

www.autismhelp.info

Lack of self control

Why does this happen?

- A child with poor language skills may 'lash out' or destroy things as a means of communication. The behaviour may be his way of saying, "I'm bored" or "It's too noisy in here." The child may lose all self control when he is stressed.
- A child with autism may appear to lack empathy and may not always understand the consequences of his actions. He may also have little understanding of his own mental state and that of others, so it's even harder for him to understand how his actions will affect others.
- The child may have a very low tolerance of frustration. He may struggle with an activity beyond the limit of his frustration, then 'lose it'. He may not seek adult help.
- The child may not understand or recognise social conventions. He may have poor emotional development, despite being quite talented in other areas. He may not be able to adjust his own behaviour in a way that is appropriate in a certain social context. He may not understand how his own behaviour looks from someone else's perspective. He may be quite unconcerned by what other's think of his outbursts. Adults may find it hard to understand these outbursts as this type of behaviour would normally be seen in a much younger child. Remember that emotional development is delayed in children with autism.
- A child might laugh or cry inappropriately when he is highly aroused or anxious.
- Children with autism are particularly vulnerable to being teased or bullied as they lack the skills to assert themselves. This can result in a sudden, angry release of tension. This may occur some time after the incident.

What can I do?

- Try to identify the trigger for the behaviour. If the behaviour is in response to stress there may need to be some adjustments to the child's environment.
- A child with autism needs to be taught a standard phrase or signal, such as raising his hand to cue his teacher when he's overwrought or needs help. Older, more able children can use a more subtle cue if they feel uncomfortable drawing attention to themselves, such as placing their pencil in an agreed position.
- Consider having a quiet area in or just outside the classroom. This can be a safe, secure area for the child when he needs a break from social pressures and classroom noise.
- Try traditional approaches like instructing the child to take a deep breath and count to ten.
- If the child spends recess and lunch breaks in the library, computer or resource room he may do very little physical activity throughout the day. A solo run around the oval after lunch break or recess may help release tension. Outbursts of aggressive behaviour may be reduced by vigorous physical activity.

- Children with autism need help to develop self-awareness of their mental states, that is, to recognise feelings of stress or discomfort. Help the child understand and interpret emotions and encourage him to share his feelings and communicate this to his teacher or integration aide.
- Breaking down tasks into more manageable parts can prevent some problem behaviours.
- Try to respond calmly. If the child discovers that his behaviour causes a great deal of excitement and fuss it may become a hard habit to break.
- Try to find out whether the outburst is a result of teasing or bullying. The child may need supervision in the playground and be taught coping strategies. See also [Coping in the playground](#).