

## **Obsessions and Repetitive Behaviour**

### **Intense Interests**

- **Intense, highly focused interests are common in autistic individuals and can start at a young age.**
- **These interests may involve topics like art, music, gardening, animals, numbers, or fictional characters.**
- **People may also form attachments to objects or enjoy collecting things.**
- **Intense interests can contribute to well-being, relaxation, and may lead to meaningful activities like work or study.**

### **When Interests Become Obsessions**

#### **Ask yourself:**

- **Is the person unable to stop the activity/interest independently?**
- **Is the interest impacting learning?**
- **Is it limiting social opportunities?**
- **Is it causing disruption to others?**

**The intensity and duration of interest distinguish an obsession from a hobby.**

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### **Repetitive Behaviour ("Stimming")**

- **Includes: hand-flapping, finger-flicking, rocking, spinning, jumping, or complex movements.**
  - **Functions of repetitive behaviours:**
    - **Provide structure and predictability.**
    - **Help manage anxiety, stress, or uncertainty.**
    - **Offer sensory stimulation (e.g., balance, visuals, sound).**
    - **Help in social interaction and relaxation.**
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## **Strategies for Managing Obsessions and Repetitive Behaviour**

### **1. Understand the Function**

- **Ask: What purpose does this behaviour serve?**
  - **Reducing anxiety or noise.**
  - **Seeking sensory input.**
  - **Coping with stress.**

## **2. Modify the Environment**

- **Is the environment too noisy or bright (e.g., strip lights)?**
- **Change the surroundings to reduce sensory overload.**
- **Offer alternatives to achieve similar stimulation.**

## **3. Increase Structure**

- **Create predictability using:**
  - **Visual supports (e.g., daily timetables).**
  - **Social stories.**
  - **Time tools (e.g., timers, time-tables).**
- **Plan in advance for transitions and stressful events.**
- **Reduce boredom by preparing calming or enjoyable activities.**

## **4. Manage Anxiety**

- **Teach self-regulation strategies:**
  - **Deep breathing.**
  - **Stress balls.**
  - **Visual emotion scales (e.g., traffic lights, thermometer).**
- **Use concrete visuals to explain emotions.**
- **Consider apps or digital tools for self-management.**
- **Seek support from autism-aware counsellors.**

## **5. Intervene Early**

- **Behaviours are harder to change over time.**
- **Start early with gentle redirection.**
- **Example: Stroking hair may be okay for a child, but not appropriate as they age.**

## **6. Set Boundaries**

- **Introduce limits on:**
  - **Time spent on interest.**
  - **Places where behaviours occur.**
- **Gradually reduce time/frequency:**
  - **Week 1: Talk about a topic for 15 mins per hour.**
  - **Week 2: 10 mins per hour.**
  - **Week 3: 10 mins every two hours.**

## **7. Provide Alternatives**

- **Suggest related activities:**
  - **Writing in an interest journal.**
  - **Recording voice notes.**
- **Explore joining clubs, volunteering, or work related to the interest.**
- **Replace sensory behaviours with safer alternatives:**
  - **Smearing → use playdough.**
  - **Mouthing inedible items → offer crunchy food or chewables.**