



# **Inclusive Futures: Effective Approaches for Supporting Young People with Autism**

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- Nearly 8 years working in the field
- Graduated with my PhD in applied behavior analysis in June 2024
- Working as the clinical director of Washington and other nearby counties at Achieving True Self
- Personal interests: reading, walking my dog, traveling



# Objectives

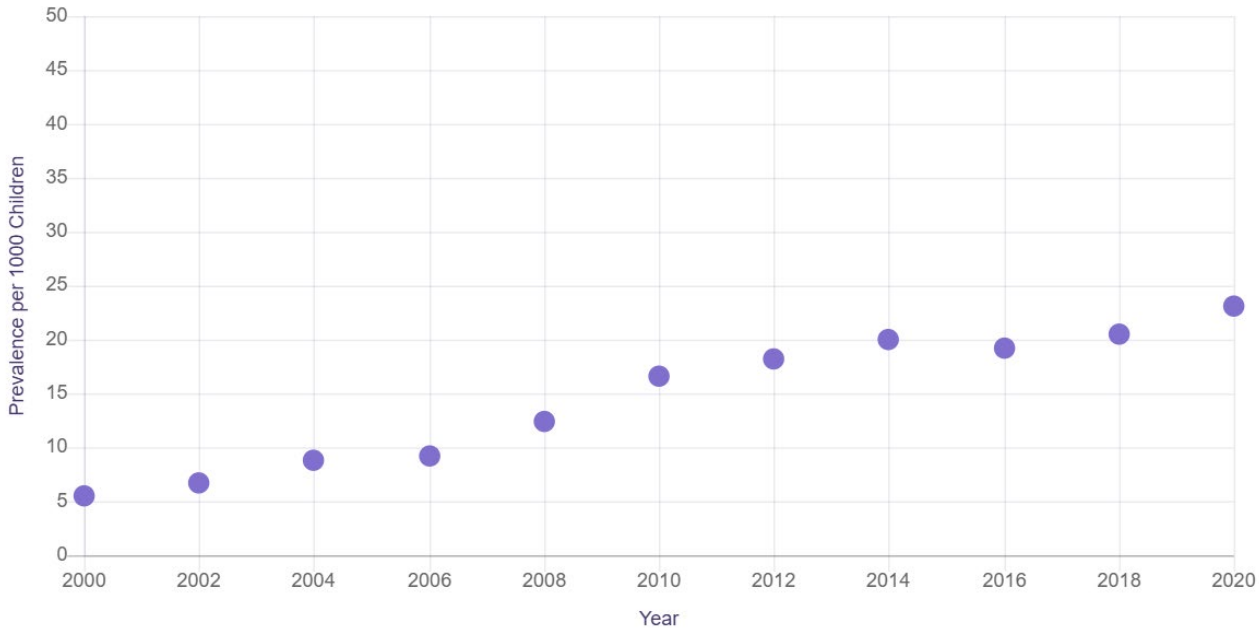
Develop an understanding of:

- key characteristics of autism
- proactive and reactive strategies
- why behaviors occur
- de-escalation

# Intro

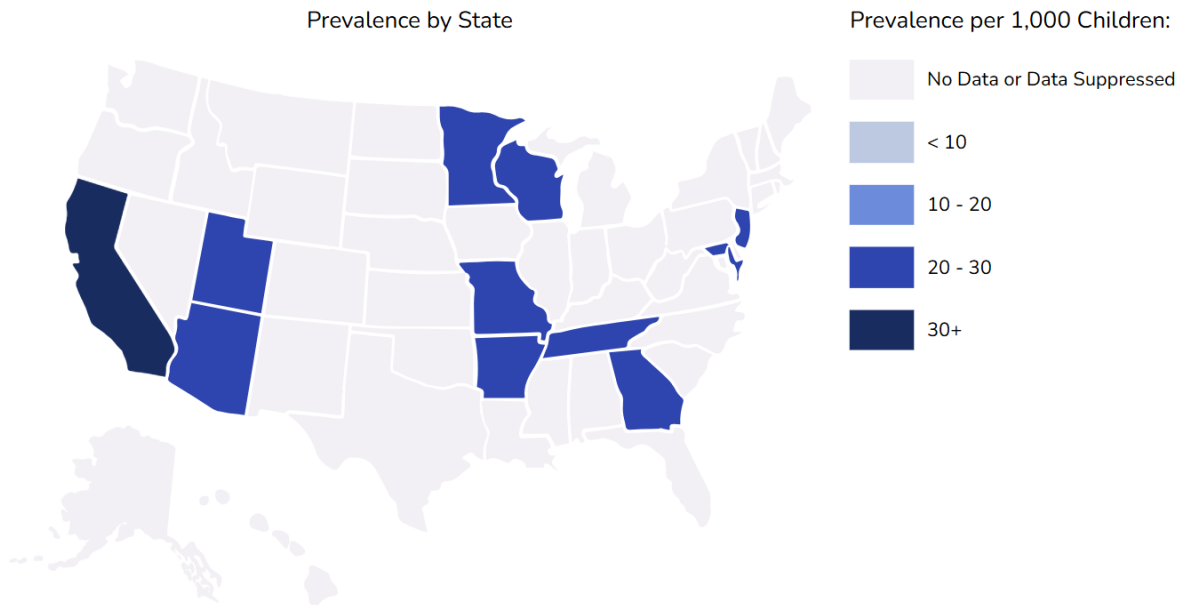
- Think of a student or child in your class, work, life, etc. that may struggle with behaviors. Might be getting out of their seat, throwing things, etc.
- As we go through this presentation, keep this one person in mind

# Autism Overview



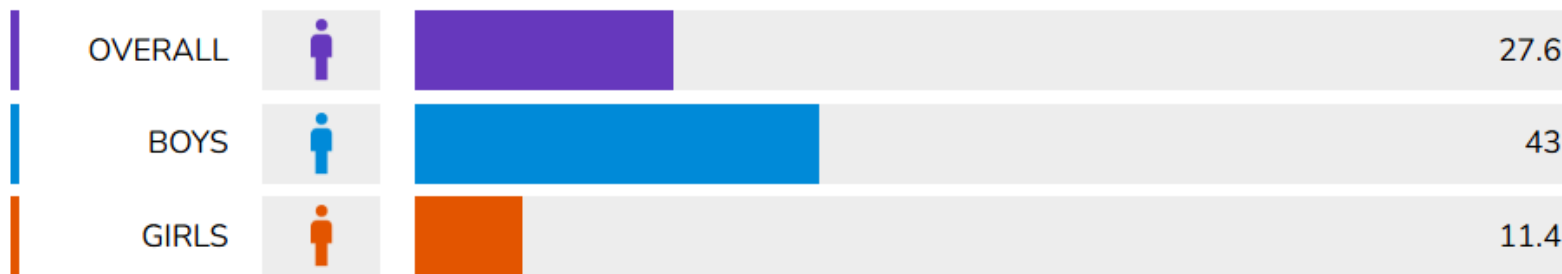


# Autism Overview



# Autism Overview

Prevalence per 1,000 Children:



For every 1 GIRL, 3.8 BOYS were identified with ASD.

# Characteristics of Individuals with Autism

- May thrive on routine and structure
  - may have difficulty with change
- Can struggle to understand social cues
- Can have specific interests/be very knowledgeable about specific topics
- May not make eye contact
- May have difficulty regulating emotions



# How can we help??

Now that we know more about autism and characteristics of, we can talk about how we can help and better support

# Proactive vs Reactive

- Proactive strategies prevent behaviors from happening
  - Positive approach
  - More successful
  - Able to teach more skills through proactive approaches
- Reactive strategies are what you do when the individual is already having behaviors
  - Person is already escalated
  - Less likely to teach new skills during this time
  - Takes longer

**If you can predict the behavior, you can prevent it (at least most of the time).**

# Specific Proactive Strategies

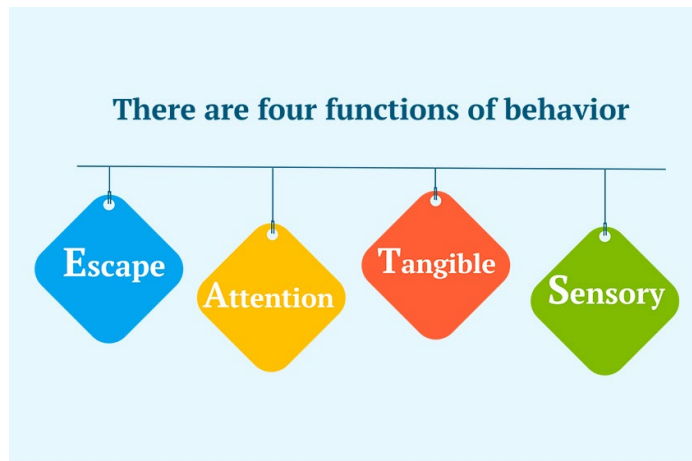
- Timers and transition warnings
- Visuals
- Choices
- Environmental arrangements
- Breaking down the task
- Pre-planning preferred activities after non-preferred activities



# Reactive Strategies

First we need to identify why the behavior is happening ...

Understanding the function of a behavior helps in developing effective interventions and strategies to address the behavior in a meaningful way.



# Functions of Behavior

**Escape/Avoidance:** The behavior is performed to avoid or escape an unpleasant situation, task, or demand.

**Attention:** The behavior occurs to gain attention, whether positive or negative. This could include verbal praise, physical touch, or even a reprimand. The individual may engage in the behavior to be noticed by others.

**Tangibles:** The behavior is aimed at obtaining a specific item or activity. This could be a favorite toy, food, or any item the individual desires. The behavior may occur in the presence of these items or when the individual wants access to them.

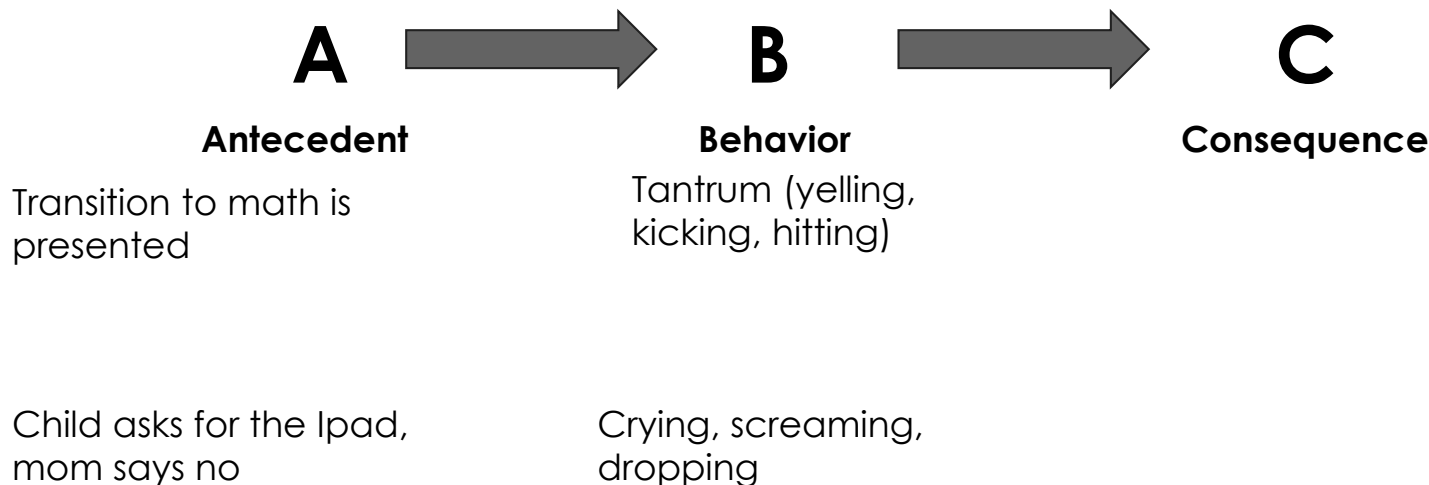
**Sensory/Stimulation:** The behavior is self-reinforcing and happens because it provides sensory feedback, like a particular feeling or sensation. Examples include rocking, hand-flapping, or repetitive behaviors that are intrinsically rewarding for the individual.

# EATS



# How to identify the function?

We want to look at the what happened before the behavior



# Carry ins

- Hunger
- Issues at home
- Sick
- Missing parent
- Others...?



# Common Reactive Strategies

## Escape/Avoidance

- have the learner ask for a break or to be all done
- if they aren't able to fully get out of something (e.g., school) provide transition warnings, set a timer

## Attention

- refrain from providing eye contact, be aware of body language, step away if needed and if safe
- once they are free of behaviors, now provide attention!
- might need to give them space to calm down

## Tangibles

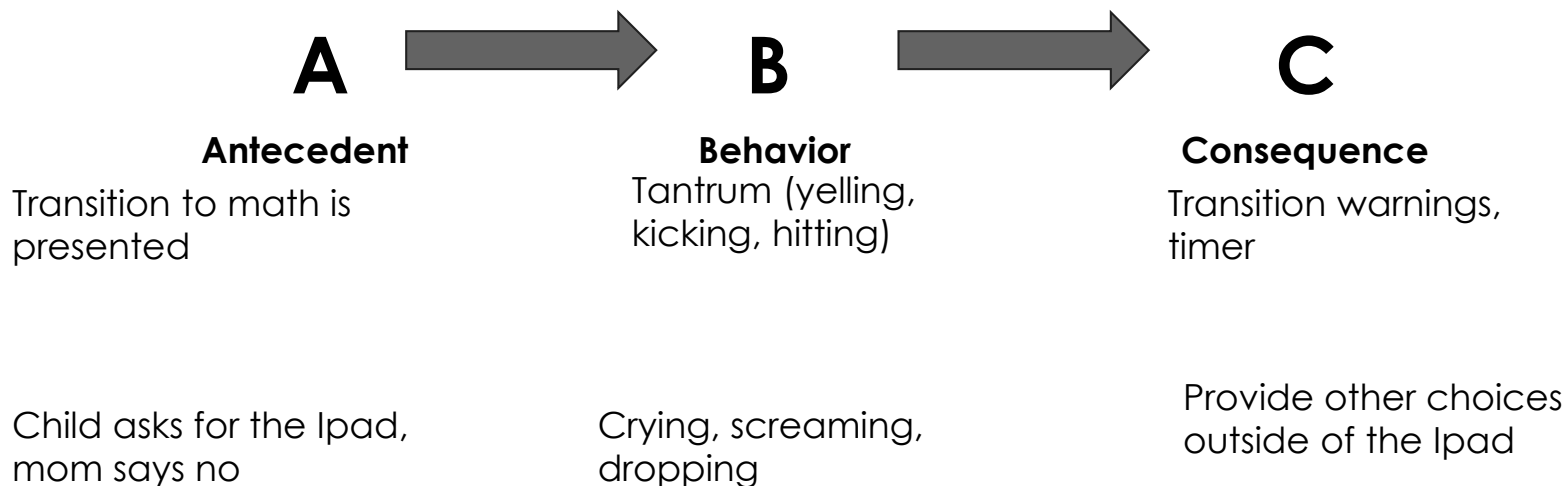
- provide other choices if the item they want isn't available
- have them ask for the item they want

## Sensory/Stimulation

- provide other appropriate options that give the same feeling

# How to identify the function?

We want to look at the what happened before the behavior

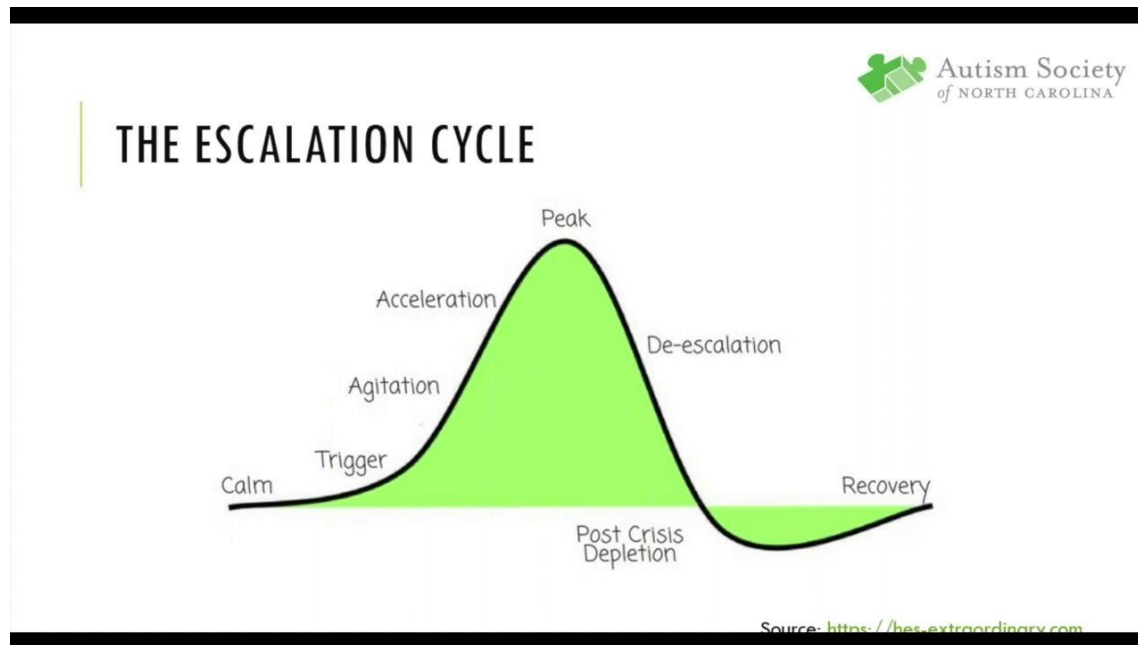


# What to do when proactive strategies aren't working ...

- stay calm!
- take a moment and understand why the behavior is occurring
  - remember the functions
- move into reactive strategies



# The escalation cycle



**What is de-  
escalation?**



"Okay, okay. I surrender. I want to negotiate a peace and quiet treaty!"

# De-Escalation Strategies

DON'T TRY TO REASON	AVOID MAKING DEMANDS	GET ON YOUR CHILD'S LEVEL
DON'T YELL OVER A SCREAMING CHILD	VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS, NOT THEIR ACTIONS	REFLECTION
RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE	BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY LANGUAGE	ANSWER QUESTIONS BUT IGNORE VERBAL AGGRESSION
MOVEMENT BREAK	BE NON-JUDGEMENTAL	USE A DISTRACTION
DECREASE STIMULATION	AVOID SAYING NO	ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR CHILD'S RIGHT FOR REFUSAL
CALMING VISUALS	DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES	SILENCE

RAISING AN *Extraordinary* PERSON

# Crisis / “Nothing is working”

**Remember: goal is not to extend the behavior or “teach a lesson”**

**Waiting with limited attention**

1. **Make sure child, other children and adults, and environment is safe**
1. **Make sure you can monitor the child without giving direct attention**
1. **When child begins de-escalating (thing staircase and showing decrease in behaviors) check in (go back to previous options)**





# Staying Calm During Escalation

- Understand the behavior
  - Behavior is communication
- Stay grounded
  - Take deep breaths, Pause before you respond, Use positive self talk like “I can do this” or “this isn’t about me”
- Pay attention to your body
  - Soft tone, body language, eye contact
- De-escalation strategies
  - avoid power struggles, offer simple choices
- Reflect and debrief with coworkers
- Self-care



# Key Takeaways

- Proactive strategies are always preferred
- Before using proactive strategies, identify why the behavior is occurring
  - EATS
- If the individual is starting to escalate, remain calm
  - safety is always the first priority!
  - acknowledge the person's feelings
  - be ready to help and engage when they are ready
  - wait until they show signs they are ready
    - pushing them will only further escalate the behavior
  - the time it takes to de-escalate varies!
    - praise all attempts to calm down
- praise the behavior you want to see more of!

**Questions?**

## Contact information

If you have any questions about the contents of this presentation please feel free to contact me at [sbendekovits@achievingtrueself.com](mailto:sbendekovits@achievingtrueself.com)



***Thank you!!!!***