

Module 6: Challenging Behaviour

What is Challenging Behaviour?

'Behaviour problems have been identified as the most challenging and stressful issue facing educators of children and young people with ASD.'

New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline
(NZ Ministries of Health and Education, 2008)



Understanding Both Sides

From the teacher's perspective, the student demonstrates problem behaviours by:

- Not complying with instructions.
- Disrupting lessons and other students.
- Tantruming.
- Destroying property.
- Being aggressive.
- Not participating, (such as sitting in a corner following their own interest).

From the student's perspective, the teacher demonstrates problem behaviours by:

- Making demands that the student does not understand.
- Communicating in ways that are difficult to understand.
- Expecting them to communicate back.

- Expecting them to engage in social activities, where the demands are far too great.
- Expecting them to stay in highly arousing sensory environments.
- Limiting their interests.

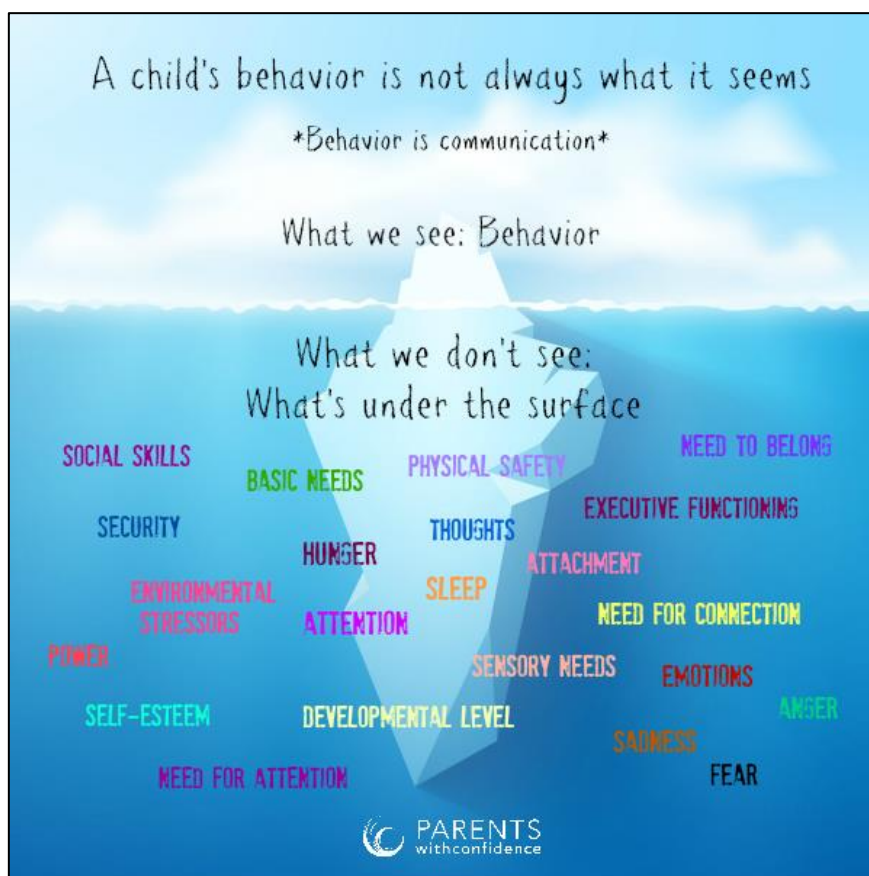
“What some of my teachers saw as a failure to ‘behave’ was simply a struggle for me to communicate, to feel heard and valued in the classroom”

Alexander, 15

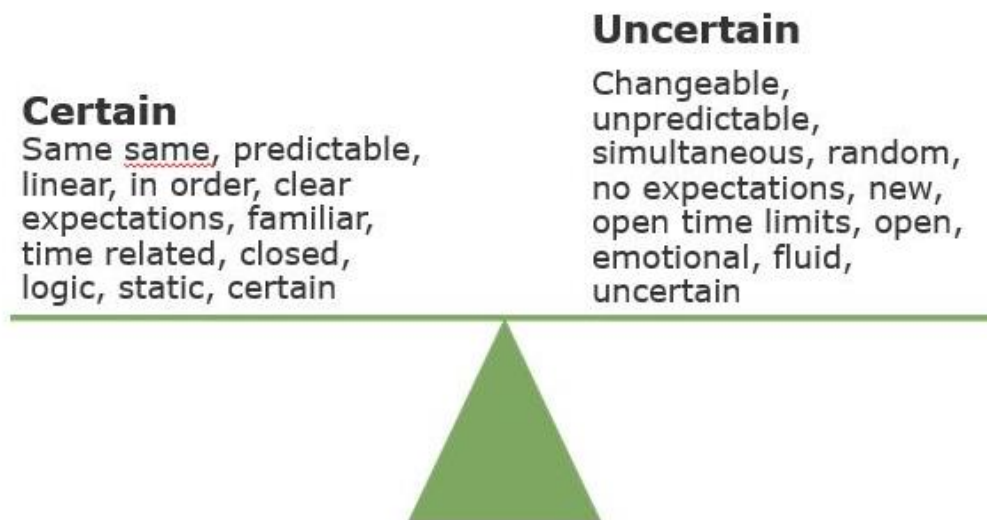
So whose problem is it? **“What should we do when it happens?”**

Why is more important

- *Understanding the why* can lead us to prevention
- Getting the wrong why gives us the wrong solution
- Is it really a problem?
- Your attitude is the paintbrush of the mind, it colours everything you see
- Understand the behaviour rather than seek to eliminate it.
- The idea of seeing behaviour as the tip of the iceberg comes from Division TEACCH (www.teacch.com)



Prevention



Prevent behaviours by tilting the seesaw.

Positive Behaviour Supports

Many of the strategies discussed in previous topics can be used to help prevent or minimise problem behaviours.

These include:

- Teaching the student alternative behaviours or appropriate behaviours in different settings.
- Increasing their ability to communicate their needs through augmentative systems.
- Providing regular physical activities or providing a quiet space for the student.
- Supporting the student through everyday transitions.
- Help and support in assignment planning.

Functional Analysis of Behaviour (FAB)

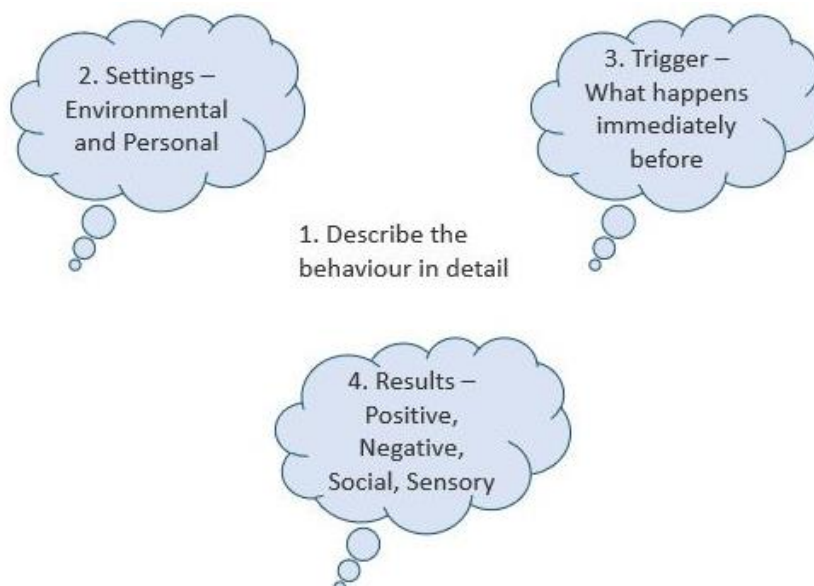
Undertaking a functional analysis of a challenging behaviour using the FAB method can be a helpful strategy to help you work out a behaviour management plan.

The FAB is a simple tool to gather as much information as possible about behaviour and determine the function or purpose of that behaviour from the student's perspective.

1. Describe the behaviour in detail
Describe the behaviour accurately, but in non-judgemental terms. Is this a challenging behaviour?
2. Describe the setting
What environmental and sensory demands may contribute to the behavior occurring? From what you know about autism and the individual student, how do you guess the student might be feeling?
3. Describe the trigger
Identify if possible what occurred just before the behaviour happened.
4. Describe the results
What are the results of the behaviour? Include positive, negative, social, sensory, and material results.

Think about

- Each lunchtime there are increasing numbers of complaints from other children that Amelia is being aggressive. She is disrupting other children’s games, she pushes others over and laughs and she is pulling other children’s hair. Depending on which teacher is on duty she is either sent inside, told to say sorry or played with.
- Her class teacher is considering keeping her in at lunchtimes or arranging with the parent to pick her up before the break



Think also “When do you NOT see this behaviour?” Why do you think that is?

Behaviour Management Plan

Understanding **why** the behaviour happened is always the starting point. A Behaviour Management Plan should reflect two principle areas; strategies that are going to be used to **prevent** or **minimise** the occurrence of the behaviour and creating a plan to **teach new** behaviours.

Hopefully a BMP will help you and your student manage a challenging behaviour- but even with the plan in place it is useful to consider what to do if the behaviour occurs again. This will help ensure a consistent response.

Some tips for creating a BMP are:

1. Discover the function

From all the information gathered, what do you think might be the function or purpose of the behaviour for the student?

2. Assess impact of possible changes

Can you change the settings or the trigger of the behaviour?

How might these changes affect the behaviour?

Can you re-design or alter the environment?

How might you be able to change the way your student feels about the situation?

3. Teach a new skill

What new skill or more effective communication strategy could you introduce to prevent the behaviour or negate the trigger?

What types of visual supports might help reduce the student's anxiety?

4. Individualise

Remember that any intervention should be student-centred and take into account the individual student's characteristics.



Classroom Snapshot: Ethan throwing chairs

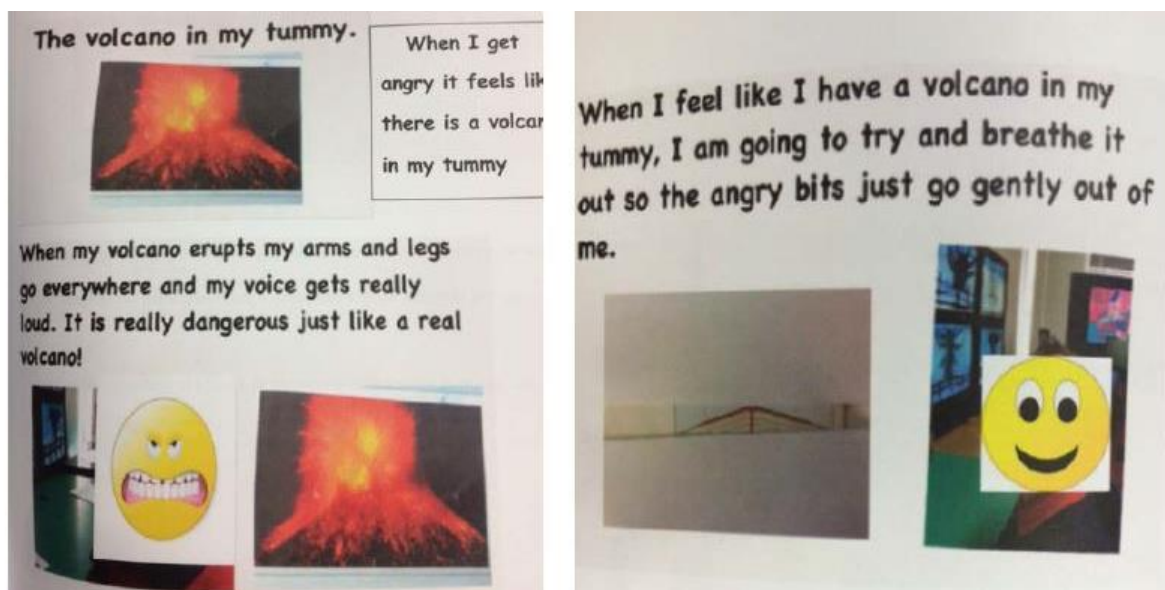
I was called in to observe a boy who had started throwing a chair in a class. The teacher told him to leave the class and sit outside. In discussion with the teacher we discovered through filling out a Functional Analysis of Behaviour that Ethan only threw chairs towards the end of lessons.

We talked about how the classroom got sensorally quite busy with more noise and people moving about, and also recognised that Ethan may be feeling quite anxious as one lesson was finishing. Playing detectives, we worked out that maybe Ethan needed a break, and this was his way of getting one. The BehaviourManagement Plan reflected a preventative approach by introducing a first, next into the class whiteboard. Ethan was also taught how he could ask for a break by placing a 'break' card on the teacher's desk and being allowed to sit in a quiet space.

Measuring Change

Gathering data before and during implementation of a behaviour management plan is very important. In the below example the frequency, severity and how much management is needed is measured. The behaviours can thus be scored and a reduction will indicate that the implementation may be working.

Describe the behaviour	Frequency	Severity	Management
Scratches other children/ adults	1. not in the past 6 months	1. no injury or pain	1. no problem, manageable situation
	2. has occurred but not in the past month	2. minor, superficial scratching	2. slight problem, causes some difficulty
	3 in the past month, once a week	3. moderate, first aid needed	3. moderate, difficult but confident I can manage
	4. in the past month 2 – 3 times daily	4. serious, immediate medical attention essential	4. considerable, very difficult on my own
	5. daily or more often	5. very serious, serious damage resulting in hospitalisation, absence from work	5. extreme, I can't manage without help



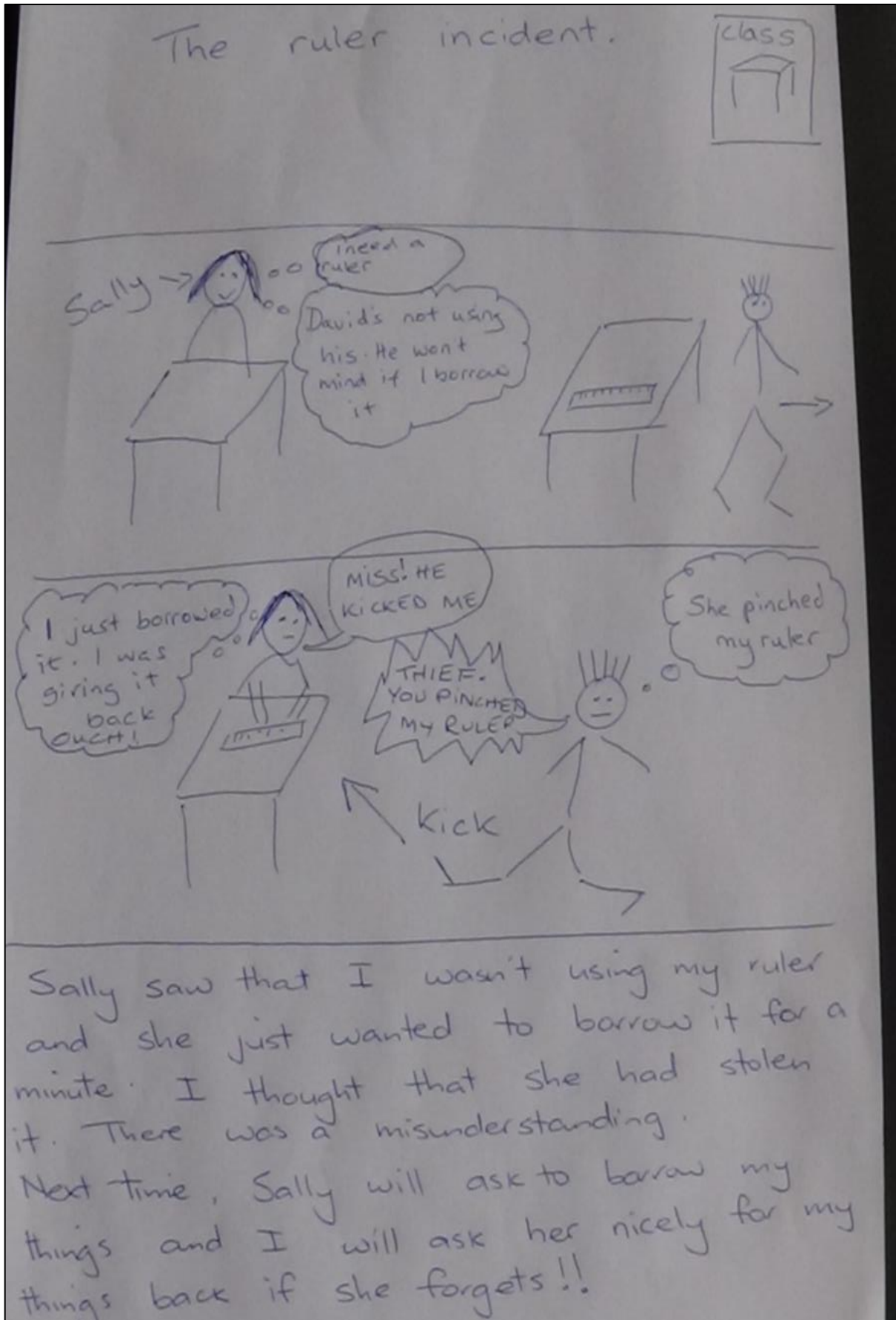
Reviewing Incidents

Comic Strips

Comic strips are a type of visual support which can be very helpful for supporting students to understand and recall incidents that have happened in the past.

They are useful to help understand the emotions of other students in situations. Comic strips rely heavily on visual supports rather than written words¹.

¹ This technique and the guidelines following are based on a trademarked technique developed by Carol Gray, which she calls Comic Strip Conversations™. You can find out more from her website at www.CarolGraySocialStories.com



When to Use a Comic Strip Story

Comic strip stories are an excellent way to give the student with autism access to what other people may be thinking as well as help develop their social understanding. These stories help to explain what people do, say, and think (externally and internally).

Comic strips are a positive way to review incidents with other students or adults, or to explain the impact of behaviour on others.

They are also a helpful way to explain aspects of the “hidden curriculum” to the student. There are the school behaviour “norms” or “expectations” that everyone just knows – it’s obvious – “everybody knows that!” The student with autism may not. These behaviours/capacities are not explicitly taught but are crucial for successful social interaction at school and beyond.

Guidelines for Creating a Comic Strip Story

Comic strip stories are developed by asking the student assumption-free questions about an incident, with an emphasis on context. Give them plenty of time to respond – perhaps write it down and leave it with them.

Colour may also be used to help students understand the different emotions expressed by the people involved.

Handy Tip! As with all new support techniques, it is better to use a student's first comic strip conversation to show something they have done well. You are more likely to get long-term buy-in if comic strips are associated with something positive.

1. Topic

Think of something the student has done well, then sit down with them and start drawing and writing.

2. Context

Draw a contextual picture in the top corner of the paper, to show where the activity is happening. If you change the context, use a new page.



3. Figures

Draw stick figures to represent the people involved.

Make sure the student understands who each figure represents. You may need to draw on a distinguishing characteristic, such as a hat or long hair.

4. Speech and Thoughts

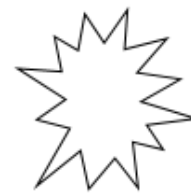
Use speech bubbles to record what each person said, and thought bubbles to show what they might have been thinking. Make no assumptions about what the student with autism was thinking – ask them.



Thought bubble



Speech bubble



Loud voice bubble

5. Emotions

Colours can be used to represent emotions. If you are using colours, always provide a colour key for the student.

For example:

- green = good ideas, happy, friendly
- red = bad ideas, anger
- blue = sad, uncomfortable
- black = facts, truth
- brown = comfortable, cosy
- purple = proud
- yellow = frightened, scared
- orange = questions.

6. What You Need

- Assumption-free brain!
- Pens, pencils, paper, rubber.
- A quiet table to sit beside your student.

7. Method

Draw the stick figures while you ask the student questions about the situation or incident.

Once they have seen how it's done, give the student the option of doing the drawing themselves. This can be fun as well as informative.



Classroom Snapshot: Using a story for understanding - the ruler incident

During a maths lesson, David suddenly kicked Sally and yelled names at her. Sally cried and complained to the teacher. After calming them down, the teacher questioned the students separately about what happened.

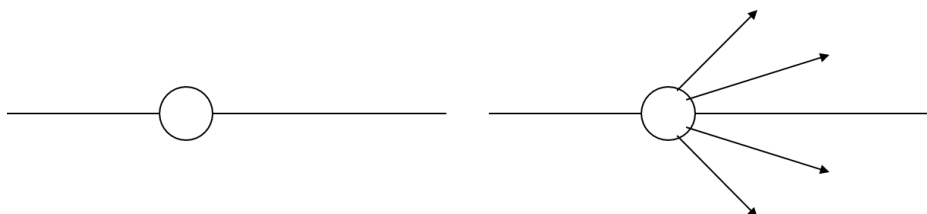
The teacher discovered that Sally had borrowed David's ruler while he was away working on the computer, but without asking him. David thought Sally had stolen his ruler, so he kicked her and called her a thief.

Through writing this incident as a comic strip, the teacher explained to David that there was a misunderstanding. Sally had only borrowed his ruler and meant to give it back soon. They recorded in the story that Sally had promised to ask him in future before borrowing his things.

Teaching Alternative Behaviours

Some students react automatically to a situation without the ability to think of alternative ways of dealing with a situation. No amount of discussion after the situation will support the student next time that button is pushed.

Often a person with Autism has only one thing to do when he reaches crisis. But think if something happens to you how many alternatives you have got. Role play can also teach alternative strategies.



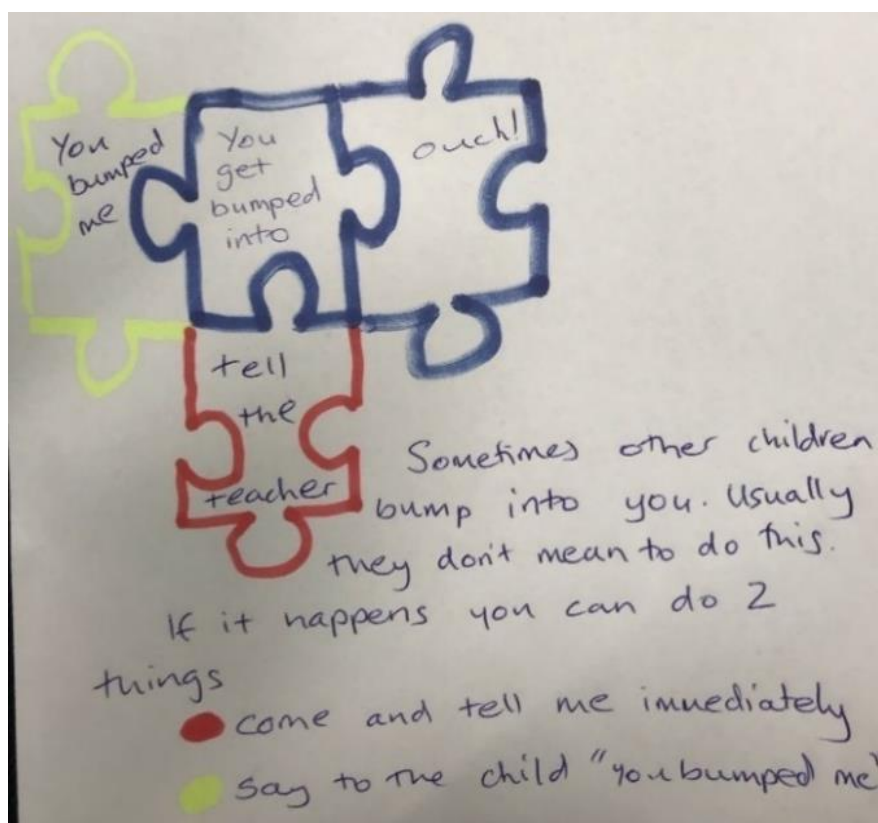
Teaching alternatives to a trigger can change what happens next. Identify the chain of behaviour that leads up to the trigger for your student's emotional breakdown. Drawing the pattern as a chain diagram can clarify your thoughts.

Decide where the chain needs to be broken and devise an alternative behaviour or skill to replace it to divert the pattern. Visual supports can often be the new link that diverts the pattern in a positive direction.



Classroom Snapshot:

A student was having difficulty reacting to students accidentally knocking into him. The teacher was aware that he really liked puzzles so used a visual support of interlocking pieces to show that there were alternative behaviours that he could do when somebody bumped into him.



Teaching Alternative Behaviours Resources:

Sarah Hendrickx (independent Autism consultant that the NAS use) and also has Autism herself talking about how anxiety affects everything, and how when you only have one strategy it's the one we use,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPD_yzMHJIs&t=593s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RarSIM9y3po>

Additional video resources: Comic strip

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mz7JhQmlC6c>