



# Identifying Triggers

In order to accurately identify triggers and purpose of your child's distress behaviour you will need to have recorded it using an ABC chart:

[neurodivergencewales.org/en/parents-carers/using-an-ABC-chart](https://neurodivergencewales.org/en/parents-carers/using-an-ABC-chart)

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Look through your completed ABC chart to look for common patterns in the 'antecedent' (what happens before) section. You can then use the CRISIS acronym to consider the main issues that may be triggering certain behaviours in an autistic child:

**Communication** - Have you communicated in a way that the child understands?

**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 Processing** - Is there an increase / change in sensory stimuli?

**Imagination** - Is the child being expected to use their social imagination?

**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.

## Example

*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 Processing** - "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 lack of support in explaining what is expected of the child and help to manage the sensory environment.

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).