

Managing your child's behaviour

Any behaviour, negative or positive, is a form of communication. For children with autism their negative behaviour is often telling you that they don't understand or can't accept something that is happening to them or their environment.

Negative behaviour is more likely due to the child's impairments in four areas;

Communication

- Difficulty expressing needs and wants
- Difficulty understanding others needs and wants

Flexibility of thinking

- Disliking change and having set ways and expectations of sequences of events and everyday routines and how games and toys should be played with.
- Problems 'mind reading' and understanding other people's actions, points of view and behaviour.
- Poor ability to predict, generalise and transfer skills and knowledge to a new situation.
- Literal understanding

Social interaction

- Little interest in others
- Not knowing how to 'be' around others

Sensory difficulties

- Sensory overload

STAR Approach

The National Autistic Society Earlybird Programme refers to the STAR approach to behaviour (Zarowska and Clements 1994).

This approach looks at behaviour as serving a purpose for the child. It enables them to achieve a specific result. It considers:

Settings

- The physical environment
- Interactions and relationships
- Activities
- Physical well-being, hunger, tiredness, illness etc.
- Thoughts, fears and moods

Triggers

- Wants

- Dislikes/fears
- Associations

Actions

- The observable behaviour

Results

- Events which happen following the behaviour

Setting	Trigger	Action	Result
When?	What's said or done.	What the child does	Avoids an activity
Where?	What <i>doesn't</i> happen.		Gets a specific toy/food
Who?	Final straw		Makes contact
What's expected of child?	Cues for established patterns of behaviour.		Expresses feelings.
The child's mood/ emotional state.			Controls stimulation.

The chart should be completed over a period of time to enable an analysis of the child's behaviour. This should lead to you being able to make changes to lessen triggers.

Some suggestions to help

- Try to stay calm
- Simplify your language – less is more!
- Focus on what you want, not what you don't. Give positive instructions - 'Quiet voice', 'Hands down', 'Good walking'
- 'First this....then....'
- Try visual support – symbols, written instructions
- Remind child of the rules/routine.
- Reason at other times.
- Reduce body language and facial distractions.
- Try a different adult (often being given a demand by a different person is acceptable to the child)
- Distract
- Compromise – give a limited choice.
- Simplify language
- Avoid trigger words – 'NO'
- Teach child a calming down strategy to be used if you notice a child becoming tense or anxious – going to a quiet/favoured area, counting, tense and relax muscles, jumping up and down etc.

STAR Behaviour chart

Name

DOB

Setting (Date, time, where, who)	Trigger	Action (What the child does)	Result (What child gains/loses)