



## Supporting Autistic Children When Behaviour's Challenge

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## The Origins.....

The term challenging behaviour originated from The Association for Severe Handicaps (TASH) (Royal College of Psychiatrists, British psychological society and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2007).

The aim of coining the concept was to inform service providers that the emphasis was on them to change their approaches and views of behaviour as opposed to the individual having to change themselves.

## Defining 'Challenging Behaviour'

Challenging behaviour' is defined as any unpermitted behaviour that risks harming or actually harms the individual or those around them, to such an extent that intervention is required.

Harm is defined using the categories provided by Beardon (2016) - risk of or actual emotional or physical injury to others; breaking the law; significant damage to property; or major disruption to the environment.

# What causes challenging behaviours?

- Anxiety & overwhelm
- Sensory distress
- Differences in communicating (frustration, overwhelm)
- Difficulties in understanding & expressing emotions (alexithymia, Interoception)

# Considerations.....

- 👋 Is anyone at risk of harm?
- 👋 What are they communicating?
- 👋 What function lies beneath?
- 👋 Is intervention really necessary?
- 👋 Are they based on NT perspectives?
- 👋 Those who aren't autistic can find empathising with autistic people difficult

# Decreasing Anxiety



- Make life predictable
- Routine
- Control

## Anxiety & Control

When the world is chaotic & choices are taken from us give your child a space they can have control over.

A tent, a cleared out cupboard, under stairs space, a den built with chairs & blankets.

They choose & have control over what & who goes in/out.

A small part of their world they can control.



Jodie Smitten, Children's Support, Wiltshire

## Routines

**Routines offer children predictability during unpredictable times.**

**Routines are not timetables. They are simply things that happen consistently.**

**During times of anxiety routines can offer comfort.**

**Use enjoyable and motivating activities to create routines. Such as daily treat times, consistent electronics times, weekly movie night, regular 1;1 time.**

**Routine naturally offers structure.**

Jodie Smitten, Children's Support, Wiltshire 

# Sensory Differences

- Vestibular (Balance)
- Proprioception (body awareness)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Vision
- Auditory
- Gustatory (taste)
- Tactile (touch)
- Interoception (internal sensations)
- Children can be sensory seeking (Hyposensitive)
- Or sensory avoidant (hypersensitive)
- Children can have both an avoidant and seeking profile
- Children can have differences in one or all areas.

# Sensory Support



- 🖐️ Allow & encourage safe stimming
- 🖐️ Be curious
- 🖐️ Use sensory tools; fiddles, ear defender, proprioception
- 🖐️ Understand the levels of distress
- 🖐️ Allow & Support avoidance

**"IN ORDER TO EMPATHIZE  
WITH SOMEONE'S EXPERIENCE  
YOU MUST BE WILLING TO  
BELIEVE THEM AS THEY  
SEE IT, AND NOT HOW YOU  
IMAGINE THEIR EXPERIENCE  
TO BE"**

Brene Brown

**EMPOWERED**  
TO CONNECT


# Communication & Emotional Literacy

All behaviour is communication

- 👋 Be curious and share this with a calm child (debrief).
- 👋 Teach communication of simple emotions- visuals are great!
- 👋 Model, Label, accept and empathise

# Alexithymia & Emotions

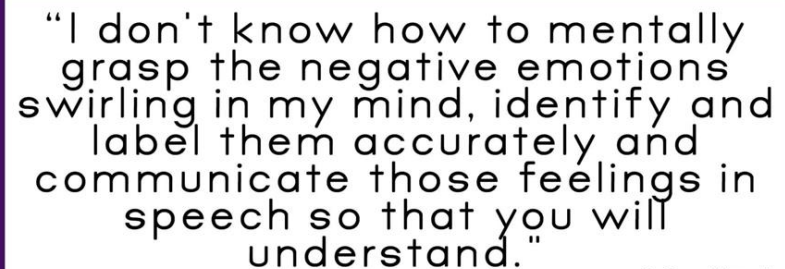
- 🖐️ Unable to express/recognise emotions
- 🖐️ 0-100 in a split second.
- 🖐️ Alexithymia & Interoception and/or volcano effect.
- 🖐️ Hyposensitivity

A light blue speech bubble with a dark purple outline, containing the text "How are you feeling?".

How are  
you  
feeling?

A grey speech bubble with a dark purple outline, containing the text "I don't know."

I don't  
know.

A white rectangular text box with a dark purple border, containing a quote about alexithymia.

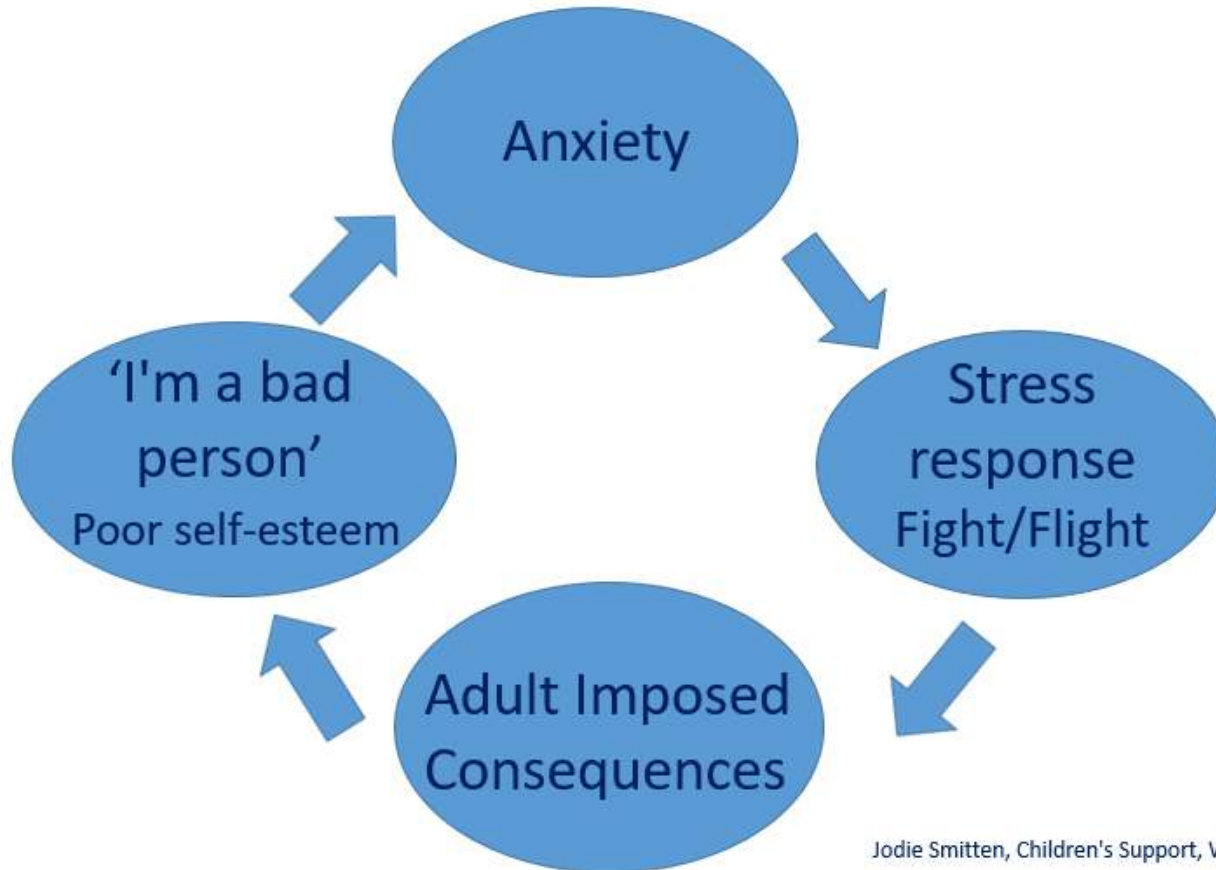
"I don't know how to mentally grasp the negative emotions swirling in my mind, identify and label them accurately and communicate those feelings in speech so that you will understand."

Dr Tony Attwood

# Meltdowns

- 🖐️ Meltdowns/shutdowns are an intense response to becoming overwhelmed
- 🖐️ Meltdowns are NOT a form of manipulation or 'naughty' behaviour
- 🖐️ When in meltdown mode a child is NOT in control of their behaviour.
- 🖐️ They can be triggered by a wide range of things; sensory differences, anxiety, change to routine, accumulative stress, communication difficulties.
- 🖐️ Meltdowns can be physically or verbally aggressive or can be shutdowns.
- 🖐️ Memory loss can occur.

# Negative Cycle Of Meltdowns



# Supporting a child in meltdown

- 👏 Remove/move away from distressing stimuli
- 👏 Remain calm and non-judgemental
- 👏 Keep others safe
- 👏 Avoid physical contact – unless a firm hug will calm and they accept
- 👏 Don't ask questions or place demands
- 👏 Don't discipline

We cannot change what is outside  
of our control  
During these times we can ride the  
storm with love, nurture, calmness  
and non-judgement  
To all those parents who care.....

**YOU**

Are Enough

Jodie Smitten, 2020

## Key takeaways.....

- Reduce anxiety using:  
Predictability  
Visual communication
- Manage anxiety:  
Sensory supports- stimming  
Environmental adjustments  
Break the negative cycle
- Improve Emotional Literacy & Communication:  
Yours and your child's  
Curiosity, labelling & debriefing

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