

De-Escalation Strategies: Key Behaviours

May pose social challenges, misunderstandings, or risks to health and safety of the individual



STIMMING

Stimming is an important part of self-regulation and expression for neurodivergent people and should not be interrupted unless necessary (e.g., they are hurting themselves or others)

Some common 'stims' include:

- Rocking back and forth, spinning, pacing, or jumping
- Flapping or tapping fingers and hands, or using fidget toys
- Making vocal sounds, like grunting or loud high-pitched humming



ELOPEMENT

** Almost 50% of children with autism will elope at some point!*

Bolting

The "**flight**" part of a flight, fight or freeze response

- Sensory avoidance and anxiety
- Use "First __, then __" to redirect
 - "First we will find your parents, then they will give you a snack"

Wandering

Sensory seeking and specific interests

- Can be engaged with around areas of interest.
- "Why don't you tell me about your favourite game while we wait for your parents?"



SHUTDOWN

The "**freeze**" part of a flight, fight or freeze response

- Response to extreme overload or stress
- Person may be completely silent (appear 'catatonic')
- Person may not be able to communicate at all (e.g., not even nod their head)



MELTDOWN

The "**fight**" part of a "flight, fight or freeze" response

- A meltdown it is about being overwhelmed by the situation.
- May continue after stimulus is removed, until the individual can re-regulate.
- Often last > 10 min, possibly up to 2+ hours.



De-Escalation Strategies: Tips for Offering Support

Offer Sensory Supports

- Reduce sensory overload if possible (quiet area, turn down music, etc.)
- Decrease number of people in the room when possible
- Warn before touching – many do not like being touched or hugged, especially by strangers

Ask Who Can Be Contacted for Support

- Ask how you can help or if there is preferred interest that could help engage them
- Tell you which triggers to avoid or remove
- If eloped, find out where they would likely go

Use Effective Dialogue

- Be Clear. Tell them what you want them to DO
- Use “Don’t touch the display” instead of “Stop that”
- Ask “yes” or “no” questions they can nod to or shake their head in response
- Do not ask them to look at you, eye contact can increase anxiety

Give Encouragement

- “Let’s take deep breaths together. You are doing great!”

Utilize Distraction to Help Calm

- Ask the person about their interests
- “Why don’t we watch a YouTube video on my phone?” Or “Let me tell you a funny story about my pet”

Help Relocate or Get to Their Destination

- They may require assistance in moving to a safer or quieter location.
- If lost, they may require directions or support reaching their destination or help

Give Choices with Examples

- “Would you like to stay here or move somewhere quieter?”

Give Time, Space, and Patience

- Use a calm, quiet voice and allow them extra time to respond
- Offer a quiet space for 10-20 minutes where they can re-regulate, if needed

- **Be patient and prepared to re-evaluate and try new approaches if de-escalation is not working**
- **If all these actions fail and a person is injuring him/herself, or another person, or damages physical property, call security or dial 911**

