



Practical Behavioral Strategies

Understanding Behavior • Building Skills • Supporting Parents

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 - Attention
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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:

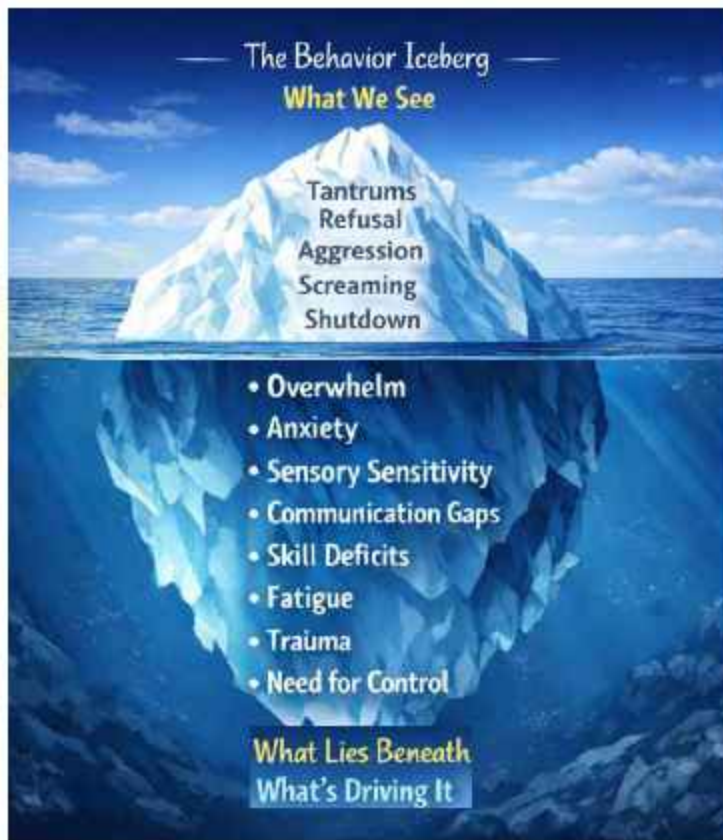
- Throws a toy
- Runs away
- Screams
- Refuses
- Hits
- Shuts down

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



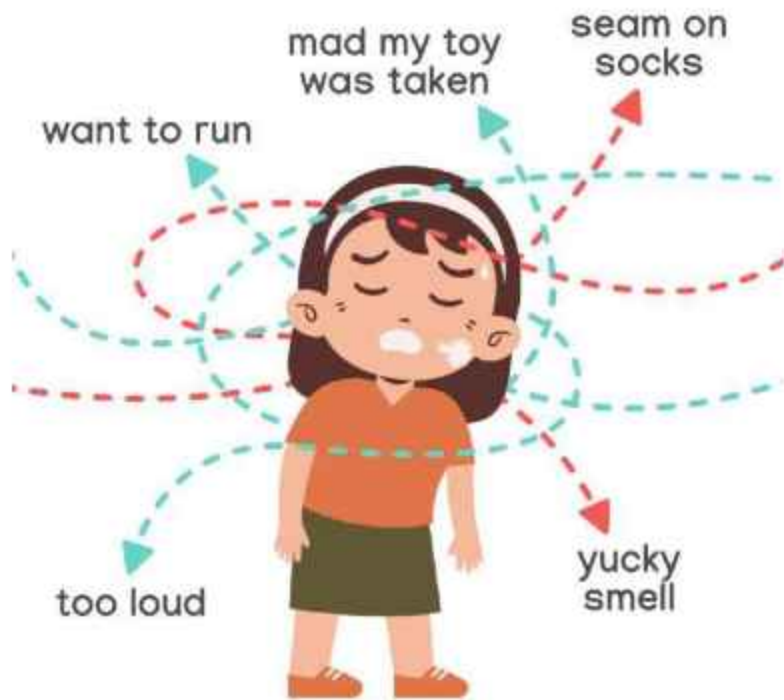
What It Means:

- “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



Sensory: Sensory Toolkit

Tactile:

- Fidget cubes
- Therapy putty
- Stress balls
- Kinetic sand

Oral:

- Chewelry
- Crunchy snack
- Silicone straws

Vestibular:

- Mini trampoline
- Swing
- Obstacle course

Sound:

- Noise reducing headphones
- White noise app
- Calm quite corner

Deep Pressure

- Weighted vest/blanket
- resistant bands

Visual

- Sunglasses
- Dim lighting



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

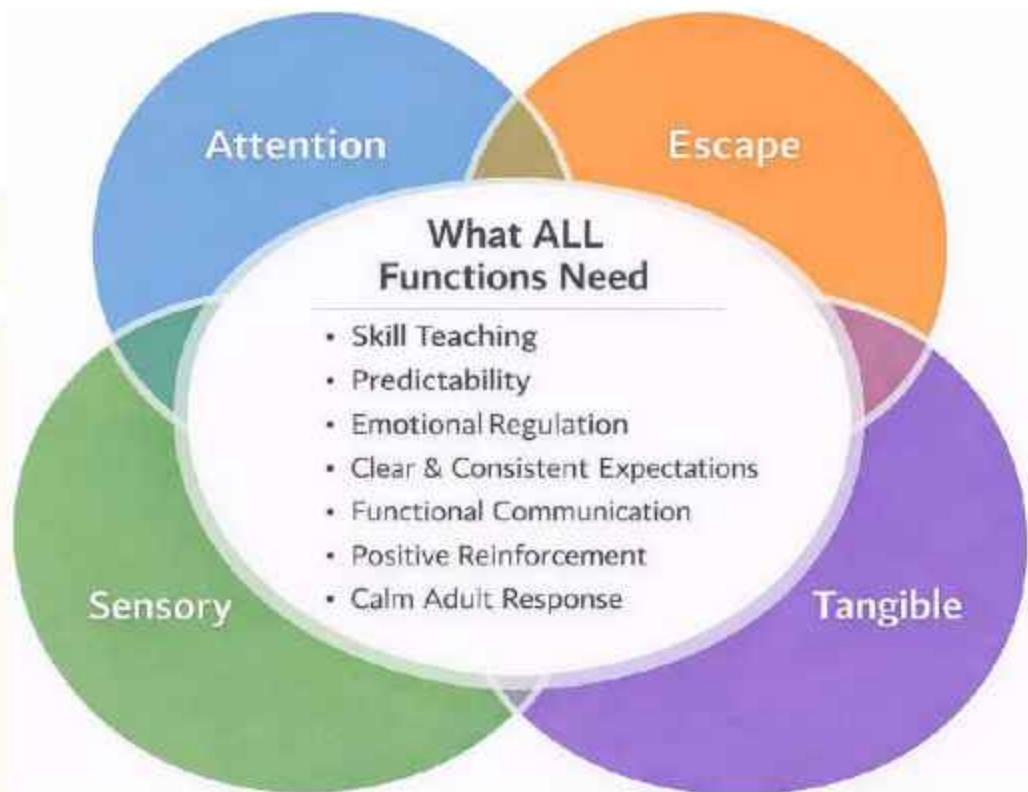
Waiting for...



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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

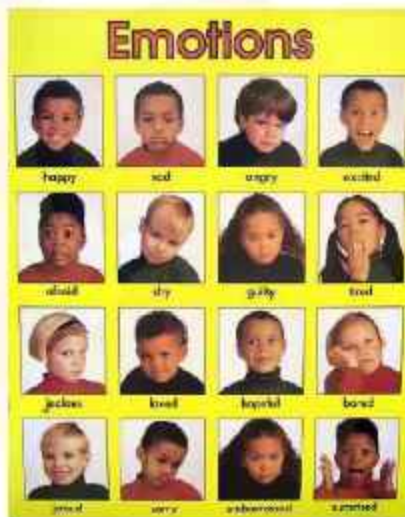
Try This:

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

Emotional Regulation

1. Identify Emotions



2. Recognize where they are on the scale



3. Use pre-taught calming strategies

CALMING STRATEGIES



Clear & Consistent Expectations

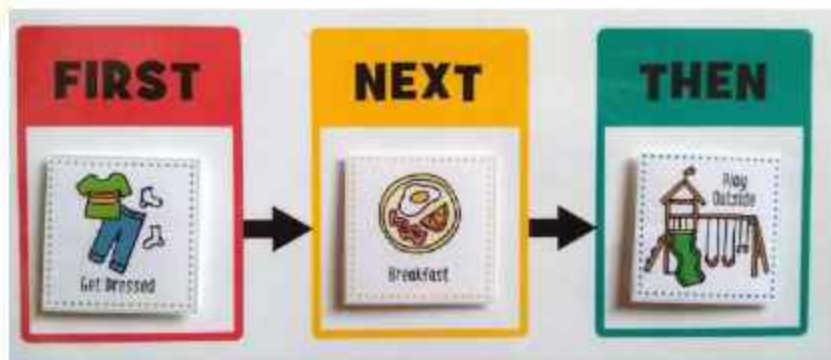
Why It Matters

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 4:30.

1. Predictability



Homework at 4:30
Visual Schedule
& Warning

Snack • Book • Break

2. Emotional Regulation



Take a Break
Calm & Steady Pace

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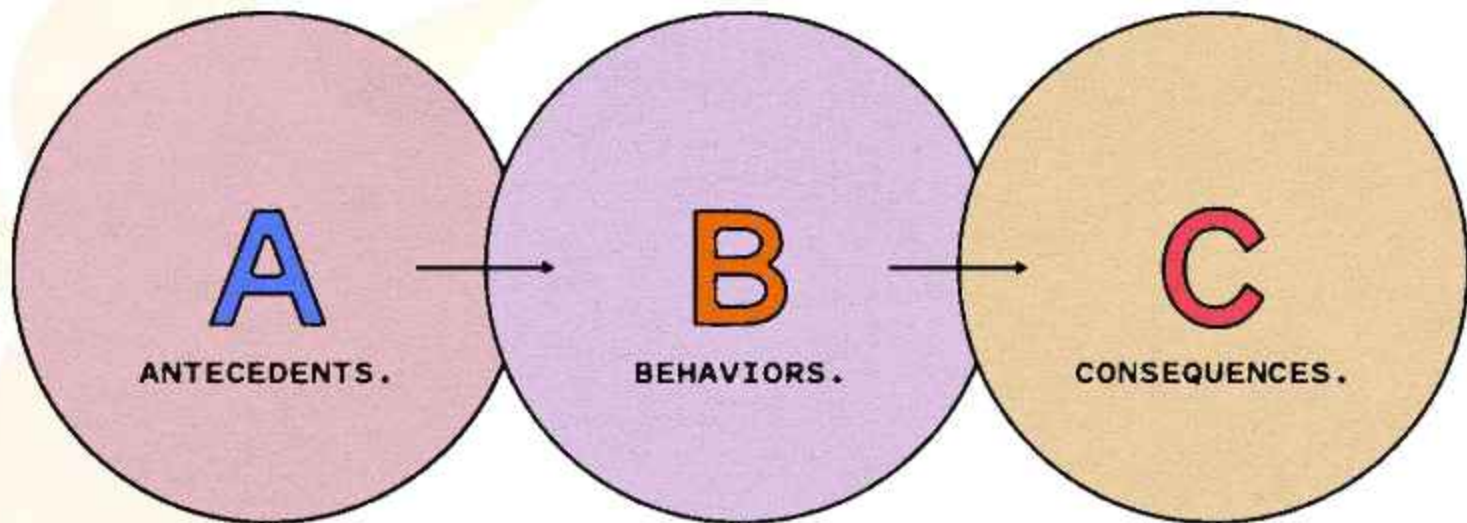
Thank you for joining us in empowering parents and strengthening families — one home at a time



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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

