



Parent Notes

# Module 4

**Autism: Planning for better behaviour**

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## In brief

Children's difficult behaviours sometimes occur at particular times of the day, for example meal times or bedtime, or in particular places, such as at the local shops. This module prepares for these high-risk times and places in a way that reduces the likelihood of difficult behaviour.

# Planning daily routines



**See Module 4 Page 2**

Most children with autism experience levels of confusion and anxiety when their world is not consistent, routine and predictable. Therefore the establishment of daily routines and schedules helps the child make more sense of his or her surroundings, to understand what is happening and provide predictability to their life.

If your child spends time in other households, such as his grandparents' or separate houses for mum and dad, it is helpful if the rules and routines are consistent. For a child with autism, figuring out the rules is a difficult challenge, so rules being the same in every similar setting helps reinforce and promote positive behaviour.

Remember that children with autism are visual learners and verbal information takes them longer to process and retain. The use of a visual schedule to support the daily routines will be helpful.

# Planning for high-risk times



**See Module 4 Page 5**

For the child with autism high-risk is also about changes and transitions which are often difficult to manage and can create high levels of confusion and stress. These times mean a break in routine, unpredictability, unfamiliarity and the need to deal with new people and places. Therefore, providing structure and visuals helps the child to anticipate what will happen next and cope with changes to activities and routines. These visuals also motivate the child and encourage them to participate in the activity. Visuals will provide your child a reminder of what is happening, refresh his memory, make it meaningful and keep him engaged.

# Planned activities routines



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Another component to this routine for families of children with autism, is the preparation of any visual material which may improve successful implementation. Routines should be presented visually in a format that your child is able to read and understand. Here are some examples of visuals that you will find useful.

- Simple photographs of objects, activities and people involved in the activity
- Many places you may want to visit with the family may have websites. These can be a valuable source of pictures which you could print off and make a social story with (e.g. zoo, Luna Park, aquarium).
- Supermarkets and department stores have print catalogues and websites showing products available. These can also be used to explain what you are looking for during a shopping trip.
- Timers
- Finish box

These visuals may be used in various formats which would include:

- single pictures
- social stories
- written social rules
- behavioural scripts
- schedules
- lanyards and key rings (e.g. finish, toilet, walk, wait, car).

Organise visual supports in such a way to maximise their use. If they need to be portable, place them in a small folder or keep them together on a key ring or lanyard.

# Developing a planned activities routine

## Select interesting activities for your child to engage in

For the child with autism, sensory stimulation can be very calming. Additional activities which you might consider involve the use of highly motivating sensory objects or toys which you may include in your planned activities routine. These objects can be offered to the child during the activity to increase the child's ability to tolerate unfamiliar experiences and reduce their stress levels. They encourage the child to feel safe and comfortable and assist them to function effectively in the environment.

## Decide on behaviours you expect from your child

You may need to show your child exactly what you want them to do. If you want your child to hold the supermarket trolley when out shopping, a physical prompt such as putting your child's hand on the supermarket trolley shows them what the expectation is. Similarly, for using cutlery in a restaurant, you may use a physical prompt such as putting your hand over the child's and showing them how to use the fork appropriately rather than eating with their fingers.

## Decide on behaviours you do not want from your child

Avoid telling your child what not to do. If for instance they are running in the supermarket aisle, instead of telling them 'don't run', say to them 'remember, you need to walk'. This makes the instruction more positive and prevents a pattern of nagging from forming. It also teaches your child a useful alternative behaviour to use in the future.

# Watching the DVD



See Module 4 Page 10



## Scene 4.1

Children with autism expect that when they see a highly preferred item such as a chocolate bar that they can have it immediately. Telling them they can have it later can create confusion and difficulties. Therefore once again the use of visuals indicating the sequence eliminates a potential problem. See Resources for examples.

## Scene 4.2

Ensure you keep your language literal and concrete. What would 'pink bread' mean to your child? To further engage your child in the shopping experience, a shopping schedule depicting the items your child will locate and put in the trolley can be helpful.

## Scene 4.3

As children with autism have difficulty in understanding how their actions affect other people and do not understand other people's feelings or points of view, this is an opportunity to encourage your child's interest and concern for other members of the family.

## Scene 4.4

It is recommended that a range of creative strategies are implemented to encourage new behaviours that you do want. It is important to follow through and finish on a successful note, especially on the first occasion, so your child will be motivated to engage in the activity again.

## Scene 4.5

The follow up discussion in the DVD is very wordy. It might be better to simply say 'I liked the way you put the biscuits back. Good shopping Josh, here's your chocolate bar'.