

Identifying Triggers of Challenging Behaviour from an ABC Chart

In order to accurately identify triggers and purpose of challenging behaviour you will need to have recorded behaviours using an ABC chart – see Advice Sheet – Analysis of Challenging Behaviour in Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Look through your completed ABC chart to look for common patterns the ‘antecedent’ (what happens before) section. You can use the CRISIS acronym to consider the main issues that may be triggering challenging behaviours in a child with ASD.

Communication	did the child understand? Has the child misunderstood?
Routines	has there been a change in routine? Has the child been supported to know the routine?
Interaction	has there been a social misunderstanding? Does the child understand what is expected of them?
Sensory issues	sensory Issues – is there an increase / change in sensory stimuli?
Imagination	is the child being expected to use their imagination or be creative?
Subjectivity	are you assuming the child is purposely being challenging and behaving accordingly?

Often the behaviour that you see is ‘functional’, which means that there is a purpose.

Behaviours with a clear purpose can include running away to move away from a distressful situation, hitting out to stop someone talking or hiding under a table to stop people looking along with many others.

By identifying the trigger or underlying difficulty and then removing the trigger or providing support, you will prevent the behaviour occurring.

An example:

The Specific Behaviour:

Screaming at the supermarket.

The possible reasons / underlying difficulties:

Communication

I can't understand how long we are going to be here. I feel anxious, but I don't understand these feelings and can't tell anyone about it.

Routines

We usually go straight home after school, I don't like things changing. Does this mean we aren't going home at all?

Interaction

I don't understand what you expect from me — what am I supposed to do?

Sensory

There are bright lights, busy shelves, strong smells and lots of people. I can't cope with it all.

Imagination

You have asked me to choose what dad might like for tea...I can't guess and don't know what you want me to say.

Subjectivity

You keep telling me to stop being silly, I'm not being silly I am scared.

In the above example, there are clear triggers for the behaviour relating to the child's lack of understanding.

You should now look at your ABC chart and see if you can find similar triggers, or ask a professional to help you.

If the child's behaviour is appropriate even if it is undesirable (for example becoming anxious around a change in routine) you should not try to change the behaviour, but rather change the environment (you could try picture planners, or count downs).

If sensory issues are the cause of the unwanted behaviour, altering the environment will also be the way to move forward (maybe shopping at quieter places or times of day).

Where there are clear triggers, that are related to the child's ASD, you should always put in additional support and alter the environment to prevent the behaviour reoccurring.