



Community Children's  
Health Partnership



# Repetitive Behaviour

**Top Tips from  
Speech & Language Therapy**

Service provided by

**Sirona**  
care & health

Some children and young people may engage in repetitive behaviours.

### These could include:

- Asking the same question over and over again
- Having certain topics that they like to talk about repeatedly
- Moving parts of their bodies in repetitive ways e.g. fingers, hands, arms, legs.
- Rocking or pacing
- Jumping and running
- Making unusual and repetitive facial expressions or noises

### Repetitive behaviours may occur because:

- It's an attempt to gain or reduce sensory input
- It's a way to deal with stress, anxiety or excitement
- They are comforting or enjoyable

## How to Support

Firstly think about whether the action is actually causing a problem. If it isn't then there may be no need to do anything. If it is causing a problem a child may need some support: -

### Increase structure

A more structured and predictable environment can help. Use plenty of pre-warning for change. Use visual supports e.g. timetables, now/next. Use visual timers to help someone understand when an activity is going to start and end.

### Agree on boundaries

Try to discuss this with your child. It is important to work together and start with small achievable steps. This is more likely to be successful.

If a child repeatedly talks about a favourite topic, allocate a set time and duration for them to do this.

If child asks the same question over and over, gently tell them you have answered the question already, perhaps they could tell you the answer? It may also signal that they are feeling anxious so this can be discussed or addressed (see below).

Think together about whether a behaviour needs to happen in a certain place within the house or at school e.g making noises. Use social stories to help explain and support change.

### Find an alternative

Where the activity relates to sensory needs, provide an alternative activity that fulfils the need in a different way:

- someone who rocks could use a swing
- for repetitive jumping, trampolines can be useful.
- someone who flicks their fingers for visual stimulation could use a kaleidoscope or bubble mixture.
- someone who puts non food objects in their mouth try edible alternatives (that provide similar sensory experiences) such as raw pasta or spaghetti, or seeds and nuts

### Support Interests

If a child is intensely interested in a topic, you could encourage them do their own research, produce written articles, powerpoints or comics on the subject which can be presented at an agreed time. Your child could also join a club relating to that particular topic.

### Managing anxiety

If a person's repetitive behaviours relate to stress or anxiety, it can be useful to start working together on skills to manage this. One useful resource is the 5 point anxiety scale or you could create an emotions toolbox to 'fix the feeling'. Mindfulness could also be useful here.

## Resources:

- [www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/obsessions-repetitive-routines.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/obsessions-repetitive-routines.aspx)
- Social stories [www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx](http://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx)
- Five Point Scale: [www.5pointscale.com](http://www.5pointscale.com)
- Emotions Toolbox: Exploring Feelings: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Manage Anxiety' by Tony Attwood;  
Exploring Feelings: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Manage Anger by Tony Attwood
- Mindfulness: [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com)

## Advice and Support

For further advice and support from a Speech & Language Therapist, please contact us via our Telephone Advice Line 07825 016 335 (Wednesdays 9am-12pm) or by email [sirona.slt@nhs.net](mailto:sirona.slt@nhs.net)

This service is provided by Sirona care & health as part of the Community Children's Health Partnership

## Let us know what you think and get involved

T: 0300 124 5300\* E: [sirona.hello@nhs.net](mailto:sirona.hello@nhs.net)

W: [www.sirona-cic.org.uk](http://www.sirona-cic.org.uk)

\*Calls from landlines are charged up to 10p per minute; calls from mobiles vary, please check with your network provider. This is not a premium-rate number.

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