

Behavioural Needs

A guide for parents of children and young people with Autism

How do you know if your child needs support with Behavioural Needs?

People with Autism may use behaviour, appropriate or otherwise, in order to communicate, especially if they lack more appropriate means in which to express their needs or fears. Some examples of difficulties with behaviour are listed below:

- Refuse or ignore requests
- Challenge rules and regulations
- Behave in socially inappropriate ways, making socially inappropriate comments or being overly friendly to strangers
- Verbal or physical aggressive behaviour
- Self-stimulatory behaviour, like rocking or hand-flicking
- Pica (eating or mouthing non-edible items)
- Hurt themselves or others – for example, by head-banging or biting
- Insisting on following a strict routine, controlling how things are done
- Talking obsessively about something
- Use of repetition to manage situations

There is usually a function for the behaviour, and there can be a number of reasons for this. Those with Autism might behave in challenging ways due to the following broad categories:

- Difficulties managing social situations
- Misinterpreting what other people are saying or communicating to them
- Difficulties identifying and communicating their own emotions
- Difficulties predicting situations and knowing what to expect; anxiety about changes
- Sensory concerns (either needing to seek out sensory stimuli, or else avoidance of unpleasant ones)

Your child's challenging behaviour might also have specific triggers:

- If familiar routines and rituals are broken.
- Transitions: this includes small transitions from activity to activity through to larger ones such as changing schools
- Particular sensory sensitivities: they might like feeling or touching particular surfaces or objects; they might get upset if they're not allowed to.
- Your child might get upset if too much is happening around them, or if they find a particular noise overwhelming, or it's too bright for them.
- Unrealistic expectations: like all children, a child with Autism can get frustrated if they're expected to do something they doesn't have the skills for, like getting dressed by himself.
- Tiredness: Children with ASD can have sleep difficulties. If your child isn't getting enough good-quality sleep, this can cause difficult daytime behaviour. They may also be overly tired if they have had to manage lots of social situations, such as a day at school or a family gathering.
- Discomfort: this could include things like the feeling of clothes against skin, a prickly label, a haircut, wet pants, a bump or pain.

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How to manage the behaviour

Some of the things that have worked for other parents of children with Autism are listed below. Every family is different, so they won't all work in your situation. You may have to try several before you find ones that work. Also, you will probably find that different ones work at different times. There won't be one single solution that fixes everything!

- The first step is trying to understand what function the behaviour has. You can use behaviour diaries such as the one from the National Autistic Society website (<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/challenging-behaviour.aspx>) to help you to identify patterns.
- Understanding the triggers of your child's behaviour will help you to pre-empt them so situations can be managed or avoided as appropriate.
- Using visual Supports such as timetables, lists, and diaries can help to your organise your child's thoughts and support their memory of what will be happening during the day. A question mark can be used for unknown events or changes in routine.
- Giving your child time and space prior to or following a difficult situation for them will help to calm them again.

Autism is pervasive, which means that your child will have needs in more than one area. You are likely to find that you need to mix strategies like those above with other strategies. As your child grows and develops, their needs will change, meaning that the strategies that work will also change. This can be tricky, but it's the same for all kids and it is how they make sure we stay alert! Once you have tried a few things you will hopefully be getting a clearer picture about your child's ASD and what works for them. Learning more about Autism can help you make more sense of all these complications. Spending time with other parents who are going through this can also be a big support, providing information and ideas but also emotional support if you need it.

Understanding your child and learning more about Behaviour

Once you have tried a few strategies, and learned more about your child and their ASD, you might be interested in finding out more about Behaviour. The following resources might be worth looking into:

1. National Autism Society: Behaviour guidelines <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour.aspx>
2. National Autistic Society **PARENT HELPLINE: 0808 800 4104** <https://www.autism.org.uk/>
3. BISNET <https://www.cedaonline.org.uk/bis-net>

Recommended Reading

The Incredible 5 Point scale - Kari Dunn Buron

The Red Beast: Controlling Anger in Children with Asperger's Syndrome - K.I. Al-Ghani

Autism: Understanding behaviour - Caroline Hattersley

Autism; Understanding and Managing Anger - Andrew Powell