

Dear ,

In response to your query regarding autism and whether it is possible for children to display different behaviours at home compared to school, please see my response below.

It is very clearly documented that many children with autism (though not all) will display considerably different behaviours in different settings. This can be as a result of a wide range of reasons, from central coherence abilities, to environmental factors, to differing levels of stress in different situations. A reasonably common pattern in terms of school/home behaviour is that the child may appear to present with no problems at school, but at home there can be major issues in terms of behaviour. Often, the result is that either school simply do not believe that the child they see at school can be displaying the reported behaviours at home, or that school erroneously believe that because the behaviours are only seen at home then the causing factors for the behaviour must also be situated there. This is not always the case, and it is of imperative importance that all parties involve recognise the serious nature of high levels of distress, and recognise that all aspects of the individual's life may be a contributory factor towards high arousal – which, in turn, may manifest in behavioural issues.

Many children with autism learn to cope at school through echopraxic behaviour – that is, copying the behaviours of those around them. The result may be that teaching staff only see a learned facade, which actually has very little to do with the reality of the child themselves. In fact, the child may not be coping at all well, and the trauma of having to exist in what can be a frightening and chaotic world may only be seen in environments in which s/he feels comfortable – often the home setting. This can lead well into adulthood – for example I support several people whose behaviour at work demonstrates no problem at all, whereas the reality is that they are in high states of anxiety and stress, to the point of self injury at home, and, in some cases, anxiety and depression to the point of suicide. This demonstrates just how important it is that all concerned recognise this reasonably common autistic behaviour as early as possible, in order to support the child well. Just because a child has the ability to 'mask' their autism at school does not mean that they are not severely affected by their autism on a daily basis.

I hope this answers your query – do not hesitate to forward this onto anyone you feel may benefit from it.

Best wishes,

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