



Proactive Strategies for Reducing Challenging Behaviour

Here are some guidelines and strategies which can help prevent or reduce challenging behaviour in your home. Using these strategies will not stop all challenging behaviour, but you may find these strategies useful in reducing it!

Increase structure and routine

If you have not done so already, it's best to create a clear daily schedule for your child's new routine, which has changed due to social distancing. Making a schedule will make things more predictable for your child, and this can help to reduce anxiety. Put a range of activities into the routine - this will leave fewer opportunities for your child to display challenging behaviour due to boredom. Make specific plans for difficult times of the day – try to ensure you have more support and supervision for your child at these times.



Create lots of opportunities for relaxation during the day

Ensure that time to relax is included in your child's daily schedule. Some examples of relaxing activities include: listening to music, story time, hand massages, swinging on a swing, looking at bubble lamps, or smelling essential oils. Challenging behaviour can also often be reduced by engaging in an activity that helps to release energy or pent-up anger. This might be something like punching a punch bag, bouncing on a trampoline or running around the garden. Please also see Occupational Therapy guidelines on the website in relation to supporting your child's regulation.

Use transition supports

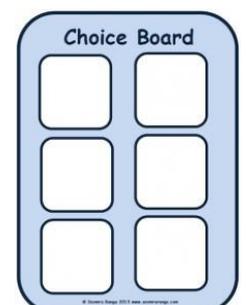
When following your daily schedule, it may be useful to use supports to help your child learn how to transition from one activity to the next. Transition supports can be auditory, such as playing a song, chanting a phrase, or an alarm bell. It can be visual, such as showing a symbol or picture, flipping over a sign, or pointing to a visual timer. It can also be physical, such as having a dance or physical movement associated with upcoming changes in activities. This will help you and your child maintain a consistent routine that is predictable. Your child may initially need direct instruction on what to do during these transition times and support in learning this skill.



Use environmental supports throughout the day

These can include visual schedules, or choice boards which have a visual display of activities and attached rewards. You can also use boundary identification, for example: carpet squares to mark their "quiet space", or tablecloths for messy, sensory activities.

Please see our website for further visual support guidelines and resources.





Reduce demands

As you and your child are spending more time at home, they may be struggling with the huge change to their routine. For this reason, it may be best for the time being to reduce or eliminate unnecessary demands. Your child may be finding a certain task difficult or overwhelming, which can cause them to engage in challenging behaviour. If it is a task that needs doing, for example having a bath, or eating a meal, come back to it later when your child is feeling calmer, and explain in simple, concise language why it needs to be done. Use visuals to support your message if your child responds well to visuals.



Use communication tools. Support your child to use appropriate ways of communicating their wants and needs. You could try photographs, symbols for activities, scales, charts or apps. Some children can have difficulty making themselves understood, understanding what's being asked of them, and understanding facial expressions and body language. Even those who speak quite fluently may struggle to tell you something when they are anxious or upset. This can cause considerable frustration and anxiety which may result in difficult, sometimes challenging behaviour.

Please see our Speech and Therapy resources on the website for further resources which may support your child's communication.

Speak clearly and precisely using short sentences

By reducing your language, your child is less likely to feel overloaded by information and more likely to be able to process what you say. Try to speak in a calm tone of voice when your child does engage in challenging behaviour, as this helps to promote a calmer response in them.

Use plenty of rewards and praise

Give encouragement to your child for appropriate behaviour, and for periods when they don't engage in challenging behaviour. Many children with autism and/or learning disabilities don't understand the connection between their behaviour and a punishment, and therefore punishing them will not help your child understand what you want, or help you to teach them new skills. Rewards however, will help them learn that appropriate behaviours bring positive outcomes. It also gives them a sense of achievement and success which is likely to help motivate them to continue with the more appropriate behaviour.



When using a reward system, choose one specific behaviour that you are rewarding, such as using "gentle hands" or "sharing with my brother". If you are using a reward system, it is best not to choose a goal such as "being good" for your child to earn a reward, as this is a vague term, and difficult to define, so your child may not know what behaviour results in a reward for "being good". Ensure that the chosen behaviour is achievable for your child. If it is too difficult for them to achieve then they may become frustrated, and result in more difficult



behaviours occurring.

Try to give praise and rewards immediately after your child engages in an appropriate behaviour, ensure you say clearly what you are rewarding, and give meaningful rewards. Some children like verbal praise, others may prefer stickers or star charts, small amounts of their favourite food or drinks, or five minutes with their favourite activity or DVD. When choosing a reward, ensure that it is manageable, and is something that you and your family can consistently provide, and that it is motivating for your child. Some children may need a reward system that changes on a regular basis to keep them motivated. Rewards need not and should not cost the earth: sometimes, a high five and praise is enough for your child to feel a sense of accomplishment.

Adapted from: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/challenging-behaviour.aspx>