

Autism Support

Addressing Challenging Behaviours

When challenging behaviours arise, it's important to know how you can empower someone with autism to change the behaviour.

If we want to help an autistic person change a challenging behaviour, we must first understand its function. Look for patterns to help you identify the reason behind the behaviour:

Behaviours that challenge:

- Get in the way of learning
- Damage or injure . . .
 - Self
 - Others
 - Property
 - Social connection



1. What is this person trying to tell you?

- Is the behaviour sensory?
- Is it trying to accomplish something tangible?
- Is it seeking attention?
- Is it trying to get out of a demand?
- What was happening before?
- What were others doing at that time?
- What time of day did the behaviour occur?
- What was the noise level?
- Was this a new or familiar task?
- Was it a structured or open-ended activity?



2. Help the person understand what you want to see (not what you don't want to see).



3. What kind of choices do they have? Help them brainstorm.



4. Allow them to choose the best option.



5. Give them a voice for the future (visuals, sign language, key words).



6. How can you give them more control the next time the behaviour comes up?

Use the Behaviour Change Plan to identify a challenging behaviour and write out what the plan is before it happens again. An important part of mapping out a plan is to consider what the person with autism needs to learn so they have the capacity to change. This is so they have positive alternative ways of meeting the function of their behaviour.

Behaviour Change Plan (example)

Behaviour	Running off in public
Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting autonomy • Impulse control, overexcitement • Lack of expectations • Love of being chased
Desired Behaviour	Walking beside me
Preventative Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly set expectations • Take a body break before the outing • Watch for signs of overexcitement and offer a sit-down break with sensory calming
Reactive Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say “Stop!” and “Wait for me!” • Then validate by saying, “You are so excited, let’s do this together!” • Hold their hand and say, “When you run away, I will hold your hand. I don’t want you to get lost.” • Hold their hand for a few minutes.
Plan for teaching Replacement Behaviour	<p>Teach them to walk beside you; practice walking in a hallway, museums, libraries, stores, parks, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold their hand when entering all new environments, until their excitement goes down • Once comfortable in a setting, say, “Walk beside me and I will go where you want to go” • If they run away, say, “Oh no, you forgot to walk beside me. Let’s hold hands again”; after a few minutes of hand holding, review the expectations and try again • If they start to pick up speed, this is a sign of excitement rising; offer a sit-down break with sensory calming • Keep first visits short and leave while the going is good • Give the choice of ending the outing during each trial (they may be overstimulated)
Other Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach “Stop!” and “Wait for me!” • Build up cognitive self-regulation skills, especially impulse control • Teach them to say, “Let’s sit down” or “All done” when they are overstimulated

Behaviour Change Plan

Behaviour	
Function	
Desired Behaviour	
Preventative Plan	
Reactive Plan	
Plan for teaching Replacement Behaviour	
Other Resources	