



UNIVERSITY *of* MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Supporting Your Emotionally Dysregulated ASD Child

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Objectives

- Identify triggers that frequently lead to behavioral outbursts in autistic youth
- Learn trauma-informed de-escalation strategies to address behavioral outbursts
- Identify supports to prevent or decrease the frequency and intensity of behavioral outbursts in autistic youth



Autism and Challenging Behavior

- Autism itself does NOT cause challenging behaviors
- Behaviors are often a form of communication
- Past responses to challenging behaviors can impact future behaviors in similar situations



Autism and Challenging Behavior

- Aggression tends to be higher in autistic youth with the following traits:
 - Younger age
 - Frequent engagement in self-injurious or ritualistic behaviors
 - Highly resistant to change
 - Significant social impairment



Triggers

Sensory
overload

Difficulty
understanding
a situation

Poor coping
strategies

"Autistic
burnout"

Sensory
Overload





Autistic Burnout

- Burnout can result from:
 - Suppressing autistic traits
 - Stress
 - Changes (e.g., in routine, environments)
 - Sleep deprivation
 - Illness



Prior to Attempting De-escalation

- Check in with yourself
 - Remember all individuals do the best they can in each situation given their skills and past experiences
 - Considering why the youth is behaving a certain way is required to help appropriately
 - Be mindful of body language and facial expressions
 - Engage in modulation strategies
 - E.g., self-talk, anticipatory relaxation strategies
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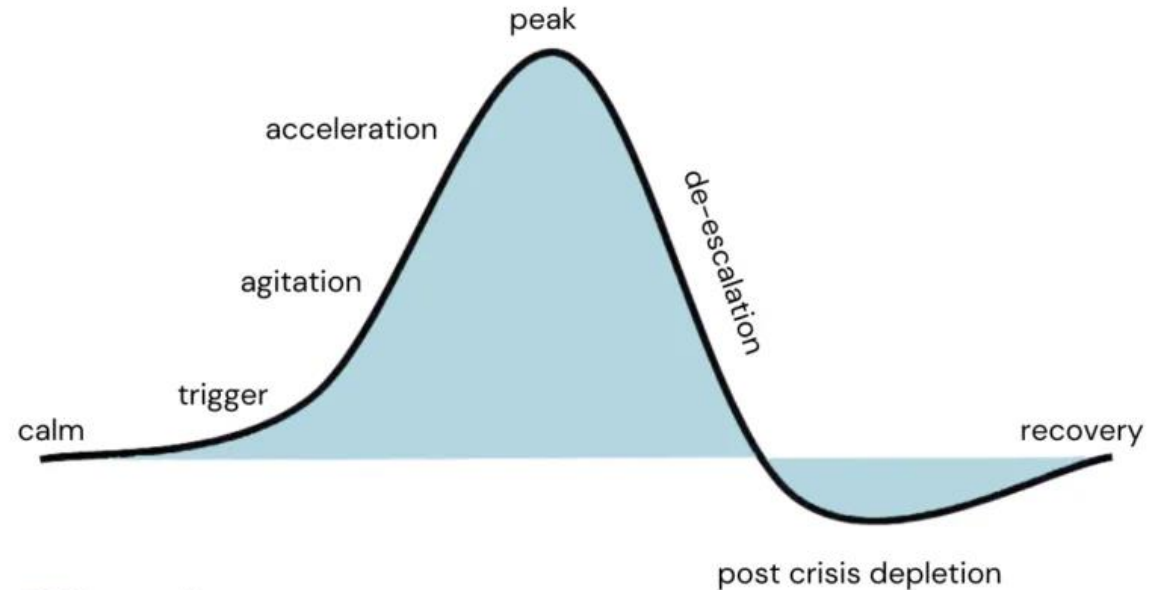


De-Escalation

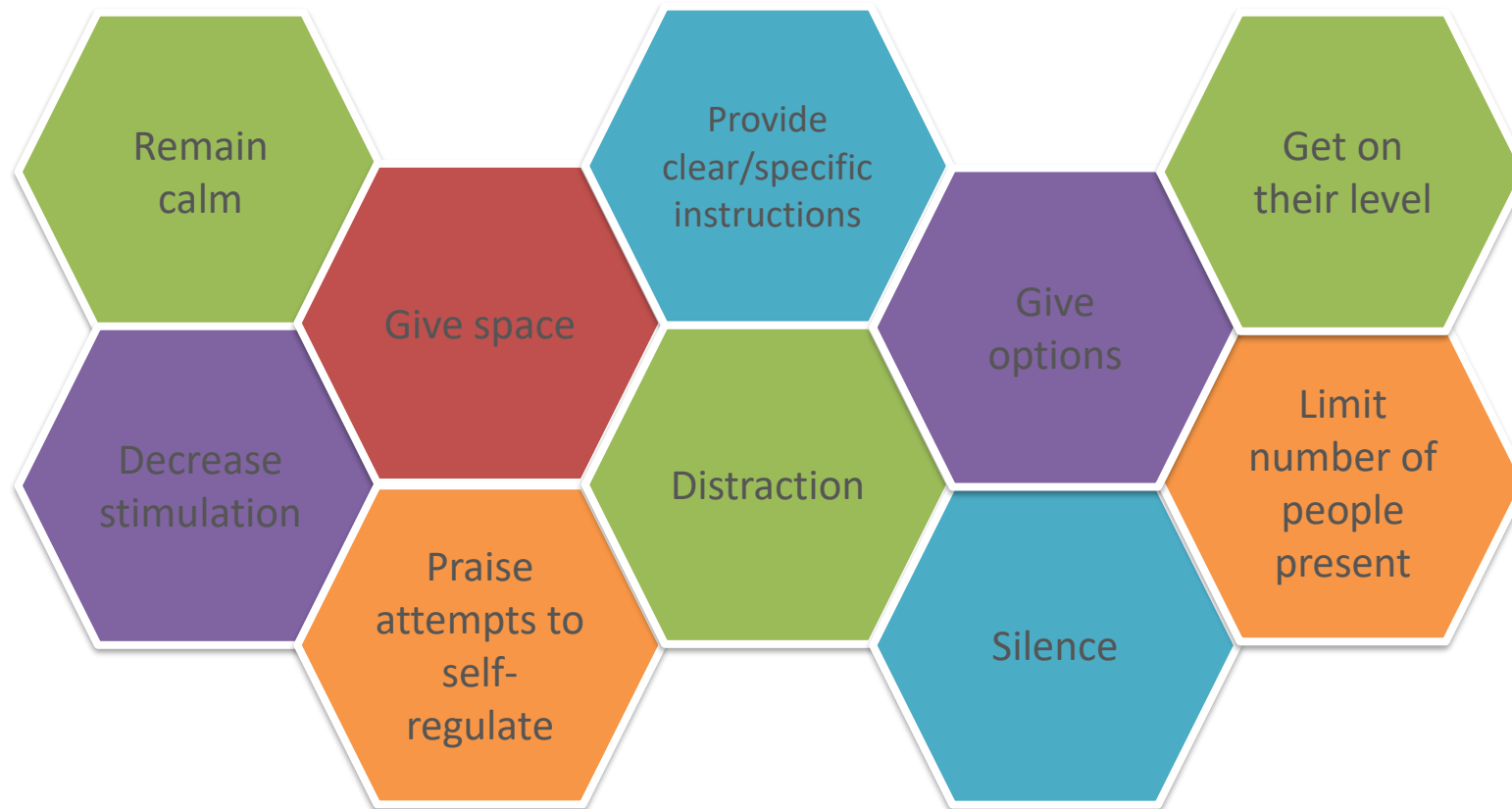
- Definition: Techniques intended to reduce an individual's agitation and/or aggression
- Verbal and Non-verbal techniques

The Escalation Cycle

pattern occurring before, during, and after a meltdown



De-Escalation Strategies





Distraction

- Most effective early on
- Offer preferred item or activity



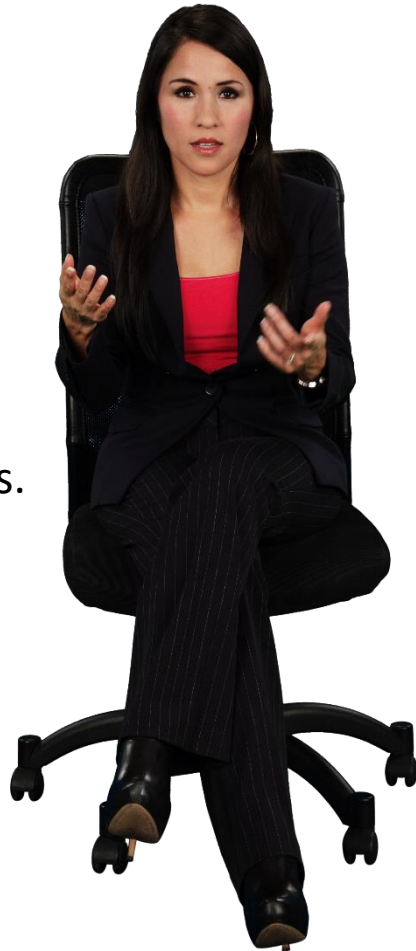


Attunement

- Recognize and understand youth's emotional state
- Active Listening
 - Accept and respect youth's feelings
 - Show youth you are listening and observing
 - Eye contact, nodding, no interrupting, summarize after they finish
 - Don't rush to action



Vs.



Remain Calm

- Important to appear non-threatening
- Be mindful of:
 - Body language
 - Facial expressions
 - Voice volume and tone

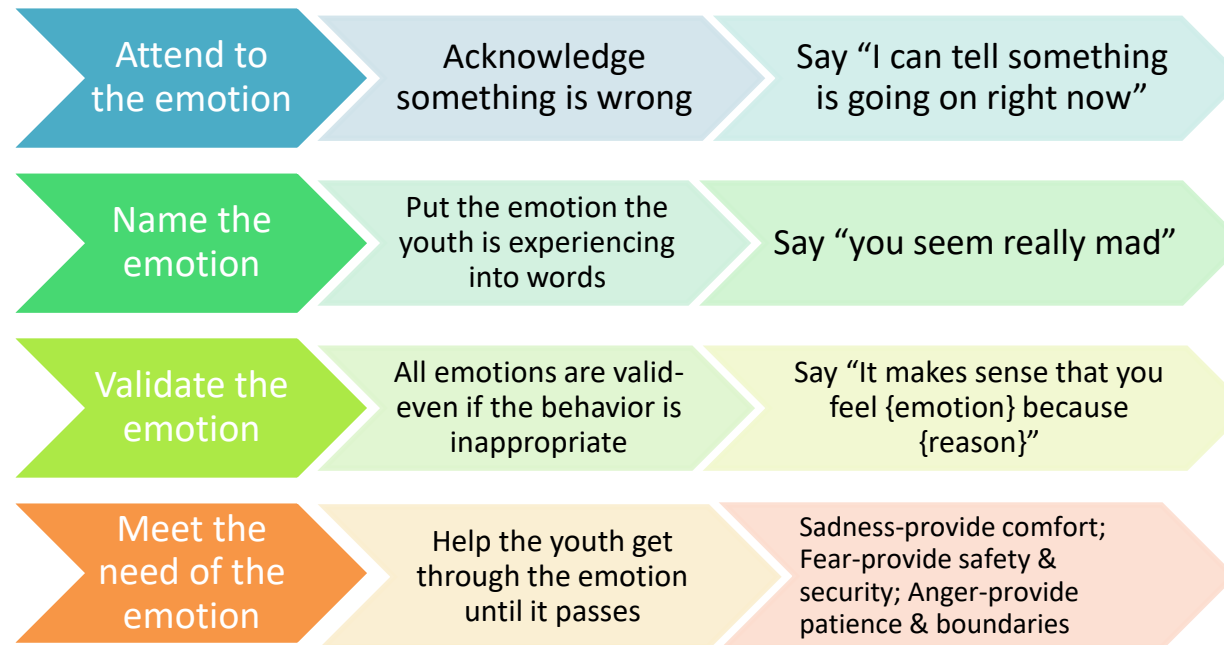


Get on Their Level

- Don't stand over them
- Either sit or kneel to be at eye level



Emotion Coaching





Sequence of Engagement

Regulate



Relate



Reason





Mirror and Match





Give Space

- Some autistic youth do not like to be touched
- Provide at least 3 feet of space
- Do not touch or hug
- Being too close can create feeling of being trapped and further escalate situation



Decrease Stimulation

- Dim lights
- Turn off television
- Limit number of people present
- Silence-No talking





What to Say

Give options

- Giving two options can give back control
- Typically youth feel they have no control in escalated situations

Provide instructions

- Instructions should be simple and clear
- Avoid repeating numerous times

Praise attempts to self-regulate



Interventions of Last Resort

- Restraints-physical force to reduce mobility or immobilize an individual
- Seclusion-involuntary confinement to an area by themselves that they are physically prevented from leaving

Should only be used when less restrictive and alternative interventions are not effective, safe, or feasible

Debrief

- Discuss the situation once everyone is calm
 - Prepares for possible future events
 - Identify triggers
 - Self-regulation strategies





Common Reasons for Increased Escalation

- Reasoning with the youth
- Making demands
- Unnecessary constraint
- Yelling to be heard
- Talking about youth in front of them
- Assuming the youth does not understand you



Preventative Measures

Provide structure

Prepare for transitions and changes

Visual supports

Sensory diet

Remove uncomfortable/distracting stimuli

Teach communication skills

Build ability to self calm/regulate













Help to recognize own behavioral responses

Exercise



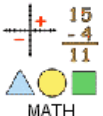











Reminders



Visual Supports/Schedules

 check in	 waiting room	 sit in chair
 exam room	 nurse swabs area	 tourniquet
 numbing agent	 feel a poke	 wait and stay still
 remove needle	 cotton ball & band aid	 good job!

Morning Work Time

 check schedule	Check schedule and go to math work table	 the time is
 MATH	Get out paper and pencil for math work Complete worksheets	 check mark
 SCIENCE	Science show and tell today. Listen quietly	 check mark
 school bathroom	Use bathroom	 check mark
 circle time	Listen quietly at circle time	 check mark
 line up	Time for lunch. Line up to walk to the cafeteria	 the time is
 lunch	Enjoy lunch! Remember to throw your trash away when lunch time is finished	 check mark

Bear Hugs (squeezes)



Sensory Break Ideas

@dogs_of_BA

Trampoline



Shaving Cream



Slime



Slinky



Fluffy Slime



Ball Pit



Sensory Block



Sleeping Bag



Sensory Bin



Sensory Tent



Squeeze Toy



Chill Out Bottle



Feathers



Projector



Squish Bag



Fidget



Water Beads



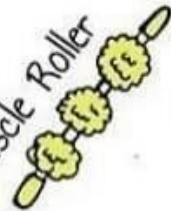
Finger Paint



Kinetic Sand



Muscle Roller



Bounce Ball



Ankle Weights



Bubbles



Chewy



Pipe Cleaners



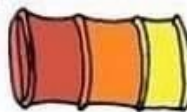
Sequin Pillow



Hammock



Tunnel



Weighted Vest



Spaghetti Arms



Busy Board








Self-Regulation Tools

5 Point Scale

5	I am going to explode!!!
4	I am getting angry!
3	I am a little nervous
2	I am feeling OK
1	I am calm and relaxed

My Self-Management Plan

	The behaviors I exhibit when I feel this way	What I need to do-
 I AM HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I grab others ■ I hit and bite ■ I yell loud ■ I cry loudly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sit and breath- deep breaths ■ I need to be in a safe place ■ go to the beanbag and stay there! ■ Get to yellow
 I AM LOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I look tense, my shoulders and body are tense ■ I bite my tongue ■ I click my neck and fingers ■ I look red and sad ■ I need everything to be in its place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Take a sensory break ■ Ask for help ■ I need someone to write and explain what's going on! ■ I need to take DEEP breaths
 I AM CALM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I can sit and focus ■ I can follow my schedule ■ I can answer with my voice ■ I do respond to others and I look relaxed! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I can earn my points and get preferred breaks

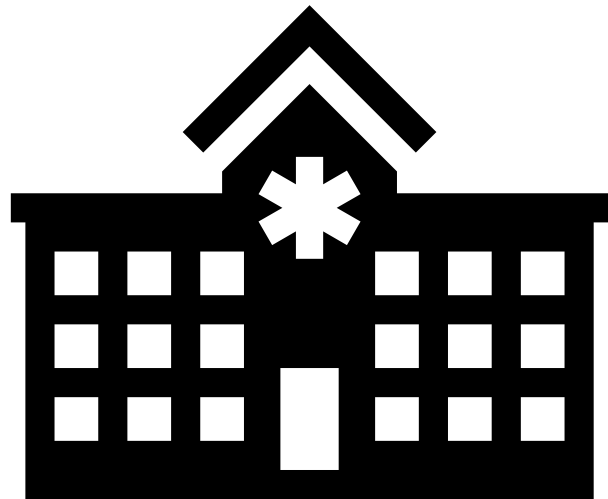
Determining when more support is needed

Aggression/self-injury becomes recurrent risk

Elopement cannot be contained

Threat of suicide

Family can no longer care for youth at home



Next Steps

- Emergency department when immediate help is required
- May lead to psychiatric evaluation and possible inpatient psychiatric hospitalization



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