



# Practical Behavioral Strategies

Understanding Behavior • Building Skills • Supporting Parents

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2. Behavior Functions & Practical Strategies
  - Attention
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3. Foundational Strategies
  - Skill Teaching
  - Predictability
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  - Clear & Consistent Expectations
  - Functional Communication
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4. Discussion

# Exercise 1: What Overwhelm Feels Like

- Write your full name
- While writing, count backward from 50 in your head
- Now tap your foot. Continuously.
- Keep writing. Keep counting. Keep tapping.

## What did you notice?

- Loss of focus
- Irritation
- Stress
- Wanting it to stop
- Mental overload



# Exercise 2: When Words Don't Work

Use the prompts on the cards to to communicate with your partner. You have 30 seconds. Remember—no words, no sounds unless the prompt allows. Go!

## What did you feel?

- Confusion
- Frustration
- Awkwardness
- Giving up
- Misunderstood



# All Behavior is Communication

## When your child:

- Throws a toy
- Runs away
- Screams
- Refuses
- Hits
- Shuts down

## They are saying:

- “This is too hard.”
- “I don’t understand.”
- “I need a break.”
- “My body is overwhelmed.”
- “I need connection.”



# Behavior is the tip of the iceberg

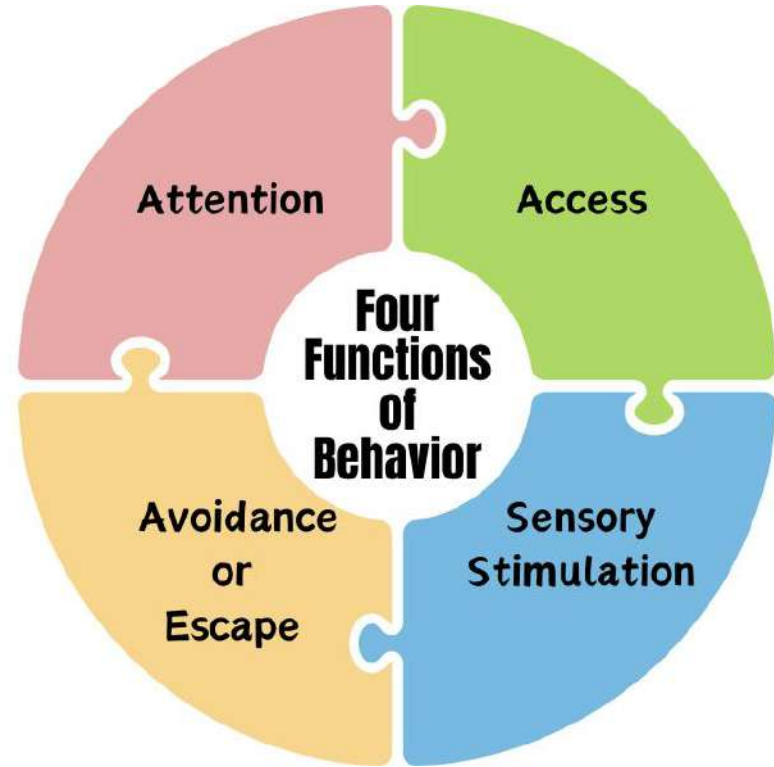


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# The 'WHY' Behind Behavior

The Four Functions of Behavior



# Attention Seeking Behavior

## What does it look like?

- Interrupting constantly
- Whining when you're on the phone
- Acting silly at the wrong time
- Hitting or teasing siblings
- Throwing something while you're busy
- Fake crying
- Escalating when ignored
- "Mom! Mom! Mom!" repeatedly
- Meltdown right when you're helping another child



# Attention: Practical Strategies

## Strategies:

- Teach the Replacement
- Planned Ignoring (When Safe)
- Special Time
- Minute Warning
- Catch Them Being Good
- Positive Reinforcement



# Escape Driven Behavior

## What does it look like?

- Refusing homework
- Saying “No!” immediately
- Melting down during transitions
- Leaving the room
- Hiding under a table
- Throwing materials
- “I can’t!” before even trying



# Escape: Practical Strategies

## Strategies:

- Make the Task Smaller
- Use Timers
- Use Visuals
- Teach - “Ask for a Break”
- Pre-Warn Transitions
- Reduce Language During Overwhelm



# Sensory Behavior

## What It Looks Like:

- Hand flapping
- Rocking
- Spinning
- Humming
- Repeating phrases
- Lining up objects
- Chewing on items
- Staring at lights
- Jumping repeatedly



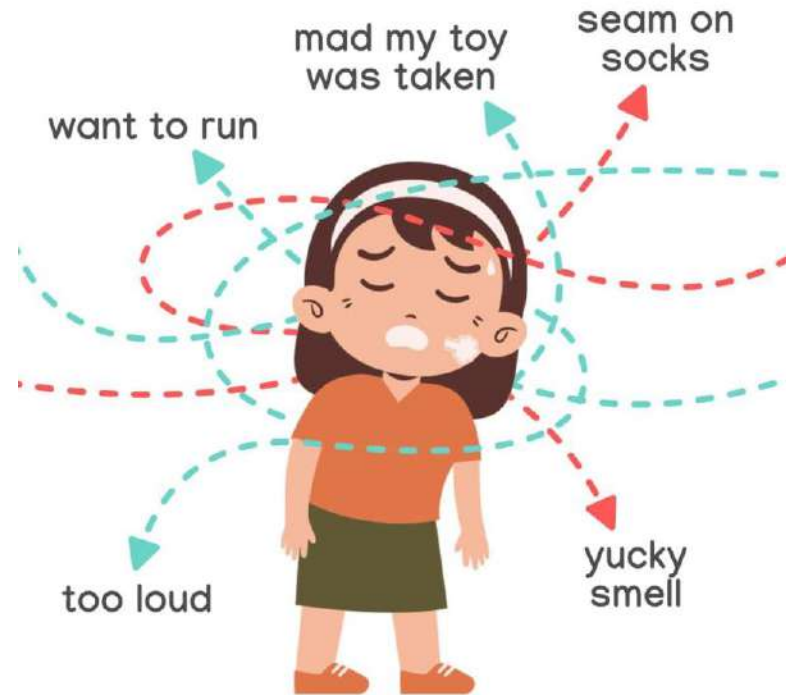
## What It Means:

- “This feels good”
- “I’m regulating”
- “I’m calming myself”
- “This helps me focus”
- “My body needs input”

# Sensory: Practical Strategies

## Strategies:

- Allow Safe Regulation
- Replace, Don't Remove
- Schedule Sensory Breaks
- Reduce Overload
- Use a Sensory Toolkit





# Access Related Behavior

## What It Looks Like:

- Crying for a toy
- Meltdown in the store
- Grabbing items
- Screaming when told “No”
- Throwing things when denied
- Repeating demands
- Escalating when a preferred item is removed

## What It’s Really Saying:

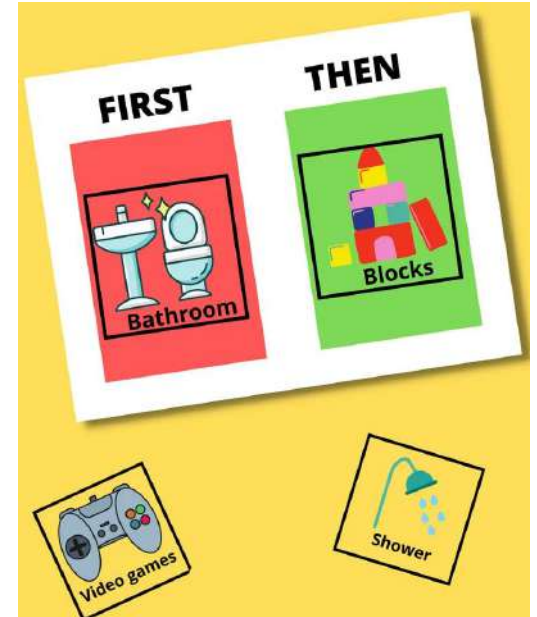
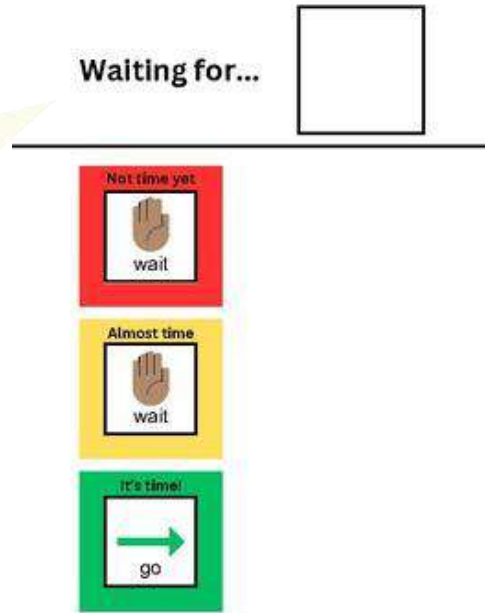
- “I want that !”
- “I don’t want to wait.”
- “I don’t understand ‘no.’”
- “I don’t know how to ask appropriately.”



# Access: Practical Strategies

## Strategies

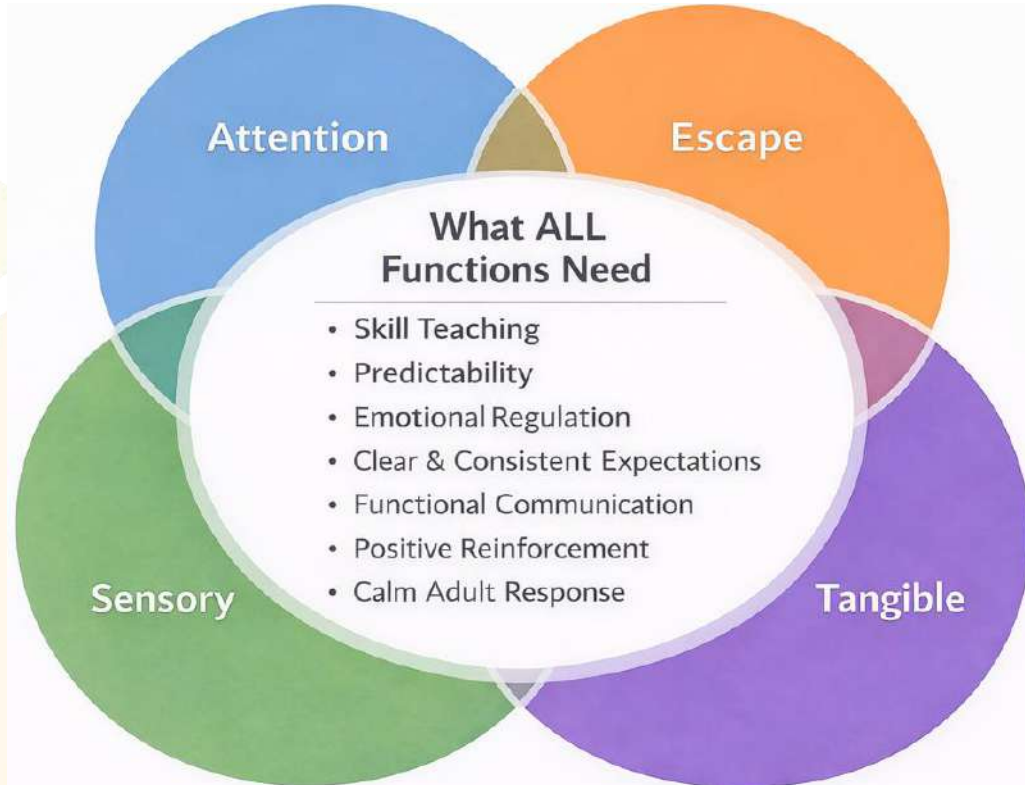
- Set Clear Expectations
- Teach Waiting
- Teach to Ask Appropriately
- Follow through
- Be consistent
- Use Visuals



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# Foundational Strategies



# Skill Teaching

Challenging behavior often means: A skill is missing

## Identify the Missing Skill

What Can't They do?

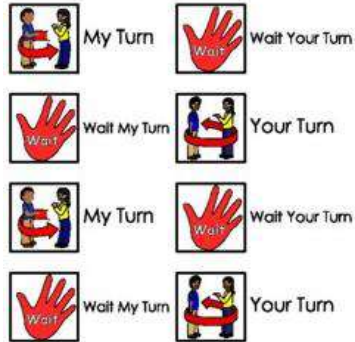
- Ask for help
- Wait
- Transition
- Problem-Solve
- Calm down



## Teach the Skill

- Teach It Explicitly
- Model it
- Role Play
- Practice it

Taking Turns



## Reinforce the Replacement

- Notice the Effort
- Praise Specifically
- Reward Attempts
- Celebrate Successes



# Predictability = Calm Nervous System

## When the child knows:

- What's happening
- When it's happening
- How long it will last
- What comes next

## Try This at Home:

- Use a simple daily visual schedule
- Say “First \_\_\_, then \_\_\_”
- Use a timer they can see
- Give a 5-10-minute warning before transitions
- Keep routines consistent (especially mornings & bedtime)



# Predictability: Visual Schedules

Visual schedules provide a clear "roadmap" for the day, which helps children with autism process information, reduce anxiety during transitions, and build independence



# Emotional Regulation

Regulation must come before reasoning

## Try This:

- Teach feelings when calm (not during meltdown)
- Create a small “calm space” at home
- Practice breathing or squeezing hands together
- Use a 1-5 feelings scale
- Model calm before expecting calm

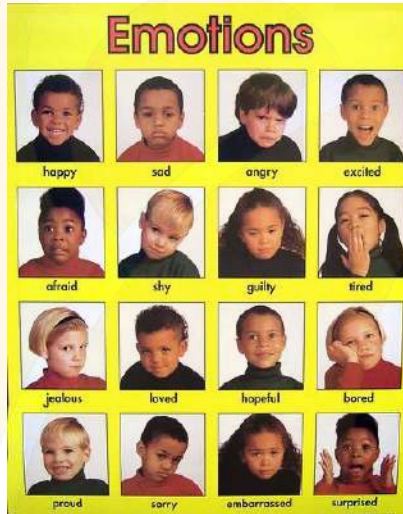
5 Point Feelings Scale		
5		<p><b>Angry</b></p> <p>I've lost control. I'm not listening anymore. I could hit, kick or bite. I need a quiet place to calm ddown.</p>
4		<p><b>Overwhelmed</b></p> <p>Everything is too hard. I'm losing control and need to leave the environment I'm in. Give me space.</p>
3		<p><b>Frustrated</b></p> <p>I'm not getting it. I'm showing signs of stress. I should take a break now.</p>
2		<p><b>Anxious</b></p> <p>Trying to stay focused, But having a hard time staying on task. Use calming strategies now.</p>
1		<p><b>Happy</b></p> <p>I feel good. Ready and willing to work.</p>

# Emotional Regulation

1. Identify Emotions

2. Recognize where they are on the scale

3. Use pre-taught calming strategies



## CALMING STRATEGIES



# Clear & Consistent Expectations

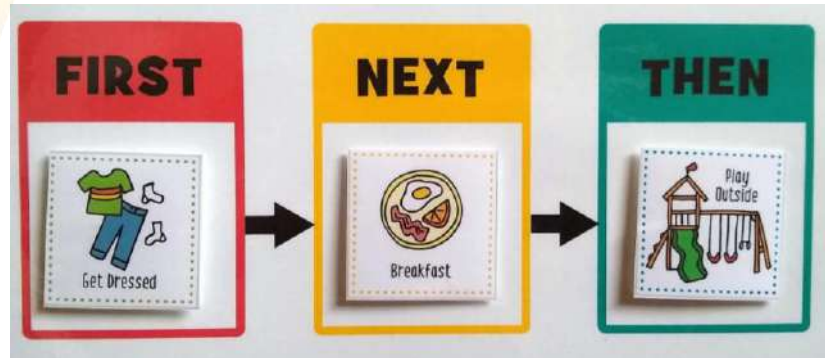
## Why It Matters

Many behavioral struggles happen because:

- Expectations are unclear
- Rules change depending on mood
- Instructions are too verbal or too vague
- Adults assume “they should know”

## What to Try

- Keep rules short (3-5 max)
- Make them visual (write or post them)
- Say exactly what you want – not what to stop
- Be consistent across caregivers
- Follow through calmly



# Functional Communication

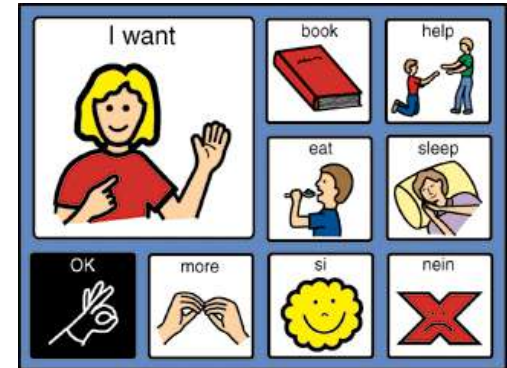
## Behavior = Communication

### Instead of This → Teach This

- Yelling → “I need help.”
- Running away → “I need a break.
- Hitting → “I’m mad.”
- Refusing → “This is too hard.”

### How to Teach It

- Practice when calm
- Model the words for them
- Use visuals if helpful
- Praise the attempt



# Positive Reinforcement

## What Gets Noticed Gets Repeated

### Daily Practical Examples

Instead of only correcting...

- Notice effort: "I saw you try again"
- Praise specifically: "You asked for help calmly"
- Use small rewards for big efforts
- Catch them being successful
- Reinforce immediately



# Calm Adult Response

## Behavior Influences Behavior

### Remember:

- Children borrow our nervous systems
- Escalation → Escalation
- Calm → Regulation
- Our response shapes their response

### Try:

- Lowering your voice
- Fewer words
- Slower movements
- Neutral facial expression
- Brief clear instruction



# Putting It All Together:

One Real-Life Example



**Scenario: Homework Meltdowns**

Child used to scream and refuse homework every day at  $\approx$  4:30.

## 1. Predictability



Homework at 4:30  
Visual Schedule  
& Warning

Snack • Book • Break

## 2. Emotional Regulation



Take a Break  
Calm & Steady Parent

## 3. Functional Communication

**I Need Help!**

Taught to Say,  
"This is hard."

## 4. Skill Teaching



Practiced Asking for Help  
Small Steps

## 5. Consistent Reinforcement



Praise &  
5 Minute Break

Structure, Skills & Support Changed the Behavior.

# Our Core Goals at Cully



1. Supporting Children
2. Empowering Families
3. Creating Aligned Environments
4. Expanding Impact Thoughtfully
5. Guiding Sustained Growth

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# Discussion

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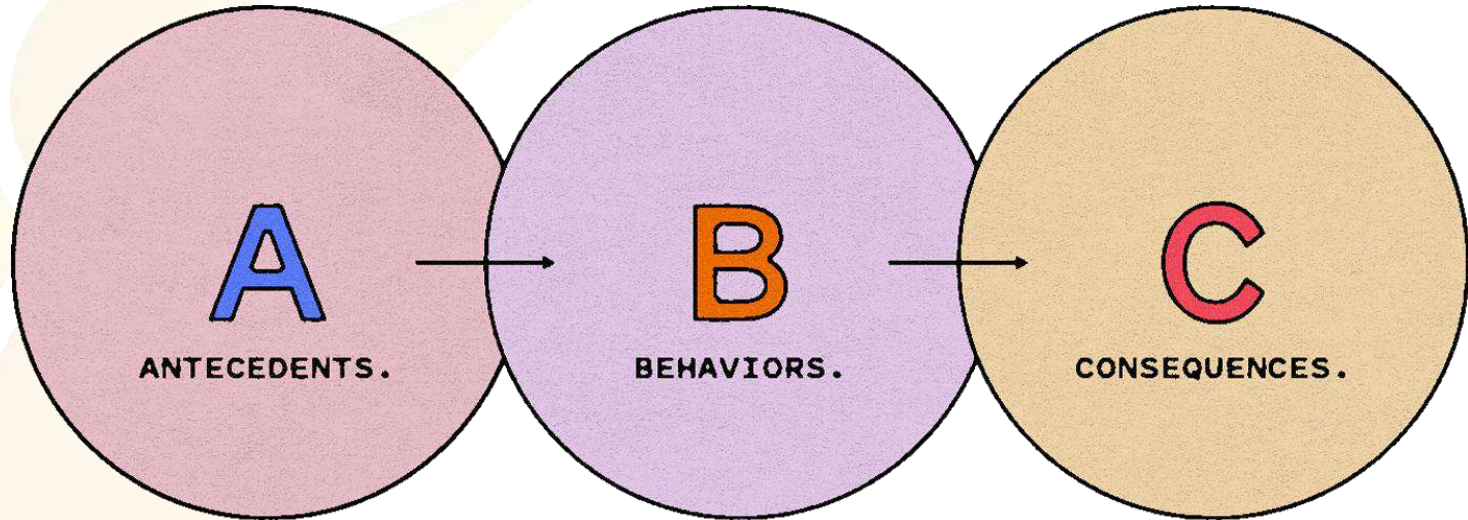
Thank you for joining us in empowering parents and strengthening families — one home at a time



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*Navigating Autism. Building Futures.*

# The ABC's of Behavior



# Augmentative & Alternative Communication

AAC refers to all methods and tools used to supplement or replace speech for individuals with complex communication needs

