Choice, Pause Signals, and a Safe Stopping Point

What it looks like to make activities genuinely optional.

Why a clear stop rule matters

A child can find a page too personal, confusing, boring or emotionally uncomfortable. An educational task should never be framed as something they must complete to get better. A pause or refusal is useful communication, not a failure.

Before you begin

State the purpose simply and offer a small choice. Ask permission before starting. Keep ordinary sensory preferences in mind—some children dislike noise, touch, closed eyes or scripted breathing. Do not insist on any of those.

While doing the activity

Watch for signs that the child wants to stop. If they say no, move away, appear overwhelmed or go quiet in a way that concerns you, stop and offer ordinary supportive care. Do not push toward disclosure.

Afterward

Do not require a score or a big emotional improvement. Ask whether the activity was helpful, neutral or not for today—if the child wants to answer. Return to familiar routines. Speak with the child’s clinician if the activity raises concerns.

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A PHRASE YOU CAN USE

“We can stop now. We do not need to finish the page.”

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

Consider creating a personal help signal during a calm moment, not during a crisis.

REFERENCES & SCOPE

EMDRIA Children’s Toolkit guidance on adult support and stopping. This guide is informational; a licensed professional provides individualized assessment and treatment.

PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE

One question I would like to ask a professional:

One choice I can offer my child without pressure:

What would tell me that more support is needed?

Bring these notes to an appropriate conversation if useful. Do not record sensitive traumatic memories here.