

Only in this class, or in other situations too?

1. What effort is hidden?

Is this taking more effort than we can see?

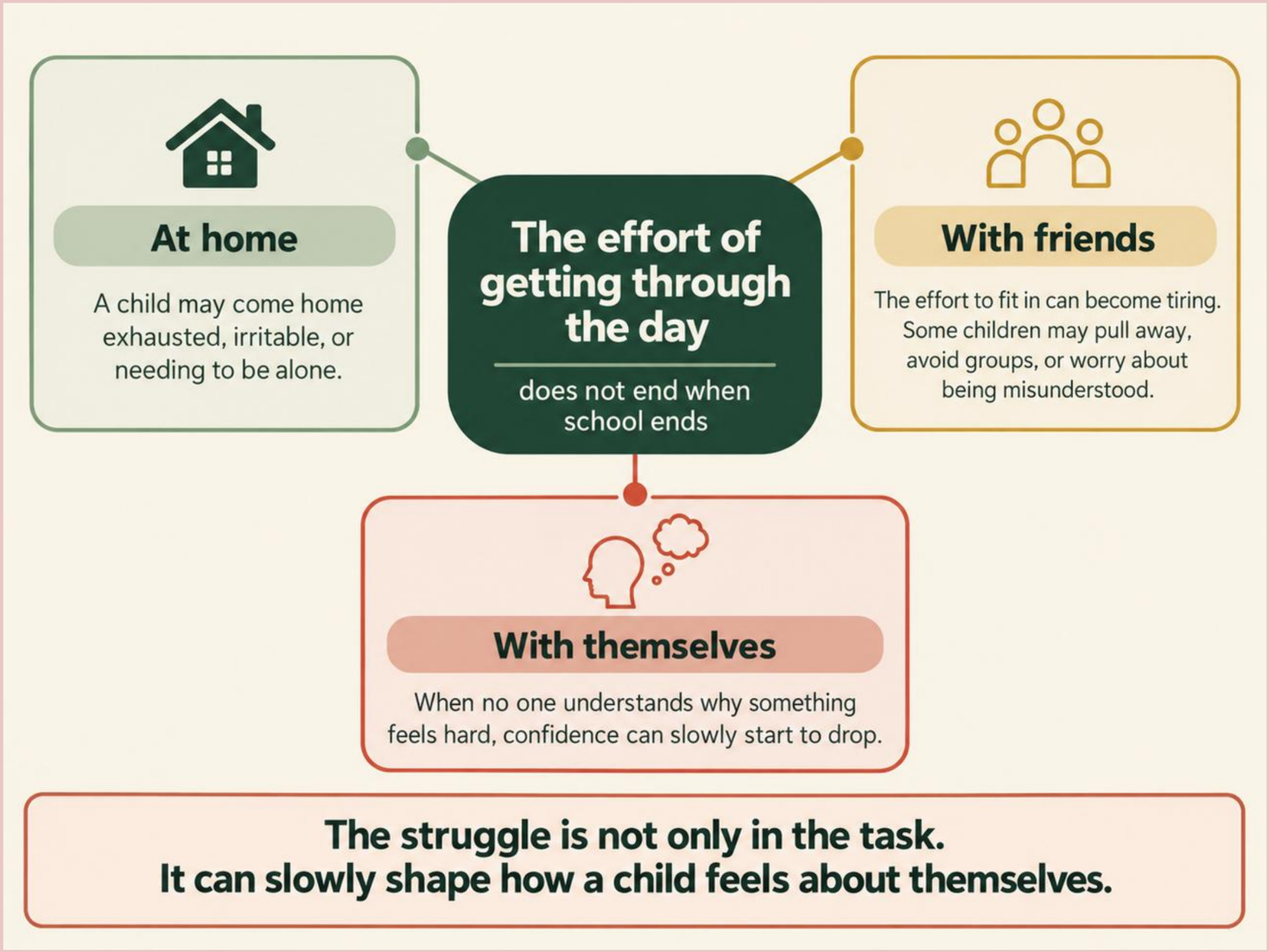
1. Is there a pattern?

Has this happened before? or is it something new?

Teachers: Notice the pattern. Ask the child. Don't decie the explanation for them.

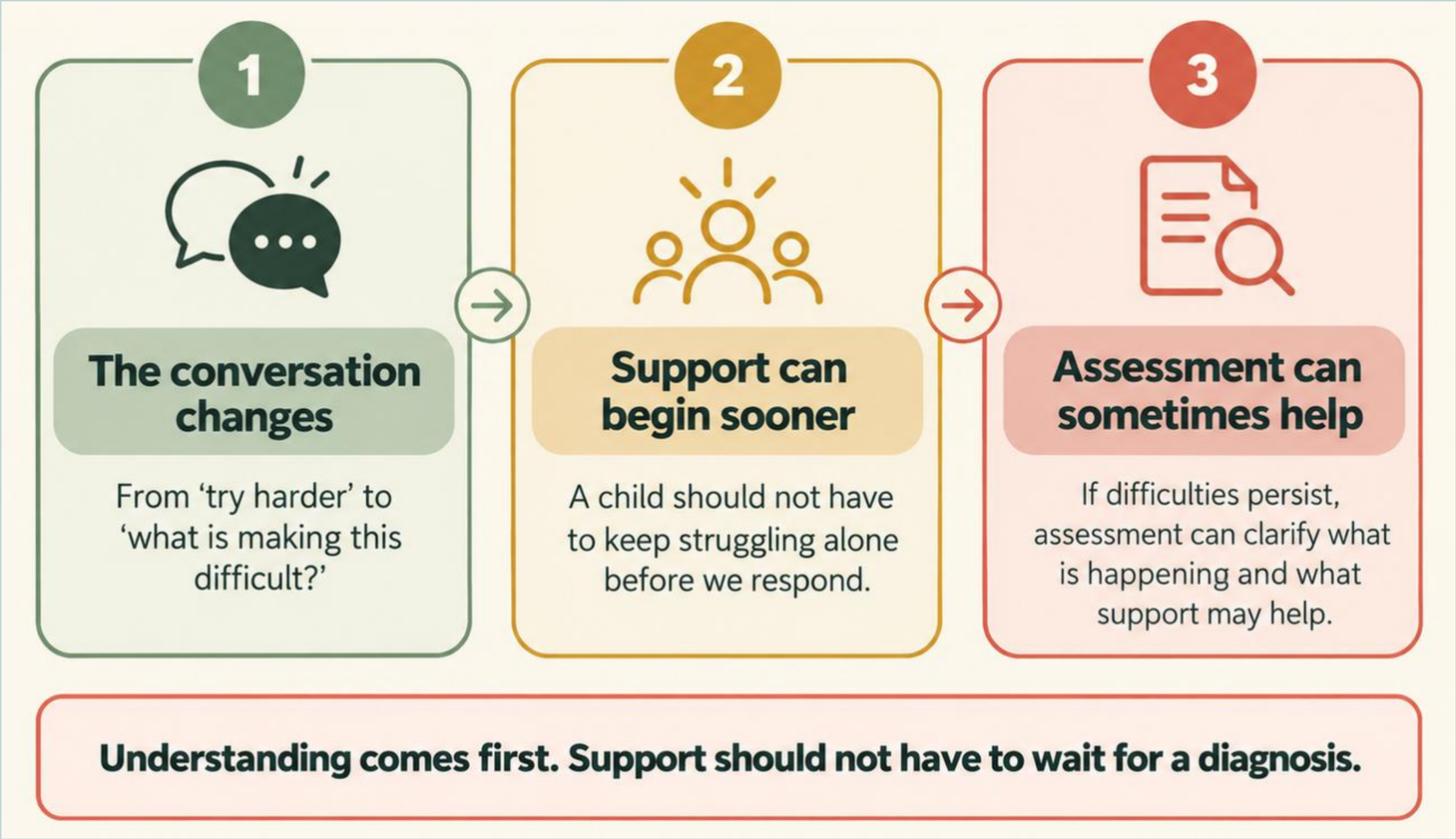
Students: If something feels difficult again & again, talk to someone you trust.

IT DOES NOT STAY IN THE CLASSROOM: THE COST



EARLIER RECOGNITION: A STARTING POINT

What if someone had noticed earlier, before the child started believing something was wrong with them?



FOR TEACHERS, FOR STUDENTS, FOR SCHOOLS



For teachers

1. Make instructions easier to follow: say them aloud and write them down.
2. Allow different ways of working: more time, a quieter space, or another way to respond.



For students

1. Try to describe where you are getting stuck, even if you do not know why yet.
2. Ask for one thing that might help and, if a friend seems stuck, help them reach out.



For schools

1. Make seeking help simple, clear, and private.
2. Build flexibility into everyday learning, not only after a diagnosis.



Small changes in how we teach, ask for help, and respond can make a big difference.

You may not see how hard someone is trying.

You can still make things easier for them.

Thank you.

Kavya Kathpalia

Mental Health & Social Impact Consultant

+9 years of experience

Contact: kathpaliakavya94@gmail.com

+91 7898434347