



Understanding Challenging Behavior in ASD

Students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may exhibit challenging behaviors. Differences in communication, sensory processing and emotional regulation can contribute to an overwhelming sense of traumatic stress.

Here are some helpful strategies to consider.

- A Functional Behavioral Assessment can be used to identify the underlying cause of the behavior and is the first step to developing a plan of action.
- Techniques of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), with a heavy emphasis on positive behavior supports, teaches new and effective behaviors so that aggression is no longer necessary to communicate wants and needs.
- Avoid use of negative statements and threats of discipline. Empirical evidence reports that positive reinforcement and respect brings about pathways to success.
- Knowing what to expect by using visual timetables, structured schedules, first/then cards, social stories and video modeling helps to smooth transitions between activities.
- Limit your verbal communication during moments of behavioral challenges. We all have difficulty processing sounds when we're in crisis. Think about how we turn down or off our car radio when we witness an accident or find ourselves in a rainstorm. For children with ASD, who can have trouble processing language, this is especially true.
- Designated sensory safe spaces in your classroom can offer opportunities to calm overstimulation before a behavior occurs. A quiet walk outside with a trusted adult also helps soothe emotional dysregulation.
- Assistive technology (high and low tech) are communication tools addressed in IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and are an essential component of success for many on the autism spectrum.
- Be a model of what you expect in your students. Remaining mindful of your own emotions and practicing steps of self-regulation can alter a challenging moment on a dime. (ie; 10 deep breaths, lifting and dropping shoulders, stretch)
- Steer clear of power struggles. For kids who are seeking to control their environment, offer choices (but you remain in charge of what the choices are). Use visual task lists, token economy reinforcement and opportunities to engage in roles of leadership. (line leader, classroom job, deliver items to office, etc)