



Tricky moments

- hints and tips for managing your child's challenging behaviour.



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Introduction

This booklet was written with parents of children with learning disabilities and/or autism in mind. However many of the suggestions will be helpful whether your child has a disability or not.

The practical tips and strategies contained in this booklet have been tried and tested by parents, teachers and other professionals in Perth and Kinross, and at www.netbuddy.org.uk, all of whom are concerned about coping with and managing the challenging behaviour of their own children or the young people with whom they work. A big thank you to everyone who contributed their ideas, time and enthusiasm to the development of this resource.

Please try out our tips and hopefully there will be something that will work for you and your family. Remember that these are ideas and suggestions that have worked for others but there are no guarantees that they will be effective with your child. Children and young people are all individuals and will react differently to different strategies. The age of your child will also make a difference. So just have some fun with the ideas and let us know what works best for you and your child. And if you have any good tips that aren't contained in this booklet, we would love to hear them!



Where you see this lightbulb symbol, it means that this is a Netbuddy Top Tip. For more tips like this, go to www.netbuddy.org.uk

The Behaviour Iceberg

Think about an iceberg - you can only see the tip but there's a lot more underneath that you can't see. The same idea can be applied to behaviour – there can be underlying reasons for challenging behaviour. So ask yourself - WHY is my child behaving like this? not WHAT is my child doing?



Remember, behaviour happens for a reason, but what are those reasons? Could there be:

- sensory issues
- poor communication skills
- frustration
- fears and phobias
- misunderstanding of social rules
- literal understanding
- too much language being used by someone
- not enough time to process what's been asked (some children can take up to 2 minutes to process a single instruction)

Try the STAR approach (Zarkowska and Clements 1994)

Setting- where does the behaviour occur?

Ttrigger- what are the signals or stimuli that sets off a specific action?

Action- what is the behaviour that actually occurs?

Response- what happens next? (This is often the bit that you can control or at least manage.)

For example, you may notice that when in a hot, noisy environment such as a shop (Setting), if you refuse to buy sweets for him/her (Trigger), he/she has a tantrum and starts screaming (Action). You may then try removing your child to a quiet place (Response) until they calm down. You could try observing and recording your child's behaviour using this approach over a 2 week period to find out what works best.

Look at the FUNCTION of a behaviour:

For example your child may spit because it's their only way to draw attention to their needs, or it's a way of getting out of a situation that they are uncomfortable in, or they may just have a horrible taste in their mouth.

Functions may include:

- Lack of knowledge/understanding of how to behave appropriately
- Pressure to do tasks which are too difficult at the time
- Fear of the situation
- Difficulty understanding routines
- Sensory issues
- Difficulties with making themselves understood
- Difficulty in understanding what's being asked of them

Aggressive Behaviour

- Remember that behaviour is a form of communication. Ask yourself – “what is my child trying to tell me?”
- Rule out possible health problems first – do they have toothache or an ear infection?
- Always try to remain calm but assertive. Adding any more emotion into an already tense situation only adds to the frustration and confusion.
- Use “time out” or a “safe space”. This can be a specific bought item (Google ‘safe space’ for ideas) or a designated empty area chosen by yourself and your child.
- Time out with a verbal/ visual countdown back to the activity e.g. literally counting down seconds using voice and hand.
- Give your child space if safe to do so.
- Try to identify the ‘triggers’ and make your child aware that if they continue they will get time out, remember to be consistent.
- If you can identify the triggers use diversion - tell your child what they can do instead. For example: “you are scratching yourself, clap your hands together”.
- Remove your child from the situation.
- Give a basic explanation of the behaviour and its inappropriateness – “you are hitting me, that hurts me and it’s not very kind”.
- Notice when they are not hitting out and praise good behaviour.
- Use reward charts with specific motivators for rewards and clear rules and consequences for misbehaviour.
- Use a “good decision” strategy where your child can make the choice in their action. Make sure there is an awareness of the consequence if the decision is negative behaviour and keep the consequence consistent. For example “you are shouting. If you want to stay in the room, please use a quiet speaking voice. If you keep on shouting, you will have to leave the room”.
- Try writing a Social Story™ (Gray, 2010). A Social Story is a means of sharing accurate information meaningfully and safely, promoting true social understanding. Go to www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories for more information and ideas or speak to a Speech and Language Therapist.
- Talk to your child, listen to them, why are they feeling like this etc.
- Say stop firmly. Use the hand signal for stop.
- Use “first...then” e.g. “first toilet, then lunch”. This can be done with symbols or words.
- Once your child has had time to calm down, talk about the situation and what they could do differently next time.
- Teach your child to share.
- Use a 5,4,3,2,1 countdown in any situation. This is a good distraction technique because it turns it into a game rather than a battle e.g “let’s see if you can get your shoes on by the time I count to 5”.



“When Sam was 14 and already taller than me, he could be very violent. He once had me up against the wall gripping my throat. I maintained eye contact, lowered my voice and informed him in calm modulated tones that he could strangle me if he wanted but did he know he didn’t have any trousers on? He looked down, laughed and let go!”



“Emily has issues with anger and frustration. What I’ve always done is to try to hold on tight, because she self harms. I talk gently and quietly into her ear the whole time, and she may well be screeching at me to let go, but I don’t. Eventually when she’s quiet, she’s generally really sorry and upset, so I just hold and cuddle, and don’t make a big deal of it. We also use a stress-ball to squeeze and an inflatable punch bag!”



Repetitive questioning / actions

- Point out to your child what is happening and ask them to either stop or use their ‘thinking’ voice – teach them that this is when it stays in their head and doesn’t come out of their mouth.
- Limit the questions - “one more question and then we’re talking about something else.”
- Change the subject or say “it’s my turn to talk and your turn to listen.”
- Turn the question around – and ask them the question.
- Remove your child from the situation if appropriate.
- Speak about the consequences if the behaviour doesn’t stop e.g. “if you keep asking that question, you will have to have time out to think about the answer.”
- Increase your child’s vocabulary so that they can talk about other things.
- Make them aware of themselves and what they are doing. e.g. “Do you realise that when you keep asking that question, it makes me sad because you are not listening to the answer?”
- Respond as early as possible if their questions are driven by anxiety.
- Or ignore the questioning if it’s driven by mischief or attention-seeking and speak to your child at a more appropriate time.
- Answer the question using exactly the same words and tone of voice three times, or write the answer down and give it to your child to read each time.
- Divert attention and say what you are going to do next. For example “talking time is over, now we will go and peel the potatoes.”
- If repetitive actions e.g. hand flapping relate to physical stimulation, replace this with a more appropriate action such as clapping hands or holding your hand.
- Give your child the option to write about it.
- Use a phrase known to your child - “are we talking about this just now?” to remind them to focus on the current topic of conversation.
- Check that they understand the reply. Ask your child to repeat or confirm your answer. Then ask them to use their “thinking” voice and ask them if they need to write the answer down.
- With repetitive actions, use “stop” and give another action for them to do, or something else to hold.
- If your child is old enough, you could try using an app for their mobile phone called “I Communicate” (produced by iTunes) which uses symbols to help your child understand various situations.



"Tim keeps asking the same question over and over. I bought a key ring on which I recorded the answer. Now he can press the button as much as he wants without driving me so crazy."



"We found that setting time limits work. We didn't want to stop Toby from writing and rewriting numbers so we let him do it for 15 minutes. We always tell him when he starts how long he can do it for and what he will be doing after."



Sexualised behaviour

- Say a firm "no thank you" to public displays of sexualised behaviours .
- Have a safe but private place for a young person to go to where they can do the action for example bathroom or bedroom.
- Use a red/green card system (it's okay here/it's not okay here) - Take them to a specified area, show them the green card and say "it's okay here, on your own" - works best with older children. Use a red card to say stop/not allowed/no/not here.
- Ask for advice from school, social work, Parent to Parent, ENABLE Scotland or your GP or health visitor.
- Be clear regarding boundaries in all settings, for example hugging care staff.
- Discuss the difference between a public place and a private place, and talk about what kind of behaviour is appropriate in each. For example, "Is it OK to kiss and hug your boyfriend during a lesson at college?"
- Try to find out the source - where are they are seeing/hearing it or learning about it?
- Divert attention –this works best with younger children.
- Use "No thank you, please put your hands on the table".
- Write a Social Story on the appropriate place for such activities.



"As a teacher, I've worked with autistic students with sexualised behaviour, and we use symbols to try and explain that certain behaviours are only acceptable in the bedroom. You can use symbols to show where different activities are allowed to take place in different rooms in the house. You could have room symbols on all the doors in the house, and symbols for all sorts of activities such as brushing teeth, eating, sleeping etc."

Withdrawal



- Negotiate with your child - “first we’ll do this and then we can do something you really enjoy”.
- Implement a de-sensitisation programme with gradual steps. For example allow your child to observe an activity. As they become more comfortable they can be encouraged to engage for a small amount of time. Increase the time slowly.
- Go with your child to an activity for the first few times until they feel more confident.
- Make use of a peer buddy. This is a ‘trained friend’ who will support your child. For more information on this speak to your social worker.
- Role play – act out what might happen e.g. when you go to the shops.
- Use symbols e.g. Board maker, a communication board which uses Picture Communication Symbols. (Go to www.mayer-johnson.com/category/boardmaker-family for more information.)
- Self esteem building - praise and encourage any efforts made.
- Stay at the activity and continue with what you are doing/ model how to play or do the activity.
- Give your child a job to do e.g. if it’s music time they can hand out the instruments, switch on the tape player etc.
- Use “first...then”.
- Don’t give a choice - say clearly what is happening. This depends on your child and the specific situation (e.g. if you have a hospital appointment).



“We use puppets to maneuver our daughter through times when she’s refusing to co-operate or join in. What she refuses to do for us, she will often do for a puppet, especially when accompanied by a funny voice! I now have a little case of finger puppets that I carry around with me.”



Always choose your battles. Be sure you are doing things that will help your child rather than simply make them ‘fit in’ - sometimes it’s ok to be different!

Toilet Training

- Have a clear routine that is followed by everyone involved with your child. This should be discussed between parents and professionals.
- Your Occupational Therapist, School Nurse, Health Visitor, and Continence Advisor may all be able to offer some advice.
- If you live in the Edinburgh area, contact the Tailor Ed Foundation for help. (See Useful Organisations section at the back.)
- Don't use nappies or trainer pants. Let them become aware of the "wet" sensation of damp pants/clothing.
- Respond neutrally to wet/ soiled clothing.
- Sit your child on the toilet for a good length of time not just a few seconds.
- Use a reward system and give lots of praise.
- Use a Social Story.
- Make regular visits to the toilet e.g. every hour.
- Start with a potty as the toilet may seem big and scary.
- Buy special pants e.g. with a favourite cartoon character. Make a special expedition to get them.
- Remember that night-time training is very different and may take much longer.
- Older children may continue to wet the bed into their teens. This might be due to a hormonal influence. This is worth discussing with your health visitor.
- Be patient with your child, try to relax and allow them as much time as they need.
- Persevere, don't give up!



"Many autistic people are visual learners and the only way my daughter understood the idea was through a book. I used her princess obsession. I bought "I Want My Potty" by Tony Ross and it worked a miracle! The book is full of pictures and the phrase "I want my potty" is repeated continuously through the book. It also shows that accidents happen."



"When Colin was learning to use the toilet we put a table tennis ball in the toilet bowl for him to aim at - makes it all a bit of fun (you can roll up pellets of paper which works as well)."





Inappropriate language

- Avoid reacting excessively to inappropriate language. If it's attention-seeking behaviour try not to respond to the language or give it much attention.
- If it's not possible to ignore, for example if you are in a public place, offer an alternative word. For example, "don't say sh.., say sugar".
- Use a Social Story on specific language and its appropriateness.
- Ask why they are saying the word – do they know what it means/where did they hear it/did they think it was a nice word to use?
- Use the phrase "we don't say that word here. You can say that in your bedroom/bathroom."
- Red/green card system can work in this context (see section on sexualised behaviour.)
- Design a feelings chart using the Incredible 5 point scale (Buron and Curtis, 2003) along with a specific phrase such as "I feel... when you say that to me. How would you feel if I said that to you?" (Go to www.5pointscale.com for more information.)
- Ask your child to use a "thinking voice".
- Use a "good choice/decision" system. Are you making a good choice here?



"My son has ASD and doesn't always appreciate the effect of his words, for example "I want to kill you." I always try to use 'when' and 'feel' - e.g. when you say you want to kill me it makes me feel very sad."

Eating challenges

- Ensure that your child is eating, even if this means that their diet is restricted.
- Try not to get upset in front of your child about their diet as this can increase their anxiety and yours.
- There are some reasons why young people on the autistic spectrum do not eat – ask your health visitor about this.
- Use themed meals – for example Nemo Fish Fingers or make faces out of different foods etc.
- Make very slight changes to accepted foods such as try a small amount of butter or cheese in mashed potatoes.
- Try using a hand blender to ‘disguise’ food such as in soups.
- Make your own food and involve your child.
- De-sensitise, use “touch, smell, lick, taste”. Start by tolerating a small piece on the plate e.g. five peas, then insist on a small taste before getting something they like.
- Offer a choice – “do you want four peas or five?”
- Use eating charts and incentives for trying new foods.
- Encourage your child to touch and smell food of different textures. Give lots of praise and positive responses to trying/touching/ tasting new foods.
- Go to supermarkets to look at food - try to make food fun.
- Get your child involved at mealtimes by getting them to help choose the menu, get involved in the shopping, cooking, laying the table etc.
- Try food art or play with food – if possible your child should choose some of the food. Don't be afraid to get messy.
- Be consistent in presenting food that your child dislikes. Explain that sometimes you have to try lots of times before you like something.



“Meals times were always a nightmare, and became a source of friction every day, so I put a tent up in the garden and suggested we eat in the tent. For some reason the change of scene distracts from what the food is and it gets eaten and I get to lie down whilst he eats!”



If your child has eating challenges and will only eat a limited number of preferred foods (a list that does change over time) then have a look at the Eating Game: www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10150096883195390.307264.117743845389

Separation Anxiety



- Be clear about when you will be coming back. Always come back when you say you are going to.
- Go with your child if they are nervous or anxious about attending an activity but gradually reduce the amount of time you stay with them.
- Allow your child to talk about their worries.
- Acknowledge their feelings - "You feel sad/you miss me/it's okay to feel sad".
- Use a first-then system. For example "first you go to school, then you will see mummy".
- Take photographs of yourself and give them to the teacher or care worker etc so that your child can use it for communication about their feelings if necessary, or as something to hold on to.
- It may be useful to use distraction techniques at the point of separation e.g. teacher reads to your child when you are leaving.
- Read or make up stories about such situations.
- Promise to do something your child really enjoys after you have been apart e.g. "after playgroup we will go to the park." Always keep your promise!
- Try to keep calm.
- Try to build confidence/self esteem by giving your child responsibility for something such as having to look after another child or a specific task to take care of e.g. choosing a story for class.
- Use a symbol strip detailing activities until you return. This is a visual breakdown of your child's day which allows them to see what's going to happen.
- Use the "I Communicate" app for your phone (see section on Repetitive questioning.)
- Be consistent in your responses when your child asks about what's happening.
- Make sure you have something to do while you are away from your child to decrease your own anxiety.



"My son always gets far more anxious about being apart from me when there are other changes going on around him, either in the family or in his usual routine. Also when he is ill or tired. It helps to think about some of the reasons he might be being more anxious, as I can then talk to him about them."

Difficulties with sleeping

- Having a clear night-time routine which everyone sticks to, e.g. bath, story then bed.
- Keep the stimulus to a minimum near bedtime e.g. no TV or rough and tumble games.
- Use a symbol/word strip for the evening and night.
- Limiting TV's etc in bedrooms and making it clear that the bedroom is for sleeping.
- Don't use the bedroom as a form of discipline - for example being sent to the bedroom for misbehaving.
- Melatonin may help, contact your GP for more information.
- Play quiet music your child likes but make sure they know that when the music ends, they must go to sleep and not ask you to play it again.
- If your child gets up, calmly say 'Back to bed.' Second time 'Bed'. Third time no speaking, just take him/her by the hand and calmly put him in bed. Continue to do this until it stops. It does work.... Eventually!
- Have a darkened room with black out blinds.
- Sit beside the bed, and then move very gradually over time towards the door.
- Use praise for when your child stays in bed even if for a short time.
- There may be medical reasons why your child is not able to sleep. It may be worth discussing this with your GP.
- There may be environmental reasons why your child can't sleep. For example, noise from vehicles making deliveries, boilers starting up in the morning or lights being left on in the bedroom. Try to minimise this where possible or change bedrooms.
- Use a reward chart and incentives for staying in bed.
- Try using a night-light if your child is frightened of the dark.
- If it helps, allow your child to have a 'soother' such as a favourite teddy or blanket.
- Use an alarm clock to show when it's okay to get up. Try novelty clocks.
- Write a Social Story about where and when to sleep, with a reward system in place.
- Use a sleep diary to record when they sleep and how long for, to keep track of your child's progress.
- Depending on the age of your child, don't let them sleep too long in the day.
- If you are still having problems, contact Sleep Scotland for advice. (See Useful Organisations section for details.)



"We had 12 years of Andrew waking during the night. A health professional suggested we wrap a quilt cover over the bed and tuck it in tightly either side under the mattress, so his bedding doesn't come off, and he feels snug and tightly tucked in. It worked instantly, and he has slept better ever since."



"I taped myself reading several of Beth's favourite stories, so she could listen to my voice after I had left her bedroom."



If your children toss and turn a lot, which means blankets don't stay on, a sleep sac is invaluable. You may want to continue using one well after the usual age as it keeps them warm and helps avoid chest infections. You can get big ones for children up to 6 years from www.gro.co.uk



Try RelaxKids CDs incorporating relaxation techniques to help children sleep. Also useful for children and adults with learning disabilities. www.relaxkids.com

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USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Capability Scotland

11 Ellersley Road, Edinburgh, EH12 6HY

Tel: 0131 313 5510

Email: advice@capability-scotland.org.uk

www.capability-scotland.org.uk

Advice and information on many aspects related to living with a disability.

Challenging Behaviour Foundation

c/o The Old Courthouse

New Road Avenue, Chatham

Kent ME4 6BE

Family support line Tel: 0845 602 7885

Email: support@theCBF.org.uk

www.theCBF.org.uk

The CBF supports families, professionals and others through education, information, research and partnership working.

Contact a Family Scotland

Craigmillar Social Enterprise & Arts Centre, 11/9

Harewood Road,

Edinburgh, EH16 4NT

Tel: 0131 659 2930

Email: scotland.office@cafamily.org.uk

www.cafamily.org.uk

Information, advice and support to parents and carers of children with any special need or disability as well as professionals working with families.

Down's Syndrome Scotland

158-160 Balgreen Road

Edinburgh

EH11 3AU

Tel: 0131 313 4225

Email: info@dsscotland.org.uk

www.dsscotland.org.uk

Help people with Down's Syndrome reach their full potential by providing information, services and support to them, their families, carers and professionals.

Dyslexia Scotland

Stirling Business Centre

Wellgreen, Stirling, FK8 2DZ

Helpline: 0844 800 84 84

Email: info@dyslexiascotland.org

www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk

Empowering people with dyslexia to reach their full potential.

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

Dyspraxia Scotland

Email: enquiries@dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
www.dyspraxiascotland.org.uk

Support people throughout Scotland with dyspraxia, both in education and employment.

Enable Scotland

2nd Floor
146 Argyle Street,
Glasgow G2 8BL
Enable Direct Tel: 0300 0200 101
Email: enable@enable.org.uk
www.enable.org.uk

Scotland's leading charity for people with learning disabilities and their families.

Epilepsy Scotland

48 Govan Road
Glasgow
G51 1JL
HELPLINE: 0808 800 2200
Email: enquiries@epilepsyscotland.org.uk
www.epilepsyscotland.org.uk

Epilepsy Scotland works with people living with epilepsy to ensure that their voice is heard.

Enquire

5 Shandwick Place,
Edinburgh, EH2 4RG
Helpline: 0845 123 2303
Email: info@enquire.org.uk
www.enquire.org.uk

Independent advice and information relating to children and young people who require additional support to get the most out of their learning.

Family Fund

4 Alpha Court
Monks Cross Drive
York YO32 9WN
Tel: 08449 744 099
Email: info@familyfund.org.uk
www.familyfund.org.uk

Give grants to families raising disabled and seriously ill children aged 17 and under.

HandsOnScotland

www.handsonscotland.co.uk

Practical information and techniques on how to respond helpfully to children and young people's troubling behaviour, build up their self-esteem and promote their positive mental wellbeing.

Mindroom

Norton Park
57 Albion Rd,
Edinburgh EH7 5QS
Tel: 0131 475 2330
Email: moreinfo@mindroom.org
www.mindroom.org

Provide one-to-one support for families affected by learning difficulties.

National Autistic Society Scotland

First Floor
Central Chambers
109 Hope Street
Glasgow G2 0LL
Helpline 0800 800 4104
www.autism.org.uk

Provide confidential advice to people with autism or aspergers and their families

USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)

Second Floor
Empire House
131 West Nile Street
Glasgow G1 2RX
Tel: 0141 354 7850
Textphone: 0141 332 6133
Email: ndcs.scotland@ndcs.org.uk
www.ndcs.org.uk

Work to remove the barriers to the achievement of deaf children throughout the world. Supports parents and carers of deaf children.

www.netbuddy.org.uk

An award winning site for sharing practical tips and information on all aspects of supporting people with learning disabilities

NHS 24 Scotland

Tel 08454 24 24 24
www.nhs24.com

24hr service to ensure access to health information and advice about treatment even when your GP surgery is closed.

One Parent Families Scotland

13 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh, EH1 3NX
Helpline: 0808 801 0323
Email: info@opfs.org.uk
www.opfs.org.uk

Works to ensure that all families, particularly those headed by a lone parent, have the support, information and confidence needed to play a full part in Scotland's economic and social life.

PAMIS

Springfield House
15/16 Springfield
University of Dundee
Dundee DD1 4JE
Tel: 01382 227 464
Email: pamis@dundee.ac.uk
www.pamis.org.uk

The only organisation in Scotland working with people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and their families for a better life.

Parent to Parent

Ryehill Health Centre, St. Peter Street
Dundee
DD1 4JH
Tel: 01382 630044
email: moira.bisset@parent-to-parent.org
www.parent-to-parent.org

Supports parents and carers of children and teenagers who have additional support needs in Angus, Dundee and Perth & Kinross.

Parentline Scotland

(Free Confidential Helpline)
0800 028 2233

Confidential helpline for advice and support on any parenting issue. However, big or small.

Princess Royal Trust for Carers

Glasgow Office
Charles Oakley House
125 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 2SD
Tel: (0141) 221 5066
Email: info@carers.org
www.carers.org

Deliver advice support for family carers and young carers through excellent local and national services. Find your local carers centre on the website.

RNIB Scotland

12-14 Hillside Crescent
Edinburgh, EH7 5EA
Tel: 0131 652 3140
Email: rnibscotland@rnib.org.uk
www.rnib.org.uk

UK's leading charity offering information, support and advice for people with sight loss.

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

49 North Castle Street,
Edinburgh EH2 3BG
Tel: 020 7378 3012
Email: info@rcslt.org
www.rcslt.org

Facilitate and promote research into the field of speech and language therapy, promote better education and training of speech and language therapists and provide information for our members and the public about speech and language therapy.

Scottish Autism

Autism Advice Helpline: 01259 720 044
Email: autism@scottishautism.org
www.scottishautism.org

Enabling people with autism living in Scotland to lead full and happy lives.

SENSE Scotland

43 Middlesex Street
Kinning Park
Glasgow G41 1EE
Tel: 0141 429 0294
Email: info@sensescotland.org.uk
www.sensescotland.org.uk

Provide advice and support to disabled people and their families.

Sleep Scotland

8 Hope Park Square,
Edinburgh, EH8 9NW
Tel: 0131 651 1392
www.sleepscotland.org

Support for families of children and young people with additional support needs and severe sleep problems.

Tailor Ed Foundation

11 Maritime Street
Leith, Edinburgh EH6 6SB
Tel: 0131 624 8970
E-mail: contact@tailoredfoundation.co.uk
www.tailoredfoundation.co.uk

Works with families living in the city of Edinburgh with a child with autism aged between 3 and 12 years old.

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