

He's not being rude. He's at capacity.

You love him and you're not doing anything wrong. This isn't a list of complaints — it's the handful of things that make a visit go better, written down so nobody has to guess. Two minutes to read.

WHAT'S ACTUALLY GOING ON

His nervous system reads an ordinary request — say hello, come here, try this — as pressure. Not because he's defiant, and not because he doesn't want to. The wanting and the being-able-to are two separate systems, and only one of them is reliably online. The more people are watching, the harder it gets.

THINGS THAT HELP

- **Say hello, then carry on.** Don't wait for one back.
- **Skip the required lines.** No "say hello to Grandma," no "give me a hug," no "what do you say?"
- **Statements, not questions.** "There's cake in the kitchen" lands far better than "do you want cake?"
- **Let him leave the room.** Leaving is how he stays. It isn't rudeness.
- **Let him be near without joining in.** Sitting at the edge is participating.
- **Say nothing about what he eats.** Nothing at all, in either direction.
- **Praise quietly and later.** Applause turns a thing he chose into a thing he's now expected to do.

THINGS THAT DON'T

- Insisting on a hug, a greeting, or eye contact
- "He just needs firmer boundaries"
- Bribing or negotiating in front of everyone
- Repeating the request more warmly — patient waiting adds weight, it doesn't remove it
- Asking him why he did something
- Telling us how well behaved other children are

If he's easier with you than with us

Please don't offer it as reassurance. Children hold together for people they're less sure of, and let go with the people they feel safest with. Him falling apart at home is evidence that home is safe — not that we're getting it wrong. At a family table, "he's always fine with me" lands as an accusation, however kindly it's meant.

Holidays and big meals

Long gatherings are among the hardest things he does: noise, a full room, unfamiliar food, a long time at a table, and a lot of adults who'd like a word with him. If he disappears halfway through, eats separately, or never comes to the table, he's managing it — not rejecting you. Letting that happen without comment is the most helpful thing anyone can do.