



# **Managing Challenging Behaviors in the Home**

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Edel McCarville, M.S.Ed.  
Thomas P. Turchiano, Psy.D.  
Noreen Vail, M.A.

# Common Target Behaviors for Children with Pervasive Developmental Disorders

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- Non-Compliance/ Disruptive Behavior
- Social skills
- Transitions
- Language
- Stereotypic Behavior
- Self- Injurious Behavior





# Why Do Children Display Problem Behaviors?

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E = Escape

A = Attention

T = Tangible

S = Sensory



# Where Do I Start?

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*Making too many new changes at once is frustrating for both your child and yourself!*



**Focus on 1-3 target behaviors and be consistent rather than trying everything at once.**

# Pick Skills to Work on that:

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- Will target the most dangerous/troublesome/socially stigmatizing behaviors.
- Can accomplish desirable changes in multiple areas (e.g., behavior specific praise for social skills, instructional behavior, and language.)
- Can accomplish desirable changes in multiple settings (e.g., a schedule that is portable at home, to grandma's, etc.)



# Interventions for Escape Behavior

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## Long-Term Interventions

- Teach communication skills to:
- Temporarily delay the task ("break")
- Gain assistance ("help")
- Provide visual cues to prompt communication
- Teach task organization skills
- Teach coping skills for when task is unavoidable



## Short-Term Interventions

- Praise and reinforce on-task behavior
- Offer choices
- Implement token economy systems (visual systems)
- Use visual supports to indicate task length and expectations.
- Use behavior momentum (begin with easy task, then move to difficult task)
- Alter the task; make it less aversive/difficult

# Interventions for Escape Behavior (cont.)

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## Reactive:

- Follow through on all commands/do not allow escape
- Return to initial task after student is calm
- Logical consequences (e.g., losing a privilege)





# Interventions For Attention Seeking Behavior

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## First Look at Environmental Considerations!

### Long-Term Interventions

- Teach communication skills to:
- Gain appropriate attention (Provide language)
- Gain appropriate attention from peers (telling jokes, initiating conversation)
- Teach coping skills for when attention is not available
- Provide social skills training

### Short-Term Interventions

- Increase reinforcement for positive behavior; catch 'em being good!
- Use visual cues to indicate when attention is available (e.g., turn-taking)
- Praise and reinforce appropriate ways of requesting attention.



# Interventions for Attention Seeking Behavior (cont.)

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## Reactive:

Use planned ignoring/extinction for negative behavior!





# Interventions for Tangible Seeking Behavior

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## Long-Term Interventions

- Teach student to communicate desire for preferred items (e.g., verbally, pictures, sign language, etc.)
- Teach student to ask when preferred activity will be available
- Teach coping skills for when activity is not available (delayed gratification).

## Short-Term Interventions

- Use preferred activities/items to reward appropriate behavior.
- Praise and reinforce appropriate requests.
- Provide alternative choices when activity/item is unavailable.
- Use visual cues to indicate when item/activity will be available.

# Interventions for Tangible Seeking Behavior (cont.)

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## Reactive:

Do **NOT** provide the item during or immediately following problem behavior!!!





# Interventions for Sensory Seeking Behavior

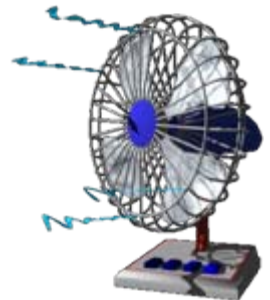


## Long-Term Interventions

- Teach play skills/leisure skills that will replace stereotypic behavior.
- Teach appropriate coping/calming strategies that will replace stereotypic behavior.

## Short-Term Interventions


- Provide access to stereotypic behavior only at certain times or places
- Reinforce play or an appropriate activity that provides the same sensory input (e.g., swinging instead of rocking).
- Reinforce the absence of the behavior.
- Replace the stereotypic behavior with an incompatible behavior.



# We All Have Sensory Needs!

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Elementary School  
Challenges:  
The Homework Struggle



# General Homework Issues

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- Why do they have to do it?
- How long should it take?
- What is your role?
- What should your role be?



# Homework Struggle Factors

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- Inconsistency
- Environmental
- Planning/Organizational Issues
- Scheduling





# Whom do you talk to?

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- Teacher
- Your child
- Significant other/caregiver
  - Grandparents, babysitter, after school program



# How to Handle the Meltdown

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- Avoid the fight
- Allow cool down time
- Discuss later when both are calm and at an appropriate time
- Collaborative approach



# How to Stop the Meltdowns

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- Do your own analysis?
  - When, Where, Why, and How?
- Identify triggers
- Behaviors
- Consequences
- Your reactions (before, during, and after)



# Homework Contract

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- Reward effort
- Expectations are outlined
  - Break down the process
- Home Only vs. Home-School
- See handout for example



# How to Develop the Contract

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- 1) Set the goals
- 2) Decide home or home-school
- 3) Form menu of daily and weekly rewards
- 4) Decide how to keep track
- 5) Set follow-up times to reassess



# Important Key Concepts

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- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Consistency
  - ✓ Routine, Environment, Reinforcement
- ✓ Planning/Organization
- ✓ Attitude



# Dealing With Challenging Behaviors on the Secondary Level

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Thomas P. Turchiano, Psy.D.

# Key Parenting Qualities

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- **Consistency**: *Having clearly established set of rules/limits, as well as consequences for failing to abide by them.*
- **Predictability**: *A child's lack of knowing what to expect from their parents often leads to feelings of anxiousness/anxiety.*
  - **Reliability**: *This promotes feelings of security, which arises from the child's knowledge that he or she is loved unconditionally, and that their parents will always be there to keep them safe, as well as provide them with clear limits.*

***The best predictor of problematic behaviors that may be exhibited by children, is the amount of inconsistent behavior exhibited by their parents' style of interaction and discipline.***





# The You Factor

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Most parents respond to their own level of emotional upset rather than to their child's actual behaviors.

Your tolerance of your child's behavior is influenced by your day. *Every day your level of coping will either increase or decrease depending upon what kind of day you are having.*

**Don't let your emotional state guide your response towards your child; rather let your child's behavior guide it.**

# So, why do kids misbehave? And what does their behavior mean?

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Children misbehave in an attempt to satisfy their need for:

- ✓ Attention
- ✓ Power
- ✓ Revenge,
- ✓ Or as an expression of their feeling of inadequacy

# Enabling

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- Enabling is defined as any parental activity that unwittingly allows a child to develop patterns of irresponsible behavior.
- Prevents children from learning how to function effectively in the world in which they live.
- Examples: any parental activity that allows/or encourages children to lie, cheat or to avoid responsibility, avoid their jobs, or to allow them to blame others for their problems.



## We Enable Our Children

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- By protecting them from consequences and by taking on their responsibilities.
- By surrendering to *feelings* of over-protectiveness, self-doubt, guilt, fear and performance anxiety.
  - By *believing* that we can't expect our children to be responsible; our children don't listen to us; if everyone else does it; it must be okay, love is the same as trust.
  - By *behaving* in ways that: keeps secrets, gives in to avoid conflict, or by doing our child's work for them.



# Consequences of Enabling

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- Allows and encourages children to be irresponsible
- Prevents children from learning how to function in the world in which they live.



# Empowering

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- Allows and encourages children to learn to be responsible individuals.
- Permits children to learn how to function in the world in which they live.

## We Empower our Children

- By *preparing* them to handle options and stress responsibly.
- By *supporting* them and giving them clear information.
- By giving them opportunities for real-life practice in mastering essential life skills.



# The Keys to Empowerment

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Giving our children...

- ✓ Concise information
- ✓ Clear parental expectations
- ✓ A sense of belonging and family connectedness
- ✓ Encouragement to grow and become independent
- ✓ Life Skill training and education
- ✓ Positive adult role models

# Appropriate Modeling

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- Modeling is thought to be *the* major cause of learning disturbed behavior.
- It is best to start early in child' life to have him or her see proper models of appropriate behavior instead of subjecting him or her to models of inappropriate behaviors.
- *Inappropriate behavior thrives on Tolerance.*
- As a psychologist or parent, it is difficult to determine if a child is in the midst of a phase, or if the problematic behavior he or she is displaying will become more ingrained.
- Be mindful of who your child uses as a role model for his or her future life achievement.



# Five Steps to Enforcing Limits

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1. *Think about a reasonable consequence for any infraction of your rules. The consequence should be meaningful, relatively short-lived, instructive and enforceable.*
2. *If possible, inform your child in advance of what the consequence will be. If this is not possible, explain your rationale for the consequence at the time you impose it.*
3. *Try not to sound harsh and vindictive; try to focus on your concern and hurt rather than criticizing them directly.*
4. *Let your child know that you will be checking on him/her during their period of restriction, and make certain that you do.*
5. *Towards the end of the punishment, review the rule they broke and make certain that they have learned from the experience.*

# To argue, or not to argue???

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## **Situations that warrant discussion**

Curfew (especially for special occasions),  
Privileges (telephone, cell phone, TV,  
Computer), Cleanliness/appearance of  
their room, Dating rules, Time spent with  
friends, Study Habits.

## **Non-negotiable Situations**

Drinking, Helping around the house,  
Using Drugs, Attending School, Treating  
others with respect, Dangerous  
situations.

# What if I Have Trouble Saying NO?

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1. Remind yourself that everyone must learn to take **NO** for an answer. (A child who fail to learn this basic lesson is likely to have problems for the rest of their life).
2. Rest assured that your child won't love you any less because you deny some of their demands. (In fact, they will respect you more in the long run).
3. Remember that YOU are the parent, and your teen is the child.
4. Make up your mind in advance about rules and expectations. (If you have any doubts, speak to a friend who is a competent parent, a school counselor, or seek the assistance of a professional).

# Trouble Saying NO continued...

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5. State your limits clearly and specifically to avoid any possibility of confusion/misinterpretation.

6. Be *assertive*, not aggressive; *firm*, not angry.  
(Remember to model the behavior you want to see in your child).

7. Remember that it may take some time before your child accepts your new and firmer approach to certain issues.

8. Remind yourself that in the long run, both you and your child will be better off with a clear understanding of your authority.



# Conclusion

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Parenting is a very challenging endeavor in today's world. Therefore, it is imperative that we as parents are mindful of the examples we set, of the limits we impose, and once again mindful of our need to be consistent, reliable and predictable. This is the foundation upon which we can build.