

Support in Wiltshire for Autism Setting Strategies (SWASS)

Setting/Reception Class strategies
for the Early Years' Foundation Stage
2013

'Getting the strategies right'



The strategies outlined in this document are designed to support young children on the autism spectrum. However, they are equally applicable for children with social communication difficulties and many are relevant for those in the Early Years' Foundation Stage who have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).

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Contents for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Support in Wiltshire for Autism Setting Strategies (SWASS)

| | |
|---|----|
| Section 1: Introduction and terminology | 2 |
| Section 2: What is the autism spectrum? | 3 |
| Section 3: Essentials for getting the strategies right | 4 |
| Section 4: Visual support strategies and how to use them | 6 |
| Section 5: Sensory sensitivities | 10 |
| Section 6: Language and communication | 13 |
| Section 7: Social and emotional understanding | 17 |
| Section 8: Rigidity, routines and obsessions | 22 |
| Section 9: Coping with change and transitions | 24 |
| Section 10: Accessing learning within the setting and environment | 30 |
| 10.1 The importance of play | 34 |
| Section 11: Potential hotspots and triggers | 36 |
| 11.1 Large groups, assemblies and special events | 37 |
| 11.2 Break, lunchtimes and outside play | 38 |
| 11.3 Supply staff/teachers and visitors to setting, or school | 40 |
| 11.4 Settings/school trips | 43 |
| 11.5 Health and safety | 43 |
| Section 12: Working in partnership with parents and carers | 44 |
| Section 13: Working with Support Staff | 47 |
| Section 14: Emotional health and wellbeing | 49 |
| 14.1 Stress and anxiety | 49 |
| Section 15: References and useful resources | 51 |

Section 1: Introduction and terminology

Introduction

In recent years, research and understanding of effective support for children on the autistic spectrum has grown significantly. Alongside this the knowledge and skills of staff within mainstream settings and schools has also increased. As such it is an appropriate time to revise and develop Wiltshire Council's recommended support strategies.

This document replaces the 'Early years SENCO Toolbox' for 'including children with social communication difficulties' (Wiltshire County Council, 2009). This document outlines the issues that are likely to affect children on the autistic spectrum. It explores good practice in supporting the teaching and learning of these children, and also has broader applications to other children within settings and schools including those with social communication difficulties and children with SLCN (speech, language and communication difficulties).

Every child or young person with autism is unique. The resources and strategies described in this document provide a sound starting point, but will need adaptation to suit individuals' needs and settings. In view of the increasing availability of published information and resources, the aim of this document is to give clear practical strategies to manage key issues within mainstream settings and schools. It is anticipated that further information can be sought, as necessary, from professionals with specialist knowledge or by referring to published resources.

Terminology

A number of terms are used to describe those considered to be on the autistic spectrum. These include 'autism spectrum disorder' which was first introduced by Lorna Wing in 1986, 'autism spectrum condition' and more recently 'autism spectrum'. There has been rigorous debate regarding these terminologies and their use. People on the autistic spectrum themselves disagree about which term is most appropriate. Some feel that a 'disorder' implies a disability and do not like to be referred to in this way whilst some individuals on the autistic spectrum do indeed consider themselves to be 'disordered'. Recently, 'autism spectrum condition' has become more widely used although has also met criticism as it could suggest a medical condition or abnormality.

The term 'autistic spectrum' simply describes the area of concern as a spectrum, making no direct reference to the more contentious terms of 'disorder' or 'condition'. This terminology, or the similar terminology 'autism spectrum', is now generally used by leading researchers including the Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER), Birmingham. The term 'autistic spectrum' will be used to describe autism and all its' sub groups within the context of this document.

Section 2: What is the autism spectrum?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how an individual communicates with, and relates to other people and the world around them. There are over half a million people in the UK with autism, which is roughly one in 100. Everyone working within a setting/school environment is, therefore, very likely to work with children who are diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. It is also important to recognise that there may be children who do not have a formal diagnosis of autism, for a variety of reasons but who have similar needs.

Many of the strategies outlined in this document are relevant to all children, particularly those with communication difficulties or those struggling to access the curriculum.

For many years, the triad of impairments (Wing, 1996) was considered to represent autism, with those diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum having some degree of difficulty within the three areas of social interaction and understanding, language and communication and flexibility of thought/rigidity of thinking. It is also now recognised that those on the autism spectrum have sensory processing difficulties.

However, one of the primary manuals used by clinicians to provide a formal diagnosis of autism and related disorders, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-Fourth Edition (DSM-IV), is currently under review and the revised and the fifth edition DSM-V will formally be in place from 2013. The other manual used for diagnostic purposes, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) is also under review. The DSM-V will include a number of changes relating to the diagnosis of autism as follows:

- 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' will be used as an umbrella term for diagnosis. However, further individual detail will be given through the use of a level '1, 2 or 3' to indicate severity.
- There will no longer be a separate diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, Atypical Autism or PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder-not otherwise specified) These will be included within the umbrella term 'autism spectrum disorder'.
- The areas of 'Social Interaction' and 'Language and Communication' will be combined into one area titled 'Social/communication difficulties'
- The requirement for a delay in language development will no longer be part of the diagnostic criteria. Greater prominence will be placed on fixed or repetitive behaviours.
- The criteria will include difficulties related to sensory processing and sensitivities.



Section 3: Essentials for getting the strategies right

This document describes a wide range of interventions, strategies and resources which will all need to be tailored to the needs, interests and motivations of children. However, the following 10 strategies are those considered essential for the effective inclusion and support of children who are on the autistic spectrum. They are outlined in more detail throughout the document.

Adjust communication

- Always gain the child's attention before speaking.
- Reduce and simplify language to small, manageable 'chunks'.
- Allow additional processing time.
- Remember that children on the autistic spectrum may not notice or understand the meaning of non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions or tone of voice.
- If you repeat your instruction use the same language each time.

Respect the right to be different - allow for the autism

- Accept, value and celebrate difference.
- Think about the autism and the associated difficulties before making judgements.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Empathy - consider how a child with autism experiences the world.

Consistency, consistency, consistency

- Where possible, ensure all adults are fully informed about strategies and interventions which work well with the child.
- Ensure that all adults' communication with the child is clear and supported by visual cues, where appropriate, so that the child knows what to expect.

Work in partnership with parents and carers

- Don't underestimate the role of parents and carers.
- Value the wealth of information parents hold.
- Ensure there are opportunities for formal and informal contact with parents.

Monitor anxiety levels

- Identify trigger points and situations.
- Reduce trigger points where possible.
- Use known motivators to distract and reward.

Provide structure and routine

- Implement predictable and reliable routines.
- Use visual support, as appropriate.
- Ensure the child knows:
 - What they need to do
 - Where they will do it
 - Who they will do it with
 - How long they will do it for
 - What will happen next.

Monitor sensory sensitivities

- Identify any sensory issues the child has.
- Plan carefully to minimise exposure to the sensory input that cause anxiety.
- Implement strategies to support hyper and hypo (high/low) sensitivity.

Plan for change and transition

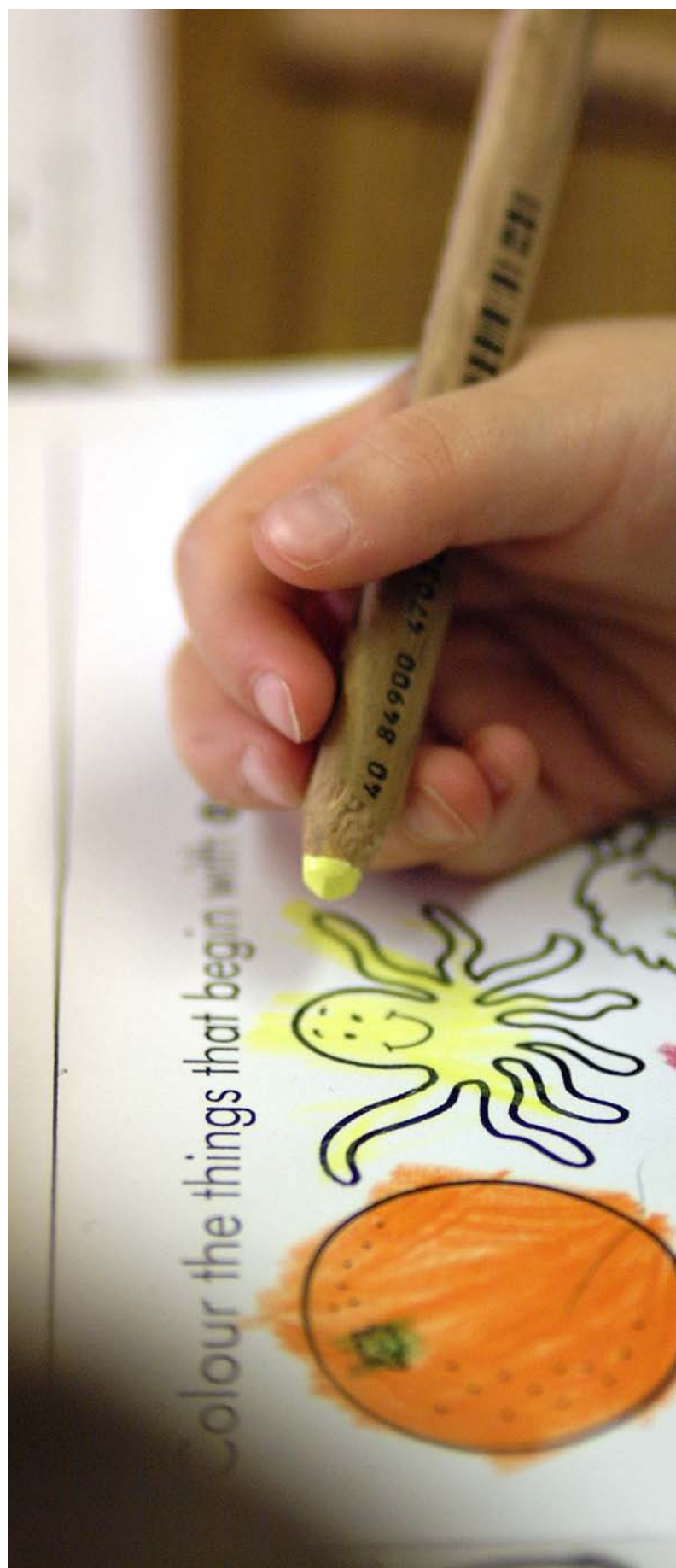
- Prepare the child for any planned changes and transitions.
- Use visual timetables, language jigs and social stories™
- When unplanned changes occur reassure the child and use a visual prompt such as a 'surprise' or 'wait' card where necessary.

Keep it visual

- Children on the autism spectrum tend to respond well to visual support.
- Use visual cue cards, visual timetables and resources to support learning.

Use motivators and special interests

- Incorporate motivators and special interests into teaching and learning whenever possible.
- Use special interests for rewards and motivators.
- Plan in time for special interests and obsessions.



Section 4: What are visual support strategies and how are they used?

Language jigs

Language jigs are visual schedules that support the sequence of an activity, for example, what to do when the photographer visits. They contain pictures and key words to help children understand what is going to happen in what order, which usually reduces anxiety. When the activity is explained to the child it is important to use the same language that has been used on the jig to avoid confusion. Language jigs can be done in advance or can be quickly sketched with key words added to prepare the child for an unexpected change or activity. It is not necessary to have artistic ability, as the sketches just need to be a basic representation.

If time allows, the child may also be able and willing to help to draw quick pictures as specified by the adult. It can be helpful to have a blank language jig to fill in whenever needed. Children should have the language jig with them or easily accessible so that they can refer back to it for reassurance or cross off events as they occur. A white board is also useful to do a quick drawing which can easily be changed when needed.

An example of a language jig: hair washing and getting changed for P.E.



Visual timetables/schedules

Visual timetables can be created for a number of different time periods/situations. They are a means to prepare children for the times, places and activities that they will be involved in and give them a clear structure. Children who have difficulty with understanding spoken language are able to see and recognise visual representations more easily. This helps them to feel more secure about what is going to happen.

A bank of symbol cards or photos can be printed and laminated so that they can be used again. Velcro can be used to stick the symbols or photos to the various timetables. Younger children often respond well to being able to pull off each one as the task is completed and put it in a 'finished' box.

For younger children the timetable may just include a morning or afternoon or may outline the whole day's activities. Timetables should include all activities, including snack, breaks and lunchtimes and be amended on a daily basis to include specific events, for example, visitors, room changes or trips. Timetables may be pictorial, include pictures and words or for older/more able children may be text only. Visual timetables can be a useful resource for the whole group/class, as well as individual children.

Examples of visual timetables and schedules. Widgit Symbols (c) Widgit Software 2002-2013 www.widgit.com



Now and next board (or first and then board)

This should be used for pupils who need daily activities broken into very small chunks and may have short attention spans. It can be used in conjunction with daily timetables or arrival schedules as necessary.

A 'now and next' or 'first and then' board displays the immediate task and the next task only. Tasks should be displayed visually and the same language should be used at all times by all staff. For younger/less able pupils, 'now' and 'next' should be used as they are generally easier concepts to understand than 'first' and 'then.'

Examples of now and next/first and then board displays



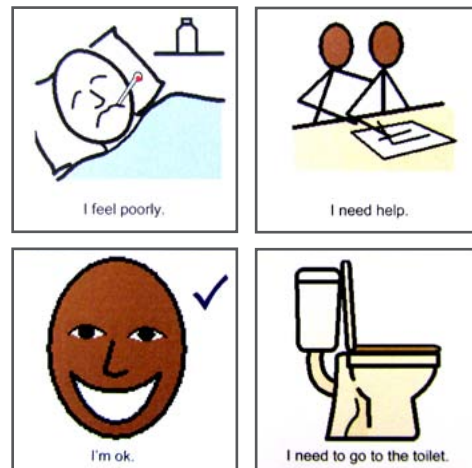
Visual prompts or cue cards

Visual cue cards are useful for all children for a range of purposes including to:

- warn children that something is about to happen
- let children know that it is their turn or that they need to wait
- provide a non-verbal 'get out' card to help exit a situation when anxieties become overwhelming
- remind children of desired or appropriate behaviour
- make rules explicit
- provide a non-verbal way for children to indicate that they need help
- help focus and maintain attention
- help sequencing skills
- support specific conversational skills
- provide a simple, visual 'back up' to spoken language or as a prompt without needing to use spoken language
- provide a 'whoops' or 'surprise' card when a planned activity or event has to be changed. For example, no outdoor play on a wet day.

Cue cards may use photos, pictures, symbols or drawings but whichever type of visual representation is chosen, the same one must be used to depict the same activity, skill or concept each time. The same cue cards should be used in all settings that the child attends. Cue cards can be particularly effective if they use photos of the child doing that specific activity.

Examples of visual prompts and cue cards



Widgit Symbols (c) Widgit Software 2002-2013
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Modelling

Modelling, practising and rehearsing a desired behaviour or way of communicating can often be very effective for children. Watching how to behave is generally much easier than following a verbal explanation. For example, rather than explaining to the child how to enter a room appropriately, show him or her how to do it. If there is opportunity to do so, then ask children to try it for themselves.

Comic strip conversations

Comic strip conversations can support children with understanding the views and actions of self and others. Comic strips are drawn using simple stick people. Colour can be used to illustrate different emotions. For example, red means angry words or feelings, blue equals happy words or feelings. The comic strips are a visual representation of simple social interactions. In this way, more abstract aspects such as feelings and intentions can be explored and therefore increase social understanding.

Comic strips should include very simple words/sentences that describe:

- the social context
- what people are saying
- what people are feeling
- what people are thinking

Comic strip conversations can be used successfully to explore and discuss incidents of challenging behaviour. Simple versions can be devised without the use of colour. It is also helpful to explain reality. For examples of comic strip conversations, please see the references.

Social stories™

Social Stories™(Gray, 2002) aim to support the development of appropriate behaviour. They describe the appropriate behaviour, rather than give overt direction and instruction. Social Stories™ may be effective in supporting children to understand the social contexts of specific situations and thus can be used to prevent potential difficulties. They can help children to understand events or activities that they find difficult or anxiety provoking. Social stories™ should be written using

the structure and formula outlined by Carol Gray. Be clear about what you want to achieve and be as factual as possible. Social stories™ use three types of sentences:

Descriptive sentences give accurate information about the setting. Who? What? Where? When?

Use words such as 'usually', 'sometimes' and 'normally' to avoid literal interpretation, for example: "Peter is in Puffin Class."

"Mrs Jones usually sits next to me at lunch time."

"Sometimes Peter plays with James and Phillip."

"Peter usually sits on a blue mat to listen to a story."

Perspective sentences describe the reactions, responses and feelings of others and sometimes the reason for their responses. These help children to try and see things from someone else's point of view. For example:

"Mrs Jones will be happy if Peter lines up quietly."

"The other children will like it if Peter eats with his mouth closed."

"It will make mum and dad happy if Peter puts his Lego away."

"The adults and the rest of Peter's class will prefer it if Peter waits until he is asked to answer a question."

Examples of social stories™

Social Stories provided by Speech and Language Therapy Service GWH Trust Wiltshire

Playing with friends

At break time it is OK to play alone sometimes.
It is also a good time to play with friends.
To play with a friend I can look around the playground.
I could also find a friend to play with in the classroom.
I can carefully watch what my friend is doing.
Then I could do the same thing as my friend and ask if I can join in.
I could ask my friend to play something different with me like,
"Do you want to play in the castle?"
If my friend says 'yes' we can go and play!
If my friend says, 'no thanks' I can find someone else to ask.
It's fun to play with friends!

This week please read this social story with me to help me to remember what to do at play times.



Asking for help

When I don't know what to do....
I should ask for help.
I can ask an adult or a friend for help by calling their name, or saying "excuse me".
I could say "Please can you help me?"
When I ask for help someone will tell me what I need to do. It will help me to understand.
When I know what to do I can do it.
When I know what to do I am happy.
I will try to ask for help when I don't understand.™

This week please encourage me to ask for help when I need it. Reading this social story together will help me to remember what to do.



Section 5: Sensory sensitivities

Children on the autistic spectrum often respond differently to sensory information. They may be hypersensitive and avoid certain sensory input, or hyposensitive so seek sensory stimulation. Some children are hypersensitive to some sensations and hyposensitive to others. Sensory issues can occur in any of the sensory processing systems, tactile (touch), visual, auditory, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive (body movement and position).

Sensitivities in these areas can impact significantly on a child's ability to focus on given tasks and access the curriculum and environment effectively. Whilst there are some common sensory differences associated with the autistic spectrum, each child on the autistic spectrum will have a unique individual profile. Children's reactions to sensory information can be extreme and may be difficult for others to understand.

Children may:

- find some colours, contrasts or visual information distressing/stimulating
- only focus on small, specific details rather than the image as a whole
- look sideways at objects and people using their peripheral vision
- find certain sounds distressing/stimulating
- be unable to filter out background noise affecting concentration levels
- make noises or hum to block out intrusive or distressing noises
- only eat certain foods or not recognise when they are hungry or full up
- have difficulty with bladder or bowel control due to not recognising the sensation of needing to go to the toilet
- put non-food items in their mouth
- find different textures or sensations against the skin distressing/ stimulating
- not recognise when in pain, or have very high or low pain thresholds
- find some smells overwhelming or seek strong odours

- find it difficult to know where their body is in space and know when they are moving
- react negatively to unexpected physical contact or crave it
- not react or register sensory input or actively seek particular sensations
- lick things which are new to him/her.

Strategies

Create a sensory profile

Ensure that staff are aware of any sensory differences. A sensory profile should be compiled on children which includes details about whether the child is hypersensitive or hyposensitive to different sensations and identifies effective strategies. Sensory profiles should be carried out by a suitably qualified professional who has experience of working with children on the autistic spectrum. However, careful observation can often pinpoint areas of difficulty.

Work closely with parents and carers

Parents and carers are often able to identify sensory differences and potentially challenging times. They hold vital information that is invaluable when designing support programmes, strategies and interventions.

Manage sensory overload

It is important that staff are aware of the signs of sensory overload in each child and monitor this. All staff need to be aware of 'triggers.' Recognising the child's increasing anxiety or agitation means that it may be possible to intervene before overload occurs. If the child apparently 'overreacts' or completely 'shuts down' think about the possible cause(s). Careful observation of reactions to sensory input and patterns of behaviour can be the only way to work out what is causing difficulty. If the child is overloaded, allow him/her time to recover in a calm, quiet environment.

Prepare the child for new sensory experiences

Include details of the likely sensory experiences that the child might have when preparing him/her for a new experience, such as a visit to a farm. Some children may need visual support to help them prepare for example, 'things we might hear' 'things we might see'.

Accept the child's experience of sensation

Ensure that staff accept children's experiences of particular sensations and do not challenge or minimise this. For example, a light tap on the arm may feel like a punch to the child, a shower can feel like needles on his or her skin. Understanding how the child experiences certain sensory input is helpful as it often explains why s/he has reacted in a particular way.

Be aware of pain thresholds

Staff need to be aware of children with high pain thresholds as they can potentially put themselves at risk. If children do not realise that they have hurt themselves or are in pain they may not stop what they are doing and so may sustain further injury. Equally a child with low pain thresholds may need monitoring or different/reduced activities which cause discomfort.

Think about background noise

Hypersensitive children may need to sit in an area of the room where there is less background noise, where possible and little or no through traffic. Low level noises such as computers humming, radiators, clocks ticking, air conditioning units or fans are often very intrusive for children on the autistic spectrum and may prevent them from paying attention. Playing quiet music in the room to block out background noise may help.

Hyposensitive children may need to sit in an area of the room where there is more noise stimulation provided that this does not distract him/her or others. Consider using headphones to listen to favourite noises or use this as a reward.

Be aware of smells

Hypersensitive children may find some smells intolerable, and this can be a reason for refusing, or struggling to work in a particular room or with certain people. Strong perfume, aftershave, toiletries, the smell of cigarette smoke or food smells can all cause difficulty. With younger/less able children who are unable to express what is causing distress it is important to consider this. Sometimes sitting or standing further away from the child is helpful, or using a room which is further away from the kitchen.

Hyposensitive children may get very close to smell people and objects. Ensure that staff are aware of the underlying sensory issues. It is helpful to work with the child to develop understanding of the appropriateness of this behaviour in different contexts and explain how others may react. Using strongly scented items as part of the task, for example scented pens, or as a reward is likely to be very motivating for these children. Consider visual stimulation and lighting

Hypersensitive children may be intolerant to fluorescent or bright lighting. Too much visual information such as bright wall displays can cause distress or distract. If possible, create a distraction-free space, for example, against a blank wall or consider the use of screens. Some children manage sensitivity to lights by wearing tinted lenses. Sunglasses can also be very helpful but ensure that staff and children are aware that this are allowed because of visual difficulties.

Hyposensitive children may be attracted to bright lights, colours or reflections. Use visually stimulating materials and consider where the child is sitting in relation to lighting. For children who are fascinated by this type of visual stimulation, consider using as a reward as it may be too distracting to use these materials as part of the task. For example, a younger/less able child could be allocated set time to play with have a bag of visually stimulating objects.

Manage tactile stimulation

Hypersensitive children should not be touched unless necessary, and if there is a need to touch him/her always warn the child first. Be aware that the child may be particularly sensitive to certain textures, for example certain clothing and labels can cause distress. Labels may need to be cut off clothes and some items of school uniform may feel intolerable, genuinely interfering with curriculum access. For the children which this applies to, a reasonable adjustment may be to allow the child to wear an alternative item of uniform, for example a plain black pair of tracksuit bottoms in place of black school trousers. Clearly it would be necessary to explain to other children and staff why the child is allowed to wear a different item. The textures of seats and flooring will also need to be considered, for example, using a cushion on chairs, a specific chair for the child or a square of fabric to sit on that the child likes instead of the carpet or floor.

Hyposensitive children may prefer the feel of tight clothing and may respond well to weighted blankets or mats. Physical activities which involve tactile feedback can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Plan for vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive difficulties (where the body is in space)

Hypersensitive children may find some movements in PE and sport difficult and may not cope well with being close to others or struggle with fine motor skills, such as picking up small items. Break down physical activities into small manageable steps in a clear sequence, and place the child on the edge of the group where s/he is less likely to get too close to others. Draw attention to changes in flooring or surfaces as these can be difficult to manage. Place the child at the front or end of lines and queues.

Hyposensitive children may bump into things or people and invade others' personal space. Sit the child in an area of the room that is easiest to negotiate furniture and does not involve going past many children. Remind children about personal space- standing or sitting an arm's length away is a useful gauge.

For Gustatory (taste) sensitivities see Section 11.2

Section 6: Language and communication

Children on the autistic spectrum have a wide range of communicative ability. It is very important not to make assumptions about an individual child's skills solely on the basis of their diagnosis. Similarly more able children on the autistic spectrum can be very adept at masking their language difficulties. For example, they may seem to be competent speakers but have poor understanding of what is said to them. Some children use language effectively, others have no or very limited verbal communication and may use signs, symbols or other alternative/augmentative means of communication.

Language includes both verbal expression (spoken language) and comprehension (understanding of language). Children may also have difficulty expressing their thoughts in writing and with understanding written text. More able children on the autistic spectrum may appear to have very good communication skills but are unable to use these skills effectively in social contexts and interaction. For example, children often have difficulty with non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions and body language (see Section Seven). Many children on the autistic spectrum also find skills related to communication difficult such as turn-taking and attention and listening skills. These pre-requisite skills are very important and need to be established in order for the child to communicate successfully.

Communication difficulties are often the cause of challenging or inappropriate behaviour. Younger children on the autistic spectrum may not understand the need for communication, may fail to communicate clearly what they want or need and will require a high level of visual support. Older/more able children may have difficulty with 'higher level' language skills such as reasoning, predicting consequences and inference or with complex grammatical structures. Children on the autistic spectrum often have difficulty processing language (i.e. understanding what is said to them and formulating a response) and many have some

degree of literal understanding. This includes understanding that the meaning of certain language is different to the superficial one.

For example, expressions such as 'Pull your socks up!' does not mean adjust your socks by pulling them up. Similarly, understanding sarcasm, jokes and metaphors can all be problematic and the use of these increases in general communication with age.

Strategies in this section are likely to be relevant for any child with Speech, Language and Communication (SLCN) difficulties.

Children may:

- not understand the need for communication
- not initiate communication
- fail to communicate clearly what they want or need
- have difficulty with attention and listening skills, particularly in relation to verbal communication
- have difficulty understanding language
- have difficulties processing language
- have a literal understanding of language, including difficulties with understanding jokes and sarcasm, metaphors and idioms
- not understand or use non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expression and body language
- find it difficult to take turns in activities and conversations
- be delayed in developing language, have disordered language skills or may not develop language at all.

Strategies for promoting good communication and behaviour



Ensure that you have the child's full attention before speaking.

With many children on the autistic spectrum it is helpful to use the child's name first and wait until they are giving you their attention before speaking. This 'tunes in' the child to the fact that you are talking to him/her. The child may not recognise themselves as part of 'Puffin Class' or 'the red group' or 'everyone' so may not respond to group instructions.

For example:

"Liam, and everyone else, please put your books away in your tray."

"Liam, you and the people sitting at your table, can line up at the door."

Encourage visual and auditory attention

Encourage children to give you their visual as well as auditory attention where possible as this can help them to focus on what is being said. Many children with communication difficulties do not have fully integrated attention skills- i.e. they have difficulty processing verbal language if they are doing something else and/or are not looking at the person speaking. This applies to older/more able children as well as younger ones.

However, some children on the autistic spectrum are not able or willing to give eye contact so should be encouraged to look towards the speaker. Others listen but need to look away and may not appear to be concentrating at all. Ensure that these children are able to listen and understand well. If they are able to do this, do not insist that they look at or towards the speaker. Instead, remind them that they are not showing that they are listening and others may think this rude.

Use clear, non-ambiguous language

Language used with children on the autistic spectrum should be specific. Language should also be as concrete as possible, i.e. relate to the 'here and now', particularly with younger children. Be aware that the child may not be able to understand what words such as personal pronouns like 'he', 'she', 'they' or what words such as 'it' or 'there' refer to. Rather than saying "Put it over there." be specific. For example, "Put the reading book on my desk."

Use 'total communication' approach with practitioners using a range of visual prompts such as picture symbols and gestures to support understanding

Reduce the amount of language used

Children can be easily overloaded by too much language. Present verbal instructions in small, manageable 'chunks' and if necessary, back up with written or visual prompts. This helps children to remember key information and the order in which they have to do things.

Allow extra time for processing

Some children need extra time to process language. It may appear that they have not heard, or are not going to make a response when in fact they are still thinking about what has been said and how to reply.

- Wait patiently and do not interrupt.
- Do not repeat the phrase or instruction because this further overloads the child and makes it more difficult for them to process language. In effect, they have to start again. If, after allowing a lot

of time the child is still not responding, repeat the phrase or instruction exactly. Do not rephrase or add further detail.

- However, if the child looks puzzled and clearly does not understand what has been said it is likely that the language used was too complex and/or too much verbal information was given at once. Simplify and reduce the language. Wait again for the child to process what has been said.

Use positive, directive language

Always say exactly what you want to happen.

For example:

“James, feet on floor” rather than “James, stop kicking!” Otherwise the child may only process ‘kicking’ and continue with the behaviour. With younger children on the autistic spectrum this instruction may need to be supported with visual cues showing the desired behaviour/actions. Another helpful strategy is to model the desired behaviour so that the child sees exactly what ‘feet on floor’ looks like. The desired behaviour can be shown by the adult or a suitable peer.

Say what you mean-mean what you say

The English language is complex. Think about what you are saying and try not to use language that can be interpreted literally or misunderstood such as:

“Go and wash your hands in the toilet.”

“Paint the person sitting next to you.”

Use appropriate questions

The type of questions used and the language of questions should always be considered when working with children on the autistic spectrum. Some children have extensive factual knowledge about particular subjects, and are most comfortable with specific questions of a factual nature.

- Open questions (e.g. “Tell me about your house”) are generally much more difficult than closed questions (e.g. “Who won the football match?”) for children on the autistic spectrum. This is because many children, including able children, are unsure what information they need to give in

response to an open question, and may not know what order to give it in. When using open questions with these children, provide prompts which can be visual and/or verbal. For example: if asking the child “Tell me about your house”, you could give headings such as ‘How many bedrooms?’, ‘Is there a garden?’, ‘Who lives there?’, ‘What number or name does the house have?’

- Start the answer.... the people who live in your house are...
- Be aware that if you ask a child a question such as “Could you put your jumper on?” or “Can you get your book?” they may interpret this literally and answer “Yes” but not realise that you are expecting him/her to do something, or they may reply “No”. The child may appear rude or disrespectful but has simply misunderstood the intention of the question. Use phrases such as “Sarah, get your book now please” so the child is clear about what is required.

Regularly check the child’s understanding

Children often become very anxious if they are unsure of what to do. For children with comprehension difficulties, it is important to check understanding at regular intervals using a ‘Total Communication Approach’.

Be aware of using sarcasm, humour and expressions of speech

Idioms and metaphors such as “Did you get out of the wrong side of bed?” and “You need to pull your weight” are commonly used in everyday communication. For younger children on the autistic spectrum who are at the stage of being able to respond to very simple language, expressions and sarcasm should be avoided completely.

Similarly with sarcasm, this is very confusing for many children on the autistic spectrum. For example, if a child chews with their mouth open and you say, “Oh, lovely!” the child may think you genuinely mean ‘lovely’ and do it again. It is generally better to avoid the use of sarcasm for younger children. For older/more able children any sarcasm that is used needs to be explained.

The use of humour should be considered according to the individual child's needs. Humour involving different meanings of words, tone of voice, and expressions can all be problematic. However, many children on the autistic spectrum respond well to humour as long as it is at an appropriate level that they are able to understand, and it is clear that the other person is not laughing at them. Many children on the autistic spectrum have a very idiosyncratic sense of humour and enjoy visual, 'slapstick' humour such as 'Mr Bean'.

Use written/visual cues to teach set phrases

For younger children who have difficulty remembering and accessing the right language for the right situation, teaching set phrases can be useful. For example, "Please can I have..." Use a verbal script as a conversation opener; can I play with you? 'Hello and Good morning' through language jig.

Ensure that the child has a means to communicate in all situations

If a child on the autistic spectrum has little or no verbal communication and uses symbols, a communication aid or other method to communicate it is crucial that s/he is able to access this throughout the day and whilst at home. For example, making sure that the materials/systems s/he uses are not left behind when changing rooms, or ensuring that a new symbol introduced at setting or school is also used in the home environment. Ensure that the child has a range of symbols or pictures which are appropriate to communicate all of their needs. Give explanations - your face is red, you are angry/feel your heart beat

Parents of younger children may pick up on worries at home and may be able to help unpack what might be triggering the anxiety. Younger children may need a quiet area to go to when they feel or demonstrate they are feeling overwhelmed. They will need to be taught how and when to use this area, a 'pop up' tent can be useful in a busy environment. Home school liaison books are useful for sharing information.

Picture Exchange Communication

Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) can be used to encourage a child to request items and to prompt social interactions and will always be introduced under the guidance of a Speech and Language Therapist. PECS can provide a very effective functional communication system to children with no verbal communication, but it can also teach important skills to those who talk. The PECS protocol emphasises teaching a child to approach others to initiate a communication interaction. Some children may talk, but don't understand that need for a social approach - they may talk to an empty room or to the fridge. These children will be able to learn about approaching an adult to request through PECS. Other children may talk, but will only do so if asked a question or told to use their words. These children may be able to learn about spontaneous, self-initiated communication through PECS. PECS can be an alternative communication system for those who don't speak or an augmentative communication system for those who do.



Examples of a visual prompt



Section 7: Social and emotional understanding

Children on the autistic spectrum have difficulty with social interaction and often need to be specifically taught how to behave in social contexts. Unlike their peers, they may not learn appropriate social responses instinctively or through observation. Children may experience difficulty with all aspects of social interaction, or may have more subtle needs. Younger children on the autism spectrum are generally unaware that their behaviour is unusual or inappropriate to others.

Lack of understanding of social interaction can often lead to conflict because the child may be perceived as being deliberately rude or inappropriate. With children on the autistic spectrum, staff should always consider first whether the child has socially misinterpreted or misjudged the situation.

It is important to consider the child's motivation to learn new social skills. For many children on the autistic spectrum, an extrinsic reward such as the child's own motivators or time to do their special interest may be required.

Some children on the autistic spectrum lack the desire to please or be accepted by others and are unconcerned about others' feelings. For example, telling a child that it makes others feel uncomfortable if s/he stands too close when talking is not necessarily going to motivate the child to change his or her behaviour. Adults may need to model behaviours and children will need to practise and rehearse these behaviours many times. The child may not mind that s/he is making the other person uncomfortable. However, if the child is told "If you stand too close, I find it hard to listen to what you are saying," s/he may want to be listened to and so may be more likely to comply.

Many of the strategies in this section may also be useful for children who are not on the autistic spectrum. Making social behaviour more overt can help to improve children's social interaction skills and understanding of themselves and others.

Children may:

- find it difficult to form and maintain friendships
- not interact fully during play, but play 'alongside' or in 'parallel'
- find turn-taking difficult in conversations, discussions or games
- find it difficult to share books or other resources with peers
- find it difficult to work with a partner or in a group
- find it difficult to initiate, maintain and end conversations appropriately
- only talk about specific topics, or choose inappropriate topics
- stand or sit too close to others, not understanding 'personal space'
- find it difficult to recognise and understand emotions and feelings in themselves and/or others
- have difficulty with eye contact and find it uncomfortable
- have a blank facial expression or use facial expressions which are inappropriate to the context, for example smiling when told that someone's pet has died
- be unable to put themselves 'in other peoples' shoes', as in empathise
- not recognise that others have thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that differ to their own
- make or accept physical contact with others only on their own terms
- find new or unfamiliar social situations and/or people difficult
- actively avoid other people or show more interest in objects
- be emotionally immature for their age
- lack tact and make extremely personal comments.

Principles when teaching and promoting social interaction skills:

- Some skills are much more complex than others. Skills taught need to be appropriate to the developmental age of the child, and their overall communicative ability. Seek specialist advice if unsure.
- In general it is better to work specifically on developing one skill at a time, for example, turn taking.
- Skills which are automatic to others may take a huge amount of effort for the child on the autistic spectrum and therefore s/he may not be able to do two things at once. For example, give eye contact whilst also remembering to stand the right distance away.
- Opportunities to practise the skill in different situations need to be given.

Strategies

Turn taking - Use a sand timer: "You watch the sand drop, and then it's your turn!"

Make the social rules overt

Younger children need to be given simple, general rules to follow. A visual cue, language jig or other means to explain a social situation that the child finds difficult can be useful.

Look beyond the behaviour

Ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of the social difficulties experienced by children on the autism spectrum. School staff may need to be trained to look beyond the behaviour of the child on the autism spectrum to ascertain what or who caused them to act that way.



Use consistent language

Staff should use the same language to refer to social skills, wherever possible. For example, it can be very confusing to the child if different terms are used for the same behaviour such as 'eye contact' and 'looking.' Ensure that the verbal terms used also correspond to written language used on visual cue cards or reward charts, especially for younger children. Good looking/good listening - specific praise

Prompt the desired behaviour

The ultimate aim is for the child to remember to use a particular social skill at the right time. However, children on the autistic spectrum often find it difficult to transfer a skill into different contexts. Use a visual or verbal prompt to remind the child of what s/he needs to do. Younger children need to be given a specific prompt, like a twiddle toy i.e. a short length ribbon when listening.

Reward good social skills

Ensure that children are praised for good social behaviour, and given a reward if necessary. Staff should identify exactly what the child is doing well using appropriate language and visual prompts if necessary. For example, "Good sitting!" "You remembered to wait your turn, well done!" or "Great, you smiled at me when you said hello!"

Give specific feedback about social difficulties

Wherever possible, explain to the child what has 'gone wrong' and why. Tell him or her how to deal more appropriately with the situation next time. Ideally this should be immediately after the difficulty or incident has occurred, or as close to it as practicable. With younger children visual cue cards/social story or other visual support and minimal language should be used.

Do not assume that children will notice non-verbal cues

Many children will not notice or misinterpret non-verbal cues such as facial expression and posture. It is often helpful to point out these cues and/or explain overtly how people are feeling. For younger children a visual cue card could be used, with simple language, for example, "I am cross." This is a cross face. Identify what you are cross about and tell the child what s/he needs to do. It is sometimes necessary to state emotions overtly and the reason/cause. For example, "I am really sad because my dog died." Suggest ways that children could help or demonstrate an appropriate response.

Discuss emotions

Children often benefit from the opportunity to specifically learn about and discuss emotions. This does not always need to be taught separately, but can be incorporated into the day. Younger children may need an emotions book, see next strategy.

Learning about their emotions

Children on the autistic spectrum often seem to move from calm to highly distressed very quickly. This may be because they fail to recognise their own feelings as anxiety grows and only show their emotions once they are out of control. Teach the child about a range of emotions and how to recognise them in themselves. Use happy or sad faces to help child express feelings.



Reacting to others

A child on the autistic spectrum may find it difficult to understand that others have different feelings from themselves and to empathise with others. He may laugh when another child falls over, as he enjoys the 'slapstick' element of the fall and fails to appreciate that the child is hurt and feels upset. He needs to be taught to recognise basic facial expressions and body language others display so as to be able to name the emotion they might be feeling, eg tears falling from another child's eyes is likely to indicate he is unhappy. The child can then be taught to react more appropriately. A mirror can be used to explore facial expressions as many children on the autistic spectrum are unaware how their face looks unless given direct visual feedback.

Make an emotions book

Children need to be encouraged to recognise and reflect on their emotions and the emotions of others. Create an 'emotions book'. Explore basic emotions first, such as happy, sad and angry before moving on to more complex ones. Focus on one emotion at a time.

Take photographs of the child or other children showing a particular emotion in different situations and contexts, or cut out photographs from a magazine. These should be natural not contrived whenever possible. Stick these in a book, exploring and recording with the child issues such as the ones identified in the previous strategy.

Use an emotions thermometer/board

Encourage the child to think about how they are feeling. The child places their name or photograph on the thermometer as a visual indicator to show their level of emotion, or indicate the emotion that they are experiencing at that particular time. Ensure that the thermometer is accessible to the child at all times. It can also be used as a whole class resource for all children.

'Help' card could be introduced if the child understanding when feeling overwhelmed.

Example of an emotional thermometer Widgit Symbols (c)
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Practise turn taking

Regular opportunities to practise turn taking should be part of the child's programme of support if this is an area of difficulty. This could include floor activities and both indoor and outdoor activities.

Be aware that taking turns within a structured game is much easier than taking turns within a conversation. Establish good turn taking within simple games and activities first before attempting specific teaching of taking turns within a conversation or discussion. 'Waiting' and 'my turn' cards may be useful for younger children.

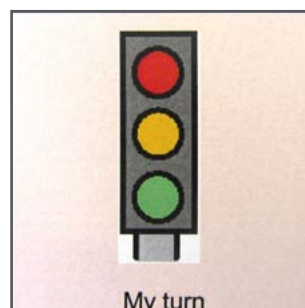
'Waiting' and 'My turn' cards

'Waiting' and 'my turn' cards can be used to support children to take turns in activities and conversation.

The child holds a 'I am waiting' card whilst waiting for their turn during an activity, game or conversation. When it is the child's turn s/he swaps this card for a 'my turn' card. Physically holding and exchanging the card can support the child with the process of waiting. It is often beneficial for other children and staff to use the cards during certain activities as well. Children may need to be taught explicitly how to use these cards. Older/more able children may need a more discrete way

of prompting them when it is their turn. Involve the child in deciding upon an appropriate system.

Examples of 'my turn' card



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Conversation cue cards

Many children find conversation difficult and will focus on subjects related to their special interest/obsessions. In order to encourage a wider range of conversational topics visual cue cards can be used. If the conversation begins to drift from the topic show the child the cue card representing the topic that is being discussed.

Social skills groups

Social skills groups can be a safe way for children to learn new skills and be able to make mistakes. The principles of teaching social interaction skills outlined earlier in this section should be used, and specialist advice sought where necessary. Children need to practice skills via role play or other methods. Role play provides an opportunity to practice a 'real life' situation, but the child should only play him/herself i.e. does not take on a character or role. Focusing upon and learning a specific social skill within a small group setting is much easier than being able to apply it in a classroom or whole school situation. However, consideration needs to be given to how to transfer the learnt skill to other settings.

Prepare carefully for team games

Team games involve a different set of rules and can be very difficult for children on the autistic spectrum to understand. Children may need to watch the game carefully first before playing themselves, with a staff member explaining what is happening. They need to be given very explicit rules and guidance about what is allowed and not allowed, and what their 'role' is. Make a Language jigs to show this.

Be aware that some children on the autistic spectrum find team games completely overwhelming due to sensory processing difficulties. These children may need to be given a separate activity or skill to practice.

Breaks from social situations

Children may find it difficult to be part of a social environment for extended periods of time. It is important to allow children to take a break from this pressure in order for anxiety levels not to be unnecessarily raised. The use of a visual cue card that staff can show the child or the child can show staff when the child needs a break can be useful. Alternatively a more subtle signal or prompt can be used which has been agreed by staff and the child. The area chosen for the 'break' should be one that the child finds calming and an agreed amount of time given. There should be a clear expectation that the child returns to the classroom or activity as soon as the time limit is reached.



Section 8: Rigidity, routines and obsessions

Children on the autistic spectrum tend to have rigid thinking patterns and can be very 'black and white' in their perceptions. The degree to which this affects the child may vary, dependent upon their cognitive ability, ability to understand the world and communicate their needs. Many children have set routines and rituals, which can cause anxiety or distress if prevented or altered. This may be because they cannot predict what 'will' or what 'could' happen next, even if the activity is within their experience. The result is often heightened levels of anxiety and stress, which can trigger challenging or unusual behaviour. Some children develop special interests or obsessions and appear fixated by specific subjects, objects or people. They may also engage in repetitive behaviours, actions and routines such as hand flapping (moving one or both hands up and down in a repetitive manner), twirling, asking the same questions especially when anxious. Changing or preventing routines and rituals needs to be considered and planned carefully. See also Section nine.

Children may:

- be unmotivated by any topics which are not related to their obsessions
- have difficulty listening and concentrating because of their obsession intruding upon their thoughts
- use their obsession as a safe topic to talk about because they lack the conversational skills to talk about other subjects
- have obsessions based on sensory or self-stimulatory behaviours, such as flapping hands at the corner of the eyes, tapping, stroking a particular texture, looking around the room for circles, opening and closing doors repeatedly
- have obsessions about particular toys/objects, either their own and/or those within the environment
- repeatedly talk about their obsession
- have an obsession around sameness or position, which could involve lining up or laying out objects in a certain way or having to sit in a particular chair

Strategies for managing special interests and obsessions

Although many children on the autistic spectrum do have special interests, others have not or 'grow out' of them as they mature. Some children may have the same interest(s) for many years, others have special interests which change frequently but are equally intense. Special interests, obsessions and rituals can be highly pleasurable for the child and often help to reduce anxiety and stress levels. Factors to consider in relation to special interests/obsessions are as follows:

- The degree to which the child is preoccupied with the special interest(s) and the extent to which this interferes with daily life.
- Whether the special interest(s) are age-appropriate and/or are generally considered 'acceptable' behaviour. For example, there may not be a high level of concern about a five year old with an obsession about stroking people's hair, but the same behaviour is not appropriate at age 11.
- How well the special interests can be fitted into the setting/school day.
- Whether time spent engaging in the special interest is to be used as anxiety management, reward or both.
- How easily the child is able to accept time constraints and has the ability to 'move on' from activities.

Schedule structured time for special interests and obsessions

Scheduling time slots within the day for the child to partake in special interests activities can help reduce anxiety, as the child knows when s/he will have time to focus on obsessions. This can improve concentration levels for the rest of the setting/school day. These sessions are most helpful at times when the child is very anxious. Always give a clear time limit for 'special interest time'. If necessary incorporate the use of a timer or other strategies. See Section nine, 'changing task or activity'.

Use the special interest to actively engage in the curriculum

Many children on the autistic spectrum will engage in learning if their particular interests or obsessions are utilised. For example, if the child likes washing machines, s/he could count the pictures of washing machines; make a collage of pictures of washing machines cut out from catalogues and so on. If the special interest cannot be used for teaching, it may be possible to use it as reward, see motivation and reward below.

Using special interests as motivation or reward

Many children on the autistic spectrum may not respond positively to generally used classroom motivators or rewards such as stickers, stamps or praise from staff. However, linking special interests to activities and rewards can be highly motivating.

However always consider the specificity of the special interest before making resources or adapting materials. Some children may only like a particular dinosaur which may need to be depicted in a certain colour, not just any dinosaur.

- Create specific stickers/ stamps that incorporate a picture of a special interest.
- Allow time on a particular interest, e.g. time to go on a particular game on the computer or looking at a specific book, magazine or catalogue.

An example of using the special interest for reward



However, always consider the specificity of the special interest before making resources or adapting materials. Some pupils may only like a particular dinosaur which may need to be depicted in a certain colour, not just any dinosaur.

- Create specific stickers/ stamps that incorporate a picture of a special interest.
- Make or use a jigsaw depicting the special interest and give one piece of it as a reward for each activity.
- Allow time on a particular interest, e.g. time to go on a particular game on the computer or looking at a specific book, magazine or catalogue.

Section 9: Coping with change and transitions

Change and transitions take place throughout the day and can cause huge anxiety. The majority of children on the autistic spectrum prefer structure where they know what to expect, and they dislike sudden change. Their response to change may be dramatic and can potentially cause distress for a long time afterwards, for example an unexpected change in the morning may still be causing considerable distress at the end of the day, the next day or the following week.

Reactions to change are also very individual. Children on the autistic spectrum may not react to a major change, but become very distressed by a seemingly minor change that would not be noticed by their peers. Any transition can cause the child significant stress which may manifest itself in a variety of ways including increased passivity, challenging behaviour or other anxiety-related reactions. Therefore, it is crucial that all transitions are managed carefully and proactively in a way which suits the needs of the individual. Some children will need a long time to process the change or transition, others respond best to being told a short time in advance.

Coping with change is an essential life skill so should not be avoided, but the child needs to learn how to cope with change within a supportive environment. Make sure new situations are well planned. Many children on the autistic spectrum are better able to manage change if they feel that others understand and accept their anxieties.

Children may:

- find it difficult to cope with changes in routines, situations, people or environments
- feel very anxious about any change or transitions
- resort to their obsession as a way to reduce anxiety especially when faced with change
- react particularly strongly to a change involving their obsession or associated routines
- experience anxiety prior, during or after moments of transition
- need repeated reassurance during transition
- ask repeated questions regarding the transition
- find it difficult to predict what will or could happen next
- have a strong need to be in control
- not be able to predict what the transition will look or feel like.

Key transitions to consider may include moving:

- from home to setting/school at the beginning of the day, and vice versa
- between activities within the setting/classroom environment
- from one environment to other areas of the setting/school, for example from the hall or lunch area

Strategies for managing change and transitions:

- Identify potentially difficult transitions

Discuss with colleagues and parents the possible times throughout the day or week which might prove challenging for the child. Parents will be able to share their experience of previous transitions, which can inform planning for future change.

Strategies to support transition and monitoring include:

- Formal and/or informal meetings such as Transition Inclusion Support meetings (TISMs) with parents to discuss transitions and establish successful strategies that have been used previously
- Allocated time at the beginning or end of the academic year to meet with previous setting/class and practitioners/teachers to share information relating to transitions
- Opportunities provided for staff to visit, observe and meet the child in the current setting.
- Opportunities provided for the child to share their 'Learning Journey'
- Plan a home visit.

Use visual resources

See Section Four. Visual timetables are a clear way to show children that there will be a change. Alternatively the timetable may involve pictures, photos and or words. Language jigs can be used as visual representations of the sequence of events to expect.

Preparation books, detailing the changes and what will occur, can support the child for bigger transitions, for example, a new setting/class book. If possible, allow the child to take their own photographs to go into the book to illustrate the aspects that are important to him/her. Maps and photographs of key new staff can be useful if a child is changing rooms/setting/school.

Coping with change

There are times when things change. Sometimes we know that things are going to change.

Sometimes things change without warning.

This can make us feel worried or angry.

It is ok to feel worried or angry.

When things change I could say to myself: "Things have changed but I am still ok."

If I feel worried or angry I can talk to an adult.

Adults can help me to understand why things have changed.

This will help me to stay calm.

Staying calm will help me to deal with change.

This will make me happy.

This week please read this social story with me to help me to cope with change.



Give advance warning of change

Wherever possible, inform the child of any changes that are going to take place and explain why the change is going to happen. The timing of giving this information needs to be judged according to the individual child. Some children on the autistic spectrum need a long time to get used to the idea of a change and think it through, whereas telling other children well in advance simply heightens anxiety levels as they worry about it continuously.

Prepare or rehearse

If possible, prepare the child in advance by for example, showing them the new environment they will be in, visiting the new setting/school when other children are not present can help reduce anxieties. Walking around the outside area boundaries can be beneficial in helping to establish where it is permitted to go.

Provide structure

Many children on the autistic spectrum respond best to a high degree of structure. Sessions/ activities should have a clearly defined structure so that children understand what is going to happen and how different activities relate to each other. Ensure that key learning points are emphasised and understood by the child. More able children are often deeply upset or angry if their peers 'mess around' or break the rules. Children may challenge peers or staff if they are not following rules precisely. Be aware that children on the autistic spectrum may not be aware of 'unwritten' rules.

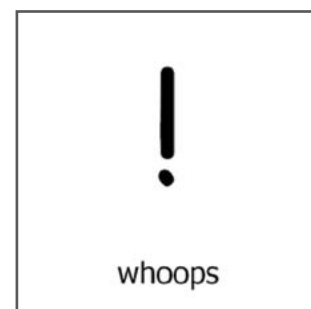
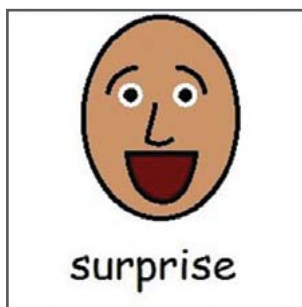
Give reassurance

If faced with an unexpected change, tell the child what will happen in a clear, concise way and reassure him/her that he will be okay. It can also be beneficial to inform the child what will happen after the unexpected event, for example, "After the fire drill, we will go back to the classroom". With more able children, seek their input about what might help them to manage and/or suggest ideas. For example: "Would it help if we stood at the back where there is less noise?"

Some children on the autistic spectrum are unable to cope with sudden change and may need to be taken away from the situation or allowed to go to a 'safe' place, given time to calm down without verbal intervention, and/or distracted by a favourite activity. If the child is overwhelmed, do not make demands or question his/her behaviour.

Some children may need a clear visual cue such as a surprise card, which can be shown to the child each time something unforeseen happens. Show the child the card and explain what the change is, using the appropriate level of language. This might be very simple, such as, "Surprise/whoops. No swimming" or for a more able child, "Duncan, this is a surprise because we cannot go outside - the workmen are here. But it is ok. You will stay here with me to play..."

Another simple visual card



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It may be necessary to allow the child to engage in a preferred activity for a few minutes whilst he or she processes the change or comes to terms with disappointment. Ensure that you give the child reassurance, even if you do not know exactly what will be happening.

Changing task or activity

Some children may need support to change task, for example a 5 minute warning of when the next activity will start. Younger children may need symbols which can be printed and laminated and show the order of tasks, usually no more than three tasks at a time. These children can be taught to take off each symbol as the task is completed and put away in a 'finished' box so that there is a clear start and end to activities.

Similarly, children on the autistic spectrum may need reminding or warning prior to the end of an activity/session to enable them to prepare for the transition to the next lesson or activity. This can be verbal, or visual. Some children respond well to the use of a timer. Electronic timers, sand timers and kitchen timers can all be used. Consider what the child may respond best to. For example, a child who has a sensory sensitivity to lights may not cope with a timer that flashes. However, a child who has a special interest in traffic lights could respond well to a timer that goes through the colours of red, amber and green as the time decreases.

Changing between areas

Children on the autistic spectrum may become distressed when moving through noisy, crowded areas particularly if they have sensory issues (see section five) and intensely dislike others' touch. Many children find it difficult to tolerate the inadvertent bumping and jostling that can occur and do not always understand that this is unintentional.

Some children have poor proprioceptive skills so cannot judge well where their body is within a space and so they may annoy their peers by bumping into them or objects.

Children on the autistic spectrum are also at more risk of others exploiting them during these times, so may benefit from the following strategies:

- Being first or last to go to the coat area and/or being accompanied by an adult.
- Specifically practising moving through the setting/school with a staff member who is able to provide clear feedback about how to behave,

where to look and so on.

- Role play, with an adult and the child plays his or herself to practice how to move around and what to say if s/he is accidentally jostled or bump into someone else.
- Use of a visual strategy to support appropriate behaviour, such as a language jig or social story.

Support following transitions

Children may also need support after a transition has occurred, particularly if this is a major one. Consideration may need to be given to the deployment of staff in the early weeks following transition. Staff should be made aware that children' anxiety levels may remain heightened and that they may need additional support.

Support during transitions can take many different forms and may include, for example:

- careful monitoring of the child throughout the day to identify any areas of difficulty in the new setting and strategies to resolve these ,such as allowing the child to be at the front of the lunch queue if this is an issue.
- peer support or mentoring from an older peer who knows the environment and systems well.

Allow time for questions

Some children repeatedly ask questions when faced with unexplained or unplanned transitions. It is important to allow time for these questions, and to answer them in a calm and reassuring way. If questioning increases to the point where it is intrusive and the child is repeating the same question over and over again despite being given an answer, careful management is required. A question and answer card, which the child can refer to, can act as a concrete and visual reminder for the child. If possible the question should be phrased in the child's own words.

Some children may require verbal prompting. Avoid answering the same question repeatedly as this is counter-productive. Remind children that they have already been given an answer.

Allow for calm time

It is essential to be aware of and plan effective calming activities for children during periods of transition. For example, allowing the child to be met by a practitioner/teaching assistant or peer prior to entering the setting/classroom. Ensure that there is visual support, if appropriate. The use of obsessions as part of a calming resource may be appropriate. See Section eight .

Moving on - tailoring phase transitions to the needs of the child

When planning for phase transitions it is important to consider what the child requires to ensure that the transition is a success. This is particularly true when planning for the transitions that involve different environments and settings. In such cases the child may require a longer period of time for preparing for the transitions. Before beginning the transition, discuss previous changes that have occurred, for example, moving from home to pre-school or moving house.

Plan bespoke visits

Children on the autism spectrum may require a number of visits to the new setting/class. Short visits of increasing length over a period of days or weeks may help develop the child's understanding of the forthcoming change. Having several visits allows time for the child to adjust to the new surroundings. Many settings/schools have had success with arranging short visits before or after a session, during the school holidays or for example during an inset day when the classroom can be explored whilst it is empty of children. This may help support the child when returning to school after a long holiday.

Ensure that the child is engaged in the process. Ensure that the child is aware of key places in the new setting, for example where the toilets are and where to hang your coat. For younger children a 'Things I want to find out book' can be created and items ticked off once completed.

Establish practical arrangements

As many children on the autistic spectrum have poor organisational skills it is really important to find out and discuss how the practical arrangements will work. For example:

- considering where the child has to go when arriving at setting/school and at the end of the day.
- looking at the areas available at break and lunch times to establish where the child is likely to be most comfortable.
- identifying any areas which are likely to cause particular difficulty in terms of sensory issues (see section 5) and considering whether there is an alternative area that could be used or where the child could be sat to minimise the difficulty. For example, Not sitting the child next to an open window if s/he is hypersensitive to smells coming from the kitchen.

Get the right member of staff for support

Consider who supports the child during the visit. It should be someone who knows the child well, and the child has a good relationship with for example their key person. The parent or member of staff can support the child with introductions to new members of staff.

Work on additional skills required in the new setting

Children may need to be specifically taught new skills, particularly when transferring from early years setting to primary to school. They may need to learn how to manage lunch from a lunch box/ change for PE. Spend time in the lead up to the transition explicitly explaining and teaching these new skills and provide opportunities for practice. These could link to 'I can' statements, which the child can refer to as preparation for their move.

Highlight new or different rules

Ensure that the child and their parents are aware of any changes in rules in the different setting.

Keep the child and the parents informed

Ensure that both the child and parents are fully informed of the different stages and activities involved in working towards the transition. Parents may also need to practice some skills related to going to the new setting/school with their son or daughter. It is helpful if parents have also visited the new environment and are aware of, for example where the toilets are so that they can help manage the child's anxiety at home. Any strategies that have worked successfully must be shared, in addition to any areas of difficulty so that parents and school staff can use a consistent approach.



Section 10: Accessing learning within setting/school environment

Strategies for difficulties that children may have in the areas of language and communication, social interaction, rigidity and obsessions and sensory issues are covered in detail in Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8. This section, therefore, highlights only additional issues which may occur in a classroom or the wider setting/school environment.

A common difficulty experienced is that children on the autistic spectrum may wish to work only on their own agenda. This is often due to the child's rigid thinking. There is usually a very genuine reason why children will not do as asked, which the child may or may not be able to explain. These reasons may seem trivial or incomprehensible to others and may include:

- not understanding what to do or what is expected
- not understanding why the work or task is relevant
- rigidity about the way in which the work is presented, such as the colour, layout, font, or use of particular words
- not feeling 'safe' about what they have been asked to do.

Whilst the ultimate aim may be for the child to comply with instructions and work in the same way as their peers, this may need a gradual, staged and flexible approach.

Many children are also very particular about certain aspects of their work and may insist on work being 'perfect' regardless of the time this takes or other demands. Other children will not attempt any activity, or offer their suggestions for fear of getting it wrong.

Early years settings and reception classes can be very busy, vibrant, visual stimulating environments which can be very distracting for children on the autism spectrum. The child may need quiet spaces to help them focus. Pop-up tents make a good pack away quiet space.

The Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children

(TEACCH) approach provides for structured teaching, a change in activities to maintain interest with a Reward at the end, and helps to focus on adult agenda and timescale. It encompasses the use of an individualised work station in the setting to provide structure for new learning within a low arousal environment.

TEACCH advocates using lots of visual support, structure and cues to enable access, independence and increased understanding. It also advocates the use of red trays to contain activities ready for completion (to do), which will then be placed in a green tray, showing that the activity is finished (finished tray). A reward is then offered, for example return to the class, or the choice of a favoured activity.

Children may:

- have problems maintaining and switching focus, and knowing where to focus attention
- only be able to listen to verbal language for short periods of time
- find it challenging to sit in close proximity of other children
- find it difficult or be unable to work in a group
- find it hard to maintain an appropriate sitting position
- fiddle or become preoccupied with objects around them
- not recognise or find it difficult to ask for help
- have a strong fear of failure
- not be able to cope with making mistakes
- not be aware of classroom rules, for example they may shout out or interrupt
- need high levels of reassurance
- find it difficult to manage distractions such as flickering lights due sensory issues
- engage in repetitive behaviours such as making noises or movements which disturb others
- follow own agenda and wander round the room or be unwilling to complete work unless on their own terms.



Strategies

Positioning in the classroom or on the carpet

It may be necessary to provide a marker or label to remind children where they need to sit. Younger children may need a carpet tile or spot, or may benefit from having a taped area around the desk or carpet to act as a boundary for both themselves and others. Children may require help to sit appropriately next to others without touching them or their belongings. Some children cannot tolerate others touching them or their belongings and need to be given a set space that is 'theirs' in each classroom and/or clear reassurance that others won't touch. Sit the child away from objects or other children that may be distracting. Ensure that children understand exactly what 'good sitting' means and use visual or verbal prompts as necessary.

Example of marking a place to sit



Example of a bare work station



Example of a work station with symbols



Cue children in to when and where they need to pay attention

Within a busy environment, children may need to be prompted about when and where to focus their attention. Encourage children to give visual and auditory attention and tell them specifically what or who they should look at. This can be effectively done as a whole class approach i.e. expecting and reminding all children to listen and look at the person speaking but the child may need the additional cue of his or her name to understand that the instruction applies to him or her.

Consider the amount of 'listening time'

Children who have difficulty with processing and understanding language are likely to 'switch off' or cause disruption to others. Where possible, do not expect the child to listen for extended periods of time. Children may benefit from being key instructions or facts in a written and/or visual format so that they are able to start work before the rest of the group. Alternatively, provide the child with another, non-disruptive activity to do whilst the other children discuss the topic, then provide key information. Some children respond well to gradually building up the amount of time they are expected to listen by using a timer.

Encourage children to ask for help

Children may have difficulty knowing when they need support and/or requesting it. For children who are acutely anxious about being 'singled out' by peers a discrete signal may need to be devised. This ensures that when the child uses the agreed signal the staff member knows that she or he needs help and approaches the child. Younger children may require specific work to recognise when they need help as well as when and how to ask for help appropriately. A 'help' card or other visual prompt which the child holds up or puts out may be useful.

Give the child a specific role in group work

Many children find group work difficult because they are unsure what they and other children need to do. Giving children a specific role or job within the group can help create a structure. Younger children may need adult support to manage some aspects of group work. When planning a group task, consider whether the child is likely to be able to access all of it, and what prompts or support might be required. An individual alternative activity many need to be designed, preferably one which can still be used as a contribution towards the group task. Older/more able children may require adult support or reassurance. Reinforcing the social rules verbally and/or visually is often helpful, for example, reminding children that everyone takes turns to talk.

Broaden the child's ability to follow others' agendas

If the child is refusing to, or appears unable to follow instructions or do as asked, try to establish what is causing the difficulty or refusal to comply. It is important to first check that the child has fully understood the task, and if/ not ensure that s/he is given a clear explanation. Other strategies which may be helpful are as follows:

- Give very explicit guidelines about the quantity and quality of work that needs to be completed.
- Give a time limit so that the child knows when the activity will start and end.
- Reassure the child that s/he just needs to do his or her best, particularly if the task is new or unfamiliar.
- Use appropriate motivators and rewards.
- Consider which elements of the task are essential and which are desirable. This reduces demands on the child and may enable him or her to engage.

Make playroom/classroom rules explicit

Ensure that children understand the classroom rules. Have visual or written prompts displayed to remind children if necessary. Use a visual cue card and simple language, for example, "Hand up to talk!" for younger children.

Make playroom/classroom rules explicit

Ensure that pupils understand the classroom rules. Have visual or written prompts displayed to remind pupils if necessary. If a child breaks a classroom rule, give him or her clear feedback. For example, if a child shouts out, "Mark, that's a great idea but you shouted out. Remember to put your hand up if you want to tell me something!" Use a visual cue card and simpler language, for example, "Hand up to talk!" for younger children.



Example of visual representation of classroom rules:

Reduce or structure open-ended tasks

Children generally find open-ended tasks difficult as they many not know what information is needed or where to start. Break down tasks using visual prompts. See also Section six re types of questions to use.

Utilise the children's strengths

Many children have particular strengths such as finding and recalling factual information, attention to detail, ensuring that items are in the correct place and ICT skills. Consider how tasks within the classroom can be geared towards maximising these strengths. Just like other children those on the autistic spectrum may also enjoy or be enabled to 'teach' their peers certain skills or information, which can raise their self-esteem.

Be aware of fear of failure

A strong fear of failure can be a barrier to attempting tasks for many children. Always encourage the child to try and reinforce that 'trying' is the most important aspect of a task, not necessarily the result. Provide reassurance before expecting the child to start the task, and throughout the task, if necessary. Other useful strategies may be as follows:

- Show the child that it is okay to make mistakes, and highlight your own mistakes. This provides a good opportunity for staff to model how they deal with mistakes. Ensure that a range of responses are modelled. For example, a minor mistake may be responded to with, "Oh dear, never mind!" whereas for a more serious mistake, it may be appropriate to demonstrate feeling frustrated with oneself as well as how to resolve the situation.
- Ensure that the task is broken down into small, manageable 'chunks' so that the child feels it is achievable.
- Praise or reward success even if it is only a very small step.

Make explicit links to enable children to transfer skills or information

Children on the autistic spectrum and those with communication difficulties often have significant difficulty in transferring or generalising information/skills learnt in one context to another. This difficulty with transferring knowledge can occur within tasks, if the task changes slightly, or when moving from one task to another in the same activity or lesson.

Identify key concepts and vocabulary

Identifying the key concepts and vocabulary within a lesson that children need to learn can help them to focus on these rather than less important information. Many children will need repetition and reinforcement in order to learn new information.

This may be achieved by:

- pre-teaching key concepts and vocabulary before the activity or lesson
- providing a book or resource containing key concepts or vocabulary using simple language
- practising or learning key concepts or vocabulary as homework.

10.1 The importance of play

Young children with autism often play differently from their typically developing peers and there can be many reasons for this. Play is usually a social activity where children use their communication skills and their imaginations, for children with autism their play may be solitary or parallel, playing alongside with little interaction. There may sensory elements to their play such as needing to smell objects or line up toys. Imaginative play may not develop in the same way as other children. Repetitive play is often a key feature, as Children with autism like to maintain sameness. They may absorb themselves in these activities for long periods of time and it can be difficult to move them on. Observing the child's play to establish the developmental level is crucial. This is will be the starting point to enable you to play with them and enable their play to develop further.

Observe the child

- In different play situations - inside and outside
- With a range of activities
- With another adult
- With another child
- What toys/items are they most interested in?
- What is the child doing?

Items which may capture their interest

- Bubbles
- Balloons
- Toys for blowing
- Fabrics of different textures
- Moving/spinning/vibrating/musical toys
- Cause and effect i.e. jack in the box
- Train sets/cars
- Playdough

Play should be fun!

What really motivates the child? It may not be toys but other items or parts of items finding the motivator will be the key to joining the play of a child with autism.

Get down to their level; lie on the floor if needed. You may need to be very animated and have a range of toys to entice them to interact. Be observant for any signs of interaction even fleeting eye contact.

Think about the environment, are there things around which may be distracting or making the child anxious.

Gaining attention

Strategies will vary depending on individual child. The aim would be for you to pause and wait for some acknowledgement from the child before continuing.

- Blowing bubbles
- Tickling
- 'Peek a boo'
- Singing favourite rhyme
- Tapping out a rhythm on a drum

Remember to pause and wait for a signal before continuing. Follow the child's play don't try and lead it at this point. Once you have the child's interest try to develop the interaction by using other motivating toys/items but remember to stop when you feel the child has had enough. Having two sets of identical toys/items - one for the child and one for you can be beneficial it will allow to copy the child allowing them to take the imitative, you may also be able to guide the play using your matching toy.

Other strategies

- Use the visual timetable/ now and next board/ TEACCH to show clearly when play is finished and what will happen next
- Make up a 'finished' - 'putting the toys away' song if the child enjoying songs to help prepare for the end of the activity
- Use visual supports/cues for any turn taking activities, and sand timers for bringing a favourite activity to a close.
- Always start with play with one adult before introducing another child as this can become challenging.
- A 'Social story' TM to set the scene for what will happen in the play session.

Remember !

- Is the child motivated by the play activity?
- Is the toy or play motivating?
- Does the child know what is expected?

Section 11: Potential hotspots and triggers

The setting/school environment with its' vibrant and colourful wall displays, special events, fire drills, rules and regulations, and confusing mass of interacting faces, noises, sights and sounds may pose many challenges to a child on the autism spectrum. The demands placed on a child to make sense of this environment can potentially overwhelm him or her. See Section five.

Example of a busy setting/school environment



Confusing demands and stimuli may result in a physical or verbal outburst, withdrawal, refusal to co-operate, or engagement in a repetitive action. These behaviours often communicate the intense discomfort, anxiety or fear that the child is experiencing. It is therefore important to be aware of the demands and stresses certain situations within setting/school may create for children on the autism spectrum. Whilst it is not always possible to pre-empt how a child will react in a new situation, there may be ways to adapt the environment and plan ahead. Careful observation of behaviour informs future support when similar situations arise.

Section 11.1: Large groups, assemblies and special events

There are many events that take place throughout the setting/school where the structure, timing, content, presentation, rules and environment can be difficult for the child on the autism spectrum. Whilst the aim would be to eventually enable the child to be included in these events this will probably need to be worked towards via a number of small graduated steps.

Children may:

- find it difficult to be with a large group of people
- react to being in close proximity of other children and inclined to touch or push them away
- be worried about how long the event will take and when, or if, it will finish
- be anxious about where they are going to sit, what it will be about and who will be leading the event
- find it difficult to cope with sensory stimuli such as loud singing, the acoustics of a large hall, the smell of food from the kitchen or the texture of the floorboards
- find it difficult to sit or stand still and listen for periods of time
- be worried about what they have to do when, and be unable to wait around for their turn For example, in a sports event
- engage in repetitive behaviours due to anxiety. These could include rocking or making noises which may distract others and attract unwanted attention
- lack interest in the subject matter or be unable to understand what is happening or being said
- have reduced attention and comprehension skills due to sensory distractions or difficulties with other people and/or the environment
- interrupt, ask inappropriate questions or answer rhetorical questions
- have fears or phobias resulting from previous experiences that caused anxiety such as loud clapping when certificates were given out
- become anxious if things don't go to plan, such as an event being cancelled due to bad weather
- not understand the rules of different sporting events, dislike the sound of whistles and find it hard to cope with winning and losing.

Strategies

Use visual supports

See Section Four. Remember that language jigs can be drawn quickly before an event is about to happen, particularly if there is a sudden change of plan. Children may like to be present when the language jig is being drawn. This will provide opportunities to talk through the steps of the event with the child and add detail that might be important to him/her.

Visual timetables can be used to plan ahead and prepare children for different events they will be attending. Use visual cue cards to remind children of the specific behaviours required in certain situations. These might include reminders to be quiet and the need to raise hands to answer or ask questions.

Forward and backward chaining

Open ended situations that have no clear sequential steps or conclusions can cause a child on the autism spectrum to become extremely anxious. Backward chaining is a useful strategy for a child who finds it difficult to cope in these situations and may only be able to participate for a short time. This strategy requires a child to join in with an activity for the last, rather than for the first five minutes. The intention is that sequences of events leading to the end of the activity become predictable and thus less likely to cause anxiety. Language jigs and timers may also be required to support the learning of routines, however once a child is familiar with and able to cope for a five minute period it may be possible to extend time from the end backwards.

Fiddle/comfort objects

A familiar toy or object that a child can hold on to, stroke, twist or squeeze may provide a distraction from anxieties, and provide comfort and reassurance. It is important that it is not distracting to others.

Reduce waiting time

For events which involve the child having to wait for his/her turn, consider arranging their turn at the beginning of the session. It may be necessary to provide alternative activities once the child has had his/her turn.

Allow time

It is important that time is allocated to support children to gradually increase their confidence to take part in large group events. It may be necessary to slowly build up the amount of time that the child is able to spend at these events or provide alternate arrangements, such as allowing the child to read a book in a quieter location whilst the event takes place.

Section 11.2: Break and lunchtimes

Less structured times of the day can provoke increased anxiety for children on the autism spectrum. Children may be unsure how to behave, and there may be issues about the number of people, noise and social demands. Some children may seek interaction with others but lack the social skills and understanding to do this successfully. Others actively avoid other children and appear to retreat into their own world or behave in a manner that may attract negative attention. As a result the child may return to the play/classroom following break time too stressed and anxious to be able to concentrate or participate in the activity/lesson.

Whilst break times provide opportunities to teach social skills in a naturally occurring way, this will need to be carefully tailored to individual needs. Some children will need 'time out' from exhausting social demands and want to be left alone. Older/more able children often really appreciate being given advice and/or support to interact with peers.

It is important that staff are fully aware of how stressful break and lunch times can be for children on the autistic spectrum, even those who appear socially able. Some may hide to avoid being around peers. All are potentially vulnerable due to their lack of social understanding and the

opportunity for peers to say and do things which may not be heard or seen by supervising staff.

At break/outside times children may:

- lack the social skills to make and sustain friendships and this can cause great distress
- be disliked as a result of acting as 'whistle blowers' when rules are seen to be broken
- be excluded from games due to poor understanding of, or unwillingness to accept, rules and to co-operate
- be avoided by others on account of their controlling behaviour and tendency to take over games
- retreat from or reject approaches from others
- misinterpret others' intentions and become involved in disputes or upsets
- invade people's personal space
- play roughly or engage in socially inappropriate physical contact such as licking, stroking and biting
- be teased and provoked as a result of over reactions to seemingly trivial incidents
- prefer their own company, pursuing repetitive activities or appearing to wander around aimlessly
- be unaware of their differences and have no desire or need to make friends or 'fit in'
- have a high pain threshold and show no reaction even if badly hurt
- have a low pain threshold and perceive a tap on the arm as a punch.

In addition, at lunch times children may:

- not like the noise, bustle and close proximity of other children in the dining room
- be unable to stand in a queue due to other children being too close
- have sensory issues with the smell, taste, appearance and texture of different food stuffs
- need to have food presented in a particular way such as toast cut into eight squares, different food stuffs not touching one another on the plate or having food mashed
- have problems using cutlery appropriately
- have limited understanding of the rules of dining etiquette such as not talking with mouth full, licking plates or eating with fingers
- be reluctant to try new foods
- be anxious about where they are going to sit and who will be near them
- have limited understanding of the sequence of events leading to collecting a meal from the counter or scraping plates and placing cutlery in a bowl
- be reluctant or unable to eat in front of others.

Strategies

Use scripts

Develop scripts for specific issues such as starting conversations, joining in a game, eating lunch or responding to teasing and bullying. Language jigs provide a visual representation of the dinner time sequence. Draw language jigs or write social stories™ with the child to explain what will happen and when or explain socially acceptable behaviour.

Familiarise the child with the area

Visit the dining room/playground or other break time/outside areas when quiet, if necessary. Point out ways in and out of the area or room so that the child knows where to exit quickly from if overloaded. This allows the child to look around properly and ask any questions when feeling calm. For younger children it may be helpful to use labels or symbols for particular areas or items s/he needs to know e.g. where to put the dirty plates.

Identify an appropriate place for children to eat

If the child is unable or unwilling to eat in front of others s/he needs to be given a suitable place to do this and a gradual, staged plan to increase their tolerance of eating in public. Some children would rather eat nothing all day than have to eat with others. There are a number of reasons which can cause difficulty with eating in public, including sensory overload and obsessive-compulsive traits about food preparation or hygiene.

Gustatory issues related to sensory sensitivities

Consult with parents or carers and ensure that staff are aware of any gustatory issues that the child may have with some tastes or textures. This may also include not being able to manage some tastes or textures together.

Hypersensitive children may find particular tastes or textures intolerable and may need food presented in certain ways. For example, they may tolerate smooth sauces or textures but be unable to eat any 'lumps'.

Hyposensitive children may have a preference for very strongly flavoured foods and may put non-food items in their mouths. It may be possible to provide opportunities for this type of sensory feedback by, for example, allowing the child to suck a lollipop or eat something rather than sucking or putting a non-food item in his or her mouth at appropriate times.

Structure the time

Divide break and lunch time into manageable chunks so that the child has a plan to follow. Younger children may need a visual timetable or prompts. For example, a language jig to remind them what time lunch starts, where to sit, where to place their dirty plate or lunchbox and what they are going to play with outside.

Make rules explicit

Explain the rules and why they are important, such as the importance of not using a ball in certain area outside so that younger children are not hurt.

Timers

Use timers to give a visual warning that the end of break time is approaching if this is a particular issue for children. For example, using sand timer or placing a sign on the classroom window which is visible to the child to indicate when there is ten minutes of break time left.

Time out

It is important that children have a safe place to go and relax. This could be in a quiet area of the playground or elsewhere in the setting/school. Some children will also benefit from having an allocated area aside from the playground where they are able to flap, spin or talk to themselves if needed. Children may enjoy having mats to roll up in or tents to hide in as a means of addressing sensory needs.

Give limited choices

Limiting choices of activity will encourage appropriate choices to be made, for example: "Skipping rope or ball?", "Would you like to use the computer or read?" If necessary, use visual aids to support choices and timers to indicate how long the activity will last.

Positive role models

Understanding peers may be willing to help to support the child join in with activities or social interaction. This needs to be carefully managed with an agreement from the child and his/her peers about how and when the support will take place.

Relaxation time

Offer children 'time out' or relaxation time following or towards the end of break and lunch times before they re-join the class. This could include time for special interests.

De-stressing or alternative activities

Offering de-stressing activities which are appropriate for age and ability, such as running, bouncing a ball, blowing bubbles, reading or computer time may help a child to relax or calm down. Many children have obsessions and special interests which provide a focus for activities or form the basis of a club.

Access to help

Children need to be aware of how to access help. This could be via a 'help card' allowing him/her to go to the staffroom or support room to speak with a particular member of staff. Once the child understands that support is readily available it may be that just having the card available in a pocket is sufficient to allay anxieties.

Section 11.3: Supply staff/ teachers and visitors to setting, or school

Visitors, especially supply staff/teachers or cover staff, may cause additional anxiety for children on the autistic spectrum as it involves a change in the established routine.

Children may:

- be worried that an unfamiliar person will not be aware of or understand their difficulties
- find it difficult to cope with or understand an unfamiliar teaching style or way of doing things
- behave less well than usual because of their anxiety, which could include withdrawal, lack of cooperation, repetitive routines or disruptive behaviour
- communicate less well than usual so may resort to repetitive questioning or talking obsessively about a subject
- be anxious about where their usual teacher is and whether s/he will return
- May be more likely to get into a conflict because of how the visitor perceives their behaviour.

Strategies for supply staff, cover staff, or visitors:

Also see Section 9.

Warn the child in advance

If the supply staff/teacher or visitor is planned, inform the child beforehand and explain the reason for the change. If the change is an unexpected one, for example, the usual teacher is ill, it is still helpful to let the child know before s/he is faced with an unfamiliar adult. Younger children will need simple explanation, visual support or a quickly sketched language jig.

Reassure the child

Whether it is a planned or unexpected change, children on the autistic spectrum generally benefit from, and require, reassurance. The nature of the reassurance depends upon the individual child's needs and level of understanding. Younger children may want reassurance that the routine will stay the same, they will still be allowed a comfort toy or time out for their obsession. If the child is likely to become extremely anxious and need to exit the room, make sure that s/he knows what to do and the supply staff understand what is planned and why.

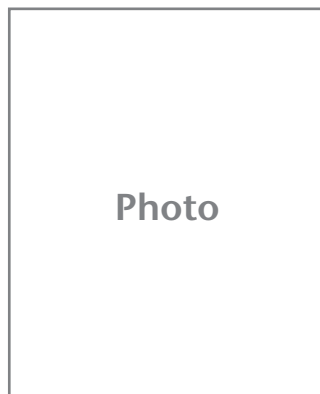
Provide key information about the child

Ensure that there is an information sheet that is given to visitors or supply staff about the child. This should include an outline of the child's needs, what s/he finds particularly difficult, any triggers, how to communicate with the child and strategies which help. Ensure that the supply teacher knows what the procedure is if the child's behaviour becomes particularly challenging or the child becomes overwhelmed and leaves the classroom. This is particularly important if there are no other staff members around who know the child, as the wrong approach from supply staff may exacerbate the situation further.



Examples of 'Important information about me'

Name



What people like and admire about me...

My smile
 I am affectionate
 I play nicely with my brother and sister I have a happy laugh and sense of humour
 I have lots of enthusiasm and energy
 My independence.

What is Important to me...

I love animals - I am interested in all animals and enjoy looking at pictures and books and talking about them.

I may talk to you about my visit to the zoo or dinosaur park from my holiday. I may talk to you about my pet hamster xxxx. I am a very caring little boy and understand how to handle and feed my pets. I may talk to you about my cat xxxx. She no longer lives with me, but I miss her.

I love looking at books - "special books" I love the enormous crocodile/animal stories/Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and the Gruffalo.

Photographs are interesting to me and I like to use my camera and take photos

How best to support me...

Using pictures/photos/communication book helps me to understand new things. I respond very well to now.....next.....simple instructions

Be patient with me, I need time to think and respond to your instructions/request - if you are too quick to repeat your request that is the time when I am more than likely to scream at you or run off

If I do scream at you when you are trying to explain things/talk to me - it works better if you ignore me/stop talking to me - if you keep repeating the instructions/request or question I am more likely to keep screaming back at you

I like to have one or two special friends, but may need your help to approach them and get them to join in the things I like to do or to understand me.

I am very independent, I like to do things for myself - if people are too quick to jump in then that is when I am more than likely to scream or hit out at you or others

If I do have a meltdown it works better to leave me/ignore me - if you approach me or try to talk to me that is when it is more than likely I will continue to scream at you or run off or start to throw things

I am a strong boy and I can get over excited- that is when I am most likely to "launch myself" at you or to scream or run around - I need a calm adult to support me at times of change.

I need a quiet area in which I can take myself off to calm down. I don't like being touched when I am upset but may respond to rubbing my thigh

Section 11.4: Setting/school trips

Going on a day trip from setting/school can provoke anxiety as it involves significant changes to the normal routine and children may be unsure what to expect. However, if prepared in the right way they can benefit immensely from 'real life' learning.

It is important to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made in order to ensure that the trip is successful for the child.

Children may:

- be uncertain about where they are going, who they are going with, and whether they will be coming back
- be anxious about times of departure and arrival and need reassurance about when they will, for example, eat lunch, have a drink and go to the toilet
- be worried about using unfamiliar toilets (particularly those with an electric hand dryer)
- have a limited or heightened sense of danger and may cling to an adult for reassurance or wander off and approach strangers
- not understand the specific rules such as the need to use a quiet voice in libraries or not touch or climb on exhibits in a museum
- find it difficult to cope if things don't go to plan such as a walk on the beach being cancelled due to bad weather.

Strategies

Talk to parents about any potential areas of difficulty

Identify any possible areas of concern and strategies that parents use effectively. Make a note of these so that staff on the trip can refer to them if necessary. Ensure that this includes independence skills, personal hygiene, organisation skills and any issues around food. If the child has a restricted diet, ask parents to provide a list of what their child will eat and/or provide appropriate food that is transportable.

Use visual support strategies

See Section Four. These can include details of the stages of the journey, a visual plan of the journey so that children are engaged looking for landmarks and/or a timetable. Ensure that the child understands what will happen when. It may be necessary to 'build in' what might happen in the event of something unexpected, such as extremely hot weather and how this could affect activities.

Use familiar items or routines to reduce anxiety

On day trips children may have a particular item which comforts them. Children may need to be able to follow familiar routines, for example ensuring bedtimes stay the same, or doing the morning routine in the same order.

Time out

Children may require 'time out' during trips from the constant contact with other children and expectations to join in and interact. Children may also need a break from the general expectation that the activities and being with others is fun, as this may not be their experience. They may require some time alone during the day to relax, follow their interests or engage in calming activities. It is important to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made in order to ensure that the trip is successful for the child.

11.5: Health and safety

Young children with autism can be unpredictable. This makes risk assessment more difficult, but being prepared can help staff overcome any problems.

There may be extra considerations and plans need to be made to ensure the child is fully included. Written risk assessments are vital and should always be drawn up with parents as they know their child best. Actions should be recorded as to how the risks will be minimized. Risk assessments are vital.

Section 12: Working in partnership with parents and carers

Working closely with parents or carers is crucial for the successful education of all children and this is especially true for those on the autistic spectrum. Parents/carers have a unique insight into the child's strengths, needs, past history and previous experience. Parents may have already tried a wide range of strategies which work well, or may feel that professionals have not understood the child or have been critical of their parenting skills. Encouraging parents to share this information and adopting an open 'no blame' attitude will support a consistent and successful approach for the child.

All staff should be aware that children on the autistic spectrum may exhibit vastly different behaviour in the setting/school and home environment. Some children who appear compliant at setting/school can be extremely challenging towards all or certain family members. The effort of 'coping' within the setting/ school environment can be exhausting and leads to the child completely 'letting go' at home.

For other children, high anxiety levels caused by the inherent difficulties of the school environment, social demands and inability to follow their own agenda lead to challenging behaviour. However, at home they are calm because they are able to follow their routines and interests and there are reduced demands.

Children on the autistic spectrum may also show a high degree of controlling behaviour, both emotionally and/or physically which has a significant detrimental effect upon family life and dynamics. This may include the child trying to determine where family members are allowed to sit, which TV programmes are watched, what is eaten and when, and where the family is allowed to go outside of the family home.

Children on the autistic spectrum may also require close supervision, and high levels of structure and routine in order to minimise destructive or challenging behaviour so families may feel that they have very limited options to visit new places

or go on holiday. Parents may have little or no respite from the daily demands of caring for the child and experience a lack of understanding from other parents. An extremely strong dependency can develop between the parent and the child, which may not be appropriate for the child's age and ability.

Some parents understandably become protective, whilst others may be unaware of the extent of the vulnerabilities of the child. This can then make it very difficult for parents to respond to other siblings' needs, and siblings themselves may become closely involved with supporting the child on the autistic spectrum or may resent the amount of time that parents spend with him/her.

It is, therefore, important not to underestimate the high levels of anxiety and stress that the parents and siblings of a child on the autistic spectrum may experience. Setting/School staff should be aware of this and work with families positively to support them as well as the child.

Strategies

View the parent as a partner

Research shows that when parents are involved with their children's education children achieve more. It is helpful to work with parents/caregivers to ensure that staff have an up to date profile of how the child may behave in different environments, possible 'triggers' and effective ways of management. This should include an understanding of the issues faced within the home environment, as well as the setting/school, and any changes in behaviour/communication, however minimal.

Effective communication

Parents of all children benefit from regular, detailed information about their child, especially if the child is on the autistic spectrum. This may need to be on a daily basis via a home-school book or other method such as e-mail. Parents may also benefit

from informal meetings where they can air concerns and discuss ways to work collaboratively. This allows a more relaxed relationship to develop and should be dictated by need- parents should feel comfortable to suggest a meeting if they would like one.

Discussing small changes or steps of progress shows the parents that you are mindful of their child which can be very reassuring. As parents of children on the autistic spectrum may be very anxious about their child they might require more staff time than other parents, and need to feel that their view of their child's strengths and difficulties has been listened to and understood. Investing sufficient time to build trust and create a good relationship with parents, with more contact at times of particular difficulty or transition for the child can lessen the amount of contact needed subsequently.

- Identify clearly what is manageable and realistic for parent-setting/school communication. For example, give clear parameters to parents regarding response times to emails so that parents do not expect an instant reply, identify a specific time each week when staff are available to speak to a parent, and explain 'up front' how information can successfully be shared. Parents who are on the autistic spectrum themselves may have difficulty processing language during a phone conversation, for example, so writing information down can be more helpful.
- It can also be helpful to state overtly to parents that misunderstandings can easily occur with children on the autistic spectrum as their perceptions of events may not be accurate. Encourage parents to inform staff immediately if they are concerned about anything that their child is saying about setting/school. e.g. a child may tell a parent that member of staff was very angry with him/her, but has misinterpreted the staff member's tone of voice and facial expression. An early explanation can provide reassurance to parents and avoid the situation escalating.
- If using a home-setting/school book the parameters and expectations regarding this need to be clear, for example, who will monitor the book within school, who will write it in, how

often, how the book will be transported between home and school. Many children on the autistic spectrum have poor organisational skills so relying upon the child to transport the book can be problematic.

- Parents should be made aware of incidents and situations at setting/school and how these have been managed. It is helpful to be explicit about the times when follow up from home is, or is not required and to be clear with parents about the rationale for this.
- Any communication regarding the child should be a balanced reflection, and focus upon the successes as well as the challenges. For example, a particularly good piece of work photographed or commented on, the progress towards and IEP, a successful break time or other social interaction. This can help children to reflect back on when things worked out positively.

Regular formal meetings

In addition to regular informal contact and communication, regular formal meetings to review progress are required. These may include reviews such as Team around the child meetings (TAC) or reviews of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)/'My support plan'. Other formal meetings might include IEP focused meetings to discuss progress and targets, annual reviews of a statement of special educational needs and transition meetings (TISMs).

Voice of the child

Children should be given the opportunity to contribute to any of the above in a way that is appropriate for their age and ability.

Generally, children should be included in all meetings about them if age or developmentally appropriate. Including the child in the meeting provides an opportunity to celebrate strengths and progress, and for consistent messages to be given to the child by staff and parents. 'One page profile' (See Section Eleven) can be used to bring the voice of the child to the meeting.

Consideration should be given to where the meeting is held in terms of lighting, background noise and other sensory issues. Parents and children on the autistic spectrum need information in advance so that they can consider their responses and are not 'put on the spot.'

Use person-centred thinking

Using a person-centred approach means that the individual child is at the centre of all planning and that his or her views are carefully listened to so that s/he is supported in the best way possible.

For example, it is important to:

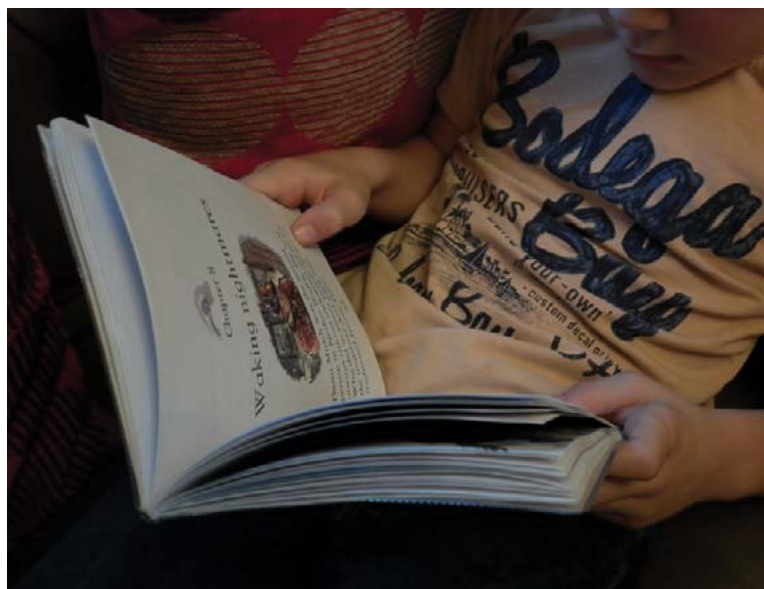
- consider what is important to the child, as well as what is important for him or her.
- identify what is working and what is not working for the child which leads to generating shared actions.
- ensure that s/he is able or enabled to make a meaningful contribution towards any decisions made, whether this is by verbal communication or other means.
- help children to participate and contribute in any activities which are important to them.
- recognise children's aspirations for the future and support them to move towards their goals, making sure that outcomes are suitably challenging but realistic.

Signposting to information and services

Parents may require support from relevant agencies. Family members could be on the autistic spectrum themselves, may be finding acceptance of the child's diagnosis and its implications difficult or need support with daily management of their child's needs. Parents and carers may require support from relevant agencies, such as Wiltshire Parent and Carer Council (WPCC), Carers' Support, Parent Partnership Services, local autism groups or Support in Wiltshire for Autism (SWAPP): Parent's programme). There is a wealth of information relating to the autistic spectrum through books, the internet or other professionals and it can be useful to signpost parents towards informative and accurate resources. See Section 15.

Siblings

The needs of siblings should not be overlooked. It is helpful for them to understand autism and how it may affect their brother or sister, books to help with this are available from Wiltshire library service.



Section 13: Working with support staff

Children on the autism spectrum, like many of their peers, may be supported by an inclusion support worker or teaching assistants in some instances to access learning. Because of the particular difficulties some children on the autistic spectrum experience, it is essential that a clear and consistent approach is agreed and used by all staff working with that individual.

Using a whole setting/school approach is beneficial to support all children, regardless of need, as well as for those children who do not have additional needs. It ensures that any adults who may be in contact with the child during the day, such as the caretaker, midday supervisors, office staff, or parent helpers are fully aware of the child's needs and support him or her in the same way.

Staff may require training to increase their understanding of the child's areas of difficulty, ensure that they have realistic expectations of him or her, and understand how to implement a range of strategies effectively. Good communication between the staff supporting the child is also crucial.

Strategies to support inclusion support workers and teaching assistants

Clarity of role

- All staff who may have contact with the child should be informed about the areas where the child needs support and how this should be delivered. Strategies to support this may include:
- Ensuring that the assistant is clear about who he/she will be working at different times and why.
- Emphasising that the assistant is part of the staff team supporting the child and therefore needs to use consistent approaches. For example, agreed language and vocabulary, motivators, rewards and consequences.
- Regularly reviewing resources and providing regular opportunities for the assistant to discuss any aspect of the child's behaviour, communication or learning that s/he is finding difficult. Specific responses to challenging

behaviour or distress need to be overtly stated and used by all staff.

- Sharing clear expectations for the child based upon the child's profile of strengths and needs, which incorporate sufficient challenge.
- Sharing the IEP and other relevant information with the assistant, including any changes to the child's profile. Ensure that s/he has opportunity to contribute to discussions or meetings and comment on the progress towards targets.
- Discussing the long term aim of the support and the level of independence that the child should demonstrate, or is working towards with the assistant. There needs to be a clear understanding of the concept of 'enabling' the child rather than over-supporting. Over-supporting can lead to considerable difficulties with children achieving less than their potential and there being an inaccurate assessment of a child's abilities.

Ensure effective communication about change with inclusion support workers and teaching assistants

- Ensure that the assistant is made aware of changes to the regular routine, so that s/he can effectively plan and prepare with the child. Such changes may include:
- Changes in staffing
- Changes to routines
- Changes of environment
- Fire drills or other events that may cause sensory overload or high anxiety
- Meetings, visitors and visits

Engage the assistant throughout the process of transition

When a child on the autism spectrum joins the setting/class, ensure that the assistants are effectively engaged in the transition process. This may include sharing information related to diagnosis, strengths and difficulties. It is important that previously effective strategies are shared. Involvement in transition may include the assistant supporting the child as they transfer.

Time to develop resources

Visual aids and resources can be of significant support to the child on the autism spectrum but may be time consuming to make and implement. In order to be effective and successful, time needs to be allocated to enable support staff to investigate, make and introduce the resources to the child.

Appreciate the challenge of the role

Working alongside a child on the autism spectrum can be hugely rewarding but may also be very challenging. Within the staff team, it is important to ensure that all team members feel supported and understand that no one person is solely responsible for any individual child. It should be recognised that staff may sometimes need to take a break from direct work with some children on occasion.

Section 14: Emotional health and wellbeing

Emotional health and wellbeing are important for all children, and often affect children's ability to access the curriculum and cope with the wider environment. Accurately identifying the emotional health and wellbeing of children on the autism spectrum can be especially challenging because of their difficulty with expressing emotions and/or communicating about how they are feeling to others. For example, children's facial expressions may not reflect their feelings and a change in behaviour may be mistakenly attributed to another cause, such as a sensory sensitivity.

Section 14.1: Stress and anxiety

Children on the autism spectrum often experience heightened stress levels in comparison to their peers. They may have reduced coping strategies and fail to recognise their anxiety before it becomes overwhelming.

High anxiety levels often impact on the child's ability to manage different situations. New or unfamiliar people or settings are a common cause of anxiety with children on the autistic spectrum as are crowds of people and social events. A significant number of children on the autistic spectrum feel most anxious around others their own age, often feeling more comfortable with younger children or adults. Some may externalise their anxiety in very obvious outbursts or patterns of behaviour, which can include complete 'shutting down' where the child is unable to respond to people or the outside environment.

Others find it extremely difficult to express their anxiety which can result in the development of further behaviours. For example, a strong need for constant reassurance, dependency on a certain person, very set routines and a refusal to engage in novel experiences.

Children may:

- become anxious from everyday incidents which are minor to others
- experience extreme anxiety triggered by change and sensory issues
- have poor self-awareness and find it difficult to interpret the physical indicators of stress and anxiety
- have difficulty recognising and regulating their emotions
- have reduced coping skills.
- base fears and anxieties on a single past negative experience.

Children, when anxious or stressed may:

- experience a reduced awareness of others
- find it difficult to concentrate and learn
- not be able to process and retain verbal language as well as they usually do
- only be able to think about or focus upon feeling anxious
- not know or be able to explain what is causing anxiety
- experience more or additional sensory difficulties
- be unable to control their behaviour
- find it hard to use constructive problem solving
- be unable to make decisions.

Strategies

- It is important that all staff are aware of the signs to look out for if the child is stressed or anxious as indicators may differ to other children and young people. Note these signs on the child's file. The cues may be very subtle. Look for triggers such as changes in body language, tone of voice, eye contact, the amount of interaction, becoming tearful or restless. Stress may trigger challenging or repetitive behaviour.
- Ensure that parents/carers are aware of any changes in the child's behaviour or demeanour and check whether similar behaviours are occurring at home so that there is clear, regular communication about how well the child is coping. Some children who appear quiet and compliant in setting behave very differently at

home, which can be misinterpreted as 'coping at setting/school and poor behaviour at home'. It may in fact be a release of the tension that has built up throughout the school day in a safe place.

- The child may need support to learn to pay attention to, and correctly interpret the messages from his/her own body. This can be achieved by assisting and encouraging the child to label feelings and physical sensations. Model talking about different feelings and the associated physical sensations, find pictures, use music or scenes from TV programmes to talk about why/ what happened to produce different sensations and emotions in other people. Once they are able to label some feelings, help them identify situations when they might feel these emotions. This allows the child to start matching feelings and sensations to situations.
- Children should be prompted to recognise the signs that they are becoming anxious, for example, by saying "You look worried, do you need help?" Talk through their feelings - "Do your shoulders feel tight? Do you have a funny feeling in your stomach? Is your face feeling hot?" For children who are unable to link their emotions to events, it can be helpful to suggest possible causes of anxiety.
- Help the child to monitor and recognise positive feelings too. For example, "I can see that you're really enjoying playing that game!"
- Physical exercise (running, bike riding, jumping on a trampoline) is a good way of letting go of accumulated stress. Stress balls or a 'twiddle toy' that the child can take their frustration out on, may also be useful.
- It can be helpful for a child to be met at the beginning of the day to go through what is happening that day by a member of staff using visual timetable.
- Information from sensory audits and profiles can be extremely helpful both at setting/school and at home. See Section five. It gives direction to the modifications that are necessary to reduce anxiety. Some children benefit from having a space in which they feel physically comfortable and get the sensory feedback that suits them.

Section 15: References and useful resources

This section contains a small selection of references and resources which may be useful. Some resources have comments by professionals who have read or used them to help outline content, but please note that these are personal opinions.

Atwood, T. (1998) *Asperger Syndrome: a guide for parents and professionals* London: Jessica Kingsley 'Comprehensive guide relating to many aspects of AS'

Bogdashina, O. (2005). *Communication Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome*. London:

Jessica Kingsley. 'Bogdashina has a son with autism and has written about several topics within autism, including sensory issues'. Cohen, M and Sloan, D (2007) *Visual supports for People with Autism A Guide for Parents and Professionals*.

Bethesda:Woodbine House. 'Practical book giving lots of examples of visual supports for all ages and abilities.' Buron, K. and Curtis, M. (2003) *The Incredible 5-Point scale* Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing 'A practical, visual way of helping pupils understand and recognise different levels of emotions'

Erbes, V. (2011) *Tools for Teachers. Practical resources for classroom success*. London: Autism Education Trust.

Grandin, T. (2006) *Thinking in pictures and other reports from my life with autism*, London, Bloomsbury 'Grandin is an individual with autism who is also a highly successful animal scientist. This book gives a fascinating insight into autistic thinking.'

Gray, C. (1994) *Comic Strip Conversations*. Illustrated interactions that teach conversation skills to students with autism and related disorders, New Horizons: Texas 'Gives a visual way for pupils to 'see' what people are thinking and feeling'

Gray, C. (2002) *My Social Stories Book*. London: Jessica Kingsley

'Foundation stage and KS1 pupils respond well to these stories about everyday activities, useful to read together before difficulties arise.'

Hannah, L., (2001) *Teaching young children with autistic spectrum disorders to learn*. London: The National Autistic Society. This is a practical, straightforward book for parent carers and staff in mainstream nurseries and schools who are supporting children aged three to seven.

Henault, I (2006) *Asperger's syndrome and Sexuality*, London, Jessica Kingsley 'Contains useful information about developing understanding of issues around sexuality.'

Jones, G. (2002). *Educational Provision for Children with Autism and Asperger Syndrome* , Abingdon, David Fulton.

Jordan, R. (2009). *Autism spectrum Disorders: An Introductory Handbook for Practitioners*. Abingdon. Routledge.

Sainsbury, C. (2009). *Martian in the Playground* (Revised ed.). London: Sage.

'Written by an individual on the autism spectrum about her experience of being different.'

Smith, C. (2003) *Writing and Developing Social Stories: Practical interventions in autism* Milton Keynes: Speechmark

Welton, J and Telford, J. (2004) *What did you say? What do you mean? An illustrated guide to understanding metaphors*. Cornwall: Jessica Kingsley Publications

Wing, L. (1996) *Autism spectrum disorders: a guide for parents and professionals*. London: Constable

Journal articles

Baird, G et al (2006). Prevalence of disorders of the autism spectrum in a population cohort of children in South Thames: the Special Needs and Autism Project (SNAP). *The Lancet*, 368 (9531), pp210-215

Barratt, P. et al., (1998) Children with autism and peer group support: Using 'circles of friends', *British Journal of Special Education*, 25 (2) pp 60-64

Websites/webpages

National Autistic Society (NAS)

<http://www.autism.org.uk/> 'Recognised national body containing a wide range of information on different topics, including details of NAS support groups and helpful links.'

Autism Educational Trust (AET)

<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>

'Useful website, giving a range of information and 'Tools for teachers-practical resources for classroom success.'

Ambitious about Autism

<http://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/page/index.cfm> 'Range of information primarily for pupils and parents/carers.'

Carol Gray, Social Stories www.thegraycenter.org

Social stories and comic book conversations

[http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/strategies-and-approaches/social-stories-](http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/strategies-and-approaches/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations)

[and-comic-strip-conversations](http://www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/strategies-and-approaches/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations) 'Easy to access information and advice, enabling practitioners to quickly get started using these approaches.'

Picture Exchange Communication System

www.pecs.org.uk

'Small steps teaching of expressive language skills.

See useful information leaflet'-

<http://www.pecs.org.uk/generaldocuments/2011In>

[fobrochure.pdf](http://www.pecs.org.uk/generaldocuments/2011In) TEACCH

www.teacch.com

The Autism Education Trust Transition Toolkit

<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/transition%20toolkit.aspx>

'Early Support for children, young people and families: Information about autism spectrum disorders'

www.ncb.org.uk/earlysupport

Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting pupils on the autism spectrum www.aet-idp.org.uk

Advice is available from Wiltshire Council Early Years Inclusion team

SWAPP - Support in Wiltshire for Autism: Parent Programme. SWAPP is a partnership programme between parents and their child's setting or school that aims to build an understanding of autism and the challenges and delights it can present.

The programme aims to empower families and staff who are closely involved in supporting a child or young person with autism.

Sessions cover all aspects of autism including communication, sensory issues and behaviour.

SWAPP 1 is for families of children in early year's settings and reception classes and uses the National Autistic Society's EarlyBird Programme. Further information on this available from Wiltshire Council Early Years Inclusion Team.

www.wiltshire.gov.uk/swapp

Online INSET. Advice on this available from the Specialist SEN Service. www.sentrain.net 'Useful for staff who do not have much experience of working with pupils on the autism spectrum.'

Other resources

Wiltshire Parent Carer Council - A voluntary service run by parents and carers for parents and carers www.wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk

ASK is a charity which provides a range of services to support parents and carers.

<http://www.askwiltshire.org>

The Parent Partnership Service. The PPS is part of ASK and supports parents and carers by providing advice and information about their child's Special Educational Need (SEN).

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