

Behaviour is a Form of Communication

We all show our views and feelings through our behaviour. For autistic children and young people who struggle with communication and interaction, behaviour is often the most effective method of communicating their needs, wants and views.

If an autistic child has learned that the behaviour provides a function for them, gets them what they want, avoids something they don't, or meets a need, it is likely to continue, even if it impacts negatively on others. All behaviour is communicating something, whether it is 'I like this, I don't like that, I want out, I want that, I feel good, I feel bad, etc.'

Some behaviours are intentional, while others may be unintentional. However, there is always a reason. While autism is a spectrum and can therefore present differently in each individual, there are common reasons behind the behaviours which we or the child we are supporting may find difficult.

Communication and Interaction

Autistic children and young people often struggle with social communication. Some people are not socially motivated and may not seek interactions, while others may be very socially motivated but don't yet have the skills and understanding to manage such interactions successfully. In addition, the unwritten rules of social interaction, such as body language, use of eye contact and physical proximity, can be difficult to acquire and can lead to misunderstandings and challenges. This is often called the 'hidden curriculum'. Autistic children and young people may also have difficulties with *receptive* and *expressive* language – understanding and being understood – and with 'theory of mind' – being able to understand another person's perspective – which can come out through their behaviour.

Change

Autistic children and young people tend to appreciate and rely on consistency and routine. They can struggle when things are different and are not as expected, which can cause anxiety and come out through behaviours.

Sensory Issues and the Environment

Autistic children and young people very often have sensory preferences – things, places, people, experiences or activities that they *seek*, or that they *avoid*. These sensitivities can have a major impact and are another common cause of behaviours.

