

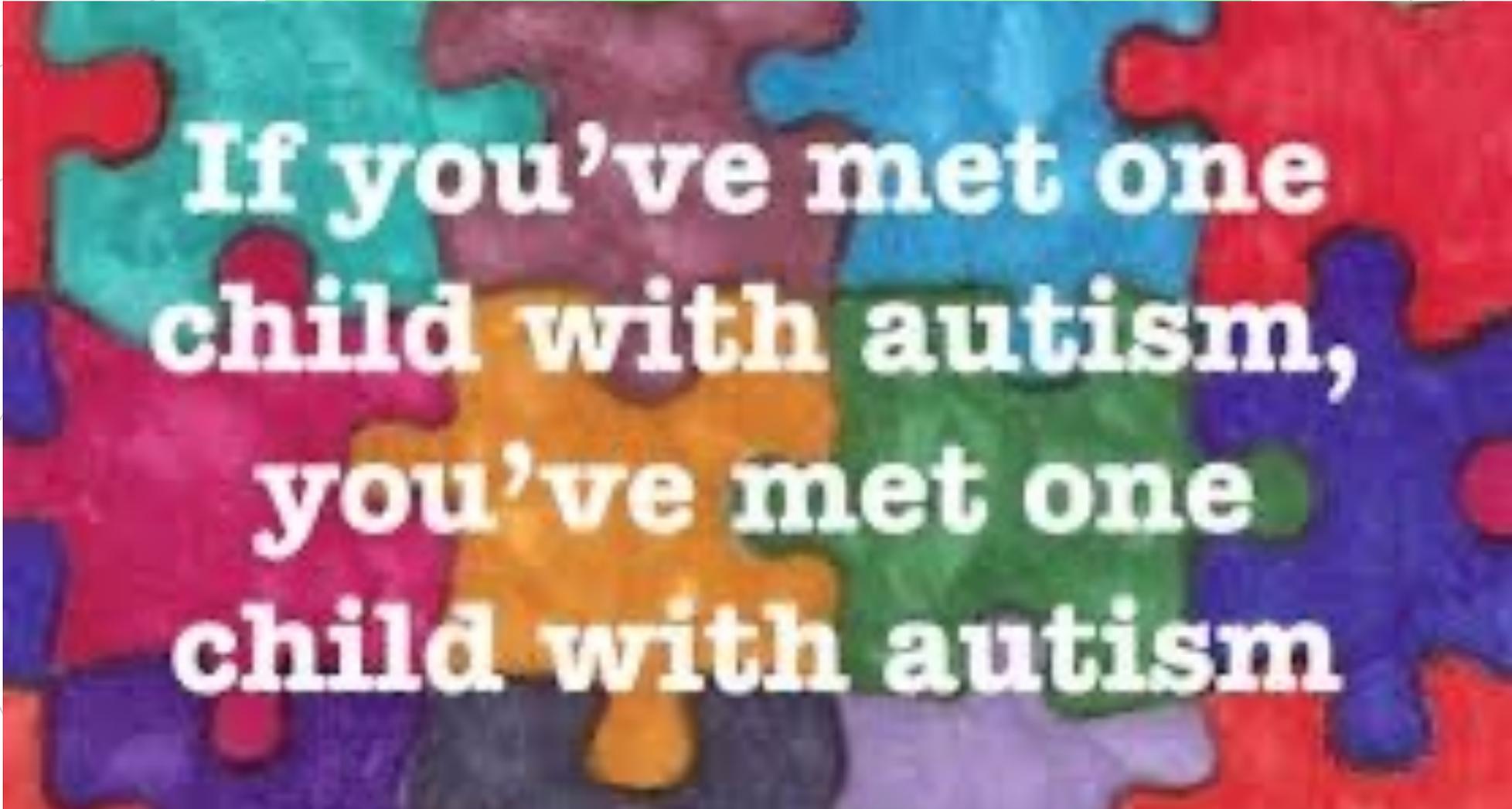
Autism in Early Childhood Settings

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<https://luthsped.org/2021/08/03/iowa-early-childhood-resources/>



**If you've met one
child with autism,
you've met one
child with autism**

Autism: Early Signs

- The characteristic behaviors of autism spectrum disorder may be apparent in infancy (18 to 24 months), but they usually become clearer during early childhood (24 months to 6 years)
- Most obvious signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age
- Any of these “red flags” does not mean a child has autism. But because the disorder’s symptoms vary so widely, a child showing these behaviors should be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team
- Under the DSM-5 criteria, individuals with ASD must show symptoms from early childhood, even if those symptoms are not recognized until later

Autism: Early Signs

- No big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by six months or thereafter
- No back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles, or other facial expressions by nine months or thereafter
- No babbling by 12 months
- No gesturing (pointing, waving bye-bye) by 12 months
- No words by 16 months
- No two-word meaningful phrases (without imitating or repeating) by 24 months
- Any loss of speech or babbling or social skills at any age

Autism: Early Signs

- Doesn't make eye contact (e.g. look at you when being fed)
- Doesn't smile when smiled at
- Doesn't respond to his or her name or to the sound of a familiar voice
- Doesn't follow objects visually
- Doesn't point or wave goodbye or use other gestures to communicate
- Doesn't follow the gesture when you point things out

Autism: Early Signs

- Doesn't make noises to get your attention
- Doesn't initiate or respond to cuddling
- Doesn't imitate your movements and facial expressions
- Doesn't reach out to be picked up
- Doesn't play with other people or share interest and enjoyment
- Doesn't ask for help or make other basic requests

Autism: Asperger Syndrome

- Major differences
 - No speech delay in Asperger's
 - Children with Asperger Syndrome frequently have good language skills, just use language in different ways
 - Speech patterns may be unusual, lack inflection or have a rhythmic nature, or may be formal, but too loud or high-pitched
 - Children with Asperger Syndrome may not understand the subtleties of language, such as irony and humor, or they may not understand the give-and-take nature of a conversation

Autism: Asperger Syndrome

- **Difference in cognitive ability**
 - Some individuals with autism have intellectual disabilities, by definition, a person with Asperger Syndrome cannot have a “clinically significant” cognitive delay, and most possess average to above-average intelligence.
- While motor difficulties are not a specific criterion for Asperger’s, children with Asperger Syndrome frequently have motor skill delays and may appear clumsy or awkward.

Autism: Diagnosis

- Needs to be done by professionals and multidisciplinary team
- Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers, Revised (M-CHAT-R)
 - Online screening tool for toddlers 16-30 months, assesses risk for ASD
 - <http://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/diagnosis/screen-your-child>

Autism: Strategies

- Less is more with verbal instruction; even highly verbal students may experience anxiety from too much verbal instruction
- Provide highly structured and predictable routines and procedures
 - Prepare for new routines and places
- Transitions
 - Transition Objects
 - Carry object to next activity or photograph
 - Specific cue and routine for certain students
 - Spot marked on rug for circle time, child allowed to go first and sit before others
- “Finished” box
 - Specific place child knows to put everything as transition begins, same place for that child

Visual Strategies

- Prepare for transitions
 - Not just verbally, but visually
 - Well in advance of transition and more than once
 - Visual Timers
 - Time Timers <https://www.timetimer.com/collections/all>
 - Visual Countdown



Visual Countdown



Time Timer

Time Timers



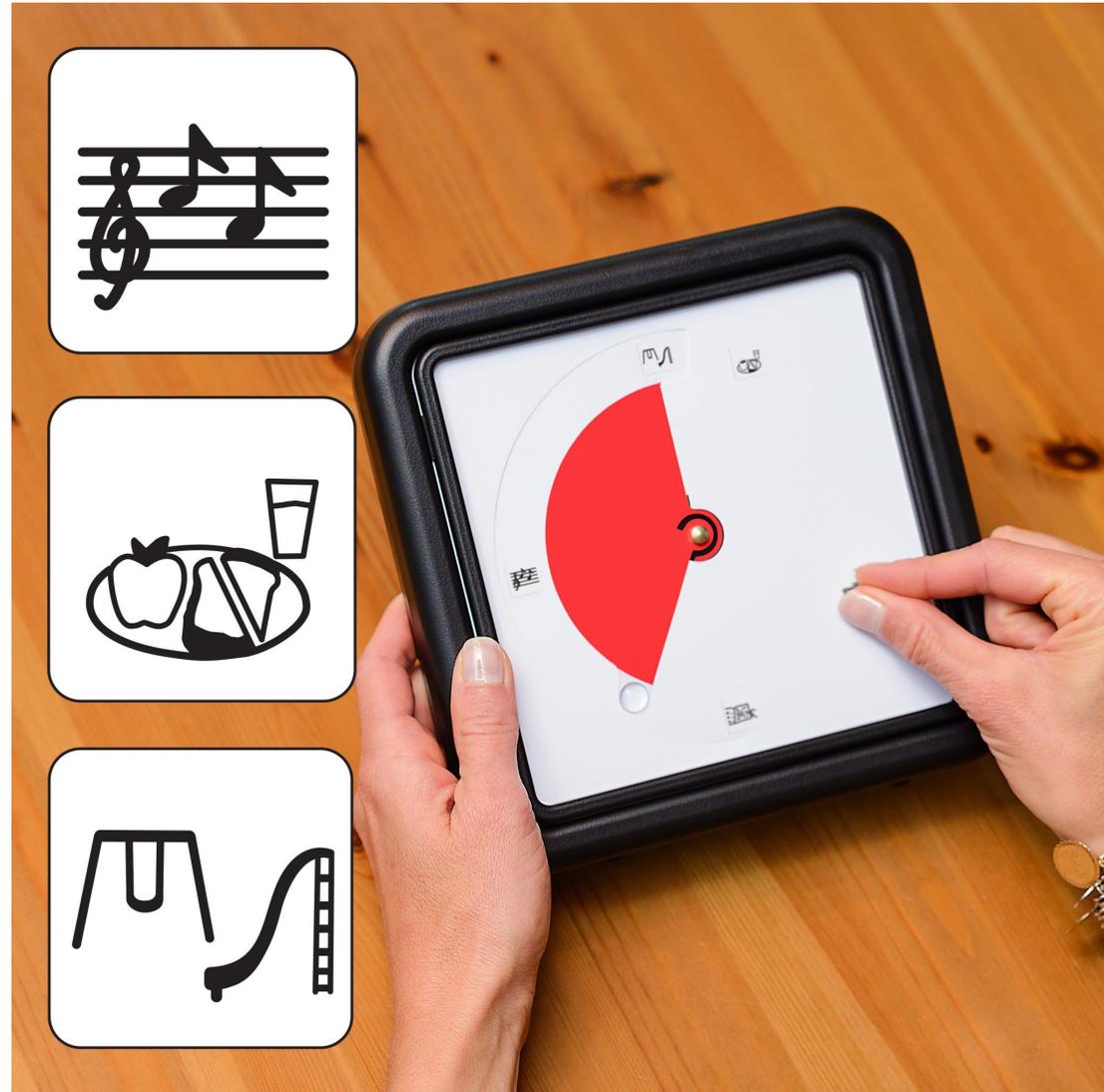
Time Timers

To Do:

- Pajamas
- BRUSH Teeth
- Bedtime Story



Time Timers

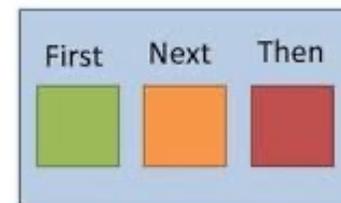
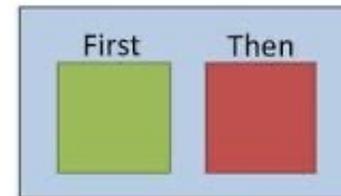


Strategies- Visual Schedules

- Great for all younger students, including those with autism and cognitive impairments
 - These children may have trouble with sequential processing, but do better with visual processing
- Visual schedules allow children to be more flexible and adaptable (something children with autism struggle with)
 - Schedule gives children stability and routine, even if activities change from day to day
- Teach children how to read and use visual schedules
- Could have one for whole class and/or for individual children as needed
- Interactive visual schedules more effective
- <https://www.specialneedstoys.com/usa/schkidules-home.html>
- <https://www.specialneedstoys.com/usa/schkidules-school.html>

Strategies- Visual Schedules

- **First, Next Then**
 - 3 activities pictured; second activity least desirable
 - Verbally review activities with child
 - After each task is complete, child removes picture and places in stop pocket
 - Schedule can be reset after all pictures are in



Strategies- Visual Schedules

- Schedule Board with stop pocket
 - Can have the whole day of activities or just a few on strip
 - After each activity is completed, remove task and put in stop pocket
 - “Ghostbusters” symbol



Strategies- Visual Schedules

- **Number Tab Board**
 - Teacher opens appropriate number of “doors” for activity (how many bites child needs to take, how many problems child needs to complete, etc)
 - Child performs desired task and teacher or child closes one door
 - Close stop sign door at the end

Other Visual Strategies

- **Choice Boards**
 - Displays a limited number of choices for activities
 - Children with autism often have difficulty figuring out what to do next or choosing from unlimited options

Other Visual Strategies

- Use cards to reduce behaviors
 - Example: student talks during class; monitor how many times/day this happens and give student less cards to begin; every time behavior happens, student has to give teacher a card; student will learn he/she can not do that once out of cards; over time cards are reduced; provide reinforcement as appropriate

Strategies: Social Stories

- Children with autism and other cognitive impairments may not inherently pick up on social cues and appropriate interactions; these need to be taught
- Social stories or scripted stories help teach these skills in a scripted and repetitive format
- Helps children understand the situation and expectations
- Model and role play with classmates important
- Use stories to help prepare student for new situations, to address challenging behavior, and teach new skills
- Social stories written in first person and contain descriptive sentences, perspective sentences and directive sentences (avoid “do not”), not all sentences are directives

Strategies: Social Stories

- **Social Stories Creator App:**
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/social-stories-creator-library/id588180598?mt=8>
- **Carol Gray Social Stories:**
<http://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/social-story-sampler/>
- **The New Social Story Book by Carol Gray:**
https://www.amazon.com/Social-Story-Revised-Expanded-Anniversary/dp/1941765165/ref=dp_ob_title_bk
- <http://www.nationalautismresources.com/autism-social-skills.html>



Sensory Strategies

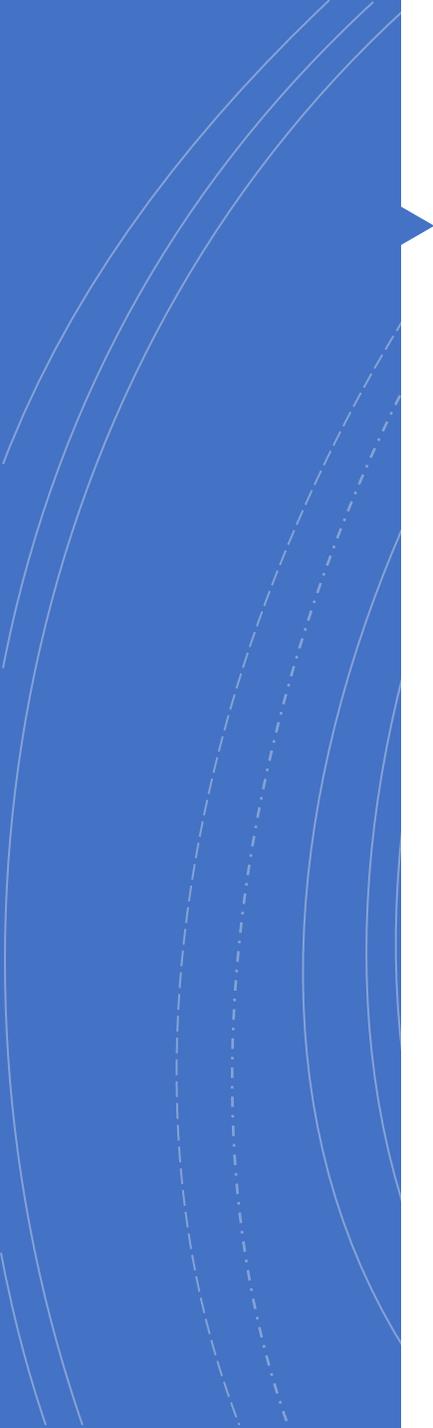
- Students who need additional time to process sensory input get very fatigued. Remember that they are processing much information at a much higher threshold than their peers (a pencil dropping is processed with the same level of intensity as the teacher's voice, with the students often having difficulty discerning what sensory information is the most important). Plan the intensity of their days accordingly.
- Make sure the student knows how to ask for a break. Use a visual support if necessary. Define acceptable break options for the student and allow them to choose. Remember that if the student has to come back and finish the non-preferred task, then he is not successfully avoiding the task.
- Use sensory items (velcro, fabric books, box with pillows, weighted vests and blankets)
 - <https://www.nationalautismresources.com/sensory-ot/>
 - <https://www.therapysshoppe.com>
 - <https://specialneedstoys.com/usa/>

Sensory Challenges

- Sensory input includes the five senses, but also others
- Proprioception- body awareness, sense of how body moves
- Vestibular- spatial orientation, sense of where body is in space, balance
- Interoception- helps understand and feel what is happening in body, sense of body's physical condition

Sensory Challenges

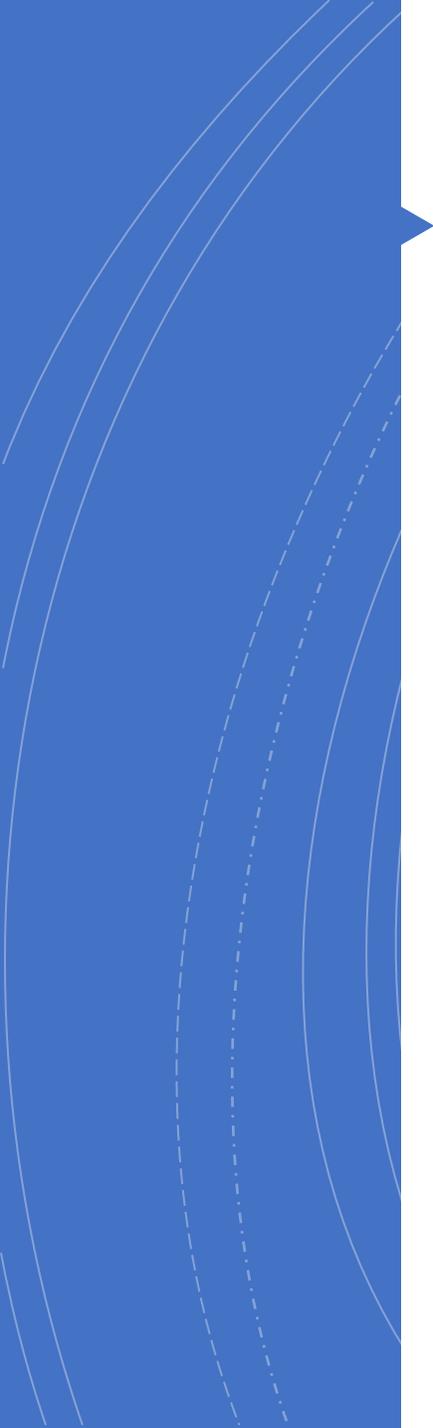
- **Oversensitivity/hypersensitivity to sensory input leads to sensory avoiding**
 - **Avoid sensory input because it's overwhelming**
 - **Loud noises, bright lights, irritating fabrics**
- **Undersensitivity/hyposensitivity to sensory input causes sensory seeking**
 - **Need more sensory input**
 - **High tolerance for pain, may play rough, not understand when they're hurting someone**



Sensory Challenges

- **Combination of hyper and hyposensitive**
 - **May be oversensitive to some sensory inputs but undersensitive to others**
 - **Reactions to sensory inputs can change from day to day or within the same day**

	Tantrum	Meltdown
What It Is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An angry or frustrated outburst. • A child might yell, cry, lash out, and hold his breath. • A child typically has some control over his behavior during a tantrum. • The behavior tends to stop when he gets what he wants. (But tantrums can become overwhelming and evolve into meltdowns.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reaction to feeling overwhelmed. • A child might yell, cry, lash out, run away and/or shut down and withdraw. • Meltdowns are out of a child's control. • The behavior tends to stop when he wears himself out or when there's a change in the amount of sensory input he is experiencing.
What Triggers It	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire to get something, avoid something or elicit a specific reaction. • Frustration. • Not being able to communicate needs and wants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensory, information or emotional overload. • Intense frustration. • Sudden changes in routine or expectations. • Not being able to communicate needs and wants.
Signs You May Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You know what your child wants or is reacting to. • Your child is choosing to engage in the behavior. • He's able to pay attention to what's going on around him. • He watches other people's reactions and adjusts his behavior to match it. • He may be trying to bargain for a solution while he's yelling. • Behavior ends once when he gets what he wants or realizes he <i>won't</i> get what he wants by acting out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may not know what your child wants or is reacting to. • Your child doesn't seem to have control over his behavior and appears panicky. • He is shutting down or trying to escape. He's not able to process what's going on around him. • He doesn't respond to people's reactions or attempts to talk to him. • He loses his ability to problem-solve and negotiate solutions. • He needs time to calm down and recover, even after a situation has been resolved.

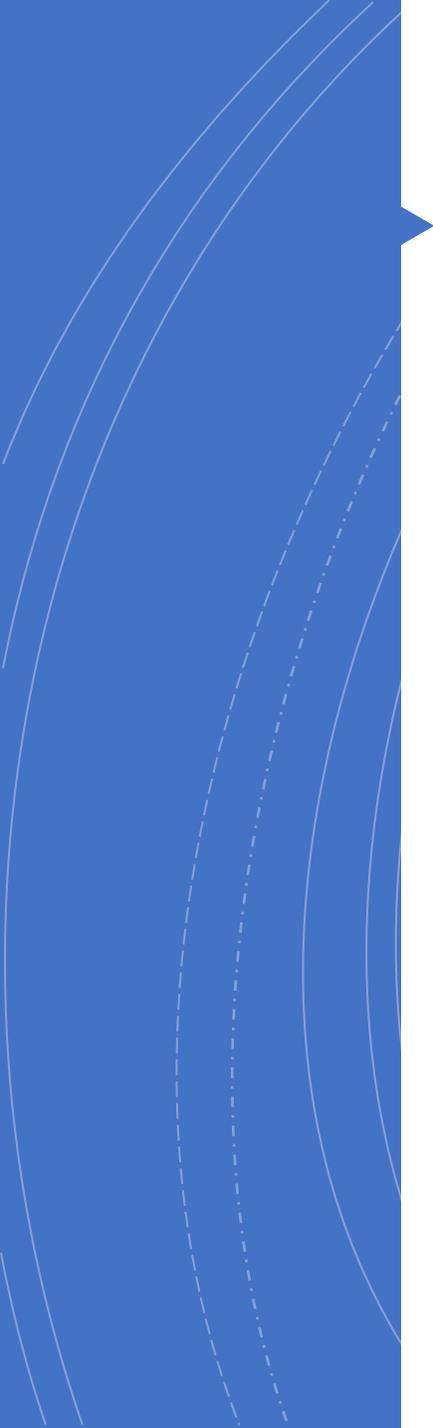


Signs of Oversensitivity/ Sensory Avoiding

- Often lead to sensory meltdowns
 - Different than tantrums, out of child's control
- Easily overwhelmed by people and places
- Seeks out quiet spots in noisy and crowded places
- Easily startled by sudden noises
- Bothered by bright light

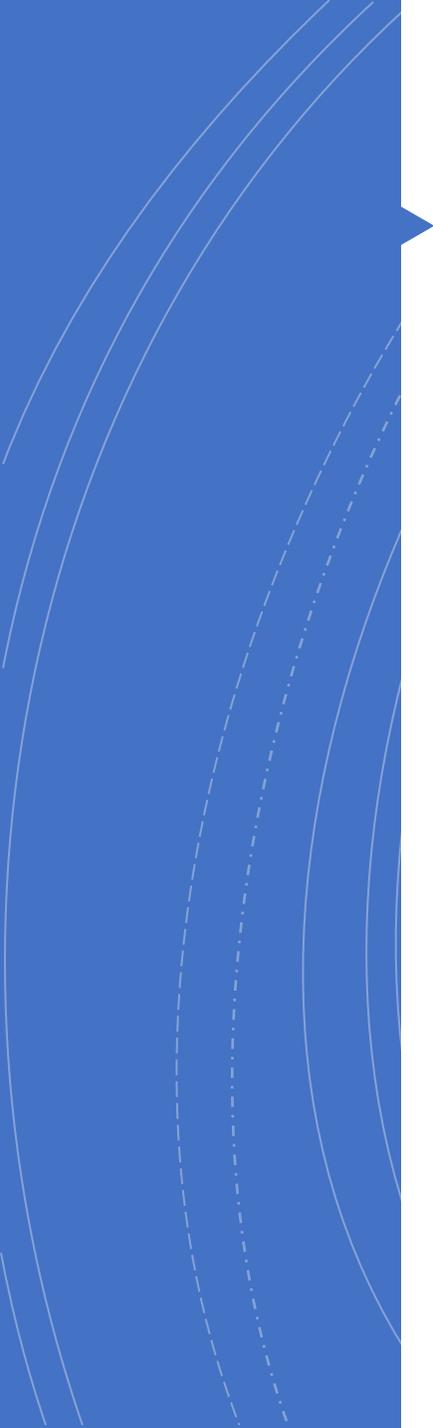
Signs of Oversensitivity/ Sensory Avoiding

- Refuses to wear itchy or uncomfortable clothing
- Avoids touching and hugging people
- Strong reaction to texture and smell of certain foods
- Refuses to try or eat certain foods; limited diet of preferred foods
- Gets upset by changes in routine and environment; avoids trying new things



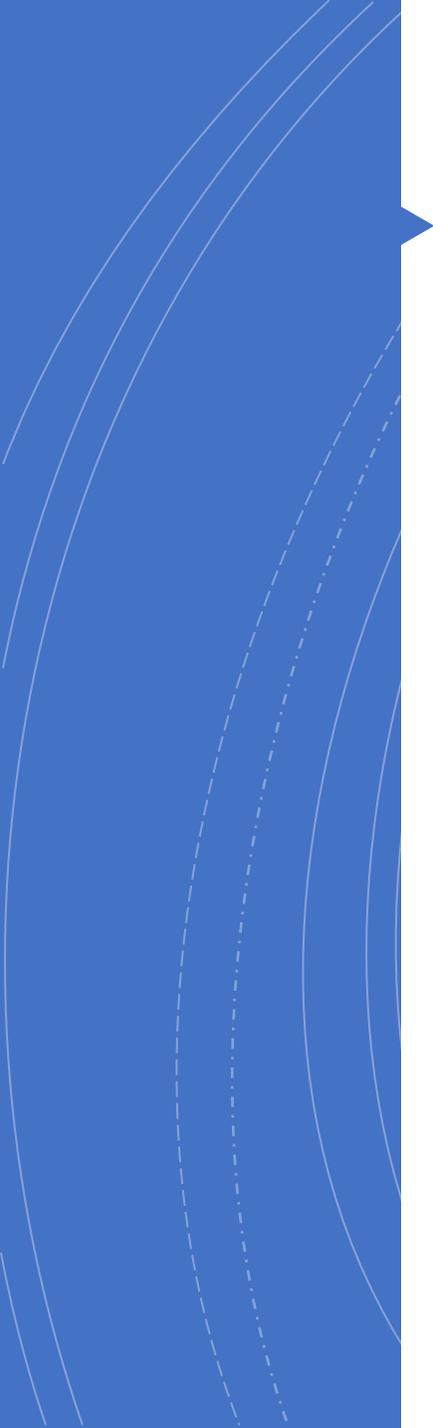
Signs of Oversensitivity/Sensory Avoiding

- **Have trouble knowing where their body is in relation to others or their environment**
- **May avoid using certain playground equipment like swings**



Signs of Undersensitivity/Sensory Seeking

- **Have a need for movement; may seek input like spicy or sour food, physical contact, and pressure**
- **Constantly touches objects**
- **Plays rough and takes physical risks**
- **High pain tolerance**
- **Squirms and fidgets**



Signs of Undersensitivity/Sensory Seeking

- **Constantly on the move**
- **Invades others' personal space**
- **Often distracted and anxious**
- **Clumsy; uncoordinated**

Understanding Behavior

- “If a child doesn’t know how to read, *we teach.*”
- “If a child doesn’t know how to swim, *we teach.*”
- “If a child doesn’t know how to multiply, *we teach.*”
- “If a child doesn’t know how to drive, *we teach.*”
- “If a child doesn’t know how to behave, *we.....
.....teach?punish?*”
- “Why can’t we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?”
- *Tom Herner (NASDE President) Counterpoint 1998, p.2*

Functions of Behavior

- **Escape**
 - Desire to get away from a person, activity, or setting
 - Example: Student runs out of the classroom
- **Attention**
 - Desire for attention from others; may or may not be a specific person or group
 - Example: Student making jokes while teacher is talking
- **Sensory**
 - Desire to obtain or get away from a particular sensory experience
 - Example: Student has trouble in the crowded lunchroom
- **Tactile**
 - Desire for a specific item
 - Example: Student pushes or hits to get a particular classroom item

Functions of Behavior

- Take a step back and consider why a child may be behaving in a certain way-first step in understanding and learning how to help; also consider potential physical/medical factors
- Helpful to think of an individual's actions as a response rather than a pre-determined or willful behavior

BEHAVIOR

POSSIBLE FUNCTION

Yelling

- Escape lunch room
- Gain attention
- Escape gym class (motor activities)

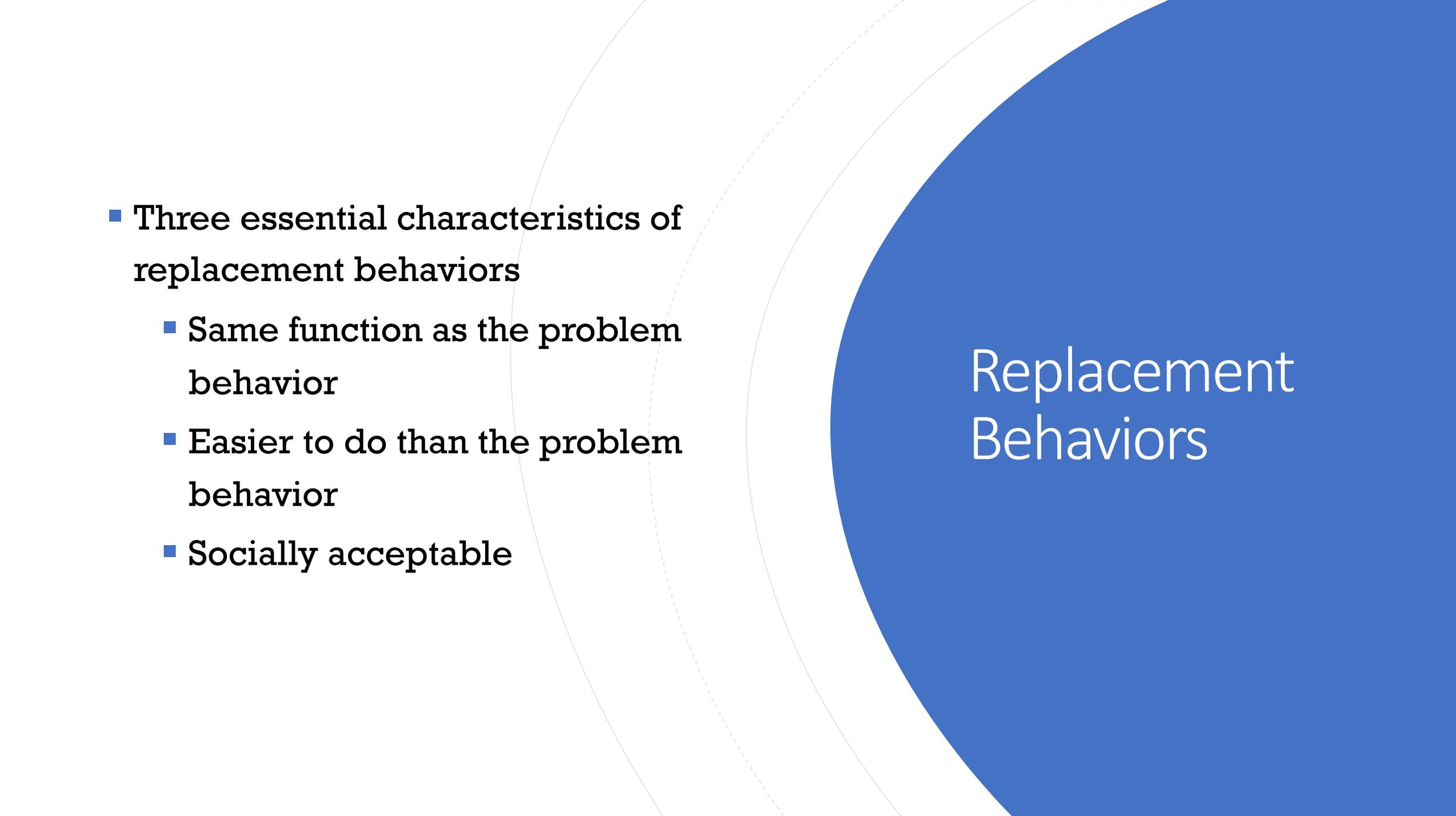
Hitting

- Gain access to desirable item
- Get help from parent
- Gain sensory stimulation
- Escape activity

Swearing

- Avoid peer interaction
- Gain attention from adults
- Escape demands (academic)

Functions of Behavior



Replacement Behaviors

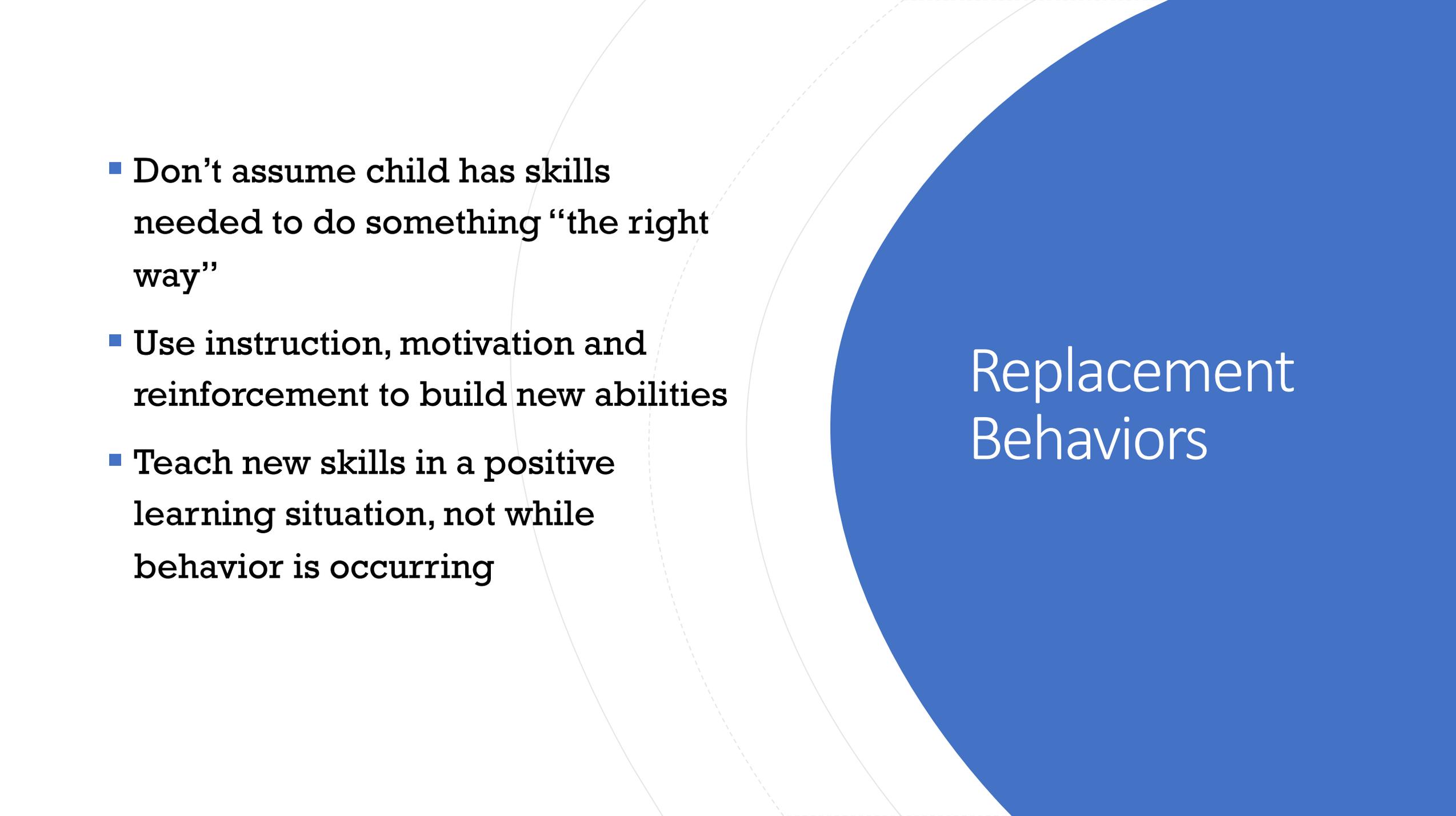
- **Three essential characteristics of replacement behaviors**
 - Same function as the problem behavior
 - Easier to do than the problem behavior
 - Socially acceptable

Replacement Behaviors

- Replacement behaviors meet the same need/have the same function as undesirable behavior
 - Meet the need/function in a more appropriate way
 - Intervention should increase the use of the replacement behavior
- Consider whether the student needs to be taught how to perform the replacement behavior, or whether the student knows how to perform the desired behavior

Replacement Behaviors

- When the function is appropriate but the form is not appropriate
- What can I teach as a replacement behavior for the challenging behavior that addresses the same outcome?
- Choosing a replacement behavior
 - Find a behavior that serves the same purpose or function as the challenging behavior
 - Teach a behavior that helps the child achieve the purpose easier, quicker, and better than the challenging behavior
 - Reinforce the replacement behavior and make sure challenging behavior is not being reinforced



Replacement Behaviors

- Don't assume child has skills needed to do something "the right way"
- Use instruction, motivation and reinforcement to build new abilities
- Teach new skills in a positive learning situation, not while behavior is occurring

Preventing Escalation

- **Goal: preventing escalation**
- **Identify triggers**
 - **Loud noises, unfamiliar adults, smells, hard work, being last, change in routine, etc.**
 - **Teach the student how to cope with or avoid things that may cause them to escalate**

Preventing Escalation

- List triggers that have lead to escalation previously
- Determine which triggers you want to help students learn to cope with (not just get used to it) and which you want them to learn to avoid (for now)
- Decide how to teach and reinforce strategies for the above (not all at once)

Preventing Escalation

Triggers	Avoidance	Teaching	Generalization	Reinforcement
<i>What are the triggers that the student will learn to independently avoid?</i>	<i>What avoidance strategies are being taught so that the student does not have to experience the trigger?</i>	<i>How and when are the avoidance strategies being taught?</i>	<i>How and when are the avoidance strategies being generalized to others settings?</i>	<i>How and when are the avoidance strategies being reinforced for being used?</i>
Loud classrooms	Using headphones or ear plugs	Role playing during morning check in, social story	Reminding during inclusion math time	Naturally Reinforcing Token on token board for each time used

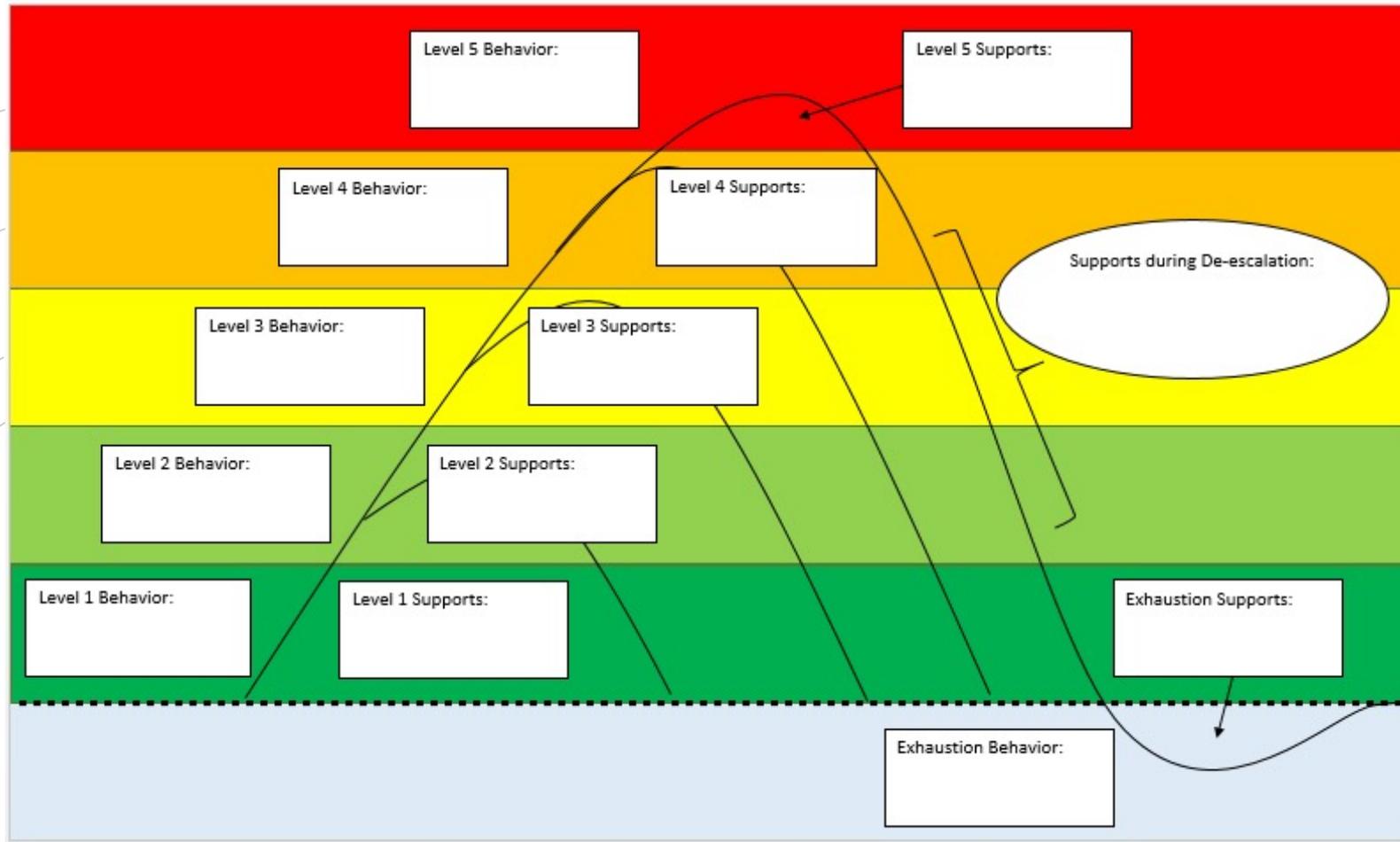
Preventing Escalation

Triggers	Coping Strategies	Teaching	Generalization	Reinforcement
<i>What are the triggers that the student will learn to independently cope with?</i>	<i>What coping strategies are being taught so that the student can tolerate experiencing the trigger?</i>	<i>How and when are these coping strategies being taught?</i>	<i>How and when are the coping strategies being generalized to others settings?</i>	<i>How and when are the coping strategies being reinforced for being used?</i>
Having a substitute teacher	Being forewarned Writing down things the student wants the sub to know about them to giving it to them	Social Story Practice writing out important information that they wish for others to know in Resource Room	Practice writing about self and sharing it with all teachers that the student does know	Social Praise Bonus points on daily tracker

<http://patrickmulick.com/day-4-of-asd-de-esclation-tips-tricks-for-triggers/>

Preventing Escalation

	<i>How I feel</i>	<i>What it looks like</i>	<i>What I need</i>
5	Leave me alone <u>Now!</u>	Runs – screams – throws things	Time and space to calm down – no one next to her – no talking to her
4	This is too much!	Says NO loudly – shoves/hits	Favorite music and squeeze ball
3	Something is Scary.	Starts refusing	Favorite scented stickers
2	I am a little worried, but still OK.	Starts pulling her own hair	Favorite catalog to look at
1	I am Calm.	typical sitting	---



Escalation Cycle

Escalation Cycle

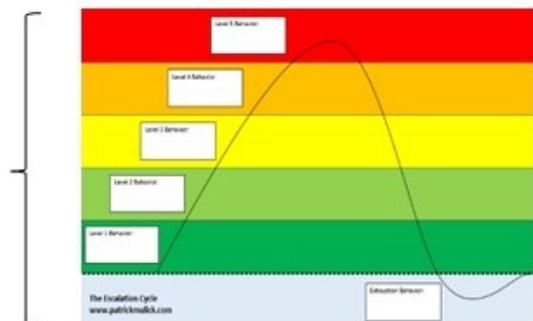
- As student moves up the escalation cycle, cognitive functioning decreases; mind and body become overwhelmed
- At height of escalation, cognitive functioning may be almost absent
- Start of escalation, student may be able to handle simple verbal directions (ex. “take a break”, “take deep breaths”)
- As escalation increases, need for more visual representation and modeling
- Interventions at each level need to be based on student’s individual ability to respond at that level
- Involve students in the cycle and plan so it’s predictable and known to them; they don’t know their own escalation cycle
- They don’t want the escalation to be happening either; when their skillsets aren’t working for them, we need to take over

Patrick Mulick's Cheat Sheet for De-Escalation.

This sheet is only intended for those who have had facilitated learning about each of these steps in order to more readily recall key considerations in developing reactive strategies to escalations. These steps are only for students who frequently attempt to escape an overwhelming or overstimulating experience through an uncoordinated or unsafe effort. Please do not copy or share without the consent of Patrick Mulick.

www.patrickmulick.com

Step 1. Identify the levels of a student's escalation.



Step 2. Identify appropriate de-escalation strategies to test.

- Go for Walk
- Deep Breathing
- Counting
- Drink of Water
- Get a Snack
- Ask for Help
- Break Spot
- Wall Pushes
- Sing a Song
- Headphones
- Lower Lights
- Turn on Fan
- Break Down Task
- Provide Choices
- Cold Wash Cloth
- Stress Ball
- Weighted Blanket
- Read a Book
- Deep Pressure
- Listen to Music
- Schedule Reminder
- Positive Self Talk
- Dim Lights
- Talk it out
- Limit Communication
- Give Time
- Other

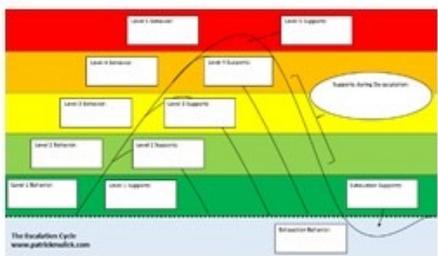
Step 3. Find time to practice the targeted strategies daily.



Step 4. Use calming strategies when student escalates and reinforce their use.



Step 5. Identify which strategies to use at what level. Physical intervention should always be a last resort if used at all.



Step 6. Identify the method by which you will tell the individual to use a particular strategy.

- verbally
- visually
- gesturing
- modelling
- hinting
- other

Step 7. Share the plan with all who will work with the student to ensure consistency.



Step 8. Take data and adjust as needed, all the while promoting student independence.



Resources

- **CDC How to Help Your Child and How to Talk with the Doctor**
 - https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/CDC_LTSAE-Concerned-about-Development_Eng.pdf
- **Tips for Talking with Parents about Developmental Concerns**
 - https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/TipsTalkingParents.pdf

Resources

- **Parent's Guide to Applied Behavior Analysis**
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/atn-air-p-applied-behavior-analysis>
- **Autism Resources, search by state:**
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-guide>
- **Autism Speaks ToolKits**
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits>
- **Autism App Finder**
<http://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-apps>

Resources

- **National Autism Resources**

<http://www.nationalautismresources.com>

- **Autism Now**

<http://autismnow.org>

- **Autism Safety Toolkit**

<http://nationalautismassociation.org/docs/BigRedSafetyToolkit.pdf>

Resources

- **Indiana Resource Center for Autism**

<https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/index.html>

- **Effective Educational Practices**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/autismSpecDis.pdf>

Sensory Resources

- **The Inspired Treehouse:**
 - <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/activities-index/>
 - <https://theinspiredtreehouse.com/back-to-school-tips/>
- **Sensory Processing 101 Book**
 - <https://sensoryprocessing101.com>
- **Understood.org**
 - <https://www.understood.org/pages/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/sensory-processing-issues/>

Behavior Resources

- Teaching Tools for Young Children with Challenging Behavior
 - <https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/pbs/TYC/tools.html>



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