

How to Use Behavioral Health Treatment to Help Your Child with Autism

DISCLAIMER: This summary provides overall strategies you can use to help your child. For more details, it may be helpful to read the tool kit Behavioral Health Treatment and to communicate with your child's clinician about your concerns.

Who would benefit from the Behavioral Health Treatment Tip Sheet?

Children with any of the following behaviors may need behavioral health treatment if these behaviors impact their quality of life: those with developmental/cognitive delays, social skill difficulties, repetitive actions or behaviors, non-compliance, or who hurt themselves or others.

How can behavioral health treatment help?

Behavioral Health Specialists will watch your child play and attempt tasks to understand the reasons behind your child's behavior. They can then create a treatment plan to improve behavior and teach new skills. Providers will also spend time teaching you strategies to improve your child's behavior and abilities.

What can parents do to support behavioral treatment?

- Be specific about your child's challenging behaviors and when they occur. Write it down and share with your therapist or teacher.
- Participate in the therapy and practice the techniques to decrease challenging behaviors and promote positive behaviors.
- Teach others (family, friends, and professionals) to implement your child's behavior plan. Share what works.
- Keep the lines of communication open by sharing information with therapists, teachers and medical providers. Parents can give providers permission to speak with one another to coordinate care for your child.





How to help increase appropriate behavior:

- Reinforce good behavior with something your child likes, and they will more likely do that good behavior again!
- Tell your child what you want them to do clearly, in a way your child understands, and what reinforcer (reward) he/she will receive for doing what you ask.
- Remember: reinforcers don't have to be toys or iPads - verbal praise can be a powerful reinforcer.
- Break tasks down into small steps, or only ask your child to do part of a task (e.g. ask him/her to pick up one block, rather than all the blocks).

How to help decrease challenging behavior:

- Define what the challenging behavior is and figure out why your child does it (e.g. to get something they want, to get out of something they don't want to do, etc.).
- Find ways to change the environment in which challenging behaviors usually take place (e.g. give scheduled breaks during difficult tasks).
- During challenging behaviors, you should remain calm and remind the child of what he/she can do instead of that behavior (for example, "You can use your words to ask for a break.").
- After the challenging behavior stops, provide immediate praise for any good behavior your child shows.

For more information:

Visit autismspeaks.org to find our *Behavioral Health Treatment Tool Kit*.