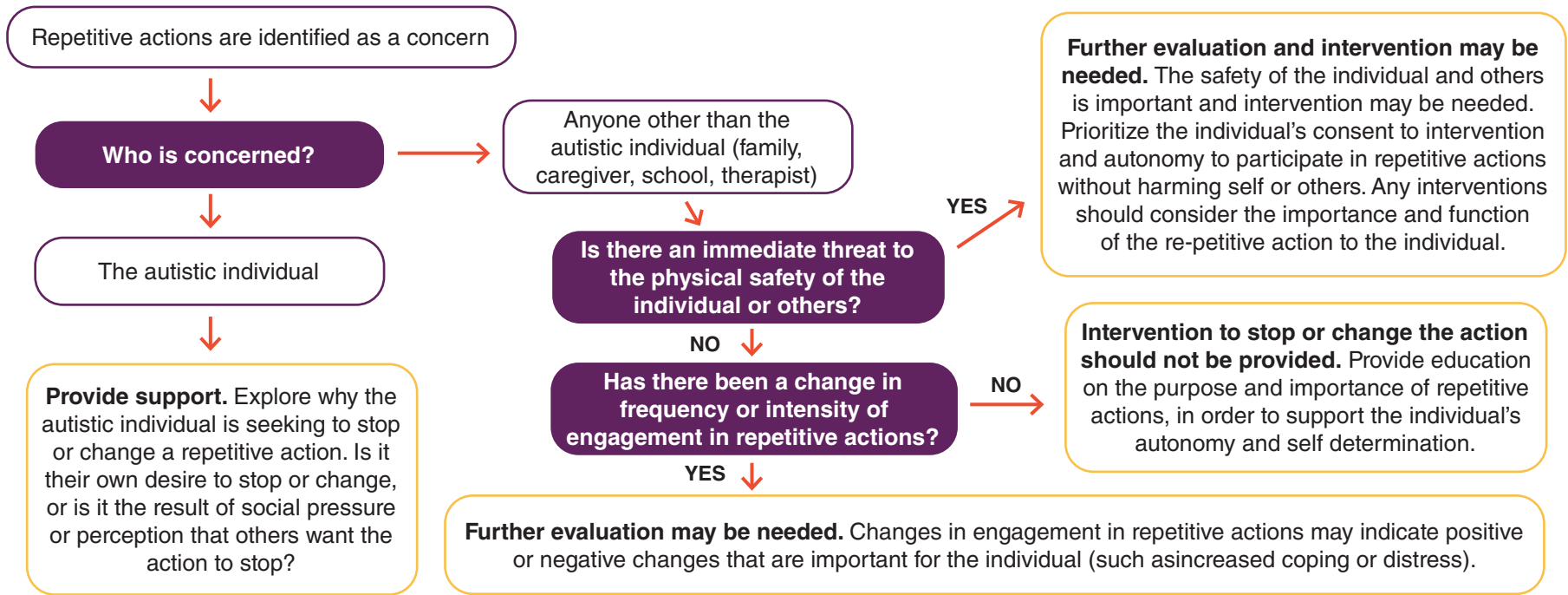


# #7: Don't provide interventions for autistic persons to reduce or eliminate "restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, activities, or interests" without evaluating and understanding the meaning of the behavior to the person, as well as personal and environmental factors.



*Occupational therapy practitioners should provide person-centered, strengths-based interventions, and advocate for autistic persons on individual and societal levels by providing information to promote inclusivity and belonging, and to decrease stigma. Actions that are considered "restricted and repetitive behaviors" by the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) may serve as meaningful activities for self-regulation, communication, or self-expression. Attempting to change or extinguish these behaviors without direct request from the individual, without understanding and incorporating the underlying meanings, or substituting other actions to meet self-regulatory reasons for the behavior commonly results in camouflaging (e.g., masking or hiding behaviors), that can result in negative self-image, depression, and an increased risk of suicidality.\**

Alternative communication should be used as needed to understand the individual's desire for evaluation and intervention, and understand the meaning of repetitive actions to the individual. Repetitive actions may be referred to as stimming, restrictive and repetitive behaviors, or RRBs. Use the following chart to inform your evaluation:



## If further evaluation or intervention is desired or warranted:

### Get curious!

Work collaboratively with the individual to identify the purpose, function, and benefit that repetitive actions may serve and why the autistic individual may be **masking** or seeking intervention.

**Repetitive actions can mean many things—it is our responsibility to collaborate with clients to ensure that their needs are met.**

- Use a neurodiversity-affirming approach to evaluation.
- Support a positive autistic self-identity.
- Evaluate the meaning or purpose of the repetitive actions as well as personal and environmental factors.
- Consider how engaging in repetitive actions is affecting occupational performance
- Consider any changes to engagement in repetitive actions and what those changes may indicate (e.g., distress, increased coping, increased comfort with autistic identity).

### Get creative!

No **compliance-based interventions** should be used. Intervention should be person-centered and collaborative, and support regulation and function (rather than changing or stopping repetitive actions).

Collaborate to determine alternatives that provide similar regulating or functional input, as well as possible environmental accommodations.

- Work collaboratively with the individual to identify replacement repetitive actions that may serve or provide the same function, purpose, meaning, or benefit.
- Educate the autistic individual about ableism and self-advocacy strategies.
- Provide education to family, caregivers, or school staff about the benefit and purpose of repetitive actions, ableism, neurodiversity, and other factors that support the individual in their desired occupations.

**Note:** This resource uses the identity-first language of “autistic individual,” in alignment with the preferences of a majority of the autism community.

#### Definitions

**Compliance-based interventions:** Intervention techniques that require behavior change in response to a demand, often to promote behaviors that match neurotypical responses or norms (e.g., restraint, seclusion, aversive procedures, escape extinction, withholding preferred items, rewards for behavior change, sticker charts). Includes punitive measures for behaviors that are not causing harm, in order to promote behaviors that match neurotypical responses and compliance rather than functional skill development.

**Masking:** Autistic individuals may learn and mimic neurotypical behaviors, especially in social settings, while hiding behaviors (such as repetitive actions) and components of autistic identity to be more like non-autistic individuals.

## Resources

Learn more through these trusted resources. This is not an all-inclusive list. Additional resources should be focused on those vetted or generated directly by autistic self-advocates.

- [Autistic Self-Advocacy Network](#)
- [Neuroclastic](#)
- [Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network](#)
- Williams, K., Dallman, A., & Googins, J. (2021, July 21). Embracing neurodiversity-affirming practice with autistic clients. *OT Practice*. 26(7). <https://www.aota.org/publications/ot-practice/ot-practice-issues/2021/embracing-neurodiversity>

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*\*Note: The recommendation was developed in collaboration with Choosing Wisely, a partnership between the of the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation and specialty societies. Choosing Wisely was active from 2012-2023.*