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Empowering Parents: Behavioural Intervention for Children with Autism

What is Autism?

Autism is a developmental disorder with difficulties in:

- 1. Social Interaction**
- 2. Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication**
- 3. Stereotyped and Repetitive Behaviours**

- *It occurs before 3 years of age and causes problems in different areas of development.*
- *Autism persists throughout the person's life.*
- *Prevalence of Autism has been estimated to affect as many as 1 in 88 children. (CDC, 2012)*
- *It is almost 5 times more common in boys than in girls.(CDC, 2012)*

Causes of Autism

The exact cause for autism is currently unknown. Autism has many causes both genetic & environmental.

Misconceptions about Autism

- ✗ Autism is caused by faulty parenting.
- ✗ All people with autism are intellectually disabled.
- ✗ Autism can be cured.
- ✗ Autism is caused by vaccines (Measles, Mumps and Rubella).

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Facts about Autism

- ✓ Autism was once thought to be caused by faulty parenting. Mothers have been accused of not providing affection and warmth. However, this has proven to be false.
- ✓ Children with autism may also have special or unusual ability in some areas like reading, music, memory and artistic abilities.
- ✓ Autism cannot be cured, but it can be managed. Children with autism can make significant improvement after intensive intervention.
- ✓ There is no scientific evidence that vaccines can cause autism.

Common Characteristics of Autism

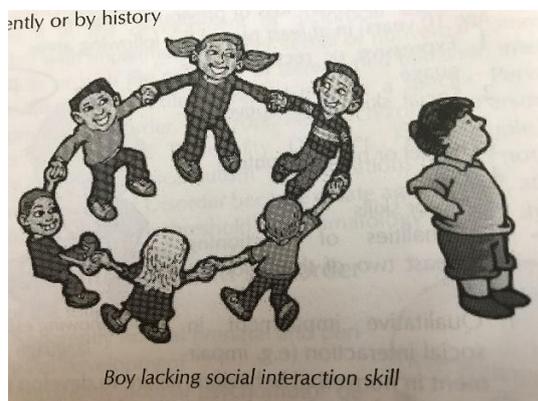
Social Interaction

1. *A child with autism often has difficulties in interacting with other people.*

In this picture, the child is not interacting with the trainers when they are trying to wave goodbye



2. *The child may prefer to play alone.*
3. *They may not show interest in others.*



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4. Children with autism may have difficulty in taking turns in social or play activities.

In the pictures below the instructor is throwing the ball to the child but the child is not throwing it back.



5. Children with autism may often laugh, cry and show distress for no apparent reasons.



In this picture, the instructor is saying hello but the child is laughing without any apparent reason.

6. Children with autism may not make eye contact while interacting with someone.

In this picture the instructor is trying to interact with the child but he is not making any eye contact with the instructor.



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Verbal and non-verbal communication

Children with autism may:

- 1. have delayed language development.**
- 2. have difficulty in expressing their needs.**
- 3. make unusual noises.**
- 4. repeat the words, phrases or sentences (echolalia).**
- 5. be unable to initiate or sustain a conversation.**

Stereotyped and repetitive behaviours

- 1. Engages in repetitive motor behaviours like rocking body, nodding head and flapping hands.**



In this picture, the child is flapping his hands.

This is repetitive behaviour.

- 2. They may be restless/hyperactive.**
- 3. The child may insist on doing the same activity for a long duration.**
- 4. Inappropriate attachment to objects.**

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Impact of Child with Autism on the family

1. A child with autism requires attention, care and emotional support from the parents, siblings and extended family members.
2. The difficulties seen in children with autism like expressing needs, mingling with others, poor eye contact and stereotype/repetitive behaviours, restricts the child and the family members to the house. This results in loneliness and lack of friends. This isolation has a profound effect on their social and emotional wellbeing.
4. Parents should discuss the challenges faced by them with other family members to workout effective management of the child.
5. It is helpful for the parents to know what their sources of strengths are. Depending on these sources of strength, parents can improve their coping skills.

Commonly seen maladaptive Behaviours

Some of the commonly seen maladaptive behaviours in children with autism include the following:

1. **Making odd sounds:** Children with autism may squeal, make strange noises and say words that have no meaning.
2. **Self-talk:** Children with autism may repeat a word or phrase or sentence out of context. They repeat the same statement many times and often repeat statements and questions made by others. For example, if an instructor asks a child with autism, "What's your name?" the child may repeat the question instead of giving an answer.
3. **Repetitive behaviours:** Children with autism engage in behaviours which are repetitive in nature like flapping of hands or fingers, body rocking & using an object for tapping.
4. **Aggressive behaviours:** Children with autism may show unprovoked aggression and socially inappropriate behaviour such as hitting, kicking and pinching.
5. **Self-injurious behaviours:** Children with autism may harm themselves by biting and head banging.
6. **Temper Tantrums:** Children with autism may show temper tantrums in the form of screaming and rolling on the floor. They engage in such behaviours when they are frustrated.

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Underlying Possible Causes of Maladaptive Behaviours

1. **Unexpected and unpredictable situation/Unfamiliar or new situation:** Sometimes a child may show maladaptive behaviour to a change in his environment because he may not have been informed about the change.

For example, a child with autism may be playing. During this playtime if he is unexpectedly taken to a therapy session without any preparation then he may show maladaptive behaviours like temper tantrums or crying.

2. **Change in daily routine:** Children with autism follow a daily routine and find this comfortable. Parents should always inform the child of any changes in the daily routine. In case they do not, the child may throw temper tantrums.

For example, a mother may want to go the supermarket in the evening. This is not part of the daily routine of the child with autism. Hence, the mother must start preparing the child for this change from the morning. Otherwise the child may show maladaptive behaviours like crying or head banging.

3. **Overstimulation:** Children with autism have a difficulty in processing sensory information. If you give a child with autism too many sensory inputs like too many toys, excessive exposure to television it will make the child feel over stimulated and he/she may not be able to understand the sensory information. This may cause the child with autism to show maladaptive behaviours.

For example, a child with autism might be given many toys or play material which are not required by the child. The child may feel over stimulated and may not know which toys to play with. In such a situation, the child will resort to maladaptive behaviours like throwing objects or shouting and temper tantrums.

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4. **Informational overload:** Sometimes a child with autism is given too many task-related instructions. These instructions are not simple and the child **with autism is not able to understand them.**

For example, sometimes a child with autism may be given multiple instructions like, “don’t remove the fruits from the basket but take the basket to the kitchen and leave it near the fridge.” The child will not be able to understand these instructions.

5. **Task demand:** Task demand means asking the child with autism to perform a task that is beyond his capabilities. This puts pressure on the child with autism as they may not be able to complete the task.

For example, a child with autism may be asked to complete a task within a time limit. “Change your clothes within ten minutes.” The time limit will exert pressure on the child and he/she may start shouting, head banging or show other maladaptive behaviours.

6. **Impaired communication skills:** Children with autism have impaired communication skill, as a result may not be able to express their needs and desires properly.

For example, a child with autism may not be able to communicate to the mother that he wants to eat oranges when he/she is feeling hungry. If the mother gives him some other food, he may throw it away and refuse to eat it.

7. **Inability to express physical discomfort:** A child with autism may not be able to express physical discomfort or pain he/she may be feeling.

For example, a child with autism may be feeling uncomfortable in a specific shirt. But he/she may not be able to tell this to the mother. As a result, he may adopt maladaptive behaviours like crying, shouting and yelling to express his discomfort.

8. **Impaired ability to understand social situations:** A child with autism may have difficulty in understanding the facial expression and body language of others. As a result, he may not understand what is expected of him/her in these situations. *Such a situation may cause him to resort to maladaptive behaviours like making unusual noises.*

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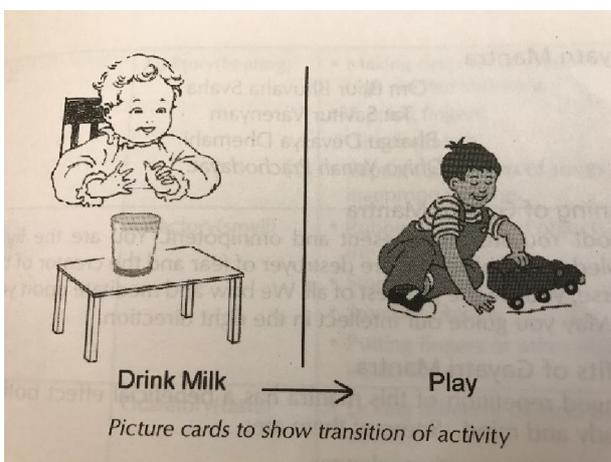
Guidelines for behavioural management of children with Autism

- 1. Provide a predictable environment and routine:** Create a pictorial routine for your child. This way the child will know which activity follows next.

Time	Activity	Monday	Tuesday	Wedne	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7:00 AM	Brushing 							
7:15 AM	Bathing 							
7:30 AM	Dressing 							
7:45 AM	Grooming 							
8:00 AM	Breakfast 							
9:00 AM	School/Instructional Time 							
10:00 AM	Play 							

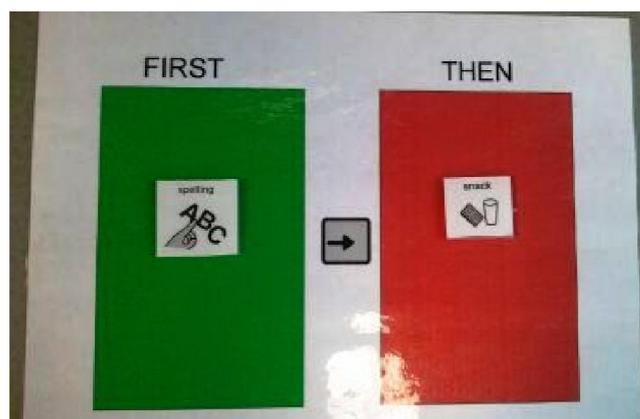
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- 2. Structured Environment:** Parents must try and create a structured environment which includes appropriate lighting facilities and free of loud noises. It is important to make this environment safe and free of harmful objects like knives and sharp objects, with which the child might accidentally hurt her/himself.
- 3. Prepare the child for changes in advance:** If there is going to be change in the child's routine you must tell the child before the change takes place. For example, on a given day the child may not have study time in the evening. Instead, he or she may have to go to a therapy session. So, the parent should prepare the child well in advance by showing picture or saying, "Today instead of study time we will be going to the therapist in the evening."
- 4. There needs to be a smooth transition from one activity to another:**



This picture makes it clear to the child that only after drinking milk the child can play.

- 5. Where possible introduce changes gradually with visual information:** If a change is taking place in the child's routine use pictures and images to better explain the changes that are going to take place.



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- 6. Use visuals to aid comprehension:** Use visuals and models like apple, bat, bathing activity when teaching the child about objects and other daily activities. This will help the child with autism understand better.



- 7. Make instructions brief and specific:** Children with autism will better understand brief and specific instructions. For example, “you can play after completing homework” is a simple and specific statement. A child with autism will understand this easily.
- 8. Encourage and praise appropriate behaviour:** Whenever a child with autism displays a favourable behaviour parents must offer praise and reward. Parents should pair this praise with an immediate reward if necessary.



In this picture, the instructors are praising the child for completing work

Behavioural Management of children with Autism aims towards

making the child as independent as possible

facilitating their development & learning

reducing behavioural difficulties

promoting socialization and improving their quality of life.

There are different approaches to manage children with autism. Depending upon the needs of the child, he/she may require various therapies like speech and language intervention and occupational therapy

