

Changing our Lens about “Behaviour”

Understanding Presentations, or “Behaviour” Using an Informed Lens

Historically, the way children and adults’ behaviour has been pathologised and desperate cries for help from vulnerable people have been ignored and viewed as ‘attention seeking’, ‘aggression’ & ‘naughtiness’. Over the years, the voices of those who are Actually Autistic (AA) and ADHD (ADHD’er) have educated and informed us to change our lens and to stop seeing human need from a deficit based approach which ignores human rights and the human experience. The below table debunks some of the older, more archaic responses to people’s presentations (or their “behaviour” as we once called it). The problem with the old way of looking at things (“lens”) is it saw the on-the-surface ‘signal’ (presentation) and tried to stop the signal from being evident. In doing this, the reason for the signal to exist and the diverse factors which led to the signal being evident were often ignored. If we want to move forward and actually help people find ways to cope with environments which adversely affect their sensory being and with demands that de-stabilise them and make them feel threatened, we need to stop focusing on the way they communicate distress and start instead, focusing the factors which are causing them to experience distress in the first place.

OLD LENS	NEW & INFORMED LENS
<p>That child just randomly threw a chair through the glass door. He didn’t seem upset or anything. He was obviously bored and demonstrating attention seeking behaviour.</p>	<p>This child is likely to be experiencing sensory dysregulation, in conjunction with being ADHD. When he’s dysregulated, he feels agitated and unsettled in his body and cannot settle his impulsive reactions to things. Further to this, ADHD affects the brain as a hyperfocus on exciting topics, thoughts or ideas and can be overwhelming in intensity. It’s likely that this child was experiencing sensory dysregulation, unable to control his impulses and got hyperfocused on the noise, feeling and sensory input he would receive from throwing that chair towards the glass door.</p>

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	<p>Respond by increasing the child’s proprioceptive sensory input (more jumping, more impact play, more rolling, more banging and smashing things in a safe way, more swings, more tumbling).</p>
<p>That child throws a huge tantrum each time his mother shows his sister attention and every time he doesn’t get his way with children. He needs to be taught social skills and needs a punishment from his mother. He’s probably like this because his mother doesn’t punish him or manage his behaviour properly.</p>	<p>This child is likely to be experiencing ‘rejection sensitive dysphoria’ (RSD) and subsequently has high registration for interoceptive sensory input (interoception is your thoughts and feelings). This means that this child experiences his feelings at a really heightened level and they are often overwhelming to him. It’s very likely that this child needs additional levels of affection and nurturing and additional levels of emotion in the responses from those around him to feel regulated and stabilised. If this child doesn’t experience heightened feelings of comfort, security, love, and emotional bonds from people in close relationships with him, he is likely to experience overwhelming feelings of rejection and abandonment. Children and adults with RSD can spend their lives feeling unwanted and experience what others believe to be significantly severe states of depression and anxiety regarding interpersonal relationships.</p> <p>Respond by stabilising the access for the child to people who he has close relationships with. Increase the amount of time he has with these people (mum/dad/close relationships) and ensure he knows when he will see them. When he’s with these people, make sure they know that it’s important to show lots of affection and provide much more emotional validation to them. Being in their presence if you’re working or doing something</p>

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	<p>else won't feel like real presence as your attention is directed elsewhere. People with RSD need real, focused attention and are wary of baseless compliments or fleeting connections with people. If they don't feel wanted and needed, it can lead to an overwhelming spiral of intensified feelings of rejection.</p>
<p>That child is very rude and doesn't say hello, goodbye, nor shake people's hands when we meet new people. She sometimes will yell, scream, and pull away when I ask her to politely introduce herself. When meeting new people, she doesn't look at people and seems to totally ignore what they are saying.</p> <p>She will often want to keep playing on her device, or just have a tantrum whenever we go anywhere. She needs to be taught social skills and be taught to be polite and</p>	<p>As a world, we need to accept once and for all that the majority (neurotypical "NT" people) should not be allowed to dictate what is respectful. The majority (NT) should not be allowed to set a series of communication requirements and socialisation expectations and then expect and require all other neurotypes to conform to this.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Every child can communicate. Not always in a way that other people understand clearly. But that's not the child's issue. A lack of understanding is not the same as a lack of communication. 2. Every child knows and possesses their own way of playing and has their own social skills which meet their needs, and which help them have social input in a way that makes them feel safe, happy and gain enjoyment from being in the presence of others. Children possess this from birth without intervention. These skills don't always yield friendships easily and sometimes children change the way they play as a result. But they change and learn social skills themselves based on meeting their own needs and attaining the outcomes they want when they are around other people. One of the most arrogant and disrespectful things an adult can do is assume that they know how to socialise better than the child.

OLD LENS

to communicate with other people in a more respectful manner.

NEW & INFORMED LENS

3. A lot of neurodivergent individuals do not like small talk, baseless irrelevant conversation, wasting time, or superficial socialisation. A lot of neurodivergent individuals are **very purpose driven** and see no point in saying hello to people who don't interest them, nor introducing themselves to people who don't seem to mean anything to them. A lot of neurodivergent people have brains which are easily focused on doing things, achieving things, experiencing things and not on superficial social encounters. Why should we all have to meet the same social nuances as our peers? Why do we have to waste 5 minutes every time we enter an environment, just to smile and suppress our desire to engage in the purpose of our visit? If something or someone doesn't seem or feel relevant to us, why aren't we allowed to keep playing on our iPad while our parents engage in the baseless socialisation that they love? Further to this, there is a heavy 'cost' (time/labour) of these interactions and this energy is better saved for navigating other situations and not unpurposeful interactions, such as these.
4. There are many **forced interactions** in society. They are 'forced' because children get in trouble when they don't do them. Schools have charts on their walls mandating them, parents demonstrate sadness and disappointment when their own children don't use them. These include

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	<p>saying hello, goodbye, making eye contact, smiling, keeping hands and body still, standing quietly, not making noises or stimming. Forced interactions make neurodivergent people suppress their bodily needs and functions and are very damaging to their wellness and overall mental health. Forced interactions are interactions which are not important, nor required in neurodivergent socialisation and should not be forced upon neurodivergent people just because these interactions make neurotypical people feel good about themselves.</p>
<p>The child purposely does things I've told him not to! I will go through rules with him and then he will break every rule. It honestly looks to me like he's doing it on purpose and wants the attention of getting in trouble from me. Sometimes I think he goes out of his way to ignore everything I ask of him. I've been told it is attention-seeking behaviour and I need to ignore it and</p>	<p>A component of Autism is something called pathological demand avoidance (PDA). This isn't someone who wants to be oppositional, and this isn't someone who is just trying to always be the boss. PDA comes from a place of fear and trauma and is a pathological need for the person to feel protected and safe. When neurodivergent children are born into neurotypical (majority) worlds, they experience trauma from birth as a result of aversive sensory input (noises / smells / sensations which are overwhelming and actually painful to them) and they are told to ignore their bodies in order to meet social nuances and expectations. As a result of this, they often experience extensive pain and trauma from these demands placed upon them and the resultant sensory overload that they experience. This leads them to be extremely wary of these demands and develop a trauma-based response to demands. This trauma-based response to demands is pathological demand avoidance (PDA). PDA is not done by intention, it's done out of fear. It can feel dangerous to</p>

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<p>set better rules and boundaries. I keep doing this, but he's starting to get pretty explosive and can be really violent at times.</p>	<p>follow rules or stipulated expectations due to how painful they've been in the past. The person will literally be triggered by a demand as a result of this. PDA presents as someone who is actually self-motivated to not comply with demands due to the fear they pathologically experience when demands are placed upon them. If you give a child or adult a list of demands, you are effectively giving them a task list of things they must do and achieve to keep themselves safe.</p> <p><i>“Jimmy, when we get to the pool, don't run, don't push children and don't jump in the deep end. Remember? These are the pool rules”</i></p> <p>This simple comment or instruction translates as <i>“when you get there, run first, then push someone, then jump right in the deep end as soon as you can if you want to feel safe”</i>.</p> <p>When the child does these things (breaks the rules), they then get in more trouble and the trust between the adult and the child continues to weaken.</p> <p>Respond by using language which is PDA friendly. This language is subsequently also friendly to the rest of the population and could be used easily with everyone. PDA friendly language includes using questions to establish expectations and reminding the person of the outcomes of their decisions and what the natural flow of life will be if they make certain choices. Examples below:</p>

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	<p>Me - <i>"I love coming to the pool, it's so great here. I hope we can stay for ages."</i></p> <p>Child - <i>"Me too, I can't wait to run in there and jump right into the pool!"</i></p> <p>Me - <i>"Jump in? Ohhh.... Fair enough. So, we won't be staying long? Bummer, I was excited for a swim today."</i></p> <p>Child - <i>"What do you mean? Yeah, we can stay all day!!"</i></p> <p>Me - <i>"Nah... they kick you out once you run. Remember that kid we saw last time? But anyway, it's ok, you do what you want and I'll think about what our next activity is as we will get kicked out of the pool as soon as you run... Hmmmm... what else do you think we can do?"</i></p> <p>Child - <i>"But I want to stay at the pool."</i></p> <p>Me - <i>"Ok... well, that's up to you. Let's see how we go. How exciting!"</i></p> <p>Confirming and displaying the natural outcomes of their decisions is the most helpful way of helping a child with a strong PDA profile to make decisions which are more likely to benefit them. Setting rules and boundaries is the quickest way to trigger PDA and make the child feel unsafe.</p>
<p>That child keeps saying rude words like "penis" and "vagina" and</p>	<p>Children with an ADHD brain are excited by scandal and love the shock response from others. Shocking someone or doing or saying something which makes someone display a strong</p>

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<p>making comments about people's bodies. They are doing it quite repeatedly and in a grade 5 classroom it's totally unacceptable. Where has the child got this sexualised behaviour from and why are they being so disgusting?</p>	<p>response is an instant hit of dopamine to the brain. This is why there are so many adult ADHD'ers who love starting arguments online in blogs, on Facebook and love making controversial statements. It's often just to shock and startle other people and get that delicious pump of dopamine to the brain as a direct result of the attention and focus they suddenly get.</p> <p>As ADHD'er children, this same dopamine hit is needed, but the children don't quite yet understand why it feels so good to get this from adults or what the impressions to others can be due to their behaviour. Children can hear something that they repeat (such as a phrase from a song, or a word they heard on YouTube) and be saying it randomly, or scripting. Suddenly, someone stops them and provides this shock reaction and tells them:</p> <p><i>"Don't say that as it's very rude, you should not say that at all."</i></p> <p>Suddenly, the combination of PDA and the delicious smash of dopamine hits their brain and all they can think about is saying that again. If they get punished enough, they will probably try to not say it around that person but will be waiting for their next opportunity to say these words and see what the next delicious response might be.</p> <p>Respond by not acting shocked or surprised when scandalous things or inappropriate things are said. Respond instead by shrugging, appearing bored, saying <i>"whatever, that's boring, but <insert sudden exciting tone of voice> I'm super excited to do this and for you to show me how you drew that superhero again!!"</i>.</p>

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	<p>If you provide energy and excitement about a different thing, you are likely to help the person shift their hyperfocus and stop saying the scandalous phrase because they no longer get the delicious dopamine hit from doing so.</p>