



BALANCE PROGRAM

This program is designed for young children, approximately 3–6 years old, recently diagnosed with autism. Children may be reported to engage in high levels of uncooperative behavior and/or some disruptive behavior (e.g., tantrums), especially when they cannot have their way. This program is not designed for children who engage in dangerous problem behavior (e.g., self-injury, severe aggression).

Participation in the Balance program will include 2, 1hr sessions with a program facilitator per week. In between sessions, participants practice at home for 10–20 minutes per day.

In-person, remote or hybrid service delivery can be arranged as needed.

The Balance program was developed by FTF Behavior Consultation
ftfbc.com

Program information included in this information package was developed and published by Dr. Kelsey Ruppel and Dr. Gregory Hanley of FTF Behavioural Consulting

Contact us for Initial Consultation



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PROGRAM GOALS

Initial Goals

- Strengthen trust in the parent-child relationship
- Allow the child some control of his/her experiences via communication
- Teach the child that problem behaviour is unnecessary

Ultimate Goals

- Create a balance between child-led and adult-led interactions
- Allow for some shared control of the daily activities and interactions
- Teach both parent and child to be present and available to each other
- Prepare the child for inevitable daily disappointments and ambiguities
- Provide the child with hope that all drudgery eventually ends and the understanding that good things follow good behaviour
- Develop a repertoire of life skills: communication, tolerance, and cooperation

Promoting Play

This step lays the foundation for the rest of the program. In this step, you encourage your child to play by allowing him/her to lead the activity while you show interest and compliment his/her play. You also encourage your child's play by making only comments rather than asking questions or giving directions. Questions and directions can make playtime feel like work to children. When you avoid questions and directions, you are showing your child that when you allow him/her to play, it is really playtime, and there will be no "surprise" work. You show respect for his/her time, and later s/he will learn to respect your time (when you want or need him/her to do something).

In this play context, your child is unlikely to engage in problem behaviour because s/he has access to many of his/her favourite items, s/he can interact with the items and with you the way that s/he wants, and s/he is not asked to do things s/he dislikes. Learning how to create this context, in which problem behaviour is unlikely, can be a valuable tool for you. In the future, when you want or need to avoid problem behaviour, you can re-create this context. You will also come back to this context throughout the program—it will be a pleasant surprise you give your child when s/he works hard at new or difficult skills.



Responding to Name

Children learn to not respond to their names because name calls often signal an impending worsening in their situation (e.g., they will have to stop doing what they want and do something the parent wants). Children can learn to attend well to their name if they experience some improvements (i.e., rewards or welcome surprises) following their name being called. This step also prepares children to be more cooperative with parental instructions following a name call.



Teach Child to Communicate Part 1

Teaching a child to communicate to get the things s/he wants is an important step in decreasing existing problem behaviour and in preventing the development of problem behaviour. In this step, we teach your child just part of the request. We will build it into a full request in the next step. We break the request up like this so that your child can be successful without much effort, which teaches your child that using words is valuable and easier than resorting to challenging behavior.

Teach Child to Communicate Part 2

In this step, we teach the rest of the request we started in Step 3. The complete request might include a social nicety, such as “excuse me,” followed by a request that yields access to the entire child-led play context. As we’ve already established, playtime involves many items your child likes, the freedom to engage with them as s/he wants, and attention from you. By teaching your child a simple request to obtain all of these desirable outcomes at the same time, s/he will be maximally motivated and will learn to use words quickly, even in challenging situations.

A long-term goal for most children is to learn specific requests for various items and activities. However, it can be difficult for many young children with autism to learn these specific requests. In order to teach specific requests, an adult must identify what the child wants. A child may become easily frustrated if the adult guesses incorrectly. This frustration is avoided with the use of a single, general request that produces child-led time. Once your child has learned the skills in this program, including how to cope with delays and how to tolerate frustration, then your child will be ready to practice specific requests.



Teach Child to Accept Disappointment

Problem behaviour often starts as an emotional response to disappointment. Other people respond to emotional outbursts, and so emotional outbursts become an effective way for a child to influence other people's behaviour. Adults may come to avoid disappointing the child so as to avoid an outburst. In this lesson, your child learns a more mature way to respond to disappointment. With practice and with rewards and welcome surprises, your child will get in the habit of responding maturely to disappointment, and emotional outbursts and other problem behavior will be less likely to occur.



Teach Child to Cooperate (A Little)

Children can learn to do new things (and do old things well) by following instructions provided by their parents. Now that access to child-led playtime has been used to strengthen the child's attending to name, communication, and toleration, the next step is to sometimes require that your child follow a few adult instructions.

Teach Child to Cooperate More (Find the Balance)

Now that you have taught some initial cooperation, the next step is to stretch the amount of parent-led activity to something that more closely approximates parent-led time during regular activities in the home.

Teach Child to Cooperate with Different Instructions

Now that the access to child-led playtime has been used to strengthen the life skills repertoire and to create balance between parent- and child-led time in sessions, the next step is to introduce new activities into the task bin to ensure that the child cooperates with lots of different activities.

Teach Child to Cooperate During Natural Routines

The final step is to extend the program to natural timelines and routines in the home so that the skills persist when the visits by the professional end.