

Hints and tips for managing behaviours



What is behaviour?

All communication is information, behaviour is anything that a person does that we can see or hear and is learned over time and through experiences. It is important to teach you child appropriate behaviours from a young age, and provide them with strategies for times when they feel anxious or overwhelmed.

As autistic children experience the world differently, they can display a range of varying behaviours such as sensory or communication differences, resistance to unexpected change, lack of sleep and transitions illness. Additionally, some autistic children are not able to communicate their needs as easily as their neurotypical peers, which can result in heightened anxiety or frustration.

Understanding the reason behind a behaviour can assist you to support your autistic child. Utilising strategies that meet their needs and help with emotional regulation may aid with behaviours that can be challenging.

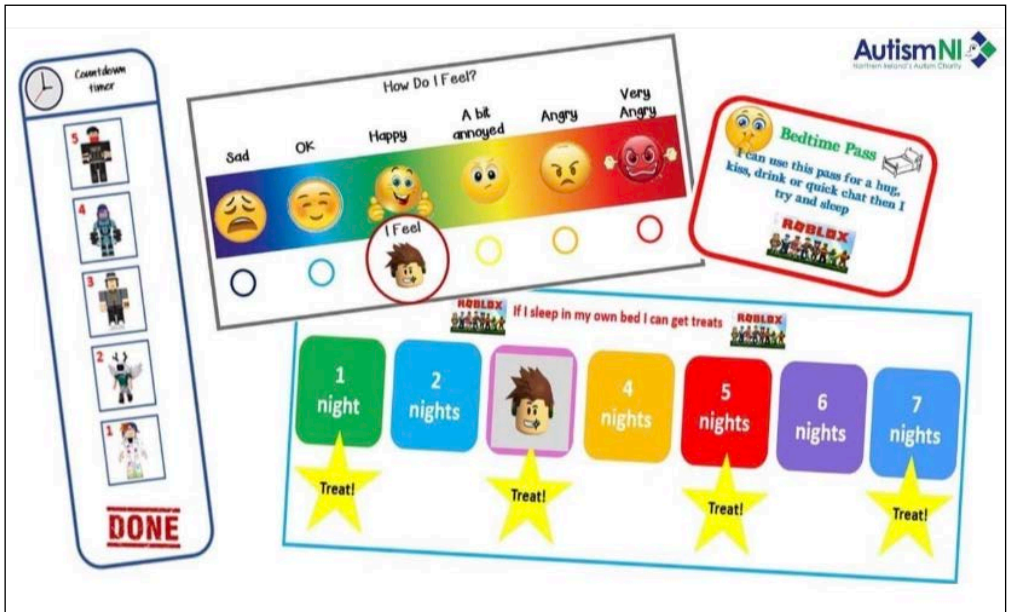
In situations which are stressful for your autistic child, things can escalate quickly and they may become distressed. This can lead to a 'meltdown' for your autistic child.

'Meltdowns' can be misinterpreted as a tantrum or aggression, however, your child is experiencing an acute stress response which often involves overly stimulated situations with increased levels of anxiety and distress.

Key things to consider when observing your child's behaviour:

- What happened before the behaviour occurred?
- What was the behaviour?
- What happened immediately after the behaviour?
- Is there a pattern to the behaviour? (For example, does it occur when your child returns from school, did it happen because your child did not fully understand what was asked or did it occur when the environment was too noisy).

Understanding the reason behind the behaviour can help you to develop strategies that will support your child.



Why use visuals?

Visuals help to explain what is expected of a person, it will help your child to understand the environment around them and to organise themselves. Visuals are great for helping autistic children express their feelings, needs and wants. When your child is feeling overwhelmed a visual method can be the easiest way for them to express this. Some autistic children may respond better to actual images rather than symbols.

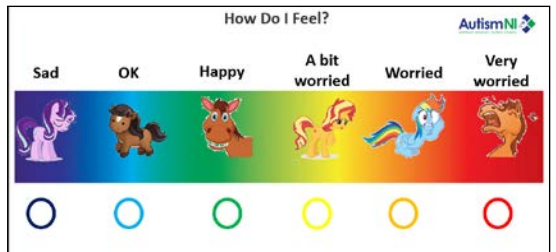
Strategies to try:

Quiet area - provide your child with an area in the house that they can go to when they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious. This could be their bedroom or a quiet space in the living room. Use calming activities in these areas to help relax your child, such as lavender smells, books or colouring in.



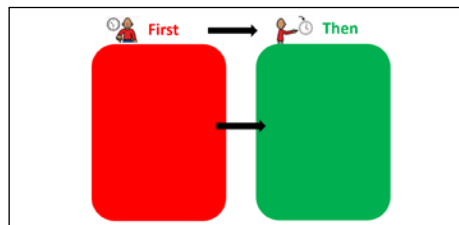
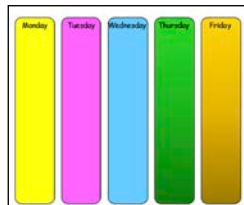
Sensory activities - throughout the day completing sensory activities with your child can help them release any sensory tensions. For example, jumping jacks, tight squeezes, push ups against a wall or bear crawls.

Emotions board - use an emotions board with your child to help them to express how they feel. You may need to teach your child different emotions and support them express how they are feeling, enabling your child to use the board effectively.



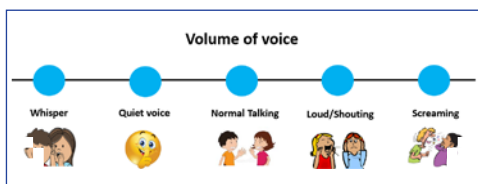
Social stories - are a great way of supporting your child. They can help support with unexpected changes or distressing situations. The presentation and content should be tailored to each autistic child's individual needs.

Weekly planner - use a planner to show your child what they are doing each day. This can be particularly helpful at times of school holidays. Your child will have structure during the school day. However, during holidays, they can struggle to adjust. Weekly planners can help reduce anxiety, to prepare for transitions and, of course, ease them back to school after breaks.



First/Then, Daily Schedule - is useful to help your child understand 'what they are doing'. Remember to use objects, pictures or symbols to aid your child's understanding of what happens now and what is coming next.

Volume control - some autistic children may experience trouble modulating their voice. You can use a volume visual aid, to help assist your child. Use it firstly as a game, supporting them to recognise different volumes.



Token charts - can be a way to encourage children, they can help to promote understanding of what you are trying to achieve together. Use your child's interests on the chart to support them and make it something they want to use, for example; Peppa Pig, Roblox, anime, football, etc.

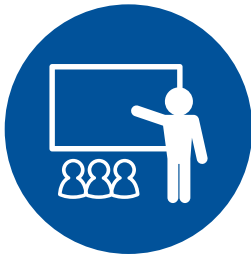
Countdown timer - is a great resource to use to help prepare your child with transitions. Showing them the countdown timer may help them visually see when the transition will happen. Be consistent, once you reach the end of the timer follow through with what you said, for example "you have 5 minutes before bedtime."



Top tips to remember:

- All communication is information
- Communicate clearly and consistently
- Provide structure
- Support your child to identify emotions
- Offer a quiet area
- Use visuals.

Investing time while your child is young will help them in the future manage behaviours, feelings, be more independent, and assist with emotional regulation. If you find strategies that best support your child share that knowledge with your family and their school.



Training

Autism NI run accredited training courses across Northern Ireland, many of these are free for parents/carers. We pride ourselves on providing training and advice that is evidence based, practical and to the highest standard of accuracy to ensure it is effective in supporting autistic people and their families.



Useful resources:

- Autism NI Helpline – 02890 401729 (Option 1)
- Autism NI Website – www.autismni.org/resources
- Autism NI Rainbow Resource Kit (Downloadable from Website)





Autism NI is Northern Ireland's main autism charity and works to provide life-changing services for over 35,000 autistic people currently living in Northern Ireland.

Our work wouldn't be possible without the generosity of our supporters. Your donation can help us continue to provide invaluable autism services, and build an inclusive society where autistic people can reach their full potential.

To make a donation, please visit www.autismni.org or call us on **028 9040 1729**.

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