



YOUR WORDS MATTER

Many children with ASD have “**Mind Blindness,**” meaning they are often literal and don't know the inferred intent of language. This often leads to difficulty understanding another person's perspective.

This can mean certain words are often very confusing, for example, children with ASD typically struggle with the words **STOP** and **NO**. If an adult says “STOP” what does that mean? Do they mean stop breathing? Stop looking? Stop moving? STOP does not tell a child what they can do – it only tells them what they shouldn't do. When you have to use STOP make sure you add a little bit more information so that the child knows what they should do, i.e. “**STOP working, pencil down, it's time to listen.**”

“NO” will also often escalate inappropriate behaviours rather than reduce them. Some children are very literal so when an adult says “No juice,” some children would interpret this as they will NEVER be able to have juice again, when what the adult really meant was the juice was “**all gone**” or the child could have it ‘**later.**’

Another instance where confusion may occur due to this literalness is in the use of the words ‘**could,**’ ‘**would**’ and ‘**can**’ as they often sound like a choice rather than a direction. For example when asked, “Could you start your work?” children may just answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ rather than taking action! It is therefore better to simply say “**Start work,**” to avoid this confusion.


Although these instructions may sound over-directed they clearly convey the intended message to the child. It is important children know what your words mean, so they can respond appropriately for their own safety and learning.

Focus on telling the child what you want them to do rather than focusing on what they are not to do e.g. if they rushed into the bathroom and started playing with the taps, rather than saying “No!” say, “**First toilet, then wash hands.**” The latter is far more supportive and directive for the child.

In the table on the following page I have a few ideas to get you started with thinking about how “**your words matter**” and can be replaced so you “**Say what YOU mean**”

YOUR WORDS

MATTER

	INSTEAD OF ...	TRY
	No yelling. Be quiet.	Use a softer voice.
	What a mess!	It looks like you had fun! How can we clean it up?
	What are you doing?	I'm here if you need help.
	No!	Wait, Now, Next, Later.
	Do you have any questions?	What questions do you have?
	Stop crying.	It's ok to cry. Take a deep breath. Tell me what's wrong.
	Calm down.	What can I do/get to help you calm down?
	That's wrong.	Mistakes are a good opportunity to learn. What else can we try?
	It's not that hard.	You can do hard things. Have a go. Try another way.
	Don't swear.	Can you say that differently? That is not appropriate language.
	Stop!	Eyes this way. It's time to listen. Pack away.
	No running.	Can you please walk.



50/50 LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR PROGRAMS

It is very important when developing a behaviour program that you put in place two types of strategies:

- ✔ Strategies for the **ADULTS** to use to manage the students behaviour.
- ✔ Strategies for the **CHILD** to manage **THEIR OWN** behaviour.



***NOTE:** Behaviour can be both 'active' and 'passive'. Some students actually 'shut down', while others 'meltdown' and others hold it together at the time and meltdown later. All of these students need to identify their personal triggers and what actions to put in place.

You will need to use a combination of strategies and while at first it may feel like YOU are doing all the work as the student learns to work with what you provide, you will do less and less and eventually move to a 50/50 approach. **This is where 50% of the strategies are by the adult and 50% by the student.** Children on the spectrum need to be 'taught' to use a combination of strategies. I have seen many examples over the years where people put in place a strategy and just expect the child to understand how to use it or what it means.

One of the key elements of a 50/50 program is teaching children to manage their own emotions. A pro-active approach to helping children with ASD, ADHD, ODD identify their 'personal triggers' is essential. Once you know these, it is easier to develop the 'Strategies' and 'Actions' to put in place for the individual at home and school.

50% STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULTS TO USE TO MANAGE THE STUDENTS BEHAVIOUR



50% STRATEGIES FOR THE CHILD TO USE TO MANAGE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOUR



STRATEGY+	ACTION =	INDEPENDENCE & SUCCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a range of visuals to support understanding. Use visual schedules to help students know what is happening. This reduces anxiety and increases independence 	Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow a visual schedule. Understand changes in schedules and regulate own anxiety if these occur. Refer to visuals to increase understanding
Use Timers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-warn Indicate HOW long they need to do a task 	Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand time limits through use of timers and clocks. Start/finish agreed task once timer has finished, particularly useful for transitioning. Refer to timer for time management
Allow the child time to process	Persistence	Ask for help, let adults know when they need time to think etc. Use Social Stories to support, to ask for help or extra time.
Pre-warn and allow completion of tasks before moving on to next activity	Small Steps	Accept they need to 'finish' for now and can complete the activity later (regulate own anxiety)
Use Preventative Breaks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice signs of anxiety (change in facial expression, body language etc). Put in place strategies like a sensory area. drink/toilet break 	Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request a break before behaviour escalates. Rejoin the group after calming themself.
Teach signs of anxiety and what to do	Repetition	Notice their anxiety and putting in place strategies to reduce it.
Use social stories	Range of Strategies	Refer to Social Stories and put in place their strategies.
Be aware of your own tone of voice and motions as this can cause behavioural difficulties	Rewards Using Strategies Independently	Understand other people's emotions and regulate their own.
Use Organisational Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colour coding books Clear Timetables Homework: having equipment ready, drink and food 	Social Stories	Independently use the organisational supports.
Create consistent routines. When the child knows what is happening and when it reduces anxiety	Timers	Independently follow the routines.
Use of sensory tools allows children "sensory breaks" and encourages processing during listening activities.	Visuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independently access sensory tools to self-regulate anxiety. Understand sensory needs and use sensory tools to self regulate.

DE-ESCALATION

Strategies for Meltdown/Shutdown

Use a Calm voice

Re-assure

Act calm, even if you're not

Give processing time

Slow it Down, Break it Down

Use Visuals to Communicate

Give small achievable steps

Re-direct

Silence - Don't talk where possible

Calm the environment

Validate Feelings

Give them extra space

Ignore whenever possible

Answer their questions but don't coach, correct

Decrease sensory stimulation

Avoid saying 'NO', as they will hear 'NEVER'

Ignore inappropriate language, tone, etc.

Don't try to Reason

Tell what to do, NOT what not to do

Let them know you are there if they need you

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- › *Episode 112:* De-escalation Strategies Before, During & After a Meltdown/Shutdown
- › *Episode 70:* Understanding Meltdowns with Jed Baker
- › *Episode 8:* 3 Stages of Meltdown

