Anger and anxiety in the classroom: Moderate or Severe Autism and Learning Difficulties

Vanessa Oldham
Leader of Outreach and Inclusion
Freemantles School

If we can reduce the anxiety, the learning will increase.

Challenging Behaviour

• ‘Children with ASD may display what appears to be aggressive behaviour, but this is not really an appropriate description for what we see in individuals with ASD.’
• ‘More often than not it is a reaction to events and there will be little awareness of their actions.’

*Managing and preventing Challenging Behaviour*
Rita Jordan
Challenging behaviour in children with Autism is almost always functional rather than deliberately malicious.

**Behaviour is communication**

"Use their own body language to tap into the way that they are talking to themselves" – Pheobe Caldwell

**The home/school divide**

**Building relationships**

No strategy is likely to be effective without first building positive, trusting relationships

**Preparing for school**

Reminders of favourite things that will happen at school

Taking something from home

Visuals to support routine
Support to transition

Visuals to aid transitioning

Processing time

Visual expectations
Good Sitting

Home/school communication

Preparation for change

Choice boards

Whoops!

Tackle confusion and ambiguity in the classroom

Communicating worries

Talking mats
www.talkingmats.com

Teach relaxation

Deep pressure and sensory input

Aromatherapy

Breathing exercises

Calm zone

Allow time for special interests

May stay the same, or may change frequently

May be more reliant on these when stressed

Effective as motivators

These cannot be removed completely, but if the interest is unsuitable we can restrict access or try to change to more appropriate alternatives
Understand Emotions

Incredible Five Point Scale

Proprioception – our awareness of where our body is positioned and what it is doing

Vestibular system – our sense of balance and our awareness of where we are in space

Consider sensory factors

Sensory Seekers

- May be passive, quiet and complacent
- May not easily engage
- May not be aware of people or things in their environment
- May keep their jumper on even if it’s really hot
- May not realise when they hurt themselves

Underresponders

- May be active or fidgety, impulsive
- May be clumsy and awkward
- May not notice if they are dirty or hurt
- May be a safety risk
- Needs to be physically active to attend and participate, slow to learn new tasks

Sensory Seekers Strategies

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**Overresponders**
- May not like noisy environments or loud noises
- May overreact to being touched, dislike getting hands ‘messy’
- May be visually distracted and disorganised
- May not play well, often refuse to go out to play
- May complain of headaches and stomach aches, poor balance
- Task avoiders, may hide, flee, throw hit, kick
- New situations are particularly tricky

**Strategies**

**Avoiding a downwards spiral**
- Refusal can become routine
- Break patterns
- Increased anxiety can lead to controlling behaviour
- Find reasons to be positive

**Anger in the classroom**
- Show visuals
- Stay calm and slow down
- Limit language
- If safe, stand back and observe
- Structure events (e.g. now/next)
- Change of face

**Top Tips:**
- In the moment
- Reward = repeat
- Consistency
- Top tips: Plan for prevention
- Listen to what the behaviour is saying
- Remember sensory factors

**Conclusion**
‘People are always looking for the single magic bullet that will totally change everything. There is no single magic bullet.’

Temple Grandin