UNDERSTANDING AUTISM & EARLY DEVELOPMENT: WORKSHOP SERIES

Behavior, Regulation & Connection

Participant Workbook

Mango Tree Center

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Understanding Autism & Early Development Workshop Series
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Mango Tree Center

About This Workshop

Behavior, Regulation, and Connection is the second workshop in the Understanding Autism & Early Development, a four-part workshop series designed for families and professionals who support young children. In this workshop, you will learn to understand behavior through a developmental lens and explore the roles of communication, sensory differences, and emotional regulation. This workshop will introduce practical, evidence-informed strategies for responding to behavior, supporting regulation, and strengthening connection with children.

This workbook was created as a companion to the workshop and includes key information from the presentation, opportunities for continued reflection and learning, practical activities, resources, and references.

Partnership & Acknowledgments

This workshop is presented through a partnership between Mango Tree Center and the Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs Section of the Hawai'i State Department of Health through Project LAUNCH, a five-year initiative funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

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Table of Contents

About Mango Tree Center & Bethann Paul 4

Introduction 5

Section 1: What is Behavior?.....7

Section 2: The History of Behavior Analysis.....10

Section 3: Communication Lens.....18

Section 4: Functions & ABC's.....20

Section 5: Functional Strategies.....24

Section 6: Seeking Professional Help & Additional Supports.....57

FAQ.....59

Glossary of Terms.....61

Resources 63

References.....74

About Mango Tree Center

Mango Tree Center is a multidisciplinary psychology practice in Honolulu providing comprehensive, evidence-based, and identity-affirming care for neurodivergent individuals and their families across the lifespan.

Our team includes psychologists, behavior analysts, therapists, and other professionals with specialized expertise in autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions. Services include autism and ADHD assessment, individual and group therapy, caregiver coaching, consultation, and community education.

Our approach is neurodiversity-affirming, trauma-informed, family-centered, and grounded in the belief that meaningful support begins with understanding each person's individual strengths, needs, experiences, and goals.

About Bethann

Bethann Paul, BCBA, LBA is a licensed clinical leader and Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). She is a practitioner at Mango Tree Center, based in Honolulu. She specializes in scaling high-quality clinical care within school administrations, multidisciplinary teams, and telehealth platforms. As a practitioner, she is dedicated to bridging the gap between clinical research and home-based application by empowering caregivers through systematic training in ABA techniques.

Throughout her nearly 20-year career, Bethann has collaborated with ABA pioneers such as Dr. Mark Dixon and Dr. Greg Hanley to implement groundbreaking procedures and programs, including the PEAK and AIM curricula as well as Practical Functional Assessment (PFA) and Skill-Based Treatment (SBT) methodology. These trauma-informed, ethical, and compassionate ABA approaches are designed to reduce severe, unsafe behavior while increasing cognitive and emotional flexibility.

Connect With Mango Tree Center

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Aloha!

Thank you for joining us for **Behavior, Regulation, & Connection,** part of the *Understanding Autism & Early Development Workshop Series*.

Autism is complex, and our understanding of it continues to evolve. This workbook is designed to accompany the workshop and give you something you can return to afterward—whether you are a parent or caregiver, educator, healthcare professional, service provider, autistic person, or simply someone interested in learning more.

Inside, you'll find:

- **Key concepts** from the presentation, with additional context and explanation
- **Research highlights** and tools for making sense of autism science
- **Activities and reflection exercises** to explore on your own after the workshop
- **Practical tools** for understanding behavior, identifying needs, and thinking about support
- **Resources** for continued learning, including Hawai'i-specific resources
- **References** for the research discussed throughout the workshop

A Note About Our Approach

Throughout this workbook, we approach autism from a neurodiversity-affirming perspective. This means recognizing autism as a meaningful part of human neurological diversity while also acknowledging that autistic people can experience real challenges, disability, and support needs—sometimes substantial ones.

Our goal is not to minimize those challenges or to romanticize autism. It is to understand autistic people more fully: their strengths and support needs, their observable behavior and internal experiences, and the ways that both individual differences and the surrounding environment can affect daily life. There is no one way to be autistic, and there is no single approach to support that will be right for every autistic person.

A Note About Language

You may encounter different language used to talk about autism. Some people prefer identity-first language (for example, autistic person), while others prefer person-first language (person with autism). Research and community discussions suggest that preferences are mixed and can vary across individuals, families, communities, cultures, and settings.

How to Use This Workbook

Look for recurring features throughout the workbook:



KEY IDEA

Important concepts to remember.



SCIENCE CHECK

Tools for thinking critically about research findings.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Ways to translate what we're learning into everyday support.



REFLECTION

Opportunities to connect the material with your own experiences, questions, or work.



TRY THIS

Activities that invite you to apply what you're learning, explore ideas more deeply, or connect concepts to real-life experiences.

Section 1
What is Behavior?

Understanding Behavior

From the moment we open our eyes in the morning, we engage in hundreds of behaviors throughout the day. Whether we are getting dressed, eating breakfast, talking to others, or completing daily tasks, behavior is a natural and constant part of our everyday lives.

A behavior is an action that can be directly **observed, counted, or timed**.

When describing behavior, focus on what you can see or hear, rather than what you assume an individual is thinking, feeling, or intending.

A helpful question to ask yourself is:
"What would I have seen or heard if I were watching a video of this moment?"

This simple question helps us move away from subjective interpretations or assumptions and toward clear, objective descriptions of behavior. By describing what actually happened, we can better recognize patterns, understand what may be influencing behavior, and identify ways to provide meaningful support.

Throughout this workbook, we will explore new perspectives on understanding behavior and discuss practical, evidence-based strategies for responding to challenging behaviors.

Why does this matter?

Many children, including autistic children and children with other developmental differences, may engage in behaviors that others find confusing, stressful, or challenging to understand and support.

When parents, teachers, professionals, and other caregivers use **vague labels** such as rude, stubborn, defiant, aggressive, anxious, or unmotivated to describe a child's behavior, these terms can:

- Carry different meanings for different people.
- Mix together what we observe with our interpretations or assumptions about why the behavior occurred.
- Make it more difficult to understand the behavior and identify appropriate ways to support the child.

Instead, practicing **clear, specific, and observable descriptions of behavior** helps us:

- Communicate more clearly with others supporting the child.
- Recognize patterns in when, where, and how behaviors occur.
- Measure progress and determine whether behaviors are changing over time.
- Remain *curious* about why a behavior may be occurring rather than assuming we already know.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Instead of:	Describe what you observe...
"My child is being aggressive."	"My child *slapped* his peer's desk with an open hand."
"She is refusing and stubborn."	"She *remained seated* after being asked to line up."
"He is being disrespectful."	"He *yelled* 'No!' and *threw* his pencil."



TRY THIS: Behavior or Not?

Circle each question with whether each scenario is a *Behavior or Non-Behavior/Internal State*.

1. Covering both ears when the fire alarm sounds.	Behavior	OR	Internal State
2. Feeling frustrated when asked to stop playing a favorite game.	Behavior	OR	Internal State
3. Repeatedly tapping a pencil on the desk during class.	Behavior	OR	Internal State
4. Walking away from the group during a classroom activity.	Behavior	OR	Internal State
5. Worrying about making a mistake during a presentation.	Behavior	OR	Internal State

Answer key: 1–Behavior | 2–Internal State | 3–Behavior | 4–Behavior | 5– Internal State



REFLECTION

Think of 1–3 behaviors you have observed in a child that you find challenging, confusing, or difficult to respond to.

Behaviors I Want to Better Understand:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Section 2
The History of Behavior Analysis

The scientific study of behavior has evolved over the past century, shifting from early theories about observable actions to systematic methods for understanding why behaviors occur and how the environment influences them.

Early 1900s: John B. Watson and Behaviorism
Psychologist John B. Watson helped establish ***behaviorism*** by emphasizing the scientific study of observable, measurable behaviors rather than relying on speculation about internal mental processes. Rather than focusing on hidden consciousness and introspective analysis, he transformed the field of psychology into a strict, empirical, data-driven science grounded in measurable environmental variables.





1930s–1950s: B. F. Skinner and Radical Behaviorism
Psychologist B. F. Skinner expanded behavioral science through his research on ***operant conditioning***, demonstrating how environmental consequences can influence the future occurrence of behavior. His work helped establish the foundation for understanding ***Antecedent–Behavior–Consequence (ABC)*** relationships. Importantly, Skinner's philosophy of ***radical behaviorism*** also recognized private events, such as thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, as part of behavior. Although these experiences cannot be directly observed by others, they remain important to understanding human behavior.

1980s–1990s: Iwata and Experimental Functional Analysis
Historically, some approaches to challenging behaviors focused primarily on stopping unwanted actions through punishment, restrictions, or other consequences, without adequately examining why the behaviors occurred.

A major advancement in behavioral assessment came from the research of Iwata and colleagues (1982), who demonstrated a systematic approach called ***experimental functional analysis.***

Rather than assuming the reason for a challenging behavior, researchers examined how behavior changed under different environmental conditions. Their research evaluated four conditions:

- ***Attention***: Does the behavior occur more frequently when it produces attention from others?
- ***Escape***: Does the behavior occur more frequently when it allows the individual to escape or avoid demands?
- ***Alone***: Does the behavior persist without social interaction, suggesting that it may produce its own reinforcing consequences?
- ***Play (Control)***: What happens when attention and preferred activities are available and demands are minimized?

By systematically comparing these conditions, researchers could identify environmental factors that may be *maintaining* challenging behaviors.

Current Modern Practice: Function-Based Behavior Support
This research helped advance the use of function-based behavioral interventions, which emphasize understanding why a behavior occurs before selecting intervention strategies.

Today, these principles inform two commonly used approaches:

- ***Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)*:** A process of gathering information to understand the circumstances and possible functions of challenging behaviors.
- ***Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)*:** An individualized plan that uses assessment findings to identify proactive supports, teach appropriate replacement skills, and guide responses to challenging behaviors.

SCIENCE CHECK: Radical Behaviorism Recognizes Internal Experiences



One common misconception about behaviorism is that it focuses only on observable behaviors while ignoring thoughts, feelings, and other internal experiences.

However, B. F. Skinner's radical behaviorism recognizes that private events, such as thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, are real and important parts of human behavior and experience.

Skinner proposed that behavior and internal experiences can be understood by examining several interacting influences:

- **Biology and Evolution (Phylogeny)**: Our biological characteristics, inherited tendencies, and evolutionary history.
- **Learning History (Ontogeny)**: Our past experiences and how previous consequences have shaped our behavior over time.
- **Current Environment**: The situations, expectations, interactions, and conditions surrounding us in the present moment.

Radical behaviorism also emphasizes that simply labeling an internal state does not necessarily explain why a behavior occurs.

For example, saying that a child is yelling because they are "angry" may describe their emotional experience, but it does not fully explain what triggered the behavior, what the child may be communicating, or what factors are maintaining it.

The Iceberg Model: Outward Behaviors May Reflect Hidden Internal Experiences

The *Iceberg Model* reminds us that the behaviors we observe are often just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface are internal experiences, unmet needs, and environmental stressors that may contribute to a child's behavior.



KEY IDEA

What we see is only part of the story. By looking beneath the surface, we can better understand the child's experiences, identify potential stressors, and respond with empathy, curiosity, and appropriate support.

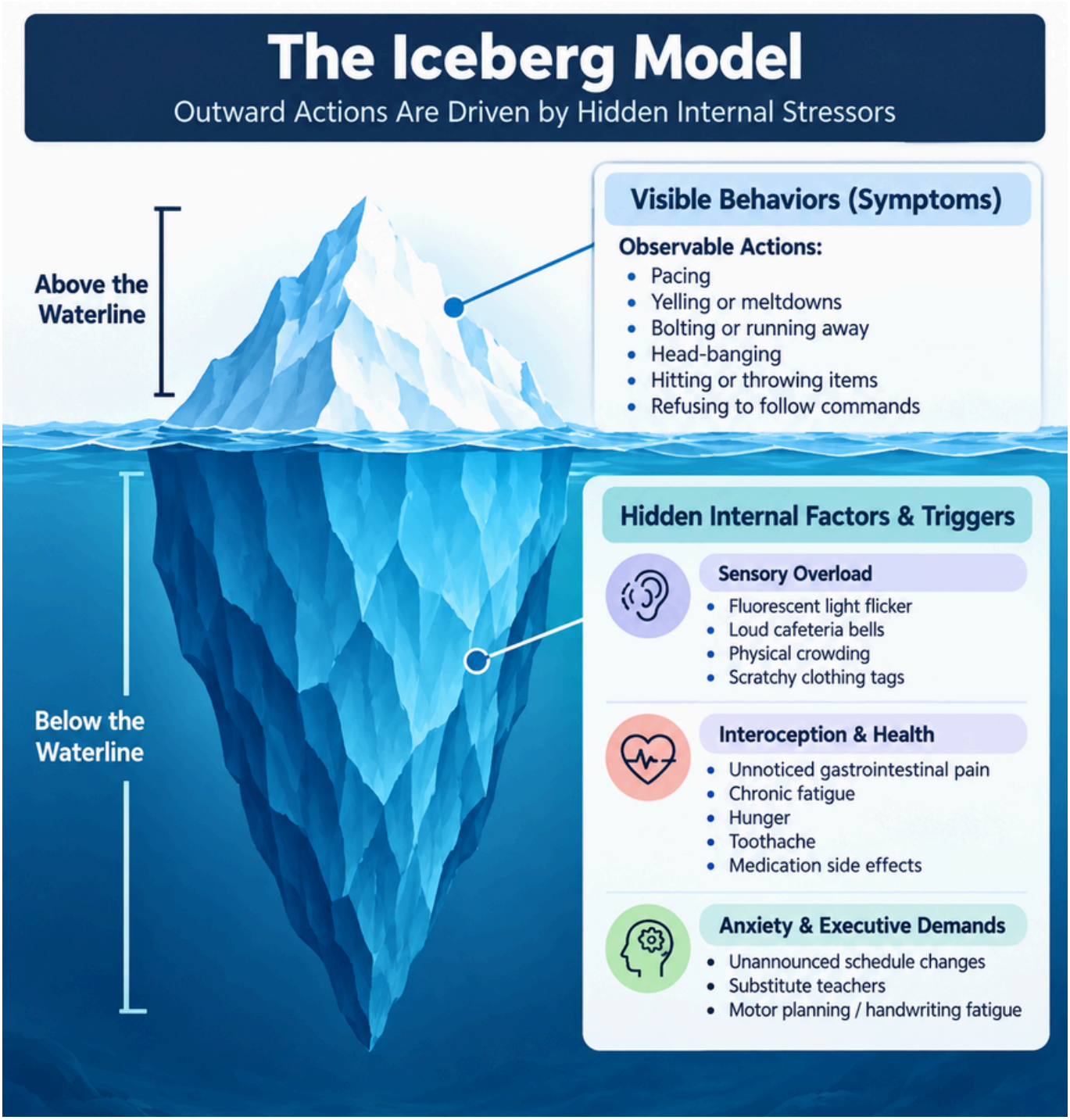
Above the Waterline: What We See
These are the observable behaviors, such as:

- **Motor Behaviors:** Pacing, running away, or leaving an area (elopement).
- **Vocal Behaviors:** Yelling, crying, or screaming.
- **Physical Behaviors:** Hitting, throwing objects, or refusing to participate.

Below the Waterline: What We May Not See
These are underlying factors that may influence a child's behavior:

- **Sensory Factors:** Loud noises, bright lights, crowded environments, or uncomfortable textures.
- **Physiological Factors:** Hunger, fatigue, pain, illness, temperature, or other internal bodily sensations.
- **Cognitive & Emotional Factors:** Anxiety, frustration, difficulty processing instructions, executive functioning demands, or unexpected changes.

When a child engages in challenging behaviors, consider what might be happening beneath the surface. Rather than asking, "Why won't this child behave?" we can ask, "***What might this child be experiencing, and what support do they need?"***


The Iceberg Model
Outward Actions Are Driven by Hidden Internal Stressors
Above the Waterline
Below the Waterline
Visible Behaviors (Symptoms)
Observable Actions:
Pacing
Yelling or meltdowns
Bolting or running away
Head-banging
Hitting or throwing items
Refusing to follow commands
Hidden Internal Factors & Triggers
Sensory Overload
Fluorescent light flicker
Loud cafeteria bells
Physical crowding
Scratchy clothing tags
Interoception & Health
Unnoticed gastrointestinal pain
Chronic fatigue
Hunger
Toothache
Medication side effects
Anxiety & Executive Demands
Unannounced schedule changes
Substitute teachers
Motor planning / handwriting fatigue

REFLECTION

Think of a child you support who sometimes engages in behaviors that are challenging, confusing, or difficult to understand. Using the Iceberg Model, identify what you can observe above the surface and explore what hidden factors might be contributing to the behavior.

1. Above the Waterline: What Do You See?
Identify 1–3 observable behaviors the child engages in (e.g., yelling, running away, shutting down, throwing objects).

1._____

2._____

3._____

2. Below the Waterline: What Might Be Happening?
Consider possible underlying factors, such as sensory overload, physical discomfort, emotional distress, communication difficulties, or executive functioning demands.

1._____

2._____

3._____

3. Connecting the Dots: How Can You Help?
What could you do to better understand the child's experiences or reduce potential stressors?

_____

_____

SCIENCE CHECK: Motivating Operations



Behavior analyst Jack Michael helped advance our understanding of ***Motivating Operations (MOs),*** which explain how a person's current needs and circumstances can temporarily change how valuable an outcome is and how likely certain behaviors are to occur.

There are two main types of Motivating Operations:

- **Establishing Operations (EOs)**: Increase the value of an outcome and the likelihood of behaviors that have previously produced it. Example: Hunger increases the value of food and may increase food-seeking behaviors.
- **Abolishing Operations (AOs)**: Decrease the value of an outcome and the likelihood of behaviors that have previously produced it. Example: Feeling full decreases the value of food and may reduce food-seeking behaviors.

Another important distinction is the difference between motivation and signals that reinforcement is available.

- **MO (Motivating Operation)**: Changes how valuable an outcome is.
- **S^D (Discriminative Stimulus)**: Signals that a particular behavior can produce reinforcement.

Example: A thirsty child sees a working water fountain. Thirst increases the value of water (MO), while the fountain signals that pressing the button can provide water (S^D).

Understanding Motivating Operations can help caregivers and educators identify when children may be more motivated to learn, communicate, or engage in certain behaviors. Two common approaches include:

- **Capturing Motivation**: Recognizing naturally occurring opportunities when a child wants or needs something and supporting appropriate communication.
- **Creating Learning Opportunities**: Thoughtfully arranging enjoyable activities to encourage communication, participation, or skill development.

For example, when a child is enjoying a bubble activity, an adult might briefly pause and provide an opportunity for the child to request “more” using words, gestures, pictures, or an AAC device.

How Modern Behavior Theory Informs Behavior Intervention

Modern behavioral assessment and intervention draw upon several important scientific contributions that help us better understand *why* behaviors occur, *how* they are maintained, and *when* they may become more likely.

THE "WHY"

Radical Behaviorism (B. F. Skinner)

Recognizes that behavior is influenced by biological factors, learning history, current environmental conditions, and private experiences such as thoughts and feelings.

THE "HOW"

Experimental Functional Analysis (Iwata et al., 1982)

Demonstrated how systematically examining environmental conditions and consequences can help identify the functions maintaining challenging behaviors. This work helped advance function-based assessment and intervention.

THE "WHEN"

Motivating Operations (Jack Michael)

Explains how changing needs and circumstances temporarily increase or decrease the value of certain outcomes, influencing the likelihood of behaviors that have previously produced them.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Consider a child who frequently yells when presented with difficult schoolwork.

WHY: The child's learning history, current demands, and possible feelings of frustration may influence their behavior.
HOW: Behavioral assessment may reveal that yelling has previously resulted in escaping difficult assignments.
WHEN: Fatigue or overwhelming demands may increase the value of escaping the task, making yelling more likely.

Section 3
Communication Lens

Behavior Serves as Functional Communication When Words Fail

Many autistic children and children with other developmental differences may experience language delays, limited verbal communication, or differences in how they express their thoughts, feelings, and needs.

When children do not yet have the words or communication skills to express what they need or are experiencing, their behavior may become an important form of communication. Even children with strong verbal skills may struggle to communicate when they are overwhelmed, frustrated, or dysregulated.

When children cannot easily express what they need through words, their behaviors may provide important clues about what they are experiencing or trying to communicate. Instead of asking, "How do we stop this behavior?" consider asking, ***"What is this child trying to tell us?"***



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Observable Behavior:	**Possible Communication:**
"Screaming / Tantrum	"This work is too hard, I need help!"
Head on Desk / Shutting Down	"I am overwhelmed by instructions."
Elopement / Bolting	"The sensory noise here is unbearable."
Grabbing / Pushing Peer	"I want that toy right now!"
Dropping to Floor	"I need a transition warning."

Functional Communication Training (FCT): Teaching a Better Way to Communicate

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is an evidence-based approach that teaches children more effective ways to communicate their needs, wants, or experiences.

Rather than focusing only on reducing challenging behaviors, FCT helps children develop **replacement communication skills that serve the same function.**

For example:

- Teaching a child to hand over a **"Break" card** instead of screaming to escape a difficult task.
- Teaching a child to press an **AAC button** to request "Help" when they are struggling.
- Teaching a child to **gesture or point** to request a preferred item instead of grabbing.
- Teaching a child to use **pictures, signs, or spoken words** to request attention, assistance, or sensory support.

The goal is to make communication *accessible, meaningful,* and *effective* so children can get their needs met without relying on unsafe or distressing behaviors.



SCIENCE CHECK

A landmark study by Carr & Durand (1985) investigated whether teaching children more effective ways to communicate could reduce challenging behaviors. The study found that:

- **Behavior has a function:** Challenging behaviors, including aggression, tantrums, and self-injury, were more likely to occur when children received limited adult attention or faced difficult tasks.
- **Communication can replace challenging behaviors:** When children were taught to verbally request attention or assistance, challenging behaviors decreased across all four children studied.
- **Meeting the same need matters:** Teaching communication skills that served the same function as the challenging behavior was an effective strategy.

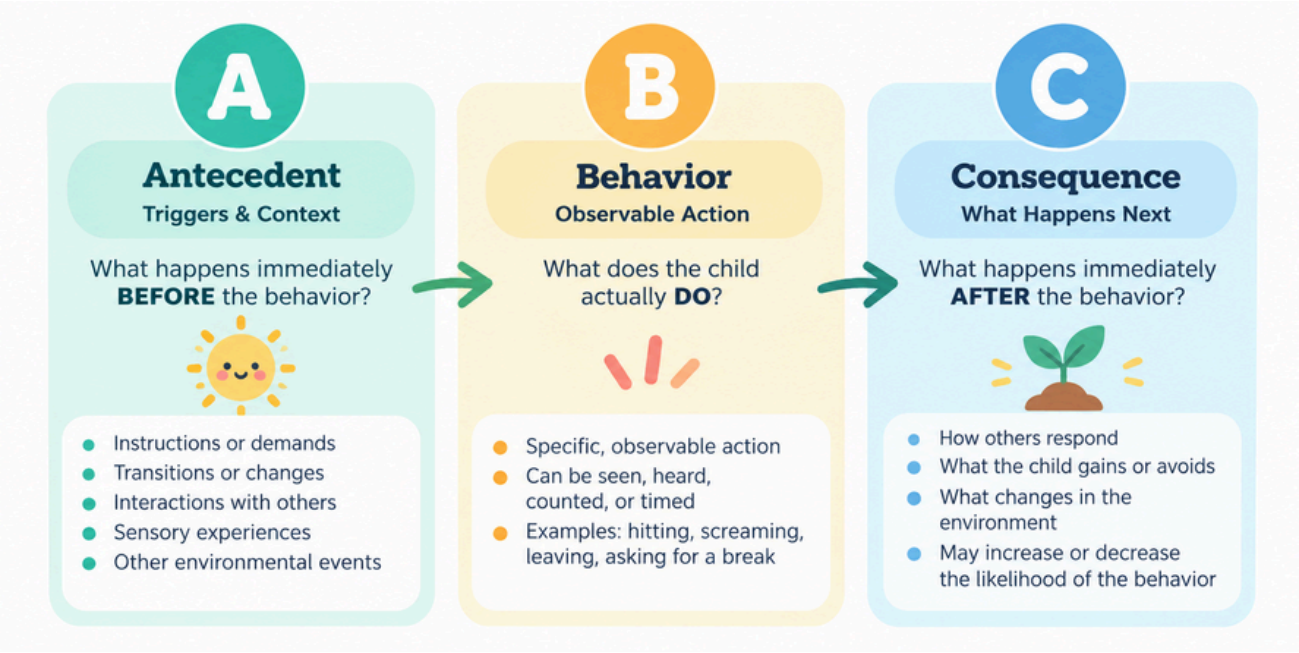
Section 4
Functions & ABC's

Understanding the ABCs of Behavior

Behaviors do not happen in isolation. They occur within a context, influenced by what happens before and after them.

The **ABC Model** is a simple framework that helps us identify patterns and better understand why behaviors occur and what may be maintaining them.

- **A – Antecedent (Before)** refers to the triggers or context surrounding what happens immediately before a behavior.
- **B – Behavior (During)** refers to the specific, observable actions that occur.
- **C – Consequence (After)** refers to what happens immediately following the behavior, including how others respond or what changes in the environment.



Understanding the WHY Behind Behavior

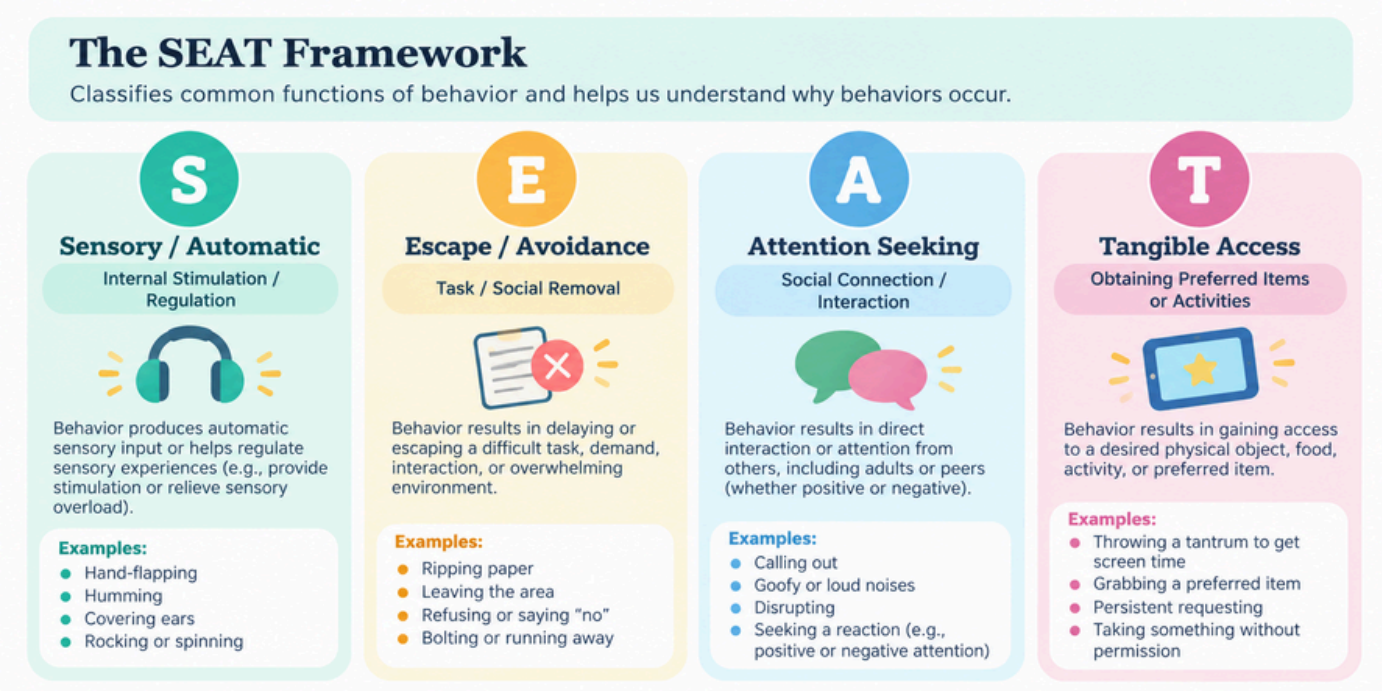
Now that we understand the ABCs of behavior, the next step is to explore **WHY behaviors occur.**

The **function of a behavior** refers to the purpose it serves or the outcome that helps maintain it. In other words, what does the behavior help the child gain, avoid, or experience?

The **SEAT Framework** identifies four common functions of behavior:

- ***S – Sensory/Automatic:*** Behaviors that provide internal sensory stimulation, support regulation, or relieve sensory discomfort.
- ***E – Escape/Avoidance:*** Behaviors that help a child escape, avoid, or delay difficult tasks, demands, interactions, or overwhelming environments.
- ***A – Attention:*** Behaviors that result in social attention, connection, or interaction from others, whether positive or negative.
- ***T – Tangible Access:*** Behaviors that result in gaining access to desired objects, food, or activities.

The same behavior can serve different functions depending on the situation, and a behavior may serve more than one function. By examining the ABCs and identifying patterns over time, we can better understand what a child may need and teach more effective ways to communicate, cope, and regulate.





TRY THIS: Identifying the ABCs and Functions of Behavior

Instructions: Read each scenario below. Identify the Antecedent (A), Behavior (B), and Consequence (C). Then, consider which function of behavior (SEAT) may best explain why the behavior occurred.

Scenario 1: Emma and the Math Worksheet

Emma is working on a difficult math worksheet in class. When her teacher asks her to complete the next five problems, Emma crumples her worksheet and throws it on the floor. Her teacher tells her to take a break in the reading corner, and Emma does not have to finish the worksheet.

Antecedent: _____

Behavior: _____

Consequence: _____

Possible Function (SEAT): _____

Scenario 2: Noah and Circle Time

During circle time, Noah notices that his teacher is helping another student. Noah begins making loud animal noises and calling out repeatedly. His classmates laugh, and his teacher turns toward him and tells him to stop.

Antecedent: _____

Behavior: _____

Consequence: _____

Possible Function (SEAT): _____

Scenario 3: Lily and the Tablet

Lily is playing her favorite game on her tablet when her father tells her that screen time is over. Lily begins screaming, crying, and repeatedly asking for more time. Her father gives her the tablet for another 10 minutes to help her calm down.

Antecedent: _____

Behavior: _____

Consequence: _____

Possible Function (SEAT): _____

Answer key: Scenario 1: A = Asked to complete difficult math problems, B = Crumples and throws worksheet; C = Allowed to leave task and take a break; Function = Escape/Avoidance; Scenario 2: A = Teacher attends to another student, B = Makes noises and calls out, C = Peers laugh; teacher responds, Function = Attention; Scenario 3: A = Father ends tablet time, B = Screams, cries, repeatedly requests more time, C = Receives 10 additional minutes, Function = Tangible Access

Sample ABC Data Sheet

Date:	**Time:**	**Antecedant:** Description of what, where, who, and how right before Behavior.	**Behavior:** Description of what behaviors occurred, intensity of behavior, duration of behavior, etc.	**Consequence:** Description of what occurred immediately following behavior, what did you do, what changed in the environment, what were others responses.	**Hypothesized Function:** S – Sensory/Automatic E – Escape/Avoidance A – Attention T – Tangible Access

Section 5
Functional Strategies

Prevention First: Prioritizing Proactive Behavior Support

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is an evidence-informed approach that focuses on understanding behavior, preventing unnecessary distress, teaching meaningful skills, and improving a child's quality of life.

Rather than waiting for challenging behaviors to occur, PBS emphasizes ***proactive tools*** or ***antecedent management strategies*** that modify the environment, reduce potential triggers, and help children succeed.

A helpful way to think about behavior support is the **90/10 principle:**

- **90% Proactive – Set the Child Up for Success:** Focus most of our efforts on preventing challenging behaviors through environmental adjustments, predictability, communication supports, and skill-building.
- **10% Reactive – Respond When Challenges Occur:** When a child becomes distressed or dysregulated, prioritize safety, co-regulation, and de-escalation rather than punishment or lengthy verbal explanations.



Proactive Tool #1: Visual Schedules & First/Then Boards

Visual schedules help children understand what to expect throughout their day by presenting activities and routines in a clear, predictable sequence. They can support independence, ease transitions, reduce uncertainty, and help children cope with unexpected changes. Visual schedules can be used for *morning routines*, *school activities*, *afternoon routines*, and *evening/bedtime routines*.

Schedules may use pictures, symbols, photographs, or written words depending on the child's developmental and communication abilities. As activities are completed, children can check them off, cross them out, or remove pictures using Velcro and place them in a designated "Finished" box or envelope.

How to Use a Visual Schedule

1. **Display the schedule:** Place it in a central, easily accessible location where the child can see and use it.
2. **Review the schedule together:** Encourage the child to check the schedule and identify the first activity.
3. **Identify the activity:** Have the child point to, name, or otherwise communicate the activity using their preferred communication method.
4. **Begin the activity:** If using removable pictures, encourage the child to take the picture to the designated activity area.
5. **Mark the activity as complete:** After finishing, return to the schedule and check off or move the picture into the "Finished" box.
6. **Move to the next activity:** Review the schedule and repeat the process until the routine is complete.

First/Then Boards

A First/Then Board is a simplified visual schedule that shows two activities in sequence:

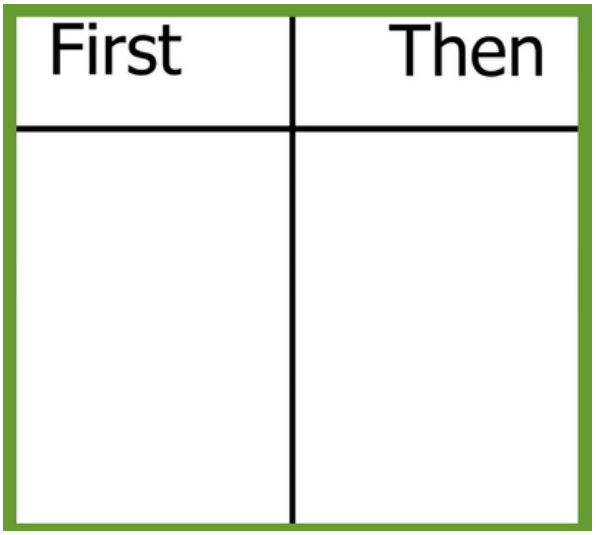
- **FIRST**: What happens now.
- **THEN**: What happens next.

For example: **FIRST** brush teeth → **THEN** read a bedtime story.

First/Then Boards are especially helpful for children who benefit from shorter, simpler visual instructions or need additional support with transitions and completing less-preferred activities.

Sample Visual Schedules & First/Then Boards









Proactive Tool #2: Choice-Making

Choice-making helps children develop a sense of autonomy, control, and independence by allowing them to make decisions throughout their daily routines. Providing meaningful choices can increase motivation, encourage cooperation, and reduce frustration or resistance when completing tasks or transitioning between activities.

Choices can be offered verbally, visually (e.g., pictures or objects), or through AAC, depending on the child's communication abilities.

How to Use Choice-Making

1. **Offer limited choices:** Start with two clear, manageable options to avoid overwhelming the child.
2. **Provide meaningful options:** Offer choices that are appropriate, achievable, and genuinely available.
3. **Use clear, simple language:** For example, "Would you like to use a pencil or marker?"
4. **Allow processing time:** Give the child time to consider their options and communicate their preference.
5. **Honor the child's choice:** Follow through with the selected option whenever possible to build trust and encourage future decision-making.
6. **Gradually expand choices:** As the child becomes more comfortable, offer additional opportunities for independence and decision-making.

Helpful Tip: Whenever possible, offer choices *before* frustration or dysregulation occurs. Avoid presenting a choice when only one option is acceptable, and recognize that children may need additional support or flexibility when making decisions.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Situation:	Choices to Offer:
Starting homework	"Would you like to start with reading or math?"
Getting dressed	"Do you want the blue shirt or green shirt?"
Taking a regulation break	"Would you like to sit somewhere quiet or take a short walk?"

Proactive Tool #3: Verbal Priming & Transition Warnings

Verbal priming and transition warnings help children prepare for upcoming activities, changes in routines, or transitions between tasks. Providing advance notice increases predictability, reduces uncertainty, and gives children time to mentally and emotionally prepare for what comes next.

These strategies are especially helpful for children who experience difficulties with transitions, changes in routines, or shifting attention away from preferred activities.

How to Use Priming & Transition Warnings

1. **Prepare the child in advance:** Explain what activity or transition is coming up using simple, clear language (e.g., "After lunch, we are going to the library").
2. **Provide gradual reminders:** Give warnings at predictable intervals, such as 10 minutes, 5 minutes, and 1 minute before a transition.
3. **Use visual or nonverbal supports:** Pair verbal reminders with visual timers, countdowns, pictures, or hand gestures to make the passage of time easier to understand.
4. **Explain what comes next:** Remind the child what they will be transitioning to, using a visual schedule or First/Then Board when helpful.
5. **Allow processing and preparation time:** Give the child opportunities to finish their activity, ask questions, or request support before transitioning.
6. **Acknowledge and support the transition:** Recognize the child's efforts and provide additional support when needed.

Helpful Tools for Supporting Transitions

- **Visual Timers:** Use timers that visually show how much time remains (e.g., a disappearing colored section or countdown display).
- **Gradual Verbal Reminders:** Provide predictable countdowns (e.g., "10 more minutes," "5 more minutes," "1 more minute").
- **Nonverbal Reminders:** Use hand gestures, fingers to indicate remaining time, or visual countdown cards for children who benefit from fewer verbal instructions.
- **Visual Schedules & First/Then Boards:** Show the child what activity is ending and what activity comes next.
- **Transition Cues:** Use consistent signals, such as a familiar phrase, picture, or gentle sound, to indicate an upcoming transition.
- **Transition Objects:** Allow the child to bring a familiar or comforting object between activities when appropriate.

Proactive Tool #4: Task Modification

Task modification involves adjusting the difficulty, length, structure, or presentation of an activity to better match a child's abilities and needs. By making tasks more manageable and accessible, we can reduce frustration, increase motivation, and support successful participation. Task modification is especially helpful for children who experience difficulties with attention, executive functioning, learning, motor skills, or becoming overwhelmed by challenging or lengthy activities.

How to Use Task Modification

1. **Complete a "Task Analysis" by Breaking Tasks Into Smaller Steps:** Divide complex or lengthy activities into manageable parts, providing one or a few steps at a time.
2. **Adjust Task Difficulty:** Modify the level of difficulty to match the child's current abilities, gradually increasing expectations as skills develop.
3. **Reduce Task Length or Volume:** Shorten assignments or reduce the number of repetitions while maintaining essential learning goals.
4. **Provide Additional Supports:** Use visual instructions, examples, checklists, modeling, or guided assistance to help the child complete tasks.
5. **Offer Flexible Ways to Participate:** Allow alternative methods of completing activities (e.g., typing instead of handwriting, pointing instead of speaking).
6. **Incorporate Breaks & Preferred Activities:** Alternate challenging tasks with preferred activities, movement breaks, or opportunities for regulation.
7. **Gradually Build Independence:** As the child becomes more confident and successful, slowly increase task demands or reduce assistance when appropriate.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Situation:	Potential Modification:
Child becomes overwhelmed by a 20-problem math worksheet.	Present 5 problems at a time, with short breaks between sets.
Child struggles to follow multi-step instructions.	Break instructions into individual steps using a visual checklist.
Child struggles with a non-preferred task.	Incorporate preferred materials, interests, or activities to increase engagement.

Sample Task Analyses





Proactive Tool #5: Embedding Preferred Activities & the Premack Principle

Embedding preferred activities involves incorporating a child's interests, favorite activities, or motivating materials into daily routines and less-preferred tasks. By making activities more enjoyable and balancing challenging tasks with preferred experiences, we can increase motivation, reduce frustration, and encourage positive participation.

The Premack Principle (sometimes called the **"Grandma's Rule"**) is a behavioral principle suggesting that access to a more-preferred activity can reinforce participation in a less-preferred activity. For example: "*First* finish putting away your toys, *then* we can play outside!"

Both strategies can help increase motivation, particularly for children who have difficulty initiating non-preferred tasks, sustaining attention, or completing daily routines.

How to Use Preferred Activities & the Premack Principle

1. **Identify the Child's Interests:** Determine which activities, toys, topics, or experiences the child finds enjoyable and motivating.
2. **Embed Interests Into Tasks:** Incorporate favorite themes, characters, toys, or materials to make less-preferred activities more engaging.
3. **Alternate Preferred and Non-Preferred Activities:** Balance challenging tasks with enjoyable activities, movement opportunities, or planned breaks.
4. **Use the Premack Principle (First/Then):** Arrange a more-preferred activity after a manageable, less-preferred activity (e.g., "First put on your shoes, then we can go outside").
5. **Make Expectations Clear and Achievable:** Specify what needs to happen before the preferred activity and use visual supports when helpful.
6. **Follow Through Consistently:** Provide access to the preferred activity as promised after the agreed-upon task is completed.
7. **Build Positive Associations:** Create opportunities for children to experience success, enjoyment, and encouragement throughout their routines.



SCIENCE CHECK

Psychologist **David Premack (1959)** described how opportunities to engage in more-preferred behaviors can reinforce less-preferred behaviors. In everyday terms, children may be more motivated to complete a less-preferred activity when they know a preferred activity will follow. However, a preferred activity is only considered a reinforcer if it actually *increases the likelihood of the desired behavior occurring again*. Simply offering a preferred activity does not guarantee that it will be reinforcing.

Proactive Tool #6: Concise Commands & Pause

Concise commands are short, clear, and specific instructions that tell children exactly what they are expected to do. Providing one instruction at a time, using a calm tone, and allowing processing time can help children better understand expectations, reduce frustration, and successfully follow directions.

This strategy is especially helpful for children who experience difficulties with attention, language processing, executive functioning, or following multi-step instructions.

How to Give Effective Commands

1. **Get the Child's Attention:** Move close to the child, use their name if helpful, and ensure they are available to listen. Avoid requiring eye contact.
2. **Reduce Distractions:** Minimize competing sounds or activities (e.g., pause the television or wait until others finish talking).
3. **Give One Clear Instruction:** Use short, specific directions that describe the behavior you want to see (e.g., "Put your shoes in the closet").
4. **Use a Calm, Neutral Tone:** Give instructions in an even, respectful voice rather than raising your voice or repeating demands.
5. **Pause and Allow Processing Time:** Wait approximately 5–10 seconds before repeating or rephrasing the instruction. Some children may need more time.
6. **Provide Support When Needed:** If the child is having difficulty, use gestures, visual cues, modeling, or break the task into smaller steps.
7. **Provide Specific, Labeled Praise:** When the child follows the instruction, acknowledge exactly what they did (e.g., "Great job putting your shoes away when I asked!").

What to Avoid

- **Vague Instructions:** Avoid directions such as "Be good" or "Behave," which do not clearly describe the expected behavior.
- **Multiple Commands at Once:** Avoid giving a long list of instructions before the child has completed the first step.
- **Negative Commands:** When possible, describe what the child *can do* rather than only what they should stop doing.
- **Questions Disguised as Commands:** If an activity is a necessary expectation, communicate it clearly rather than presenting it as an optional question.
- **Unnecessary "Let's" Instructions:** Use direct language when giving an individual instruction rather than implying a shared activity that the adult will not participate in.
- **Rapid Repetition:** Avoid repeating instructions immediately or increasing your volume before allowing adequate processing time.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Instead of...	Try Saying...
"Stop making a mess!"	"Put the blocks in the bin."
"Don't run!"	"Use walking feet."
Can you put your shoes away?"	"Put your shoes on the shoe rack."
"Behave yourself!"	"Keep your hands on your own body."
"Let's clean up your room."	"Put your clothes in the hamper."



REFLECTION

Think about common instructions you give your child or student. Are they short, specific, and easy to understand? Sometimes, we unintentionally give vague, lengthy, or negatively worded instructions that make it harder for children to know what is expected.

Your Challenge: Identify 3–5 instructions you commonly use and practice rewriting them into more effective commands.

My Common Instructions:	My Improved Instructions:
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____

Proactive Tool #7: Scheduled Breaks & Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR)

Scheduled breaks and **Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR)** involve providing children with regular, predictable opportunities to access preferred activities, attention, movement, or sensory experiences before challenging behaviors occur.

Rather than waiting until a child becomes frustrated, overwhelmed, or dysregulated, we proactively provide opportunities to meet their needs throughout the day.

This strategy is especially helpful for children who experience difficulties with sustained attention, sensory regulation, task demands, or waiting for access to preferred activities or social interaction.

What Is Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR)?
Noncontingent Reinforcement (NCR) is a behavior support strategy in which a child receives access to a preferred item, activity, or interaction on a planned schedule, *regardless of whether a particular behavior occurs*.

For example, instead of waiting until a child begins calling out repeatedly to receive attention, a teacher might provide brief, positive check-ins every 10 minutes. By proactively providing access to meaningful experiences, NCR may reduce the motivation to engage in certain challenging behaviors to obtain those same experiences.

How to Use Scheduled Breaks & NCR

1. **Identify the Child's Needs:** Consider whether the child benefits from movement, sensory experiences, adult attention, preferred activities, or opportunities to rest.
2. **Create a Predictable Schedule:** Offer regular breaks or access to preferred experiences before the child typically becomes overwhelmed or frustrated.
3. **Use Visual Supports:** Incorporate scheduled breaks into visual schedules, timers, or First/Then Boards to increase predictability.
4. **Provide Access Regardless of Behavior:** Do not require the child to complete a task or demonstrate a particular behavior to receive the scheduled support.
5. **Keep Breaks Meaningful:** Offer activities that genuinely meet the child's needs, such as movement, quiet time, sensory tools, or positive social interaction.
6. **Monitor and Adjust:** Observe whether the schedule supports engagement and regulation, and adjust the frequency, duration, or type of support as needed.

Proactive Tool #8: Specific, Labeled Praise & "Catch 'Em Being Good"

Specific, labeled praise involves recognizing and describing the positive behaviors we want to see more often. Rather than simply saying "Good job!", we tell children exactly what they did well, helping them understand which behaviors to repeat.

How to Use Specific, Labeled Praise

1. **Notice Positive Behaviors:** Look for everyday opportunities to recognize cooperation, communication, kindness, effort, and independence.
2. **Be Specific:** Clearly describe the behavior you are praising (e.g., "Thank you for putting your toys away!").
3. **Praise Immediately:** Offer praise as soon as possible after the positive behavior occurs.
4. **Be Consistent & Genuine:** Frequently recognize positive behaviors using a warm, encouraging tone that matches the child's preferences.
5. **Praise "Positive Opposites":** Identify the appropriate behavior you want to see instead of a challenging behavior and intentionally reinforce it.
6. **Recognize Small Successes:** Praise effort, progress, and attempts at new skills—not just perfect performance.

"Catch 'Em Being Good" means intentionally noticing and acknowledging positive behaviors throughout the day, rather than primarily giving attention when challenging behaviors occur. This strategy helps strengthen appropriate behaviors, build confidence, and promote positive interactions between children and adults.

Look for opportunities to recognize children when they:

- Follow directions or complete routines.
- Share, take turns, or play cooperatively.
- Use appropriate communication to request help or breaks.
- Try something new or challenging.
- Demonstrate independence in daily living skills.
- Show effort, persistence, or flexibility.
- Use coping or regulation strategies.

Helpful Tip: Praise should feel encouraging, not overwhelming. Some children prefer quiet acknowledgment, a thumbs-up, a smile, or another form of positive feedback rather than enthusiastic verbal praise. Follow the child's preferences and remember that praise functions as reinforcement when it increases the behavior over time.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Positive Opposites

Instead of...	Try Saying...
“Don't run!”	“Please walk.”
“Stop yelling!”	“Use your indoor voice.”
“Don't hit!”	“Keep your hands to yourself.”
“Stop leaving your things everywhere!”	“Put your backpack on the hook.”
“Stop jumping on the couch!”	“Keep your feet on the floor.”
Don't interrupt!”	“Wait for a pause before speaking.”
“Don't talk with food in your mouth!”	“Finish chewing before speaking.”
“Don't get out of your seat!”	“Stay seated until break time.”

Specific, Labeled Praise:

Instead of...	Try Saying...
“Good job!”	“Great job putting your toys in the bin!”
“Nice!”	“I like how you waited for your turn!”
“That was nice!”	“Thank you for using kind words with your sister!”
“Awesome!”	“You worked really hard on that difficult problem!”
“That's better!”	“Thank you for asking for help when you needed it!”



TRY THIS: Turn Challenging Behaviors Into Positive Opposites & Specific, Labeled Praise

Positive opposites are the appropriate behaviors we want to see instead of challenging behaviors. For each challenging behavior below:

1. Identify a positive opposite (the behavior you want to see instead).
2. Write an example of specific, labeled praise you could provide when the child demonstrates that behavior.

1. Challenging Behavior: **Child interrupts adults while they are talking.**

- Positive Opposite: _____
- Specific, Labeled Praise: _____

2. Challenging Behavior: **Child runs through the classroom.**

- Positive Opposite: _____
- Specific, Labeled Praise: _____

3. Challenging Behavior: **Child throws toys when frustrated.**

- Positive Opposite: _____
- Specific, Labeled Praise: _____

Sample Answer key: 1 – *Positive Opposite* (e.g., waits for a pause in the conversation or appropriately requests attention such as raising hand); *Specific, Labeled Praise* (e.g., "Great job waiting until I finished talking before asking your question!") | 2 – *Positive Opposite* (e.g., walks safely through the classroom using walking feet); *Specific, Labeled Praise* (e.g., "I like how you used your walking feet to move safely through the classroom!") | 3 – *Positive Opposite* (e.g. places toys down gently and uses an appropriate coping or communication strategy such as asking for help or a break); *Specific, Labeled Praise* (e.g., "Thank you for putting the toy down gently and telling me you needed help!")

Proactive Tool #9: Teach Replacement Communication Skills

As mentioned in Section 3, **Functional Communication Training (FCT)** is an evidence-based approach that teaches children appropriate, effective ways to communicate their wants and needs. The goal is to teach a replacement communication skill that serves the same function as the challenging behavior.

1. **Identify the Need:** Use the ABCs and SEAT framework to consider what the child may be trying to obtain, avoid, or communicate.
2. **Choose an Accessible Communication Skill:** Select a replacement skill that matches the child's developmental and communication abilities (e.g., spoken words, gestures, picture cards, signs, or AAC). Start with a skill that is simple and easy for the child to use.
3. **Model and Practice the Skill:** Demonstrate the communication skill and provide opportunities to practice during calm, low-stress situations. Use prompts or visual supports as needed, gradually reducing assistance as the child becomes more independent.
4. **Respond Immediately and Meaningfully:** When the child uses the replacement skill, respond promptly by providing the requested help, break, attention, or access whenever appropriate and feasible. This teaches the child that communication works!
5. **Practice Consistently Across Settings:** Encourage the use of the skill across different people, environments, and situations. Continue recognizing and reinforcing appropriate communication while gradually building independence.



PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Observable Behavior:	Possible Communication:	Potential Replacement Skill:
Child repeatedly interrupts while an adult is speaking.	"I want your attention!"	Teach the child to say "Excuse me," tap the adult's shoulder, or use an attention card.
Child drops to the floor when asked to transition away from a preferred activity.	"I'm not ready to stop. I need more time!"	Teach the child to request more time or a transition warning.
Child pulls an adult's hand toward a closed snack container.	"I need help opening this!"	Teach the child to point to a help symbol, sign "help," or make a verbal request.



REFLECTION

Think of a child you support who engages in a behavior that may be challenging, confusing, or difficult to respond to. Using what you learned about the ABCs, functions of behavior (SEAT), and Functional Communication Training (FCT), consider what the child might be communicating and how you could teach a more effective replacement skill.

1. Observable Behavior: What does the child do?
Describe the behavior using specific actions you can see or hear.

_____

_____

2. Possible Communication: What might the child be trying to tell us?
Consider the possible function of the behavior and the underlying need.

_____

_____

3. Replacement Communication Skill: What could we teach instead?
Identify a safer, more effective way for the child to communicate the same need (e.g., spoken words, gestures, pictures, AAC, or a break card).

_____

_____

Proactive Tool #10: Using Reinforcers to Strengthen Positive Behaviors

Reinforcement is a fundamental principle of learning that explains how consequences influence future behavior.

A reinforcer is something that follows a behavior and increases the likelihood that the behavior will occur again.

Reinforcers can help children:

- Strengthen positive and expected behaviors.
- Learn and practice new skills.
- Increase motivation to participate in challenging or non-preferred activities.
- Build independence and maintain skills over time.

Important: A reward is something we intend to be motivating, but it only functions as a reinforcer if it actually increases the behavior over time. What is reinforcing for one child may not be reinforcing for another.

Reinforcement Is a Natural Part of Everyday Life!
Reinforcement happens constantly in our everyday lives, often without us realizing it. In fact, caregivers are likely already using reinforcement in their daily routines!

Examples with Children:

- A child finishes getting ready for bed and enjoys a favorite bedtime story.
- A child cleans up their toys and earns time to play a computer game.
- A child asks for help appropriately and receives assistance.
- A child shares a toy and receives positive attention from a caregiver.

Examples with Adults:

- We work to earn a paycheck, which reinforces our work-related behaviors.
- We exercise because we enjoy the energy, satisfaction, or other benefits afterward.
- We complete household chores so we can relax in a clean environment.
- We continue sharing jokes because others laugh and respond positively.

Using Reinforcers to Strengthen Positive Behaviors (Continued)

There are six common types of reinforcers:

1. **Primary / Biological** (e.g., food, favorite snacks, drinks)
2. **Social** (e.g., Specific praise, high-fives, hugs, smiles, positive attention, encouragement.
3. **Tangible** (e.g., favorite toys, small gifts, preferred objects, collectibles)
4. **Activities** (e.g., going to the park or zoo, riding a bike, swimming, playing a favorite game)
5. **Privileges** (e.g., extra computer or tablet time, choosing a family activity, selecting a movie, special one-on-one time with a caregiver)
6. **Token Economy** (e.g., points, stars, tickets, coins, or tokens that can be exchanged for preferred activities or items)

How to Identify Effective Reinforcers

What motivates one child may not motivate another. Even a child's favorite item may become less reinforcing depending on their mood, interests, or recent access to it.

1. **Ask the Child:** Find out what activities, items, or experiences they enjoy or would like to earn.
2. **Ask People Who Know the Child Well:** Talk with parents, teachers, caregivers, or other providers about the child's interests and preferences.
3. **Offer Choices:** Present several options and observe which items or activities the child selects.
4. **Observe the Child**: Notice what they naturally gravitate toward during free time and what activities they repeatedly seek out.

Reinforcement vs. Bribery: What's the Difference?

Adults sometimes worry that offering rewards will feel like "bribing" a child. However, planned positive reinforcement is a teaching strategy designed to build skills and strengthen desired behaviors.

Planned Reinforcement

- Expectations are established ***before*** the behavior occurs.
- Reinforces a clearly identified positive behavior or skill.
- Uses predictable, consistent expectations.
- Focuses on teaching and strengthening skills over time.

Reactive Bargaining ("Bribery")

- A reward is offered ***after challenging behavior has already begun*** to make it stop.
- May unintentionally reinforce challenging behavior if stopping it repeatedly produces a preferred reward.
- Often involves spontaneous negotiations or changing expectations.
- Focuses primarily on resolving the immediate situation.

Using Reinforcers to Strengthen Positive Behaviors (Continued)

Steps for Using Reinforcers to Strengthen Behavior

1. **Select a Specific Target Behavior:** Identify the positive behavior you want to increase. Choose something observable and measurable. Example: Instead of targeting "better listening," reinforce "following a one-step instruction."
2. **Keep Expectations Reasonable:** Start with achievable goals based on the child's current abilities. Reinforce small steps toward the desired behavior before gradually increasing expectations. Example: Initially reinforce completing two math problems rather than requiring an entire worksheet.
3. **Select an Effective Reinforcer:** Choose something the child finds motivating. Whenever possible, involve the child in selecting what they would like to earn. Example: The child chooses five minutes of a favorite game after completing a short assignment.
4. **Decide When and How Often to Reinforce:** When teaching a new skill, provide reinforcement frequently and consistently. As the skill becomes established, gradually shift toward more natural and intermittent reinforcement. Example: Initially reinforce each successful attempt to request help, then gradually reinforce more independent use of the skill.
5. **Deliver Reinforcement Immediately:** Provide the reinforcer as soon as possible after the desired behavior so the child can connect their action with the positive outcome. Example: "Great job putting your toys away! Now it's time for your game!"
6. **Make Reinforcement Contingent on the Target Behavior:** Clearly communicate what behavior earns the reinforcer, and follow through consistently. Example: "First put your blocks in the bin, then we can play your favorite game."
7. **Maintain the Reinforcer's Value:** Rotate reinforcers, offer choices, and monitor whether they continue to motivate the child. Avoid overusing the same reward if it loses its appeal.
8. **Pair Reinforcement With Positive Social Feedback:** Whenever appropriate, combine preferred activities or items with specific, labeled praise. Example: "You worked hard to finish those problems! Great job sticking with it. Let's play!"
9. **Consider Using Visual Supports:** Use visual reminders, First–Then boards, token charts, or reward menus to help children understand expectations and track their progress toward earning reinforcement. Example: A child earns one star for each completed activity. After earning five stars, they exchange them for a preferred activity.



TRY THIS: Identifying Reinforcers & Creating Your Own Reinforcement Plan!

Instructions: List five items or activities that might be reinforcing to your child. Refer back to the six types of reinforcers.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Instructions: Think about one positive behavior you would like to strengthen in your child or student.

1. Target Behavior: What specific, observable behavior would you like to increase?

_____

2. Reinforcer: What item, activity, privilege, or social experience would motivate the child?

_____

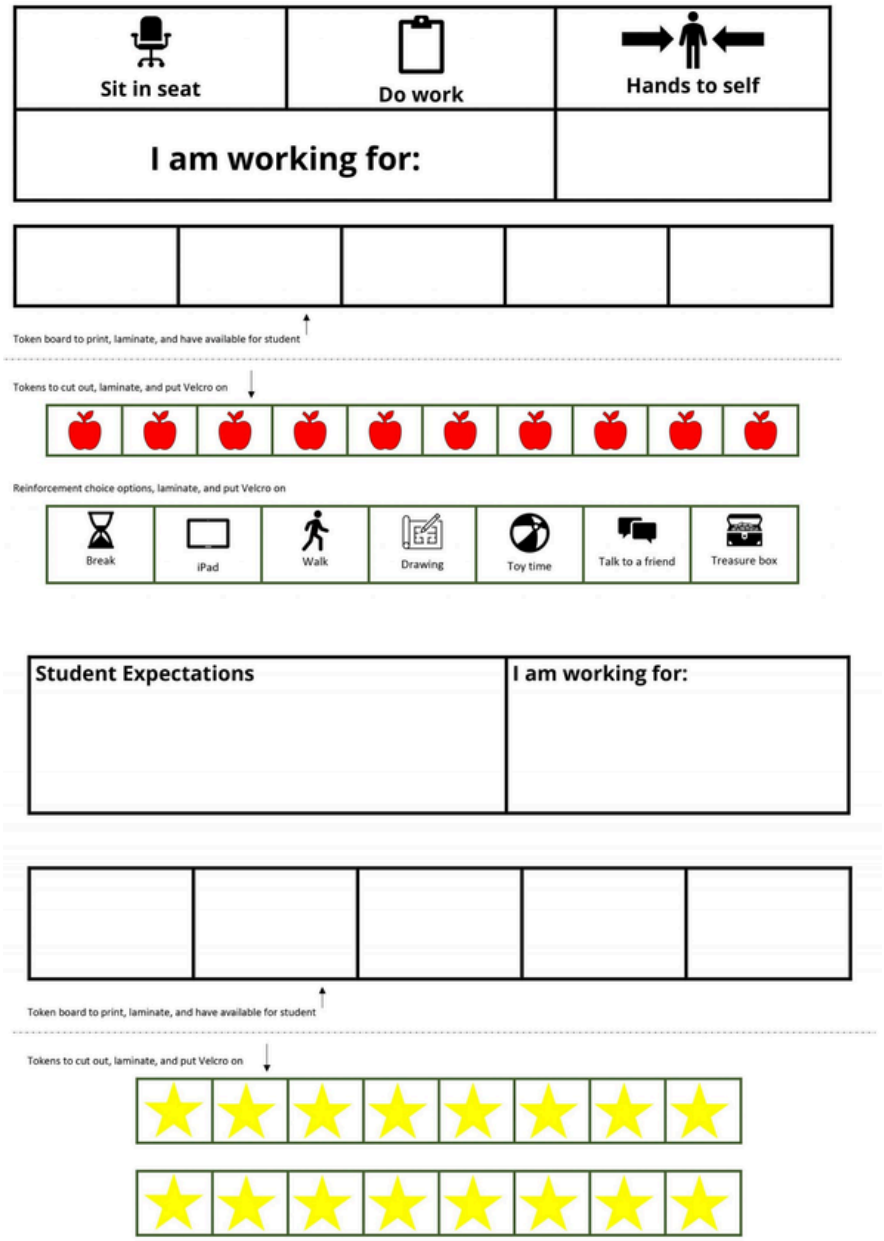
3. Behavioral Expectation: What does the child need to do to earn reinforcement? Keep the initial goal achievable.

_____

4. Reinforcement Schedule: When and how often will you provide reinforcement?

_____

Sample Token Economy





Proactive Tool #11: Building Connection & Positive Relationships

Building positive, trusting relationships is one of the most important proactive strategies for supporting children's behavior and emotional regulation.

When children experience consistent warmth, attention, and positive interactions with caregivers and educators, they have more opportunities to feel safe, connected, and supported.

Rather than waiting until challenging behaviors occur to provide attention or comfort, we can *proactively create opportunities for connection throughout the day.*

Five Daily Connection Practices

1. Child-Led Play
Spend time participating in activities your child enjoys. Allow the child to take the lead while you follow their interests without placing unnecessary demands or directing the activity.

During child-led play, do your best to describe what your child is doing (e.g., "you are stacking the blocks!"), imitate appropriate play or copy what your child is doing, and praise the specific behaviors you like to see. Try to *avoid* giving commands or instructions, asking questions, and providing corrections or critical feedback.

2. Shared Joy
Notice and celebrate moments of happiness, excitement, and enjoyment together. Show genuine interest in the activities and experiences that bring your child joy.

Example: Celebrate with your child when they complete a favorite puzzle or excitedly show you something they created.

3. Validate Feelings
Acknowledge your child's emotions without immediately correcting, dismissing, or trying to change how they feel. Offer reassurance and support.

Example: "I can see that you're really frustrated. That was hard. I'm right here with you."

Building Connection & Positive Relationships (Continued)

4. Warm, Positive Attention
Provide frequent moments of positive attention through smiles, encouraging words, a calm presence, or physical affection when welcomed by the child.

Example: Offer a warm greeting, sit beside your child during a preferred activity, or acknowledge something they are excited to share.

5. Predictable Check-Ins
Schedule brief, consistent opportunities for one-on-one connection, even when the child is not requesting attention.

Example: Spend 10 minutes together after school or establish a special bedtime routine where the child can talk, play, or connect with you.



TRY THIS: Fill Their Connection Cup!

Choose one or two connection practices to incorporate into your daily routines.

1. What is one activity your child or student enjoys that you could participate in together?

_____

2. When could you schedule a predictable opportunity for positive connection?

_____

3. What is one way you can provide more positive attention throughout the day, even when the child is not requesting it?

_____

Reactive Strategies: How Can We Respond During Dysregulation?

Reactive strategies are the ways adults respond when a child becomes frustrated, overwhelmed, or dysregulated. The immediate goal is to maintain safety, reduce distress, and support the child's return to regulation, rather than focusing on compliance or teaching new skills during heightened distress.

General Reactive Strategies

1. **Stay Calm & Neutral:** Use a calm voice, supportive body language, and brief, clear communication. Avoid raising your voice, arguing, or escalating demands.
2. **Provide Space & Reduce Demands:** Allow the child time and space to regulate while maintaining safety. Reduce unnecessary instructions, questions, and lengthy explanations during heightened distress.
3. **Prioritize Co-Regulation:** Offer reassurance, connection, or calming supports based on the child's individual needs and preferences. Some children benefit from adult proximity, while others need additional physical space.
4. **Acknowledge & Validate Feelings:** Recognize the child's experience without necessarily agreeing to every request (e.g., "I can see this is really frustrating. I'm here to help.").
5. **Reinforce Replacement Skills:** Recognize and respond when the child uses functional communication, coping strategies, or other helpful skills (e.g., requesting a break, asking for help, or using a calming tool).
6. **Provide Specific, Labeled Praise:** When appropriate, acknowledge positive behaviors and efforts (e.g., "Thank you for telling me you needed help!"). Praise should be genuine and matched to the child's preferences.

Helpful Tip: During significant dysregulation, prioritize *safety* and *regulation*. Save problem-solving, teaching, and discussions about expectations for when the child is calm and available to participate.



KEY IDEA

*When children are dysregulated, our first priority is to respond with **calmness**, **safety**, and **connection**. Teaching and problem-solving are often more effective after regulation has been restored.*

Co-Regulation: Supporting Children Through Dysregulation

Co-regulation is the process of helping a child manage their emotions and physiological arousal through supportive interactions with a calm, responsive adult.

When children become overwhelmed or dysregulated, they may have difficulty processing instructions, communicating their needs, or using coping skills independently. A calm, supportive adult can help create the conditions for the child to regain regulation.

How to Support Co-Regulation

1. **Regulate Yourself First:** Take a breath, lower your voice, and maintain calm, neutral body language. Avoid reacting with frustration or anger.
2. **Reduce Demands & Verbal Input:** Use fewer words, pause unnecessary instructions, and avoid lengthy explanations or problem-solving during heightened distress.
3. **Provide Space or Connection:** Some children benefit from reassurance and adult proximity, while others need physical space and reduced interaction. Follow the child's individual preferences.
4. **Offer Regulation Supports:** Provide access to calming or sensory tools, movement, quiet spaces, or other supports that help the child feel safe and regulated.
5. **Validate & Acknowledge Feelings:** Use brief, supportive statements such as “I can see this is hard” or “I'm here if you need help.”
6. **Reconnect & Teach When Calm:** Once the child is ready, revisit the situation, practice replacement skills, and collaboratively problem-solve for next time.

Helpful Tip: Co-regulation does not mean giving in to every request or removing all expectations. It means prioritizing safety and emotional support while maintaining appropriate, flexible boundaries. The goal is to help the child regain access to their communication, coping, and problem-solving skills.

From Co-Regulation to Skill Building

Co-regulation helps children become ready to learn, while function-based strategies help strengthen replacement skills. During dysregulation, prioritize safety, connection, and emotional support. Once the child is regulated and ready, focus on teaching and reinforcing appropriate communication, coping strategies, and other skills that meet the same underlying need as the challenging behavior.

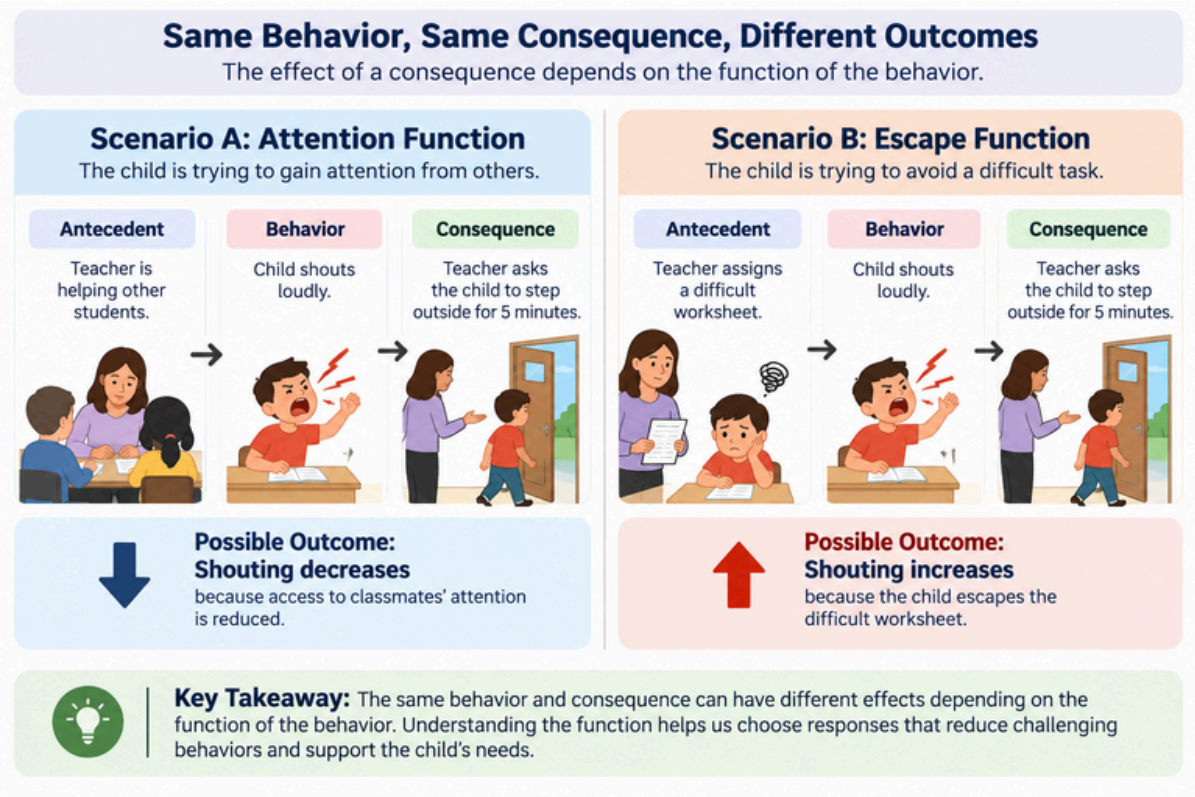
Function-Based Consequence Strategies

While general reactive strategies help adults respond safely during dysregulation, **function-based consequence strategies** focus on how adult responses may influence whether a behavior occurs again.

The same consequence can increase or decrease a behavior depending on its function. A consequence that successfully reduces one child's challenging behavior may unintentionally reinforce the same behavior in another child. This is because consequences can influence future behavior differently depending on what the child is seeking or trying to avoid.

In the visual below, both children engage in the same behavior (shouting) and experience the same consequence (being asked to step outside). However, the behaviors serve different functions:

- Attention Function: Shouting may *decrease* because the child loses access to classmates' attention.
- Escape Function: Shouting may *increase* because the child successfully avoids a difficult task.



Function-Based Consequence Strategies: SENSORY / AUTOMATIC

Children with developmental differences, including autism and ADHD, may engage in behaviors that provide *sensory stimulation*, *comfort*, or *regulation*. These may include rocking, hand flapping, humming, rubbing textures, or repetitive movements.

Not all sensory-based behaviors need intervention. Safe behaviors that support regulation and do not meaningfully interfere with functioning (e.g., hand flapping when excited) should generally be respected. Intervention should focus on behaviors that pose *safety risks* (e.g., self-injury) or significantly interfere with daily functioning.

How to Respond to Sensory-Based Behaviors

1. **Allow Safe Sensory Behaviors:** Avoid interrupting harmless behaviors that help the child regulate, even if they appear unusual or unexpected to others.
2. **Offer Alternative Sensory Activities:** When a behavior is unsafe or disruptive, gently redirect the child toward safer activities that provide similar sensory input (e.g., offering a chew-safe tool instead of biting their hand).
3. **Prioritize Safety:** If self-injury occurs, reduce immediate hazards and use the least intrusive safe response. Physical blocking should only be used when necessary to prevent injury and consistent with an individualized safety plan and appropriate training.
4. **Remain Calm & Neutral:** Use a calm voice, supportive body language, and minimal verbal demands. Avoid strong emotional reactions that may increase distress.
5. **Reinforce Safer Alternatives:** Promptly acknowledge and support the child's use of safer sensory activities, coping strategies, or functional communication.
6. **Address Underlying Needs:** Consider whether sensory overload, pain, fatigue, anxiety, or environmental stressors are contributing to the behavior, and adjust supports accordingly.



KEY IDEA

For sensory-based behaviors, the goal is not to eliminate sensory differences. It is to respect safe self-regulation, reduce harmful behaviors, and provide safer ways to meet sensory needs.

Function-Based Consequence Strategies: ESCAPE / AVOIDANCE

Escape-maintained behaviors occur when a child engages in a behavior to avoid, delay, or end an activity or situation they find difficult, unpleasant, or overwhelming.

The goal is to reduce challenging behaviors while teaching appropriate ways to request help, breaks, or task modifications and supporting successful participation.

How to Respond to Escape-Maintained Behaviors

1. **Stay Calm & Reduce Escalation:** Respond with a calm, neutral tone. Avoid arguing, repeated demands, or lengthy explanations.
2. **Maintain Reasonable Expectations:** When the child is regulated and the task is appropriate, gently support continued participation rather than automatically removing the task following challenging behavior.
3. **Increase Support & Prompting:** If the child is struggling, provide additional assistance, model the first step, simplify instructions, or move necessary materials within reach. Avoid escalating physical or verbal prompting when the child is distressed.
4. **Modify the Task When Needed:** Reduce the difficulty, length, or complexity of the task to make participation more manageable (e.g., completing three problems instead of an entire worksheet).
5. **Teach & Reinforce Functional Communication:** Prompt and honor appropriate requests such as "Help," "Break," or "Too hard." Support the child in returning to the activity when ready.
6. **Reinforce Successful Participation:** Provide specific praise or positive feedback for task initiation, effort, requesting help, and completing manageable steps.

Helpful Tip: Automatically removing a task following challenging behavior can sometimes unintentionally strengthen escape-maintained behaviors. We do not want challenging behavior to become the child's only reliable way to avoid difficult situations. Instead, teach and reinforce appropriate communication (e.g., requesting help or a break), provide necessary accommodations, and support successful participation. Remember that breaks and adjustments should always be available when genuinely needed.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Sensory-based Behavior	Sensory-based Consequence Strategy
Child jumps up and down and flaps hands when excited.	Allow the behavior; no intervention is necessary if it is safe.
Child bites their hand to obtain sensory input.	Assess for pain or distress and offer a safe, appropriate oral sensory alternative.
Child repeatedly rubs soft textures on toys.	Allow access to preferred textures as a safe sensory-regulation activity.
Child hums loudly during independent work.	Allow humming when feasible or collaboratively identify an alternative space or quieter strategy.
Child repeatedly bangs their head against a hard surface.	Prioritize immediate safety, assess possible medical or environmental causes, and follow an individualized safety plan.
Escape-based Behavior	**Escape-based Consequence Strategy**
Child throws a difficult worksheet.	Reduce demands, offer help, and support completion of a smaller, manageable portion when ready.
Child leaves their seat during a lengthy assignment.	Offer a movement break and divide the assignment into shorter work periods.
Child refuses to begin cleaning up toys.	Give one clear instruction, model the first step, and help the child begin.
Child avoids a multi-step morning routine.	Use a visual schedule and provide one instruction at a time with additional support.
Child refuses to begin cleaning up toys.	Give one clear instruction, model the first step, and help the child begin.

Function-Based Consequence Strategies: ATTENTION / CONNECTION

Attention-maintained behaviors occur when a child engages in behavior to gain attention or elicit reactions from others. These reactions may include eye contact, verbal responses, facial expressions, laughter, physical contact, or even negative attention such as scolding or reprimands. The goal is to reduce challenging behaviors while teaching and reinforcing *appropriate ways to seek attention and connection*.

How to Respond to Attention-Maintained Behaviors

1. **Provide Positive Attention Proactively:** Offer regular opportunities for positive interactions, encouragement, and connection throughout the day.
2. **Teach Appropriate Attention-Seeking Skills:** Model and practice replacement behaviors such as saying "Excuse me," raising a hand, tapping an adult's shoulder, or using a communication card.
3. **Use Selective Attention:** Intentionally provide more attention to appropriate behaviors while minimizing unnecessary attention to minor, functionally identified attention-seeking behaviors.
4. **Consider Planned/Active Ignoring When Appropriate:** For certain mild, safe attention-maintained behaviors, adults may briefly withhold attention so the behavior is less likely to be reinforced. This should be implemented with professional guidance.
5. **Immediately Reinforce Positive Alternatives:** Provide specific, labeled praise or meaningful attention when the child uses appropriate communication, coping strategies, or other positive behaviors.

What Is Planned/Active Ignoring?

Planned ignoring involves intentionally withholding attention following a specific, mild behavior that has been identified as attention-maintained. It is important to clarify that this strategy means *temporarily* withholding attention from a *specific* behavior, not ignoring the child's emotional needs, distress, or attempts to communicate.

Depending on the individualized plan, this may involve:

- **Avoiding Eye Contact:** Briefly looking away rather than directly reacting to the behavior.
- **Maintaining a Neutral Expression:** Avoiding exaggerated facial reactions such as frustration or surprise.
- **Limiting Verbal Responses:** Avoiding reprimands, lectures, or repeated explanations.
- **Avoiding Unnecessary Physical Contact:** Not providing attention through touching or physical redirection.

Why Does Planned Ignoring Work?

When a child's behavior is maintained by attention, even seemingly negative reactions from others, such as eye contact, verbal reprimands, facial expressions, or physical contact, may unintentionally reinforce that behavior.

In behavioral psychology, attention functions as *positive reinforcement* when it increases the likelihood of the behavior occurring again.

Planned ignoring uses the principle of **extinction**: By *briefly* and *consistently* withholding attention following a specific, mild attention-maintained behavior, we remove the reinforcement that may be maintaining it. Over time, this can help decrease the behavior.

At the same time, we **immediately provide positive attention for appropriate alternative behaviors,** such as asking for attention, using functional communication, or engaging appropriately with others.

For example, a child repeatedly makes silly noises to get an adult's reaction. Instead of responding to the noises, the adult briefly withholds attention and then provides positive attention when the child appropriately requests interaction.

When NOT to Use Planned Ignoring

It is not recommended to use planned ignoring for:

- Physical aggression, self-injury, or dangerous behaviors.
- Emotional distress, fear, anxiety, or significant dysregulation.
- Requests for help, comfort, or necessary support.
- Behaviors that may reflect pain, sensory overload, or unmet needs.

Helpful Tip: Planned ignoring is a specialized behavioral strategy that should be used only for mild, safe behaviors confirmed to be attention-maintained. It is recommended to work with a qualified behavioral or mental health professional to determine whether it is appropriate, develop an individualized plan, and ensure consistent, safe implementation. Some behaviors may initially increase when attention is withheld, so ongoing monitoring is important.

Function-Based Consequence Strategies: TANGIBLE ACCESS

Tangible-maintained behaviors occur when a child engages in behavior to gain access to a desired item, activity, or experience.

For example, a child may scream, grab, or throw objects when they want a toy, snack, or additional screen time.

The goal is to reduce challenging behaviors while teaching appropriate ways to request preferred items, tolerate waiting, and cope when desired items are unavailable.

How to Respond to Tangible-Maintained Behaviors

1. **Stay Calm & Maintain Boundaries:** Respond with a calm, neutral tone. When appropriate, avoid providing access to a desired item solely in response to challenging behavior, as this may unintentionally reinforce the behavior.
2. **Support Regulation:** Allow time and space for the child to regulate. Avoid lengthy explanations, arguments, or repeated demands during heightened distress.
3. **Prompt Appropriate Communication:** When the child is ready, encourage an accessible request such as "Can I have it?", "More time, please," or using a picture card or AAC device. Do not require a fixed period of calm before responding to communication.
4. **Reinforce Replacement Skills:** When the requested item or activity is available and appropriate, provide access following functional communication to strengthen that skill.
5. **Offer Alternatives When Unavailable:** If the item or activity cannot be provided, acknowledge the child's frustration and offer choices for alternative activities or a clear explanation of when it will be available.
6. **Teach Waiting & Flexibility:** Gradually practice waiting, accepting alternatives, and tolerating delayed access during calm moments, using visual timers, schedules, and positive reinforcement.

Helpful Tip: Providing a preferred item immediately following challenging behavior can sometimes unintentionally strengthen tangible-maintained behaviors. However, when a child appropriately communicates their needs, independently or with support, we want to reinforce this functional communication as soon as it occurs, while maintaining reasonable, predictable boundaries when necessary.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Attention-based Behavior	Attention-based Consequence Strategy
Child repeatedly makes silly noises to get classmates to laugh.	Minimize unnecessary reactions to the noises and reinforce appropriate ways to gain peer attention.
Child interrupts adults who are talking.	Teach a gesture or phrase for requesting attention and respond positively when used.
Child whines to gain adult attention.	Assess the child's needs, model a clearer request, and provide attention for appropriate communication.
Child whines to gain adult attention.	Respond promptly and provide specific praise (e.g., “Thank you for asking for help!”).

Tangible Access-based Behavior	Tangilble Access-based Consequence Strategy
Child screams when wanting a preferred toy.	Support regulation, prompt an appropriate communication request, and provide access when available.
Child grabs a toy from another child.	Support returning the toy and teach requesting a turn or asking to share.
Child cries when tablet time ends.	Validate frustration, maintain a reasonable boundary, and offer choices for the next activity.
Child repeatedly demands a preferred snack that is unavailable.	Acknowledge the request, explain when the snack will be available, and offer alternative choices.
Child throws objects when denied access to a preferred activity.	Prioritize safety, support regulation, and teach appropriate requests and coping skills once ready.

Section 6
Seeking Professional Help & Additional Supports

When Should You Seek Professional Help?

The strategies discussed throughout this workbook can help caregivers and educators better understand behavior, support regulation, and teach positive replacement skills. However, some children may need additional, individualized support.

If you have consistently implemented these strategies, collaborated with your child's existing support team, and continue to observe significant difficulties with behavior, learning, emotional regulation, or daily functioning, it may be helpful to seek professional guidance.

Consider seeking additional support when:

- Challenging behaviors are frequent, intense, or worsening.
- Behaviors interfere with learning, relationships, independence, or daily activities.
- The child experiences significant distress or difficulty regulating emotions.
- Existing strategies and supports have not resulted in meaningful improvement.
- Caregivers or educators feel uncertain about how to safely and effectively respond.

Who Can Help?

Depending on your child's needs, professionals may include:

- **Psychologists**: Psychologists are professionals holding a Ph.D. or Psy.D. in psychology and can provide behavioral and psychological services, including assessment/evaluation and psychotherapeutic interventions.
- **Developmental-Behavioral Pediatricians (DBP):** DBPs are professionals holding an M.D. or D.O. medical degree and have received additional training in developmental-behavioral pediatrics. They can evaluate developmental, behavioral, and medical factors affecting a child's functioning and often work in medical clinics/hospital settings.
- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Providers:** ABA providers are qualified behavior analysts who can conduct behavioral assessments, develop individualized, function-based intervention plans, as well as engage in ABA interventions.
- **Licensed Mental Health Professionals:** Licensed mental health clinicians with expertise in autism, developmental disabilities, and behavioral intervention can provide therapy, caregiver coaching, and behavioral support.
- **Other Specialists:** Occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and medical providers may address sensory, communication, motor, or health-related needs.

Important: If behaviors involve serious self-injury, aggression, or immediate safety concerns, seek professional assistance promptly rather than waiting to see whether strategies improve over time.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. I think my child needs additional behavioral support at school. What should I ask?

Start by sharing your concerns with your child's teacher, school counselor, or special education team.

You might ask:

- “What behaviors are interfering with my child's learning or participation?”
- “What strategies are currently being used, and how is progress being measured?”
- “Would a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) be appropriate?”
- “Would my child benefit from a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)?”
- “Should we consider an evaluation for special education services or accommodations?”
- “How can we coordinate strategies between home and school?”

If your child already has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), you can request a team meeting to discuss behavioral concerns and whether additional assessment or supports are needed.

2. Does my child need an autism diagnosis to receive behavioral services?

Not necessarily. Eligibility depends on the specific service, program, and funding source.
For example, school-based special education services are determined by educational eligibility and needs, while certain medical or insurance-funded services may require specific diagnoses or medical documentation.

3. How can I access behavioral services through insurance?

Contact your insurance provider to ask about covered behavioral health services, provider networks, referral requirements, prior authorization, and any diagnostic or medical necessity requirements. Coverage for psychological evaluations, psychotherapy, caregiver training, and ABA services may differ depending on your plan.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

4. What if my child needs services through the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) or Department of Health (DOH)?

Hawai'i has multiple service systems, each with different eligibility requirements and responsibilities.

- DOE: Supports eligible students through school-based evaluations, special education, related services, and accommodations.
- DOH: Administers programs that may support children with developmental, behavioral, or mental health needs, depending on age, eligibility, and program criteria.
- Private Insurance: May cover medically necessary behavioral health assessments and interventions, subject to plan requirements.

Because eligibility and service pathways vary, families may need to communicate with multiple agencies to identify available supports.

5. What if I am having difficulty accessing services?

Consider contacting local disability advocacy organizations, parent support networks, or family resource centers. These organizations may help families understand available programs, navigate eligibility processes, prepare for school meetings, and identify additional resources.

A few local organizations to connect with may include:

- **Special Parent Information Network (SPIN)**
  - Website (spinhawaii.org)
  - Call (808-586-8126)
- **Hilopa'a Family to Family Health Information Center**
  - Website (hilopaa.org) or Call (808-791-3467)
- **Ho'omana Parent Support Group**
  - Website (https://sites.google.com/view/windwardautismprogram/parentfamily-support/hoomana)
  - Email (hoomanagroup@gmail.com)
  - Call (808-426-6879)

Remember: You do not need to navigate every system alone. Collaboration among families, educators, healthcare providers, and advocacy organizations can help identify appropriate supports for your child.

Glossary of Common Terms

ABA — Applied Behavior Analysis: A scientific approach to understanding learning and behavior and developing individualized interventions. ABA-based interventions may include teaching communication, daily living, social, and adaptive skills; modifying environmental conditions; and reducing behaviors that interfere with safety or functioning. Services should be individualized, respectful of the child's needs and autonomy, and focused on meaningful improvements in quality of life.

ABC Model: Antecedent, Behavior, Consequence: a framework for understanding behavioral patterns.

BCBA — Board Certified Behavior Analyst: A professional credentialed in behavior analysis.

BIP — Behavior Intervention Plan: A written plan outlining prevention strategies, replacement skills, responses, and progress monitoring. It typically identifie target behaviors and their likely functions, proactive strategies to prevent challenging behaviors, replacement skills to teach and reinforce, supportive responses when challenging behaviors occur, and methods for monitoring progress and adjusting interventions.

EI — Early Intervention: Developmental services and supports for eligible infants and toddlers and their families. Services can include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, parent coaching and other supports.

FCT — Functional Communication Training: Teaching effective communication that serves the same function as challenging behavior.

FBA — Functional Behavior Assessment: An assessment process to identify why challenging behaviors may occur and what maintains them. It may involve interviews, observations, reviewing ABC patterns, collecting behavioral data, and, when appropriate, more structured assessment procedures.

IEP — Individualized Education Program: Covered by the federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA*), an IEP is a written program describing special education services and supports for an eligible student tailored to their unique needs.

SEAT — Sensory, Escape, Attention, Tangible: Four common categories of behavioral function.

Section 504 Plan: A plan documenting accommodations or services needed for equal access to education under Section 504.

REFLECTION

- What is one idea from this workshop that changed, challenged, or expanded the way you think about behavior, regulation, and connection?

_____

_____

- What is one strategy you plan to begin using or continue practicing?

_____

_____

- What is one area where your child or student may need additional support?

_____

_____

- Who could you collaborate with to better support your child or student?

_____

_____

- What is one thing you want to learn more about?

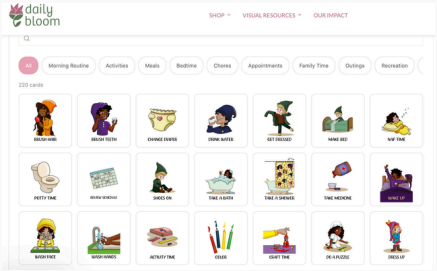
_____

_____

Resources

Proactive Positive Behavior Tools

There are a lot of behavior tools and visual aides available online. The resources below are good starting points for visual supports to teach and reinforce positive behaviors and emotion regulation.



Visual Schedule Builder- My Daily Bloom
Free

https://mydailybloom.com/pages/visual-schedule-builder



Visual Schedule, Choice Cards, Rewards Charts, and More - Social Worker Toolbox
Free

https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/printable-visual-schedules-and-daily-routine-charts-for-children/

https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/free-printable-charts-for-kids-daily-routines-behaviour-chores-goals-and-more/

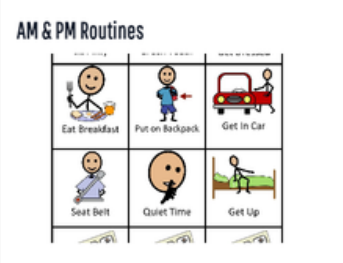
Token Board Creator- Edzucate
Free

https://www.ezducate.ai/free/token-board



Calm Down Cards- Little Puddins
Free

https://www.littlepuddins.ie/visual-supports/free-autism-well-being-calm-down-cards



Routine and Communication Visuals - Autism Academy
Free

https://aaed.org/printable-visuals/

Spectrum Unlocked

Choices Board, Communication Boards & More- Spectrum Unlocked
Free

https://www.spectrumunlocked.com/tools

SensoryGift

Routine, Calm Down, Appointment Visuals & More- Sensory Gift
Free

https://www.sensorygift.com/printables-hub/



Visual Timer

Available on Amazon, Target, Walmart, etc.

Fidgets



Pop Fidgets

Available on Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc.



Chew Fidgets

Available on Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc.



Sensory Fidgets

Available on Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc.



Fidget Spinners

Available on Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc.



Squishies & Stress Balls

Available on Amazon, Walmart, Schylling, etc.

Other Sensory Aids



Noise Cancelling Headphones and Passive Earmuffs

Available on Amazon, Best Buy, Alpine Hearing Protection, etc.



Weighted Blankets, Vests, Stuffed Animals

Available on Amazon, Target, etc.



Sensory Chairs (Bean Bags, Swivel, Rocking, Wobble, Cocoon, Hammock)

Available on Amazon, Target, etc.



Visual Sensory Lamps

Available on Amazon, Target, etc.

More Online Resources to Teach Positive Behaviors and Emotion Regualtion

PBS Kids

https://www.pbs.org/parents

A website with videos, games, articles, and craft ideas for parents to share with their children ages 2-8, including resources to teach emotions, self-awareness, and social skills

Sesame Street Workshop

https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/social-emotional-skills/

A website with videos, articles, and games for parents to share with their young children including resources to teach children about autism

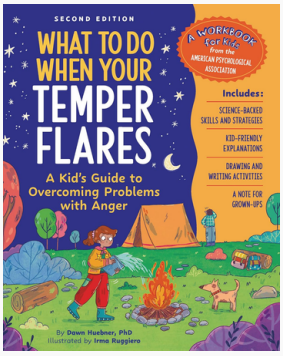
Books on Behavior and Regulation for Autistic Readers

Books written to teach language and skills for understanding emotions, behavior, and coping skills.



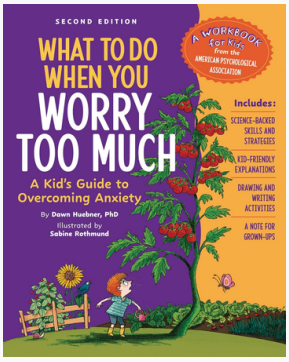
A Little Spot of Emotion— Diane Alber
Young children

A book series that helps kids identify, understand, and manage their feelings through colorful characters, relatable stories, and simple coping strategies.



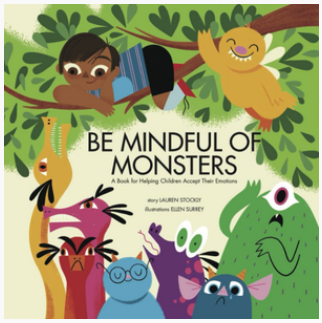
What to Do When Your Temper Flares: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems With Anger -Dawn Huebner
Elementary Age Children

A child-friendly guide that helps kids understand their anger, recognize triggers, and learn practical strategies to calm down, manage frustration, and respond to challenging situations in healthier ways.



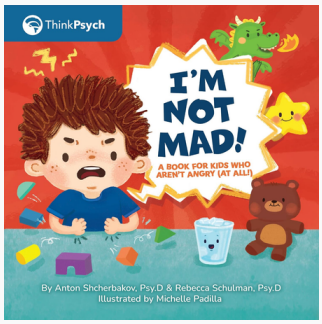
What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety -Dawn Huebner
Elementary Age Children

A child-friendly guide that helps kids understand anxiety, recognize worry patterns, and learn practical strategies to manage anxious thoughts and feel more confident.



Be Mindful of Monsters - Lauren Stockly
Elementary Age Children

A beautifully illustrated children's book that uses playful monster metaphors to help children understand and accept big emotions. Encourages emotional awareness, mindfulness, and conversations about feelings with adults.



I'm Not Mad!: A Book for Kids Who Aren't Angry (At All!) - Anton Shcherbakov, PsyD, and Rebecca Schulman, PsyD
Young Children

A humorous children's book that helps kids recognize, understand, and express feelings of anger. Encourages emotional awareness, self-acceptance, and healthy strategies for navigating big feelings.



I Use Kind Words. I Do Not Hit! - Suzanne T. Christian
Young Children

An engaging, affirmation-based children's book that helps toddlers learn alternatives to hitting and practice using words to express their feelings and needs. Encourages emotional awareness, kindness, and positive communication

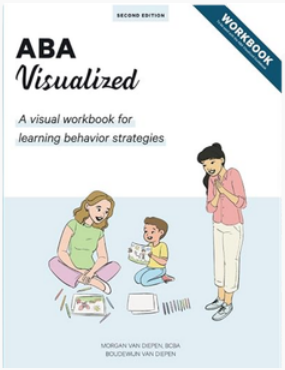


Roll With It! CBT Coping Skills Kit - ThinkPsych
Elementary Age Children

An interactive coping skills kit that helps children explore and practice strategies for managing big emotions. Uses playful, hands-on activities grounded in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) to build emotional awareness, flexibility, and self-regulation skills.

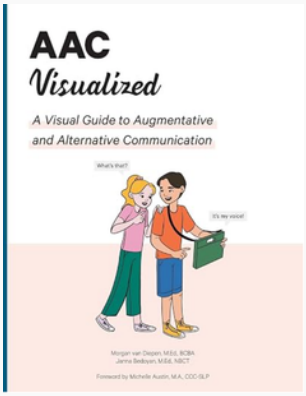
Books on Behavior, Regulation, and/or Connection for Guardians and Educators

Books written to teach behavior coaching strategies and understanding behaviors as communication



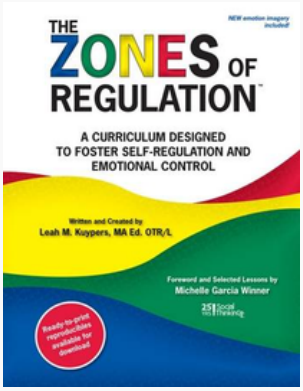
ABA Visualized Workbook 2nd Edition: A Visual Workbook for Learning Behavior Strategies -Morgan van Diepen BCBA, Boudewijn van Diepen

An interactive training tool for teaching behavior strategies! This second edition workbook uses a unique hands-on learning method



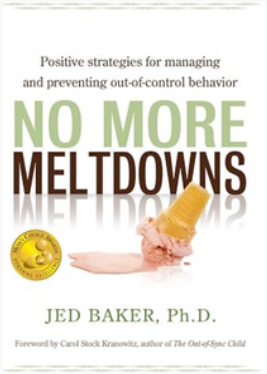
AAC Visualized- Morgan van Diepen

An interactive book for teaching how to support learners who are nonvocal or have limited speech, with the belief that everyone should have a voice.



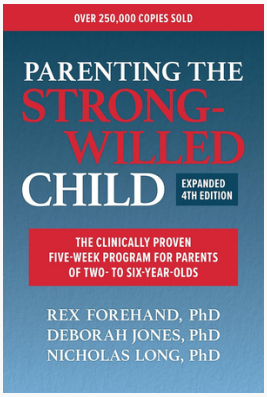
The Zones of Regulation - Leah M. Kuypers

An award-winning, research-based emotional regulation curriculum that gives educators, clinicians, caregivers, and support teams ready-to-use instruction for helping learners ages 4+ build skills for everyday life.



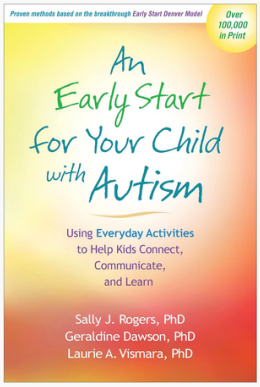
No More Meldowns- Jed Baker Ph.D.

A practical guide for parents and educators that offers strategies for understanding, preventing, and responding to emotional meltdowns. Emphasizes identifying underlying triggers, supporting regulation, de-escalating difficult moments, and developing proactive plans to reduce future challenges.



Parenting the Strong-Willed Child - Rex Forehand, PhD, Deborah J. Jones, PhD, and Nicholas Long, PhD

First published in 1996, this widely recommended, evidence-based parenting guide has supported families for 30 years. Now updated in its fourth edition, its structured five-week program emphasizes positive attention, consistent boundaries, and strengthening parent-child relationships to address challenging behaviors.

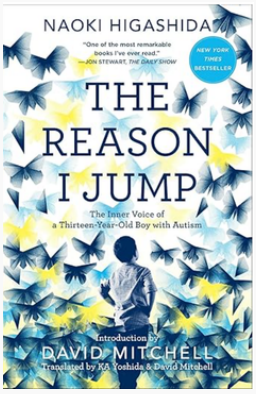


An Early Start for Your Child with Autism: Using Everyday Activities to Help Kids Connect, Communicate, and Learn - Sally J. Rogers, PhD, Geraldine Dawson, PhD, and Laurie A. Vismara, PhD

A practical, evidence-based guide that helps caregivers support young autistic children's communication, social engagement, and learning through everyday activities. Based on the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM), it emphasizes playful interactions, responsive relationships, and natural opportunities for skill development.

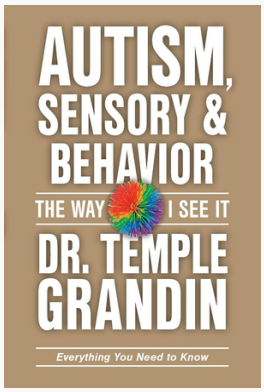
Understanding Autistic Experiences: Books by Autistic Authors

Books written to share the perspective of autistic individuals.



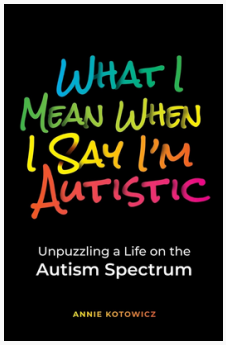
The Reason I Jump - Naoki Higashida, KA Yoshida (Translator), David Mitchell (Translator)

Written by Naoki Higashida, a nonspeaking autistic teenager, this firsthand account offers insights into his experiences of communication, sensory processing, emotions, and behavior. Encourages readers to look beyond outward behaviors and better understand the diverse ways autistic people experience and interact with the world.



Autism, Sensory and Behavior: Everything You Need to Know (The Way I See It) - Temple Grandin, PhD

Drawing on her lived experience as an autistic person and extensive research, Dr. Grandin explores how sensory differences influence behavior, learning, and emotional regulation. Offers practical strategies for understanding sensory overload, supporting individual needs, and building on autistic strengths.



What I Mean When I Say I'm Autistic - Annie Kotowicz

A thoughtful, accessible exploration of autistic thinking, communication, sensory experiences, and social differences. Helps readers understand how autistic people experience and navigate a world designed around neurotypical expectations.

Thank You!

You've completed the Understanding Autism: Behavior, Regulation, & Connection Workshop Workbook!

Thank you for your time, curiosity, and commitment to learning more about autism and supporting neurodiverse individuals and families.

We hope the information and resources you gained will be helpful as you continue your learning journey.

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