



OAK TREE SCHOOL

Nurturing potential, encouraging independence

Understanding Behaviour in Autism

Behaviour is a form of communication.

Common reasons behind behaviours:

- Sensory overload
- Difficulty with transitions
- Challenges with communication
- Anxiety or frustration
- Unexpected change in routine

Every child is different — we focus on individualised support

The behaviour we see is often the final stage of a much longer internal experience of stress, anxiety, confusion, or dysregulation.





There is a lot of sensory input to process throughout the day. Sounds, lights, smells, touch, movement, and social demands can all build up. Sometimes this becomes too much to manage, and behaviour is the way this overwhelm is communicated.

Sometimes we push the safest people away from us to check they are still there, much like checking the harness on a rollercoaster. You do not want to break it, but you need reassurance that it will keep you safe. Children often do the same with the adults they trust most.

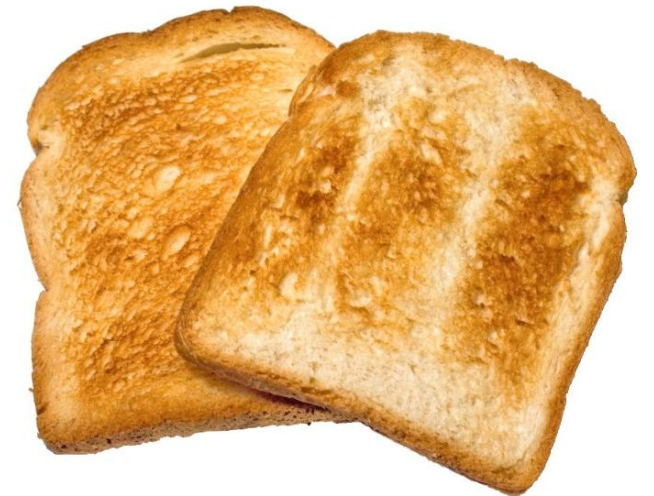




Transitioning from one activity to another can be difficult. Even moving towards something enjoyable can feel overwhelming, like standing at the edge of a swimming pool knowing you want to jump in, but still finding it hard to make that move.

Sometimes things are not presented in a way that feels familiar, predictable, or safe, which can cause significant anxiety and distress.

For example, when you think of toast, what do you picture? Is it the same as someone else's idea of toast, or something completely different? Unexpected differences can create real uncertainty.



What are Proactive Strategies?

Aim to **prevent** behaviours before they occur.

- Structured routines and visual timetables
- Sensory regulation breaks
- Consistency
- Clear communication (PECS, visuals, Makaton)
- Social stories to prepare for any changes

Focus: Reducing anxiety and promoting predictability



Proactive Strategies at Home



Create visual schedules for the day



Use timers or countdowns for transitions



Use zones of regulations to help name feelings



Praise and reinforce positive behaviours

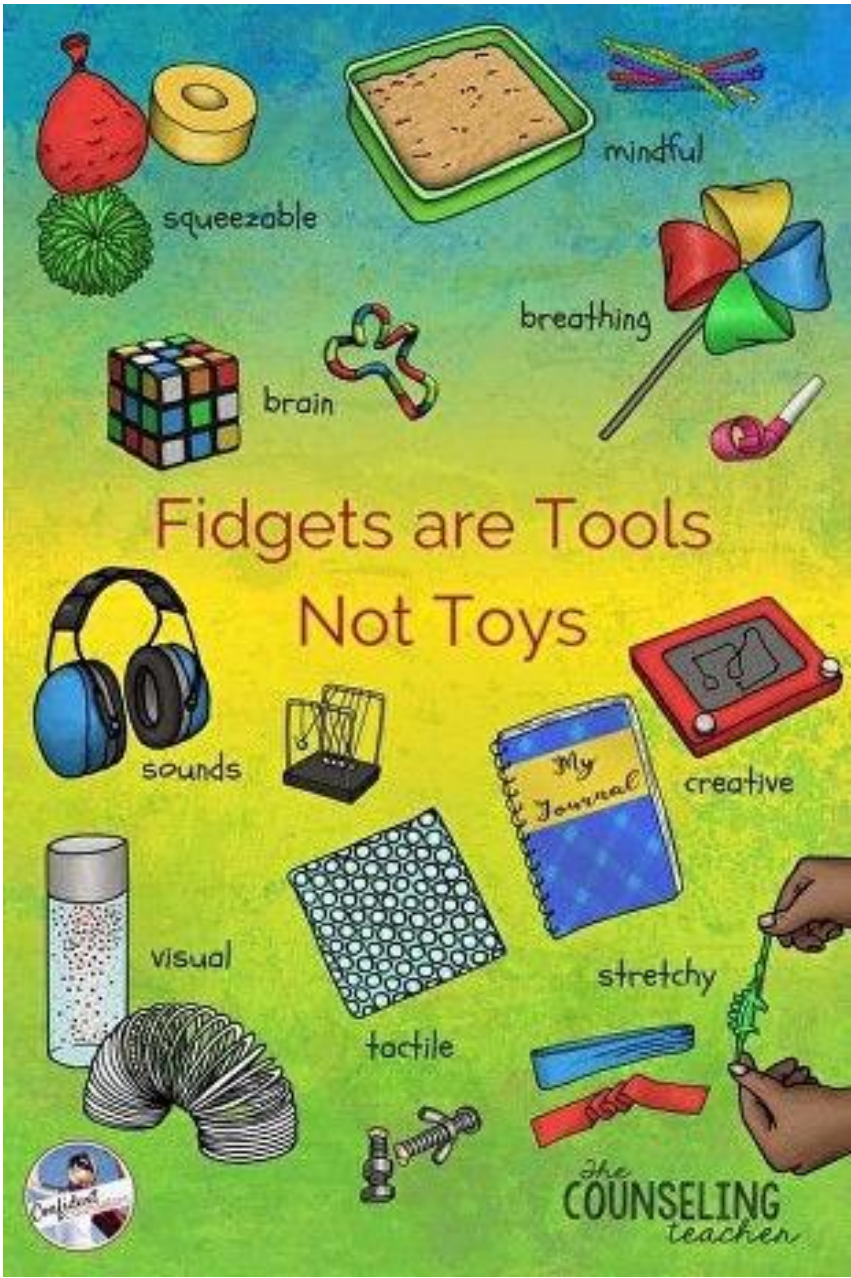


Visual calendars



Social stories





What are Reactive Strategies?

Strategies used **after** a behaviour occurs.

The goal is to respond in a way that is safe, calm, and consistent.

Examples:

- Reduce verbal input during periods of dysregulation
- Allow processing time
- Offer choices when safe
- Use de-escalation techniques

Consistency is key.

Listen to Music 	Get a Drink of Water 	Take a Walk 	Look out the Window 
Pretzel Breathing 	Read/Listen to a Book 	Get Some Fresh Air 	Visit a Friend 
Body Sock 	Regroup in a Small/Dark Space 	Rainbow Breathing 	Journal 
5,4,3,2,1 Strategy 	Play with a Fidget 	Color 	Draw 



CPI: Crisis Prevention Institute

Focus on:

- **Preventing** escalation
- Using **non-restrictive interventions** first
- **Teamwork** and communication

Holds are only used **as a last resort**, and only when:

- There is **immediate risk** of harm
- All other strategies have been tried



The CPI Crisis Development ModelSM



How CPI Supports Students

Emphasises:

- Respect and understanding
- Non-confrontational communication
- Knowing each child's *crisis cycle*

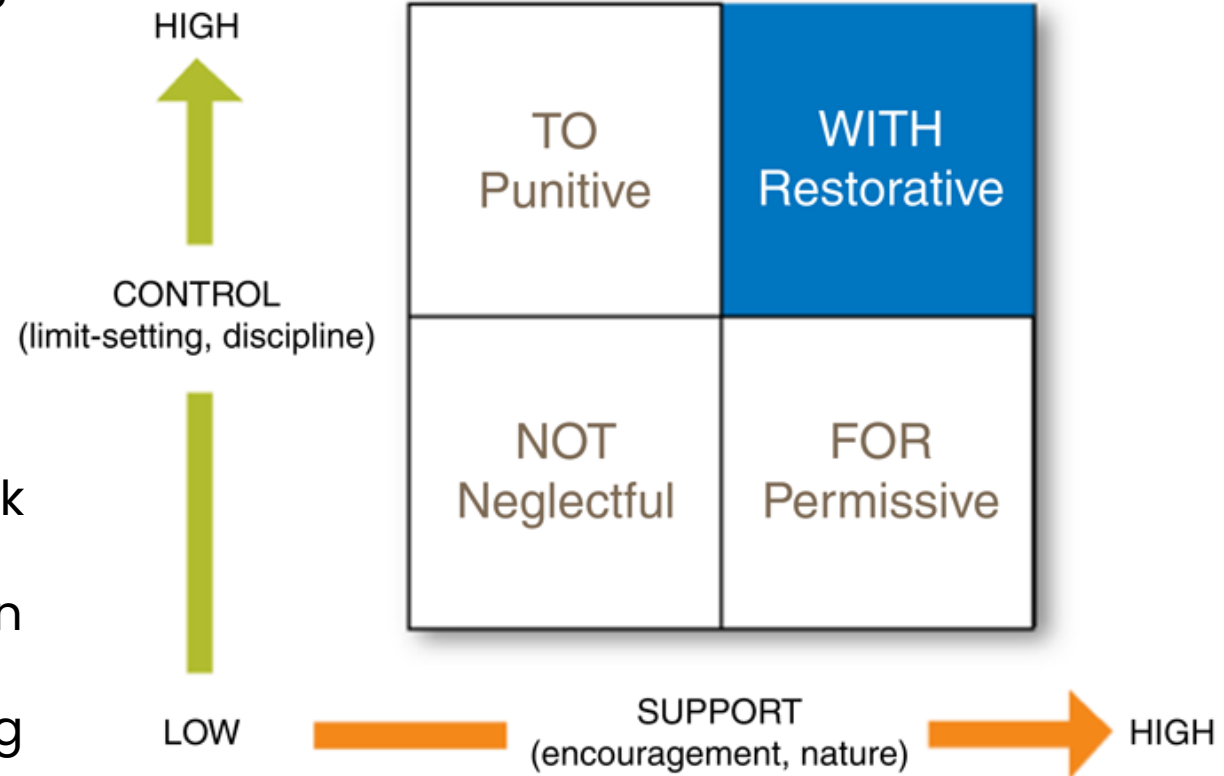
Behaviour is **documented and reviewed** to implement future support



Consequences

Punitive consequences (such as detention or losing "Golden Time") often fail because they require a high level of abstract reasoning. A student may not connect a morning outburst with an afternoon punishment, which leads to confusion and anxiety rather than learning.

In contrast, natural consequences are immediate and concrete. If a student spills water, the natural consequence is helping to dry the floor. If they break a toy, that toy is no longer available to play with. This creates a direct, sensory based link between an action and its result. Autistic learners these real world associations are much more effective for long term progress than arbitrary punishments.

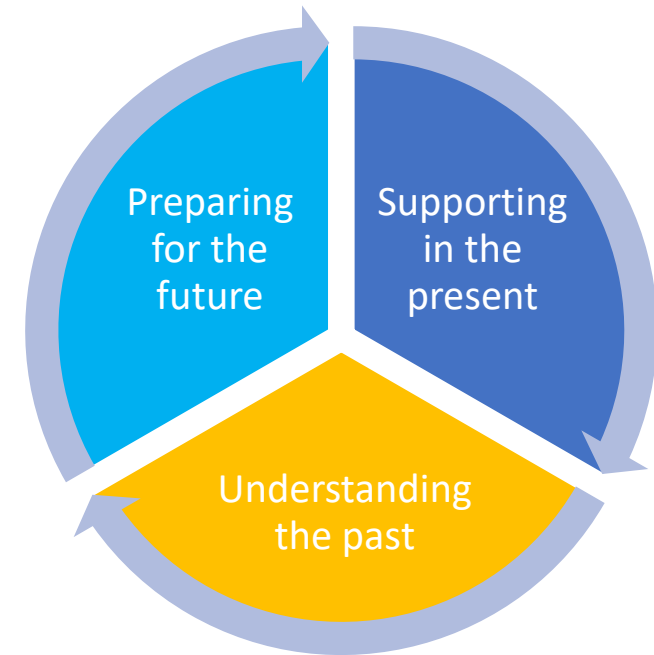


Restorative Practice

Focuses on repairing relationships and building trust.

After an incident, we ask:

- What happened?
- Who has been affected?
- What can we do to make it right?



Encourages accountability and empathy.



Benefits of Restorative Practice



Builds emotional intelligence

Helps children learn from experiences

Strengthens school-home partnerships

Supports long-term behaviour change, not just short-term compliance



What Can Parents Do?



- Use consistent routines and boundaries
- Communicate openly with the school
- Be proactive with sensory tools and regulation strategies
- Ask for support, we're a team!





Please feel free to email us if you any questions or concerns:

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