UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR, REGULATION & HOME STRUCTURE IN AUTISM

Parent Handout
Maryam Nawaz School of Autism
Dr. Aniqa Sohail

Key Message

We understand behavior not to blame, but to support.

What Is Behavior?

Behavior is anything a child does: crying, shouting, hitting, running away, staying silent, or repeating actions. Behavior is not bad manners.

Behavior Is Communication

Autistic children often communicate through behavior because words are difficult, emotions are confusing, or sensory overload happens. When words are not there, behavior becomes the language.

Crying means I am overwhelmed. Hitting means I cannot say stop. Running means I need escape. Repeating actions means this calms me. The child is overloaded, not naughty.

What Is Regulation?

Regulation means the body is calm, emotions are settled, and the brain is ready to learn. No regulation means no learning.

Dysregulation looks like meltdowns, aggression, crying, shutdown, or refusal. This is stress, not stubbornness.

Correct Order for Autism

CALM → CONNECT → TEACH. First calm the body, then connect emotionally, then teach skills.

Sensory Problems & Solutions

Children may be sensitive to noise, lights, touch, clothes, or crowds. Simple sensory solutions include dim lights, lowering TV volume, comfortable clothes, a quiet corner, and movement breaks. Sensory support means fewer meltdowns.

Autism & Home Structure

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. The child's brain works differently. It affects communication, behavior, and sensory processing. Autism is not caused by bad parenting. Every autistic child is unique.

Structured & Sensory-Safe Home

Structure means the child knows where an activity happens, what to do, and when it finishes. Structure creates safety, not strictness. Predictable routines reduce anxiety. Use simple charts, pictures, written lists, and First–Then boards. No printer needed.

Calm Corner & Parent Role

Create a calm corner with cushions, low light, and comfort items. During stress, stay calm, speak less, comfort first, and remove demands. Your calm helps your child calm.

Final Message

You do not need to fix your child. You need to support their nervous system. A calm parent and structured home support better regulation and learning.

Understanding Behavior & Regulation in Autism

For Parents – Maryam Nawaz School of Autism
Dr. Aniqa Sohail

Key Message: Today we understand behavior not to blame, but to support.

What Is Behavior?

Behavior is anything a child does – crying, shouting, hitting, running away, staying silent, or repeating actions. Behavior is not bad manners.

Behavior Is Communication

Autistic children often communicate through behavior because words are difficult, emotions are confusing, or sensory overload occurs. When words are not there, behavior becomes the language.

What Is the Child Saying?

Crying: I'm overwhelmed | Hitting: I can't say stop | Running: I need escape | Repeating: This calms me. The child is overloaded, not naughty.

What Is Regulation?

Regulation means the body is calm, emotions are settled, and the brain is ready to learn. No regulation means no learning.

Dysregulation Looks Like

Meltdowns, aggression, crying, shutdown, refusal. This is stress, not stubbornness.

Correct Order for Autism

Wrong: Teach → Correct → Punish
Right: **CALM** → **CONNECT** → **TEACH**

Sensory Problems

Children may be sensitive to noise, lights, touch, clothes, or crowds. Sensory overload is a major cause of behavior problems.

Simple Sensory Solutions

Dim lights, lower TV volume, comfortable clothes, quiet corner, movement breaks. Sensory support means fewer meltdowns.

How Parents Should Manage

Stay calm, speak less, observe triggers, comfort first, praise calm moments. Your calm helps your child calm.

Golden Rules

Behavior is communication. Regulation comes first. Connection changes behavior. Routine creates safety. Progress is slow but real.

Closing: A calm parent creates a calm child. Your understanding equals your child's growth.

AUTISM IN REAL LIFE – CORE CONCEPTS FOR PARENTS

(Understanding the brain, behavior, emotions, and how to respond calmly and effectively)

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. This means the child's brain processes the world differently. It affects communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, sensory processing, and flexibility. Autism is not caused by bad parenting, lack of discipline, or stubbornness. Every autistic child is different, but all need safety, predictability, and understanding.

The autistic brain processes sensory input more strongly and has difficulty filtering noise, light, touch, and movement. It enters stress mode quickly and takes longer to calm. What feels normal to others may feel too loud, too bright, too fast, or too confusing. The brain reacts as if there is danger, even when there isn't—this is why behavior happens.

Behavior is communication. When children cannot explain feelings with words, they show them through behavior. Crying means overwhelm, running away means escape, hitting means I can't say stop, shutting down means too much, and repetition helps calm. Always ask: What is my child trying to tell me? Behavior is a signal, not a character flaw.

Tantrums and meltdowns are different. A tantrum is controlled and stops when a demand is met. A meltdown is not controlled, caused by sensory or emotional overload, and needs calming—not punishment. Punishment during a meltdown makes things worse; calm support helps recovery.

Dysregulation means the body is not calm, emotions overflow, and the brain is not ready to learn. It may look like meltdowns, aggression, crying, refusal, shutdown, or zoning out. This is stress, not stubbornness.

Many autistic children have sensory sensitivities to sound, light, touch, movement, smells, or textures. Early signs of overload include covering ears, pacing, irritability, withdrawal, or avoiding eye contact. Act early when these signs appear.

What helps: a calm voice, fewer words, gentle presence, removing demands, and offering space or comfort based on the child. What does not help: shouting, lecturing, forcing eye contact, or punishing meltdowns. Children borrow regulation from adults—calm parent means calmer child.

Always follow this order: CALM → CONNECT → TEACH. Regulation must come before learning. Support regulation with quiet spaces, reduced noise and light, movement breaks, comfort objects, and predictable routines.

A structured environment means the child knows where an activity happens, what to do, and when it finishes. Use visual schedules, First–Then boards, prepare for transitions, and reduce clutter and noise.

Create a calm corner at home: a safe break space with cushions, low light, favorite objects, and quiet. This space is for calming, not punishment.

Final message: You do not need to fix your child. You need to understand and support their nervous system. Progress is slow, non-linear, but very real. A calm parent, safe environment, and understanding lead to growth, learning, and trust.

Understanding My Child's Brain

Basics of My Child's Neurology & Behavior

Parent Training – Maryam Nawaz
School of Autism

Session Facilitator

- Dr. Aniqa Sohail
- Pediatrician & Autism Expert
- Lifestyle Medicine Consultant
- Founder – HELP Autism Pakistan

Why Understanding the Brain Matters

- Behavior comes from the brain
- Children do not misbehave on purpose
- Understanding reduces anger and stress
- A calm brain learns better

How an Autistic Brain Is Different

- Processes information differently
- Feels sensory input more strongly
- Finds change stressful
- Needs extra time to respond

Sensory Processing Differences

- Sounds may feel too loud
- Lights may feel too bright
- Touch may feel uncomfortable
- Too much input causes overload

What Happens During Overload

- Brain enters survival mode
- Child cannot listen or reason
- Behavior becomes intense
- This is stress, not stubbornness

Behavior Is Communication

- Behavior shows unmet needs
- Meltdowns show overwhelm
- Silence can mean shutdown
- Aggression can mean frustration

Regulation Comes Before Learning

- Calm first, teaching later
- Upset brain cannot learn
- Connection helps regulation
- Safety supports learning

Why Punishment Does Not Work

- Punishment increases fear
- Fear blocks learning
- Brain needs safety
- Support works better

How Parents Can Help the Brain

- Stay calm
- Use simple words
- Keep routines
- Reduce sensory load

What Parents Should Remember

- My child is trying
- Behavior is brain-based
- Small changes help
- I am my child’s safe place

Final Message

- Understanding changes reactions
- Calm builds connection
- Connection builds learning
- Parents are powerful