

Check-Off the Known or Possible Functions of ASD-Related Acting-Out Behaviors

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Instructions: Write the behavior in question in the blank below. Identify only one behavior at a time unless a cluster of behaviors always happen together 100% of the time at the same time. Then, check all appropriate boxes, putting a “K” next to the box when it’s known what the function of the behavior is 100% of the time, put a “K/P” next to the box when it’s sometimes known but not all the time, and put a “P” when you’re checking a box because it’s simply possible that the identified function is sometimes the underlying reason for the behavior.

Like with all ASD behaviors, it never does any good to simply try to stop a particular behavior. Think about it – Does “Just stop it!” ever produce any good or lasting change in neurotypical kids? – in adults? – in you?

Instead, we must always strive to understand, ***“What is the FUNCTION of the (violent or other) behavior?”*** Here are some possible functions (see handout):

Behavior: _____

- Attention-Seeking** (when “acceptable” or positive methods don’t succeed).
 - Remember, for all children, getting negative attention is better than getting none at all.
- Expressing Pain or Discomfort**
- Communicating Overwhelm**
- Seeking Help**
- Expressing Unmet Emotional Needs**
- Escape or Avoidance** (removing themselves from an unwanted task, environment, or person ... or demand/expectation being placed on them)
- Seeking Predictability** (disruptive acts force adults to stop, slow down, and/or reset routines; ASD kids may use behavior to regain structure)
- Exerting Autonomy or Control**
- Self-Advocacy**
- Testing Boundaries**

- ❑ **Sensation-Seeking**
- ❑ **Sensation-Avoidance**
- ❑ **Physical Release** (discharging built-up energy, restlessness, or hyperarousal – meltdowns can serve as a type of neurological reset in both neurotypical and ASD children)
- ❑ **An Attempt at Self-Regulation** (paradoxically using aggression or disruption to regain inner equilibrium)
- ❑ **Expression of Hunger, Fatigue, or Physiological Needs** (acting-out when basic needs aren't met; in ASD children, Interoception challenges may mean that the child doesn't even recognize hunger, tiredness, etc., until they “boil over” through some kind of behavior)
- ❑ **Imitation of Observed Behavior**
- ❑ **Peer Influence or Social Gain**
- ❑ **Revenge or Retaliation**
- ❑ **Avoiding Social Interaction** (using behavior to push others away when interaction feels confusing, uncomfortable, draining, unsafe, or overwhelming; think about how many times a neurotypical child will avoid, for example, the uncomfortableness of meeting a new adult, etc.)
- ❑ **Protective Behavior**

Notes:

“We have to do a much better job at getting in there earlier in order to support self-regulation in these kids so that we’re not constantly reacting to a violent episode and then wondering, ‘How do we get this kid under control?’ after the meltdown has already started. We have to do a much better job at reading the signs – especially the subtle signals - leading up to a meltdown. Even argumentative speech can be a signal of growing dysregulation. Everyone on the team must move into a solidly preventative mode and mindset.” – Dr. Barry Prizant