

SOME ADVICE ABOUT BEHAVIOUR

Some children have behaviours that parents find difficult to manage and that cause considerable stress to the whole family.

It is always useful to start by trying to identify the reason for behaviour from the child's perspective and considering what the child is trying to communicate through their behaviour.

Some behaviours are directly linked to difficulties trying to

communicate. Other triggers might be social situations which they find stressful, unstructured time, sensory difficulties or change.

Understanding your child's difficulties can help you develop strategies to help behaviour problems.

You may find it helpful to track your child's behaviour in a diary, so you can begin to see patterns in behaviour and notice small, positive changes as you develop strategies.



Some possible underlying reasons for behaviour

- **frustration:** they can't do something or can't tell you what they want
- **fear:** they are frightened of something
- **strong feelings:** they are unhappy or angry about something
- **hyperactivity:** they have excess energy and cannot seem to burn it off
- **discomfort:** they are in pain
- **attention:** they have learnt they get your attention by behaving a certain way
- **lack of understanding:** they may need time to work out what you mean and so don't respond to an instruction when you expect them to
- **difficulty processing:** or making sense of sensory experiences in the environment.



Myth: *Children are just naughty, and if parents knew how to bring up their children they would behave like other children.*

Truth: This is probably the most hurtful myth as it shows a complete misunderstanding of what a child is feeling.

Autistic children and children with ADHD may behave in a way that is perceived by some as just naughty but no amount of good parenting can alter the fact that a child has a special educational need or disability.

SETTING THE SCENE FOR POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

All children will communicate their needs and respond to situations differently. But there are some general rules that will help you manage your child's day to day behaviour.

■ **Establish daily routines**

- Most children will cope more easily if they know in advance what is going to happen. Visual timetables can help with this
- Routines can also be used to set up clear boundaries and acceptable behaviour, which can be reinforced with rewards.

■ **Build communication**

- It is vital to have two-way communication with your child
- If your child has limited understanding, or little or no speech, there are ways of communicating you can try. This may be using simple language (one step instructions or key words), giving children time to understand what you've said or signed and repeating key instructions
- If you're asking your child to do something, give brief instructions and be specific. Instead of asking: "Can you tidy your bedroom?" say: "Please put your toys into the box and put the books back onto the shelf." This makes it clearer what your child needs to do and creates opportunities for praise when they get it right

- Don't forget your own non-verbal language/behaviour. Your tone, warmth, posture, eye contact and facial expression will all affect how your child responds to you
- You can also communicate by using visual supports – some people will understand things better if they see it rather than hear it. Seeing it, rather than saying it, helps the person retain and process information. You can use symbols, photographs or pictures familiar to the child.

The National Autistic Society has a section on their website about behaviour www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour.aspx

Visual Timetables

Often used with children who are on the autism spectrum and might be helpful to children with ADHD as can help them make sense of everyday life. Often used as a daily timetable, they enable children to understand what they are doing and when, give structure to the day and can reduce anxiety levels. Symbols are used to represent the tasks, activities or lessons.

Visual supports

These are usually a single symbol, picture or message used to provide structure and routine, encourage independence, build confidence, improve understanding, avoid frustration and anxiety, and provide opportunities to interact with others.

Visual supports can be used in a range of ways:

- as a single message, the child takes a yellow card



from their pocket when they need to go to the toilet, or puts purple card on the board when they're feeling stressed

- different coloured tablecloths, e.g. white for dinner time, blue for colouring time
- basic symbol to allow a person to express an opinion, e.g. by putting a thumbs down symbol next to one of today's activities, to show they didn't enjoy it
- emotion thermometer so an individual can place a marker to explain how they are feeling and learn how to recognise emotions
- time trackers to help with starting and finishing activities, and transition between activities.

More information here:

www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx and here: <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/5-point-scale-emotional-regulation/>

Praise and rewards

Be positive when your child behaves as you'd like. Give specific and evidence-based praise, instead of saying a general: "Thanks for doing that," you could say: "You washed the dishes really well. Thank you."

Give praise immediately and make it clear to your child that you're pleased and why.

Giving praise has so many benefits:

- helps a child's self-esteem
- shows them the difference between good and bad behaviour
- helps to set boundaries and rules, and

- reinforces the behaviours that you do want to see.

You can use a reward chart when your child needs to work on changing their behaviour. Your child collects stickers or tokens for the chart each time they behave the way you want. They then get a reward based on the number of stickers they have gathered. The stickers and the reward reinforce the praise that you give.

Alternatively, you can fill a jar with objects – glass beads, stones, and marbles. At the end of the day or week convert any objects into pocket money or small treats.

Social stories

Social stories™ were created by Carol Gray in 1991. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation

and why. The terms ‘social story’ and ‘social stories’ are trademarks originated and owned by Carol Gray.

A social story is a present tense story written about a situation which the child finds difficult to cope with. The aim is to increase their understanding and help them be more comfortable in situations.

Social stories may:

- describe a situation in terms of the relevant social clues and/or correct responses in a non-threatening format
- translate goals set into smaller understandable steps
- teach routines as well as helping to accommodate changes to routine
- address a wide variety of behaviours, including aggression, fear, obsessions and compulsions.

Social stories work especially well for autistic children because often they lack the ability to see situations from the perspective of others.

More information here: www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx

Exercise

Make sure your child gets lots of physical activity during the day. Walking, skipping and playing sport can help your child wear themselves out and improve their quality of sleep.

Living with ADHD's compact guide for parents includes 15 tips for parents: www.livingwithadhd.co.uk/files/adhd-a-compact-guide-for-parents-livingwithadhd.co.uk.pdf

NHS advice about ADHD can be found here: www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/living-with/

NHS advice about autism can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/autism-and-everyday-life/>

"Separate the child from the behaviour"
(K, aged 13)

MANAGING DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR

In some situations, children become anxious or distressed, which can trigger behaviour that challenges. It can take time to work out some triggers but it's important you do, so you can find ways to deal with the behaviour.

Keep social situations short and sweet. Invite friends to play, but keep playtimes short so your child doesn't lose self-control. Don't aim to do this when your child is feeling tired or hungry, such as after a day at school.

Devise strategies that remove or reduce the effect of triggers

If difficult behaviour keeps happening and you are unsure about the triggers, it can be helpful to keep a diary, or a behaviour chart, to try to learn more about it. A good example is an ABC chart:

- **A – antecedents** – the things that lead up to the behaviour
- **B – behaviour** – what the child is actually doing
- **C – consequences** – what happens in response to the child's behaviour

There is a similar model that some teachers and other professionals use called STAR – Settings, Triggers, Action, and Result. They may discuss this system with you.

Worry/Anxieties

The world can be an extremely challenging environment for an autistic child and many experience anxiety difficulties. If they do not have the tools to calm down when anxious, they may have a meltdown so developing strategies to manage anxiety and teach your child how to regulate their emotions will help.

Pick your battles carefully – when your child is autistic or has ADHD, it can seem that your entire day is spent reprimanding them. Focus on the behaviours that are the most worrying and work on those first.

Emotional recognition

Autistic people often struggle to recognise their emotional states. They can struggle to give them a label (e.g. angry, sad) and to recognise how they feel within their body and how this might make them behave.

Parents can support emotional recognition by:

- Modelling their own experience of emotions by labelling the emotion they are experiencing and talking about how it feels and how it makes them behave (e.g. “I have burnt the toast. I’m feeling angry now, it feels all hot inside.”)
- Using emotion cards and talking about how different emotions feel
- Drawing pictures of the body and talking about how different emotions affect your body (e.g. worry can make your heart go faster). There are lots of online resources to support this such as Blissful Kids’ website www.blissfulkids.com
- Accepting the emotions their child is feeling. All emotions are ok; it is the behaviour that can be difficult

- Labelling the child's emotions when you know they are experiencing them (e.g. "You seem angry now, that's ok.")
- Modelling coping strategies e.g. "When I'm angry I sometimes put on loud music."

Try to understand that there is always a reason for your child's behaviour; you may not be able to see the trigger or understand how important it is to them but just knowing there is one helps.

Here are some ways you can help your child manage anxieties and emotions:

- share different emotions together and talk about it being OK to feel worried, anxious, sad etc.
- talk about worries you have and encourage your child to tell you about the feelings they have like butterflies in their tummy
- praise your child when they tell you about worries and anxieties or use techniques they have been given
- use visual resources to teach the different feelings and emotions and talk about how to regulate emotions
- use worry monsters, worry beads, worry books, worry stones and other resources to help you child identify and manage to control their worries. Explain that once they pass the worry on it is someone else's worry to deal with and not theirs
- teach breathing techniques and introduce calm music or apps they can listen to when anxious to help them regulate themselves
- limit a child's exposure to violent, scary books, videos games and if they see anything like this that worries them talk about it and explain

- offer distractions when you see your child is becoming anxious, move their focus onto something else around them, give them a comforter, encourage them to run or jump
- make sure your child has downtime in their day to regulate themselves and manage stimulation
- introduce a calming box, punch bag or dark den which your child can use in the recovery phase.

I love chewing things -
I don't like loud noises like
are school fire alarm.

I don't like eating.

I find it hard to go to sleep.

I do not like waking up at
01:00 to 04:00 in the morning, I wake
up because I have got my self used
to it.

Please may you help me get
to sleep.



Myth: “Stimming” is strange behaviour.

Truth: The word “stimming” refers to self-stimulating behaviours, usually involving repetitive movements or sounds.

Almost everybody stims in some way such as tapping feet or chewing gum. There are various forms of behaviour that are characterised as stimming; it’s not just rocking, chewing, waving arms, or repetitive playing. It could be whistling or doing anything repetitively. The point is that a child who stims is behaving in that way as they find it comforting. It is part of a diagnosis tool for autism.

Stimming

The word ‘stimming’ refers to self-stimulating behaviours, usually involving repetitive movements or sounds. There are several reasons for stimming which include:

1. Over-stimulation:

Stimming can help block out sensory overload.

2. Under-stimulation:

Stimming helps provide extra sensory input when needed.

3. Management of emotions: Both positive and negative emotions can

trigger stimming. We’ve all seen physical reactions to joy or excitement, such as jumping or waving of hands. Frustration or anger may intensify a stim to the point of it becoming destructive.

4. Self-regulation: Some stims serve the purpose of soothing or comforting.

Meltdowns

A meltdown is an intense response to overwhelming situations. It is not a temper tantrum; it is not bad behaviour and it is not a child being naughty.

A meltdown happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily loses control. This can be expressed verbally (shouting, screaming, crying), physically (kicking, lashing out, biting) or both.

Many will show signs of distress before having a meltdown, which is sometimes referred to as the “trigger” or “rumble”.

They may start to exhibit signs of anxiety such as pacing, seeking reassurance through repetitive questioning or physical signs such as rocking or becoming very still. At this stage, there may still be a chance to prevent a meltdown.

Strategies to consider include distraction, diversion, helping the person use calming strategies such as fiddle toys or listening to music, removing any potential triggers, and staying calm yourself.

Tips to help you and your child through them:

- keep calm, limit communication and stay positive
- talk to your child in a slow, calm, controlled voice
- empathise with them, reassure them you love them and are there to help them when they are ready
- if you can, safely get down to the child’s level to talk to them but give them space. If they are hitting out or shouting to be left alone give them space
- offer a hug, hold of their hands, massage their feet, rub their back etc. when they have calmed down

- create a safe place for them to feel secure and away from others, provide items they can stretch, pull, pinch, punch, squeeze and express any feelings they have bottled
- stay close but give them space to stretch out and roll if needed.

Once calm try to teach deep breathing exercises, clenching and unclenching fists, play relaxing music and reassure them again they are loved no matter what.

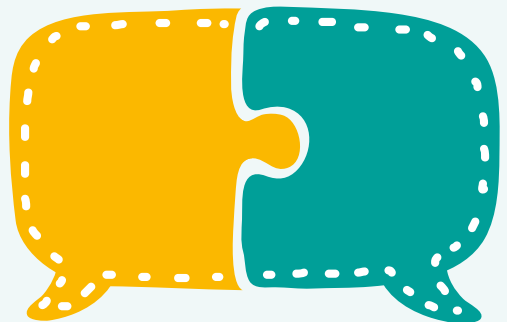
Shutdown is being frozen following a very stressful event. Some autistic people can become very quiet and self-contained or “freeze” in response to stress rather than experiencing a “meltdown”.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation’s website has a lot of helpful information about behaviour support www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk

Self-injuring behaviours

There might be a number of factors causing a young person to self-injure which include:

- They feel they are not being listened to
- They have been told off
- They feel they have little or no choice about things
- They have been bullied
- They are feeling unwell.



The Royal College of Psychiatrists have information on their website for parents and carers: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/information-for-parents-and-carers/self-harm-in-young-people-for-parents-and-carers>

Helpful tip: The National Autistic Society's website has a section around 'self-injury': www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/challenging-behaviour/self-injury.aspx.

Sleep Advice

Many people with autism or ADHD are likely to suffer from disturbed sleep patterns at some point in their lives.

Reasons for this could include:

- having difficulty settling, winding down and going to sleep
- waking repeatedly during the night, or having difficulty getting back to sleep after waking up to go to the toilet
- increased anxiety or an inability to relax causing insomnia
- social cueing problems, where an autistic person doesn't make the connection between others in the house going to bed and their own need to sleep
- irregular secretion of the sleep hormone melatonin, which regulates sleep patterns, or having atypical circadian rhythms (body clock)
- neurological conditions such as epilepsy
- sensory differences, such as increased sensitivity to blue light from smart phones, laptops and other screens, or sensitivity to certain sounds or white noise,

which may be upsetting or distracting and keep them awake

- problems caused by food allergies, which could cause gastrointestinal issues and discomfort, or increased sensitivity to caffeine or other stimulants, which can disturb sleep
- hypersomnia – sleeping too much. Increased exhaustion could be caused by the additional stress autistic people experience in social situations.

Strategies for dealing with sleep disorders

- Keep a sleep diary. This can help establish any unusual patterns of sleep and identifying factors but also be shown to professionals such as teachers, GPs etc.
- Establish a reassuring routine. Use visual timetables to make it easier to follow, limit screen time (TV, computer, tablet,



smart phone) or exposure to bright lights an hour or two before bedtime, as these can inhibit the production of the sleep hormone Melatonin

- Make the bedroom more comfortable. Some children have sensory difficulties which makes it harder for them to relax, as well as stay asleep
- Block out light using dark curtains or black-out blinds
- Help reduce noise by using thick carpets, shutting doors, turning off appliances and moving your child's bed away from a wall with activity going on the other side

- Block out noises by letting the person use ear plugs or listen to music through headphones
- Remove labels from bedding and night clothes, or try bedding and nightclothes made from other materials
- Reduce smells coming into the room by closing the door fully, or by using scented oils that the person finds relaxing
- Remove distractions, such as toys on the bed and pictures on the wall (unless the person finds these relaxing), and consider a different colour on the walls
- Use relaxation techniques such as having a bath, massage, quiet time or gentle exercise such as yoga, to help the person wind down before bedtime.

TOYS AND BEHAVIOURAL AIDS

Do2Learn

- www.do2learn.com

Free printable activities and picture cards plus forms to assess behaviour and implement strategies to manage it.

Orkid Ideas

- www.orkidideas.com

Provide tools to help children develop coping strategies to manage their day. Downloadable resources for anxiety, behaviour and emotions, communication and social skills, timetable, schedule and routine.

The Play Doctors

- www.theplaydoctors.co.uk

Provide resources and visual aids to support

communication, behaviour, anxiety (worry books and toolkits), social skills including social stories and emotions.

Twinkl

■ www.twinkl.co.uk

Large range of free downloadable behaviour and reward charts.

Widgit

■ www.widgit.com

Printable symbols for use with visual timetables and visual aids/supports.

Chewigem

■ www.chewigem.co.uk

Offer a range of chewing, fidget and sensory aids.

Fledglings

■ www.fledglings.org.uk

Toys, clothes and sensory products for disabled children.

ROMPA

■ www.rompa.com

Provide specialist play, leisure, therapy and sport equipment including sensory toys and equipment.

Sense Toys

■ www.sensetoys.com

Sensory toys and educational resources for children with special needs, including autism and ADHD.

Spacekraft

■ www.spacekraft.co.uk

Supply an extensive range of multi-sensory toys and equipment.

TFH Special Needs Toys

■ www.specialneedstools.com

Wide range of robust toys and equipment including multi-sensory, soft environment equipment, toys, switches and music.

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