

www.autismhelp.info

Lack of self control

Why does this happen?

- A student with poor verbal 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 student may lose self control when he is stressed.
- A child with autism may appear to lack empathy and experience difficulty understanding the consequences of his actions. He may also have little understanding of his own mental states and that of others – so he doesn't understand how his actions can affect others.
- Students with autism tend to have a low tolerance of frustration. The child may struggle with an activity beyond his point of frustration. He may not readily seek adult help.
- The student 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. Emotional development is delayed in children with autism.
- A student with autism might laugh or cry inappropriately when he is highly aroused or anxious.
- Students with autism are particularly vulnerable to being teased or bullied as they lack assertiveness skills. This can result in a sudden, angry release of tension. This may occur some time after the incident.

What you can 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 student's environment.
- The student can be taught a standard phrase or signal, such as raising his hand to cue his teacher when he's overwrought or needs help. An older child might prefer to use a subtle, non-verbal cue if he feels uncomfortable drawing attention to himself. Another alternative is a laminated pass card that the child can give to his teacher when he is feeling overloaded. This system may work well for some students but to prevent abuse of this system you may need to impose a limit on the number of times it can be used each day. Help the student to develop coping mechanisms for other times.
- Consider having a quiet area in or just outside the classroom. This can be a safe, secure area for the student when he needs 'down time' from social pressures and classroom noise.
- If the student 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.

- Try traditional approaches like instructing the student to take a deep breath and count to ten.
- If destructive behaviour is occurring, you can try to change the behaviour by managing the environment. This involves pre-empting the behaviour and planning ahead.
- Students with autism need help to develop self-awareness of their mental and physical 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 aide.
- Breaking down tasks into more manageable parts can prevent some problem behaviours.
- Respond calmly. If the student 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 student may need supervision or strategies to help him cope with breaks. See also [Coping with recess and lunch breaks.](#)