

Improving Work Completion, Decreasing Disruption, and Preventing Meltdowns for Students with High- Functioning Autism

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I. KIDS WITH HFA AND BEHAVIOR: COMMON ISSUES

II. WHAT IS HARDWIRED AND WHAT IS ‘DELIBERATE’ MISBEHAVIOR?

III. SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS AND CORRELATED STRATEGIES

A. Behavior: Work refusal

Characteristics of AS/HFA associated with the behavior

- **Extreme difficulty with handwriting (Kennedy-Kreiger study)**
- **Perceived lack of rationale and minimal motivation to complete work**

Strategies

1. Decrease requirements for handwritten work production
2. Allow alternatives to handwriting whenever possible—
keyboarding, use of voice-to-text, low-tech solutions, oral test-
taking, etc.
3. Increase incentives for work completion (DOTS for Motivation;
Source: Ginger Gates, Ph.D.)

B. Behavior: Interrupting instruction with off-topic comments

Characteristics of AS/HFA associated with the behavior

- **Lack of perspective-taking**
- **Intense focus on topic of interest; persistent thoughts about and verbal references to topic of interest**

Strategies

1. Establish clear time-and-place rules for talking about topic of interest (Time-and-Place Rules, attached)
2. Establish times when kids are encouraged to pursue interest in topics in a productive way (e.g., clubs, projects, science fairs)
3. Limit topic perseveration *in conversation* by teaching
 - a. 'One more thing' (when conversing with adults)
 - b. 'Rule of three' (when conversing with peers)

C. Behavior: Meltdowns over changes in routine, unexpected events, etc.

Characteristics of AS/HFA associated with the behavior

- **Intense need for routine and consistency**
- **Acute cognitive challenges in shifting attention and focus**

Strategies

1. Teach a sequence for staying calm when encountering changes in routine, unexpected events, issues with peers, etc.
2. Prepare kids for changes in routine ahead of time whenever possible

Time-and-Place Rules for Topic(s) of Interest

1. The topic may be discussed during breaks, recess, lunch, after school, and on the bus, or while walking to and from school
2. The topic may be discussed during meetings for special interest clubs
3. The topic may be included in academic assignments with prior teacher permission
4. The topic may be discussed with community mentors working in related fields
5. The topic may be included in special projects for science fairs, job fairs, or other activities promoting transition to adulthood and career exploration
6. The topic may *not* be discussed at any time during teacher instruction
7. The topic may *not* be discussed during independent seatwork time
8. Materials relating to the topic (books, catalogs, magazines, etc.) may be accessed in accordance with the time-and-place parameters listed above

Note: While it is not acceptable for students to interrupt instruction by talking about intense areas of interest, these interests may be channeled into productive activities. Many students can be motivated to complete more schoolwork by including topics of interest in assignments. In addition, many intense interests provide the impetus and opportunity to explore career options in related fields.

Steps for Staying Calm

(for changes in routine, unexpected events, issues with peers)

Younger kids (include pictures or icons)

1. Stop	
2. Take a deep breath	
3. Count to 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Say "OK"	
5. Follow the direction	

Older Kids

1. Stop
2. Take a deep breath
3. Count to 5
4. Look around (what are others doing?)
5. Ask a peer what they are going to do
6. Follow the direction/move on

Note: This process should be practiced by kids for a few minutes each day. Provide brief role-play opportunities that reflect common scenarios requiring this replacement behavior. Reinforce kids for participating in the teaching process, including role-playing, and for demonstrating the steps successfully when problems arise.