



SERIES 2:

Understanding & Managing Challenging Behaviour in Neurodiverse Children

- What are the **common behaviour challenges** associated with neurodiversity?
- Are there specific challenging behaviours associated with neurodiversity?

Common behaviour challenges associated with neurodiversity often stem from differences in how neurodiverse individuals process sensory information, communicate, and interact with their environment.

While the specific behaviours can vary widely depending on the type of neurodiversity (e.g., autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc.), **some common challenging behaviors include:**



IMPULSIVITY

Example: A child with ADHD may frequently interrupt others during conversations or act without considering the consequences, such as running into the street without looking.



SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

Example: A child on the autism spectrum may become overwhelmed by loud noises or bright lights, leading to meltdowns or a need to withdraw from the environment.



DIFFICULTY WITH TRANSITIONS

Example: A child with autism may struggle with changes in routine, leading to anxiety or refusal to participate in new activities.



SOCIAL INTERACTION CHALLENGES

Example: A child with social communication disorder might have difficulty interpreting social cues, leading to misunderstandings or conflicts with peers.



REPETITIVE BEHAVIOURS

Example: A child on the autism spectrum might engage in repetitive behaviours such as rocking, hand-flapping, or repeating phrases, which can be misunderstood as stubbornness or defiance.



ATTENTION AND FOCUS ISSUES

Example: A child with ADHD may find it hard to stay focused on tasks, often getting distracted easily and having difficulty completing assignments.



EMOTIONAL REGULATION DIFFICULTIES

Example: A child with neurodiversity may struggle to manage their emotions, leading to frequent outbursts, frustration, or anger that might seem disproportionate to the situation.



COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

Example: A child with a language processing disorder may find it challenging to understand or express themselves verbally, leading to frustration or withdrawal from conversations.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING CHALLENGES

Example: A child with ADHD may have difficulty organizing tasks, managing time, or remembering instructions, which can be perceived as irresponsibility or laziness.



SENSORY-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

Example: A child with sensory processing disorder might constantly seek physical input, such as spinning, jumping, or touching objects excessively, which could be seen as hyperactivity or lack of discipline.



These behaviours are often misunderstood in African and ethnic minority communities, where they might be attributed to poor parenting or stubbornness.

However, understanding that these behaviours are linked to underlying neurodevelopmental differences can help parents, educators, and the community provide appropriate support and interventions.

In **African and ethnic minority communities**, challenging behaviours are often associated to poor parenting or stubbornness.

➤ How can we differentiate between challenging behaviour stemming from neurodiversity and those that are not?

Differentiating between challenging behaviours stemming from neurodiversity and those that are not, especially in African and ethnic minority communities where such behaviours may be attributed to poor parenting or stubbornness, requires a nuanced understanding of the child's specific diagnosis and the context of the behaviors.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

1. Understanding Neurodiverse Triggers vs. Behavioural Choices:

Neurodiverse Triggers: Neurodiverse behaviours are often triggered by specific stimuli or situations that overwhelm the child, such as sensory overload, changes in routine, or difficulties in processing information. For example, a child with autism might have a meltdown in a noisy, crowded place because they are overwhelmed by sensory input, not because they are being stubborn.

Behavioural Choices: In contrast, behaviors not linked to neurodiversity might be more consistent with testing boundaries or reacting to frustration in a way that is more typical of their age.

For example, a child might refuse to do chores out of defiance, which is different from a neurodiverse child struggling to complete the task due to executive functioning challenges.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

2. Patterns of Behaviour:

Consistent Across Environments: Neurodiverse behaviours are usually consistent across different environments and are not easily modified by typical disciplinary actions.

For instance, a child with ADHD might consistently struggle with focus and impulsivity at school, home, and in social settings.

Context-Specific: Behaviours that stem from non-neurodiverse causes may be more context-specific and might change with different environments or responses.

For example, a child may act out at home due to specific family dynamics but behave differently at school or in other settings.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

3. Response to Interventions:

Neurodiverse Response: Children with neurodiverse conditions often require specialised strategies and supports to manage behaviours.

If typical disciplinary measures, such as time-outs or grounding, are ineffective, it might indicate that the behavior is related to the child's neurodiversity. For example, a neurodiverse child may not respond to being grounded but may benefit from structured routines and sensory breaks.

Behavioral Response: If a child responds well to traditional behavioural interventions, such as clear consequences and rewards, it might suggest that the behaviour is not rooted in neurodiversity but rather in learned behaviours or environmental influences.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

4. Communication Difficulties:

Neurodiverse Communication: A child with neurodiversity might struggle with communication, leading to frustration and challenging behaviours. For example, a child with a language processing disorder might act out because they cannot express their needs or feelings effectively.

Intentional Misbehaviour: A child who does not have these communication difficulties may misbehave intentionally as a form of expression or to seek attention, which is different from a child who genuinely cannot communicate their needs.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

5. Consistency with Known Diagnoses:

Neurodiversity Consistency: Behaviours that align with the child's diagnosis and are consistent with what is known about that condition are likely related to neurodiversity.

For example, a child with OCD may engage in repetitive behaviours that they cannot control, which is different from a child who chooses to repeat actions for attention or other reasons.

Inconsistency: Behaviours that are inconsistent with the child's diagnosis and seem more situational or change rapidly with different interventions may be less related to neurodiversity.





Here are strategies for parents of already diagnosed children to distinguish between these behaviours:

6. Consultation with Professionals:

Regular Check-Ins: Regularly consulting with healthcare professionals, such as paediatricians, psychologists, or therapists, can help parents differentiate between behaviours related to neurodiversity and those that are not. Professionals can offer insights based on the child's developmental history and specific diagnosis.





Examples of Differences:

Example 1: Meltdowns vs. Tantrums

Neurodiversity: A child with autism may have a meltdown in response to sensory overload, such as bright lights and loud noises. This is not a choice but a reaction to being overwhelmed.

Non-Neurodiversity: A child might have a tantrum because they didn't get what they wanted, such as a toy. This behaviour is more about testing boundaries and can be addressed with consistent discipline.

Example 2: Inattention vs. Disinterest

Neurodiversity: A child with ADHD might struggle to pay attention in class due to an inability to focus, regardless of their interest in the subject.

Non-Neurodiversity: A child might not pay attention because they are simply not interested in the topic, and their behaviour may improve with more engaging material.

By understanding these differences, parents can better advocate for their neurodiverse child and address behaviours in a way that is supportive and appropriate to their needs, rather than relying on traditional interpretations of behaviour that may not apply.