Support in Wiltshire for Autism:

School Strategies

March 2013

“Getting the strategies right”

Wiltshire Council

Where everybody matters

The strategies outlined in this document are designed to support pupils on the autism spectrum. However, they are equally applicable for pupils with social communication difficulties and many are relevant for pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) or those struggling to access the curriculum.

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Section 1: Introduction and terminology

In recent years, research and understanding of effective support for pupils on the autism spectrum has grown significantly. Alongside this the knowledge and skills of staff within mainstream 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 'Primary Teacher's Toolbox' and the 'Secondary Teacher's Toolkit' for 'including children with social communication difficulties' (Wiltshire County Council, 2006). It combines content from the two sources into one generic document for use across primary and secondary schools.

This document outlines the issues that are likely to affect pupils on the autism spectrum. It explores good practice in supporting the teaching and learning of these pupils, and also has broader applications to other pupils within school including those with social communication difficulties and pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties (SLCN)). Teachers in reception will have access to a revised SWASS: Early Years and Foundation Stage version will be aligned with this document.

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 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 autism spectrum. These include 'autistic 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 autism 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 autism 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 'autism 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 'autism 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?

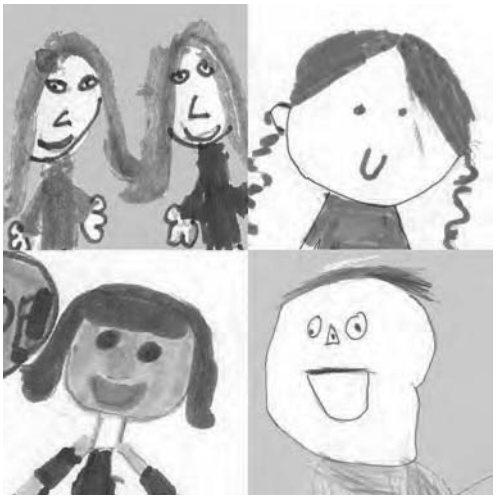
Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how an individual communicates with, and relates to other people and the world around them. There are over half a million people in the UK with autism, which is roughly one in 100. Everyone working within a school environment is, therefore, very likely to work with pupils who are diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum. It is also important to recognise that there may be pupils 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 pupils, 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 pupils. However, the following ten strategies are those considered essential for the effective inclusion and support of pupils who are on the autism spectrum. They are outlined in more detail throughout the document.

Adjust communication

- Always gain the pupil's attention before speaking.
- Reduce and simplify language to small, manageable 'chunks'.
- Allow additional processing time.
- Remember that pupils on the autism spectrum may not notice or understand the meaning of non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions or tone of voice.
- Remember that 'wh' questions such as where, what, why may confuse some pupils. Rather than ask "What do you need?" say "For swimming you need..." and let the pupil respond.

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.
- Value skills and strengths.
- Have realistic expectations.

Consistency, consistency, consistency

- Where possible, ensure all adults are fully informed about strategies and interventions which work well with the pupil.
- Ensure that all adults' communication with the pupil is clear and supported by visual cues, where appropriate, so that the pupil 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 and carers hold.
- Ensure there are opportunities for formal and informal contact with parents/carers.

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 pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil for any planned changes and transitions.
- Use visual timetables, language jigs and social stories™ for younger/less able pupils and written support, explanation and rehearsal for older/more able pupils.
- When unplanned changes occur reassure the pupil and use a visual prompt such as a 'surprise' card where necessary.

Keep it visual

- Pupils 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 to take part in an assembly. They contain pictures and key words to help pupils understand what is going to happen in what order, which usually reduces anxiety. When the activity is explained to the pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil 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. Pupils 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.

Examples of language jigs

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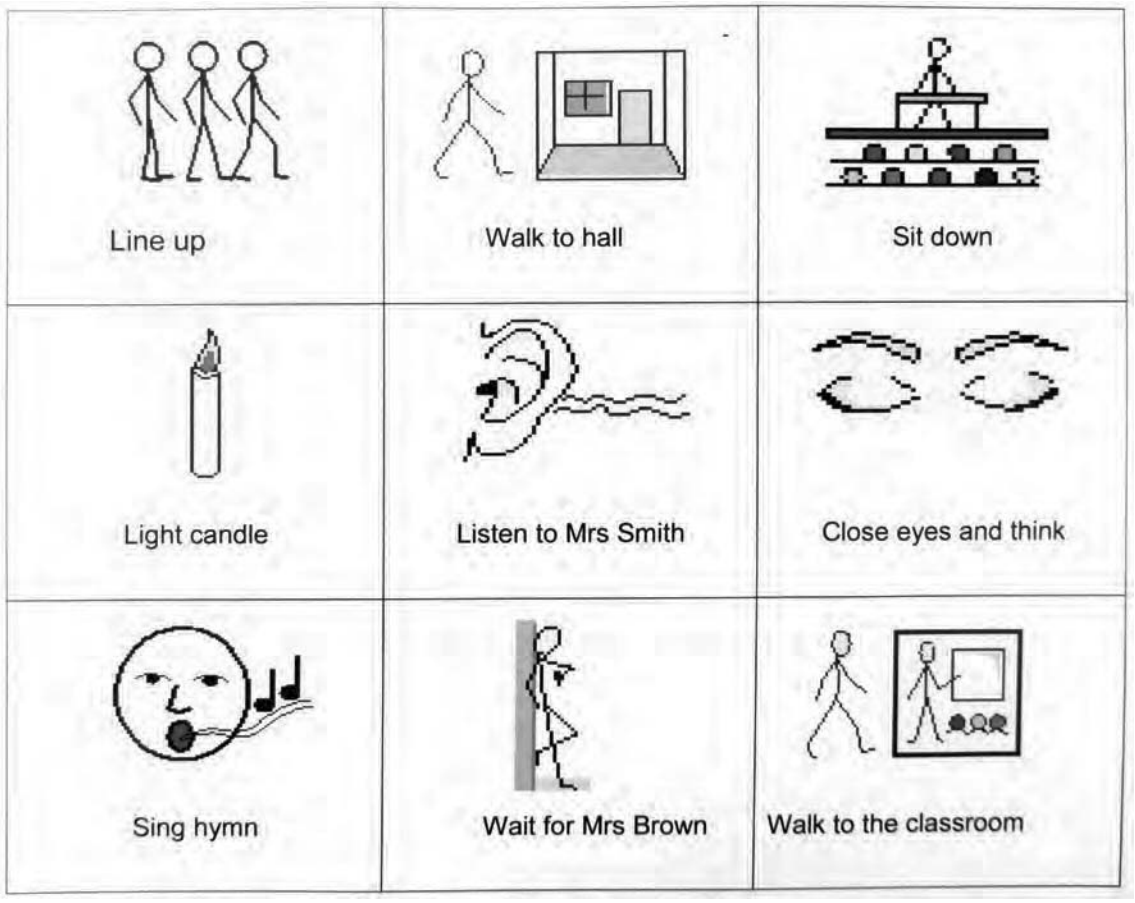

Examples of language jigs

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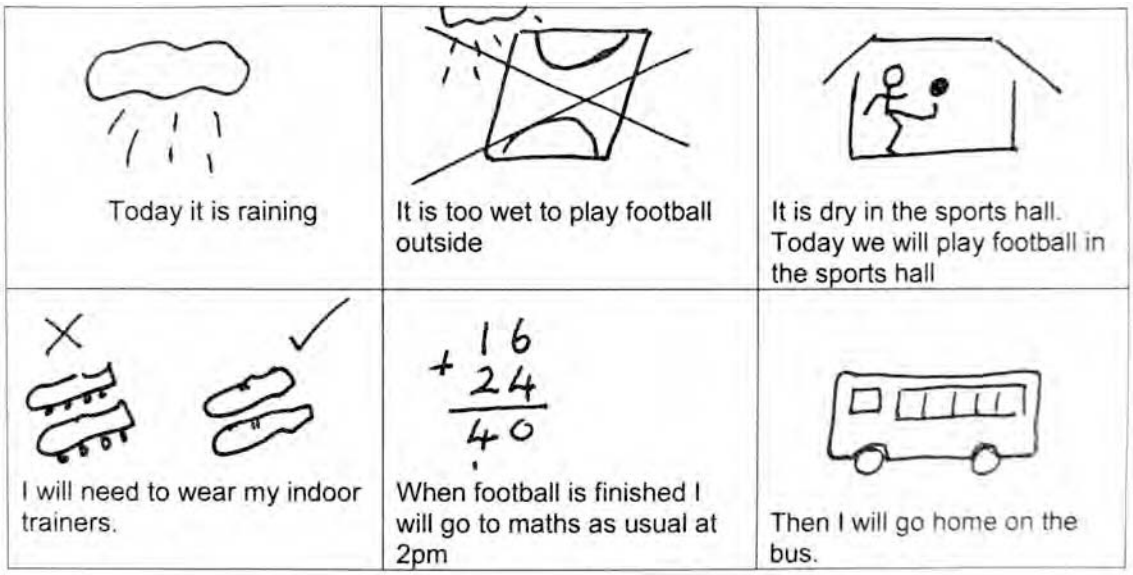

Visual timetables/schedules

Visual timetables can be created for a number of different time periods/situations. They are a means to prepare pupils for the times, places and activities that they will be involved in and give them a clear structure. Pupils 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.

Visual timetables can be a useful resource for the whole class, as well as individual pupils. It is important to frequently refer back to the timetable throughout the day. Drawing the pupils' attention to the timetable at key points in the day and involving the pupil in making alterations such as a change of teacher can help avoid inappropriate behaviour. If a pupil appears unsure or reluctant, saying "Let's look at the timetable" helps him or her to 'see' what is happening next and may reduce anxiety.

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/less able pupils 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/less able pupils the timetable may just include a morning or afternoon or may outline the whole day's activities. Older/more able pupils may prefer a weekly timetable. Timetables should include all subject lessons or activities, including breaks and lunchtimes and be amended on a daily basis to include specific events, for example, visitors, classroom changes or school trips. Timetables may be pictorial, include pictures and words or for older/more able pupils may be text only. It can be useful to use a question mark symbol to indicate uncertainty or 'it depends', for example a PE lesson might be indoors or outdoors depending upon the weather.

A selection of visual timetables and schedules

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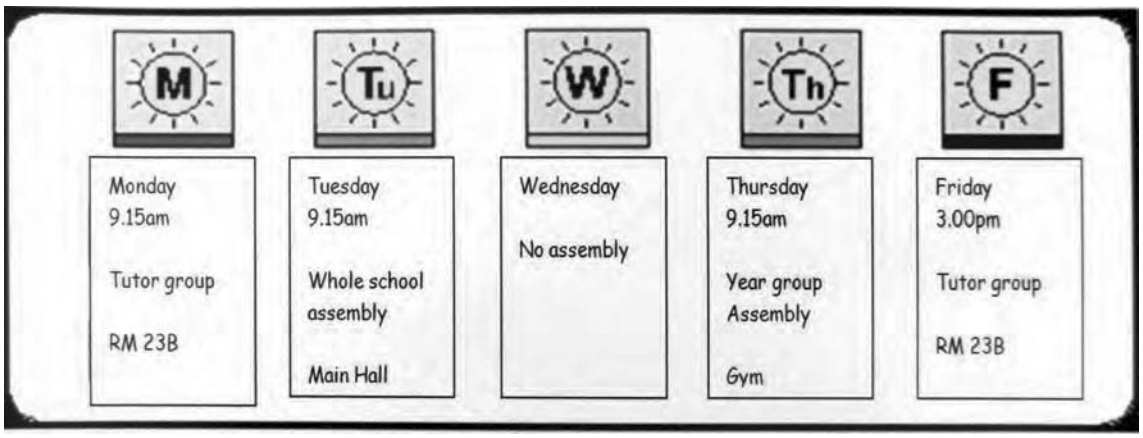

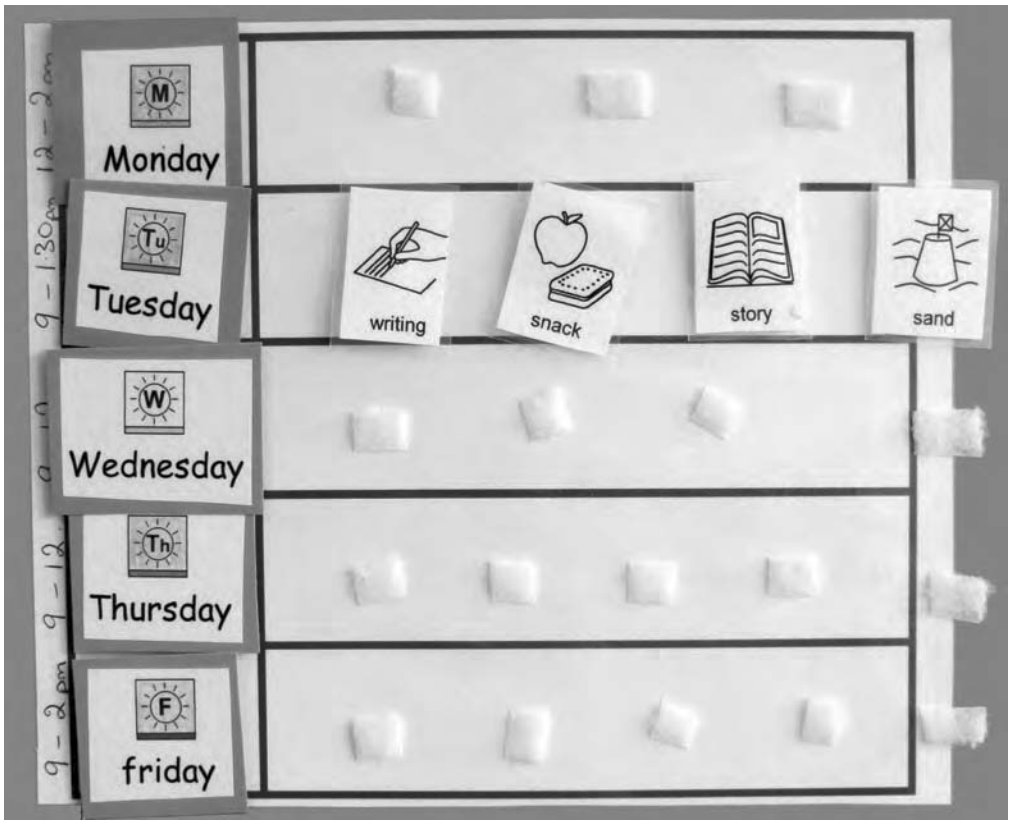

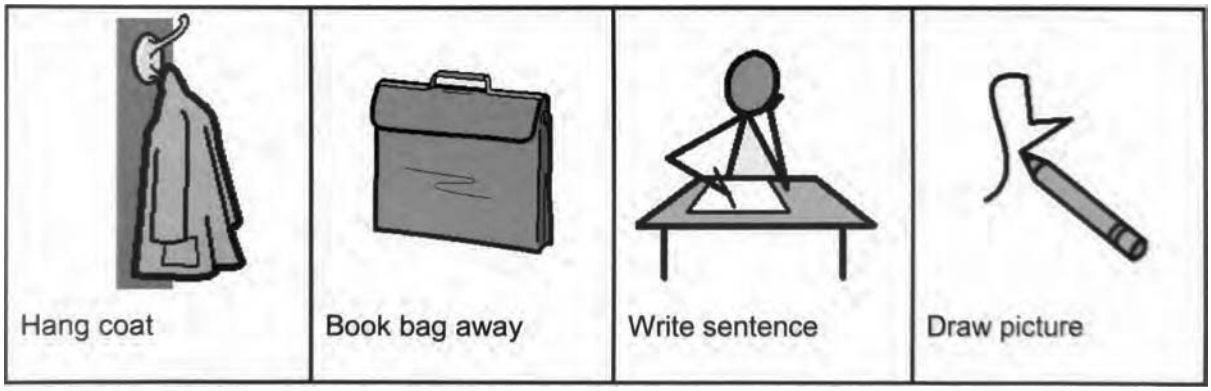

Using diaries to understand time

Some pupils need support to understand the passing of time. A 'termly-timetable' will support pupils in understanding how each day relates to the wider context of time. This can be especially useful if a pupil is particularly excited or anxious about a specific event, for example, a school trip or residential visit, but doesn't understand how 'far away' it is.

- Create blank diary pages for the given period of time (can be easily printed from Outlook or similar programme). Alternatively school planners or diaries/organisers can be used.
- Enter some basic key information on the diary pages as appropriate.
- Enter the specific event the pupil is worried or excited about in a more visually impactful manner.
- Pupils should tick off each day in order to visually see how time is progressing toward the event. However, if pupils are very anxious about a specific event, this may heighten anxiety. Some pupils respond well to being able to tick off the days, but also having specific activities related to the event written and/or visually represented on the relevant dates. For example, activities prior to a residential visit might be: 'look at photos of the place', 'go and look round the centre with Mum', 'go through the different activities that will be happening', 'write down my worries/questions and ask Mrs Smith', 'buy some sweets to take to the residential', 'pack my bag'. This helps to break down the planning for the trip into manageable chunks and can reduce anxiety.

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.'

An example: **'Now register – next** assembly.'
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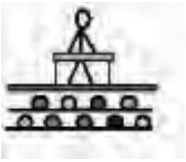
Now register	**Next assembly**
	

Some pupils may find a numerical reference easier to understand, i.e. '1-2'.

Visual prompts or cue cards

Visual cue cards are useful for all pupils and can be used for a range of purposes including to:

- warn pupils that something is about to happen
- let pupils 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 pupils of desired or appropriate behaviour
- make rules explicit
- provide a non-verbal way for pupils 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. Cue cards can be particularly effective if they use photos of the pupil doing that specific activity.

Examples of visual prompts and cue cards

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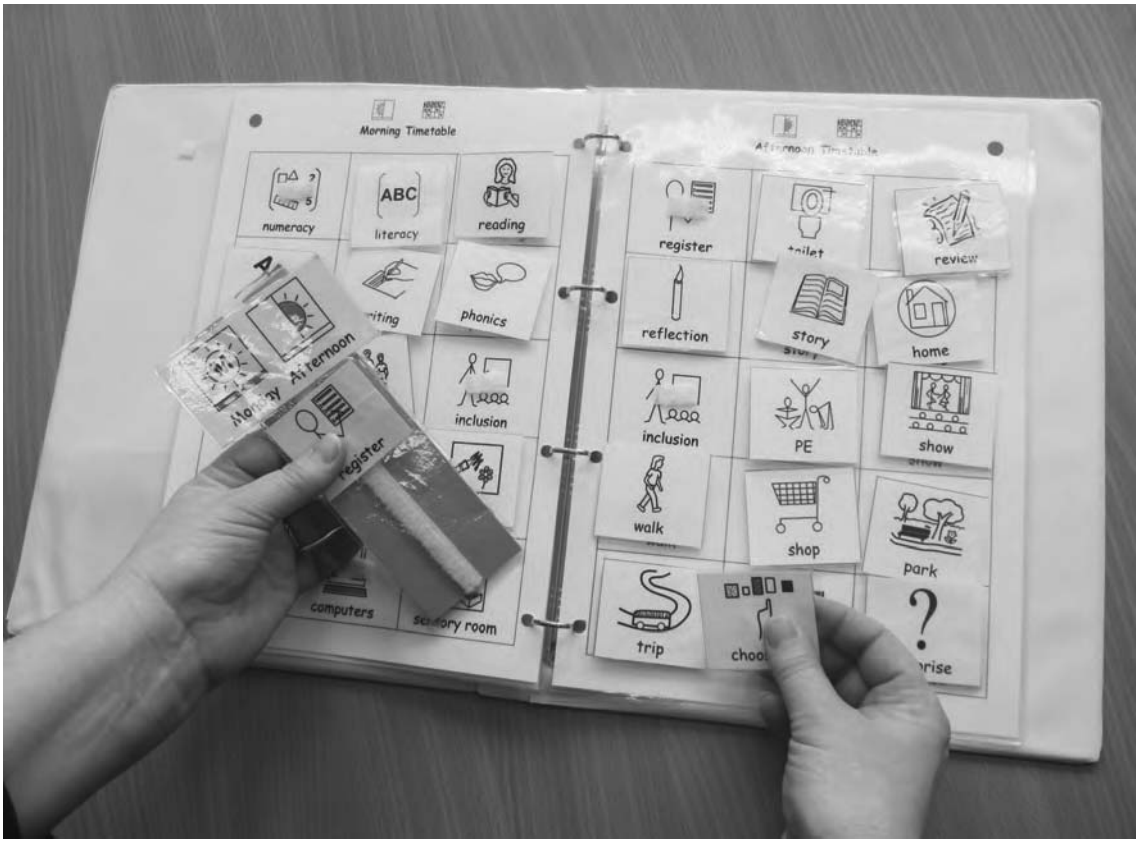

Examples of visual prompts and cue cards

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Written instructions

Pupils can find following long and/or complex verbal instructions difficult. Short written instructions outlining the key points in the right order can be very helpful for older/more able pupils. Pupils can tick off or cross out tasks as they are completed. It can also be a way to promote independent working, rather than relying on support staff to 'break down' instructions.

For example:

1. Write down the title and date.
2. Find page 64 in your textbook.
3. Copy diagram 2 in pencil.
4. Label your diagram neatly using a ruler and blue pen.

Modelling

Modelling a desired behaviour or way of communicating can often be very effective for pupils. Watching how to behave is generally much easier than following a verbal explanation. For example, rather than explaining to the pupil how to enter a room appropriately, show him or her how to do it. If there is opportunity to do so, then ask pupils to try it for themselves. With some pupils you may need to do the desired behaviour with them several times to help reinforce their understanding of how to do it.

Comic strip conversations

Comic strip conversations can support pupils 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.

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 giving overt direction and instruction. Social Stories™ may be effective in supporting pupils to understand the social contexts of specific situations and thus can be used to prevent potential difficulties. They can help pupils 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 Class 3B.”
“Mrs Jones usually teaches in Class 3B.”
“Sometimes Peter plays with James and Phillip.”
“Peter usually plays football at break.”

Perspective sentences describe the reactions, responses and feelings of others and sometimes the reason for their responses. These help pupils 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 pupils 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.”

Directive sentences prompt the appropriate behaviour. They refer to what the pupil will 'try' to do. For example:

"Peter will try to line up at the door at the end of Break."

"Peter will try to tidy his Lego away when he is asked."

"Peter will try to eat with his mouth closed and wait until he has swallowed his food before he speaks."

"If Peter has a question he will try to wait until someone looks at him before he asks."

Gray asserts that successful Social Stories™ contain two to five descriptive and perspective sentences to every one directive sentence. It may be appropriate to end the story with a positive statement such as 'This is okay' or another positive outcome.

Example of Social Stories™

How do children share a play area?

My name is Andrew.

I am learning to share.

Sometimes children share one play area.

Children need a little space when they play.

A little space is about the length of my arm.

Adults can help children learn to play with a little space around them.

I can learn to play with a little space between the other children and me.

A little space helps children feel comfortable and safe when they play.

Section 5: Language and communication

Pupils on the autism spectrum have a wide range of communicative ability. It is very important not to make assumptions about an individual pupil's skills solely on the basis of their diagnosis. Similarly more able pupils on the autism 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 pupils 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). Pupils may also have difficulty expressing their thoughts in writing and with understanding written text. More able pupils on the autism spectrum may appear to have very good communication skills but are unable to use these skills effectively in social contexts and interaction. For example, pupils often have difficulty with non-verbal communication such as eye contact, facial expressions and body language (see Section Six).

Many pupils on the autism 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 pupil to communicate successfully. All communication skills may vary according to factors such as fatigue, level of anxiety, time of the day and the communicative demands of the environment.

Communication difficulties are often the cause of challenging or inappropriate behaviour. Younger/less able pupils on the autism 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 pupils may have difficulty with 'higher level' language skills such as reasoning, predicting consequences and inference or with complex grammatical structures.

Pupils on the autism 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 pupil with SLCN (speech, language and communication difficulties).

Pupils:

- may not understand the need for communication
- may not initiate communication
- may fail to communicate clearly what they want or need
- may have difficulty with attention and listening skills, particularly in relation to verbal communication
- may have difficulty understanding language
- may have difficulties processing language, especially when combined with maintaining eye contact

- may have a literal understanding of language, including difficulties with understanding jokes and sarcasm, metaphors and idioms
- may not understand or use non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expression and body language
- may find it difficult to take turns in activities and conversations
- may 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 pupil's full attention before speaking.**
  With many pupils on the autism spectrum it is helpful to use the pupil's name first and wait until they are giving you their attention before speaking. This 'tunes in' the pupil to the fact that you are talking to him/her. The pupil may not recognise themselves as part of 'Class 8' 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 line up at the door."

- **Encourage visual and auditory attention**
  Encourage pupils 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 pupils 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 pupils as well as younger/less able ones.

  However, some pupils on the autism spectrum are not able or willing to give eye contact. It may be appropriate to encourage the pupil to look towards the speaker. Other pupils may only be able to listen if they are looking away, and may need to do something else in order to help them listen, such as humming quietly or fiddling with a stress ball or similar item. They may not appear to be concentrating at all.

  Ensure that these pupils are able to listen and understand well. It may be helpful for staff to have an agreed sign for pupils to register whether or not they have understood, such as a 'thumbs-up' for understanding, and a 'thumbs-down' to indicate lack of understanding. 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. Verbal praise for compliance, for example, "Good listening!" helps to reinforce pupils' efforts.

Example of a visual prompt

- **Use clear, non-ambiguous language**

Language used with pupils on the autism spectrum should be specific. Language should also be as concrete as possible, i.e. relate to the 'here and now', particularly with younger/less able pupils.

Pupils may not understand what certain words such as personal pronouns like 'he', 'she',' they' or words such as 'it', or 'there' refer to or represent. Rather than saying "Put it over there." be specific. For example, "Put the reading book on my desk."

- **Reduce the amount of language used**

  Pupils 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 pupils to remember key information and the order in which they have to do things.

- **Allow extra time for processing**
  Some pupils 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 pupil and makes it more difficult for them to process language. In effect, they have to start again. If, after allowing a lot of time (i.e. counting slowly to at least six in your head) the pupil is still not responding, repeat the phrase or instruction exactly. Do not rephrase or add further detail.
- However, if the pupil 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 pupil to process what has been said.

- **Use positive, directive language**
  Always say exactly what you want to happen.
  For example say: “James, feet still.”
  rather than: “James, stop kicking!”
  Otherwise the pupil may only process ‘kicking’ and continue with the behaviour. With younger/less able pupils on the autism 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 pupil sees exactly what ‘feet still’ looks like. The desired behaviour can be shown by the adult or a suitable peer.

  Older/more able pupils may still require explicit instructions such as “Show me that you are concentrating by looking at the board, sitting still and being quiet.” Be aware that telling a pupil to ‘listen’ or ‘concentrate’ does not tell the pupil exactly which behaviours they need to display.

  If ‘listen’ or concentrate’ is used as shorthand, ensure that work has been done with the pupil so that you are confident s/he understands what s/he is expected to do. For example, ‘listen’ means sit or stand still, no talking and look at the person speaking. Visual and/or written prompts may be useful as reminders.

- **Say what you mean-mean what you say**
  The English language is complex. Think about what you are saying and try to avoid language that can be interpreted literally or misunderstood.

  Examples of language that can be misinterpreted:
  “Go and wash your hands in the toilet.”
  “Paint the person sitting next to you.”
  “I’ll help you in a minute” may be interpreted as in exactly 60 seconds time.
  “Draw a table.” The pupil may draw an item of furniture rather than a table to complete.

- **Use appropriate questions**
  The type of questions used and the language of questions should always be considered when working with pupils on the autism spectrum. Some pupils 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 pupils on the autism spectrum. This is because many pupils, including able pupils, 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 pupils, provide prompts which can be visual and/or verbal. For example: if asking the pupil “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?’

- Questions involving how the pupil or another person feels are also problematic for many pupils as they can find it difficult to identify their own and others’ emotions. See Section Six. Sometimes providing a simple choice of two or three emotions that the pupil understands can be helpful. Remind him/her of the context, then link the emotion to it. For example, “This person is walking down the street late at night and nobody else is around. Do you think he feels excited, happy or scared?” With younger/less able pupils offer them a choice of two photos or pictures showing different emotions and ask them to select the right one.

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

- With written questions ensure that the pupil understands what is being asked. The language of textbooks and worksheets is often very different to the language that the pupil may be familiar with, for example ‘birth rate’ rather than ‘the number of babies born’.

- **Regularly check the pupil’s understanding**
  Pupils often become very anxious if they are unsure of what to do. For pupils with comprehension difficulties, it is important to check understanding of verbal and written language at regular intervals. Be aware that some pupils will nod, say “I know” or otherwise indicate that they understand when they do not. This can be a good way to stop others asking them further questions!

  Whenever possible, ask pupils to repeat back instructions or explain in their own words. Asking pupils if they have understood is not always reliable as they may just say “Yes” when they haven’t understood. In addition, pupils may not realise that they have not understood or may not want to admit it in front of peers. Writing key instructions down so that the pupil is able to refer to them is often helpful. Repeat instructions using exactly the same language rather than rephrasing.

- **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/less able pupils on the autism spectrum who are at the stage of being able to respond to very simple language, expressions and sarcasm should be avoided completely.

For more able/older pupils, teach them an awareness that expressions do not have their literal meaning. For example, “Give yourself a pat on the back! Do I really mean pat your back? Can you remember what it means?” and explain.

Once pupils understand there is not a literal meaning, it is useful to teach them what commonly used expressions mean. There are published resources available for this or it can be easily done by, for example, a matching activity-matching the expression to its meaning.

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

The use of humour should be considered according to the individual pupil’s needs. Humour involving different meanings of words, tone of voice, and expressions can all be problematic. However, many pupils on the autism 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 pupils on the autism 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/less able pupils 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...” and responses to greetings and other social interactions, such as “Okay, thanks!” or “Can I play?”

- **Make sure the pupil has a means to communicate in all situations**
  If a pupil on the autism 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 school day and whilst at home. For example, making sure that the materials/system s/he uses are not left in the classroom when the pupil goes into the hall, or ensuring that a new symbol introduced at school is also used in the home environment. Ensure that the pupil has a range of symbols or pictures which are appropriate to communicate all of their needs with them at all times.

  Older pupils who communicate verbally may struggle to express their needs and feelings when highly anxious, and an appropriate strategy needs to be discussed with them for these times. For example, asking the pupil to jot down the worry rather than having to speak straight away to a member of staff.

  There may also need to be a discrete signal agreed between the staff member and pupil for times when the pupil is overwhelmed and needs to leave the room quickly without being questioned by staff. A specific ‘time out’ or ‘I need to leave the classroom’ card may be useful.

  Older pupils may also need a visual system to indicate emotions that they may not be able to express verbally when anxious such as appropriate words and/or pictures depicting emotions to point to.

Example of visual prompts

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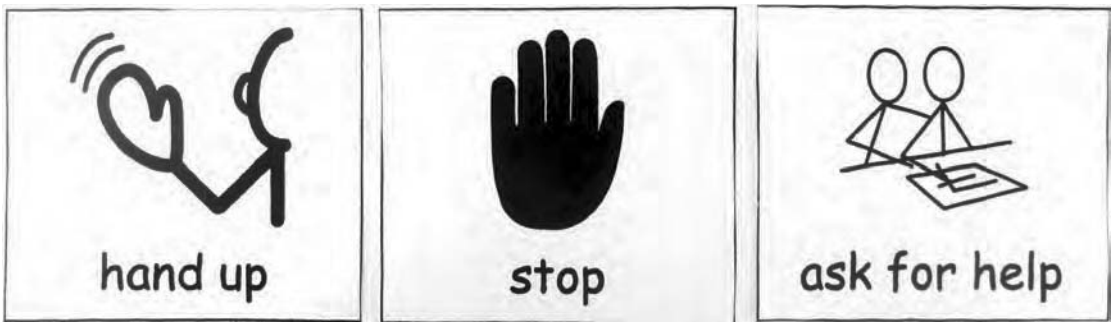

Section 6: Social and emotional understanding

Pupils on the autism 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. Pupils may experience difficulty with all aspects of social interaction, or may have more subtle needs. Younger/less able pupils on the autism spectrum are generally unaware that their behaviour is unusual or inappropriate to others. However, older/more able pupils are often acutely aware that they do not 'fit in' socially which can cause high anxiety levels and may lead to behaviours such as self harming.

There are many unwritten social rules which dictate acceptable behaviour in different contexts. These rules are extremely complex and often rely on the correct interpretation of subtle clues such as the use of a particular facial expression or change in tone of voice. A particular difficulty for pupils on the autism spectrum is that there are exceptions to every rule. This means that it is not possible to simply learn a rule and apply it in every situation. For example, a rule might be "It is rude to interrupt". However, in an emergency, this rule does not apply.

Lack of understanding of social interaction can often lead to conflict because the pupil may be perceived as being deliberately rude or inappropriate. With pupils on the autism spectrum, staff should always consider first whether the pupil has socially misinterpreted or misjudged the situation. For example, a pupil may smile when told that someone's pet has died or if reprimanded by a member of staff.

It is important to consider the pupil's motivation to learn new social skills. For many pupils on the autism spectrum, an extrinsic reward such as a stamp, sticker or time to do their special interest may be required. Some pupils on the autism spectrum lack the desire to please or be accepted by others and are unconcerned about others' feelings. For example, telling a pupil that it makes others feel uncomfortable if s/he stands too close when talking is not necessarily going to motivate the pupil to change his or her behaviour. The pupil may not mind that s/he is making the other person uncomfortable. However, if the pupil 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 pupils who are not on the autism spectrum. Making social behaviour more overt can help to improve pupils' social interaction skills and understanding of themselves and others.

Pupils may:

- find it difficult to form and maintain friendships
- not interact fully during play, but play 'alongside' or in 'parallel'
- use inappropriate behaviour such as pushing peers to get attention or as an alternative to social interaction which is difficult, such as greeting the other person
- find turn-taking difficult in conversations, discussions or games
- find it difficult to share textbooks 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'
- not recognise that others have thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that differ to their own
- only make or accept physical contact with others 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 pupil, 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 pupil on the autism 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.
- For each skill there are a number of component parts. The pupil needs to understand what the words mean, for example, what is body language, why that skill is important, how to use the skill themselves and how to recognise and understand the skill when it is used by others.
- Opportunities to practice the skill in different situations need to be given.

Strategies:

- **Make the social rules overt**
  Younger/less able pupils need to be given simple, general rules to follow. A visual cue, language jig or other means to explain a social situation that the pupil finds difficult can be useful. However, older/more able pupils may also need to also be given specific exceptions to the rules and an explanation about why the exceptions occur.
- **Look beyond the behaviour**
  Ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of the social difficulties experienced by pupils on the autism spectrum. School staff may need to be trained to look beyond the behaviour of the pupil 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 pupil 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/less able pupils.

- **Prompt the desired behaviour**
  The ultimate aim is for the pupil to remember to use a particular social skill at the right time. However, pupils on the autism spectrum often find it difficult to transfer a skill into different contexts. Use a visual or verbal prompt to remind the pupil of what s/he needs to do. Younger/less able pupils need to be given a specific prompt, like "Hands still" when listening. Older/more able pupils can be encouraged to think for themselves with a more general prompt such as "What did you forget to do when you started talking?" i.e. look at, or towards the person s/he is speaking to.

- **Reward appropriate social skills**
  Ensure that pupils are praised for appropriate social behaviour, and given a reward if necessary. Staff should identify exactly what the pupil is doing well using clear 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 pupil 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/less able pupils visual cue cards or other visual support and minimal language should be used. With older/more able pupils, give a clear verbal explanation. For example, "You just pushed past Amy and that made her cross. You need to say 'Excuse me' and wait for her to move her chair." Encourage older/more able pupils to suggest what went wrong and what they could do next time themselves.

- **Support pupils to resolve the situation**
  Ensure that pupils understand that if they have done something wrong and/or a conflict has occurred, they need to try to resolve it. For example, by saying 'sorry', shaking hands, writing a note or other means. This encourages the pupil to take responsibility and understand that their actions or communication has an impact upon others. It is also an opportunity to reinforce how they have made the other person feel. It may be helpful to use a debrief/thinking sheet. For example a simple sheet with 'what I did', 'how I made the other person feel', 'what can I do to put it right?'
  Encourage older/more able pupils to suggest how they could resolve or repair the situation.

- **Do not assume that pupils will notice non-verbal cues**
  Many pupils 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/less able pupils a visual cue card could be used, with simple language, for example, "I am cross."

Identify what you are cross about and tell the pupil what s/he needs to do. With older/more able pupils, encourage them to think about how the other person may be feeling and why. Help them to look for 'clues' and tell them if they do not know. 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 pupils could help or demonstrate an appropriate response.

- **Discuss emotions**
  Pupils 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 school day. Younger/less able pupils may need an emotions book, see next strategy. Useful areas to discuss are as follows:
  - What makes them feel that emotion? Think about times and places.
  - What do they look like and behave like when they feel that emotion? Eyes? Mouth? Voice? Hands and body?
  - What happens to their body when they feel that emotion? Help them to recognise the different physical sensations.
  - What makes other people feel the same emotion? What do other people look like/how do they behave?
  - What strategies can be used to manage specific emotions and feel calmer?
  - Refer back to this book frequently, especially when discussing social situations or difficulties.

  A mirror can be used to explore facial expressions as many pupils on the autism spectrum are unaware how their face looks unless given direct visual feedback.

- **Make an emotions book**
  Pupils 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 pupil or other pupils 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 pupil issues such as the ones identified in the previous strategy. Ensure that the pupil is also taught how to manage that particular emotion, for example, ways to calm down.

- **Use an emotions thermometer**
  Encourage the pupil to think about how they are feeling. The pupil 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 pupil at all times. It can also be used as a whole class resource for all pupils.

Example of an emotional thermometer

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Alternatively a 1-5 number scale may be used as per 'The Incredible five point scale' (see Section Fifteen).

Example of an emotional rating scale:
'the incredible five point scale'

Nam_____ My "Switch" Scale

Rating	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
5	Angry >:(Swearing Hurting The switch is down.	Angry Doesn't feel good. Uncomfortable.	Get help from Mrs O'Leary or Mrs Young. Get to a 4.
4	The switch is going down. Start to look angry. "Shut up" "I say mean things."	Upset I want to be on my own.	Close my eyes and count to ten. Chill out Get to 3 rip up/screw up paper.
3	The switch is in the middle I might look a little bit cross. I could be nice or I could be nasty.	A little bit more upset	Chill out. (3 minute timer Get to 2.
2	The switch has moved a little bit I would look the same. I would still be kind	A little bit sad.	Move away from things that upset me. Get back to 1.
1	The switch is up. Smile I'm kind. I'm helpful.	Comfortable.	Enjoy it

- **Practise taking turns**
  Regular opportunities to practise turn taking should be part of the pupil's programme of support if this is an area of difficulty. This could include board games, discussions 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/less able pupils, see next strategy.

- **'Waiting' and 'My turn' cards**
  'Waiting' and 'my turn' cards can be used to support pupils to take turns in activities and conversation.

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

Examples of 'I am waiting' and 'my turn' cards

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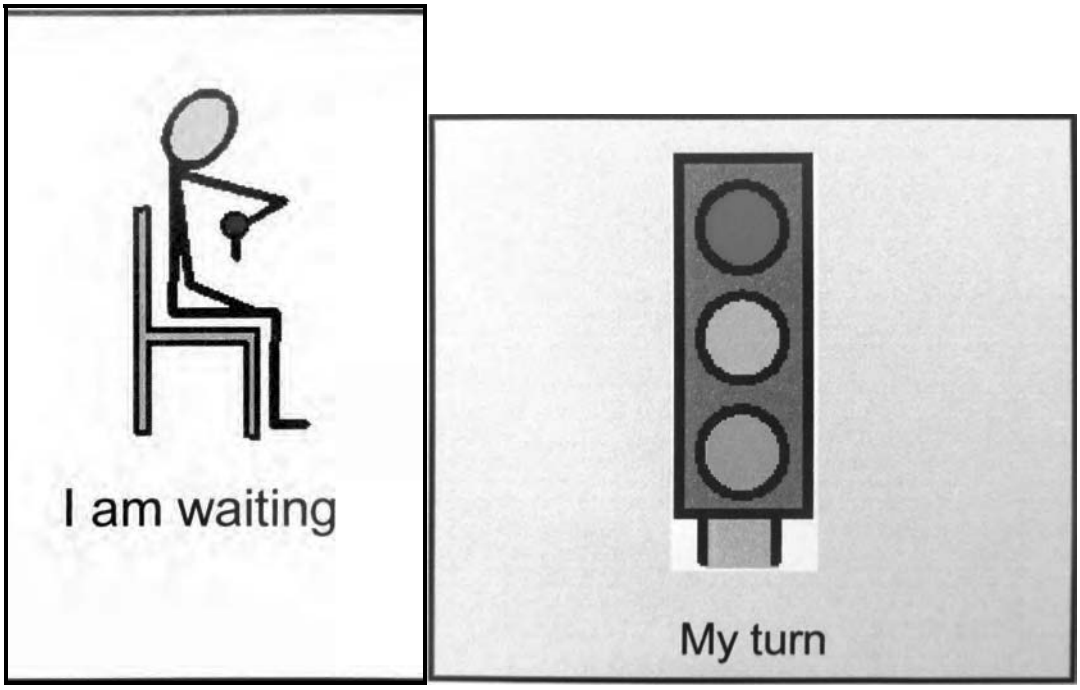

- **Conversation cue cards**
  Many pupils find conversation difficult and will focus on subjects related to their special interest/obsessions. In order to encourage a wider range of conversational topics visual cue cards can be used. If the conversation begins to drift from the topic show the pupil the cue card representing the topic that is being discussed. This may be words and/or pictures.

  Use a verbal prompt as well, if necessary. For example, "Remember that we are talking about...?" Visual cue cards can also be used to set boundaries on conversations such as the time limit or number of questions allowed on a certain topic.

Example of a conversation cue card

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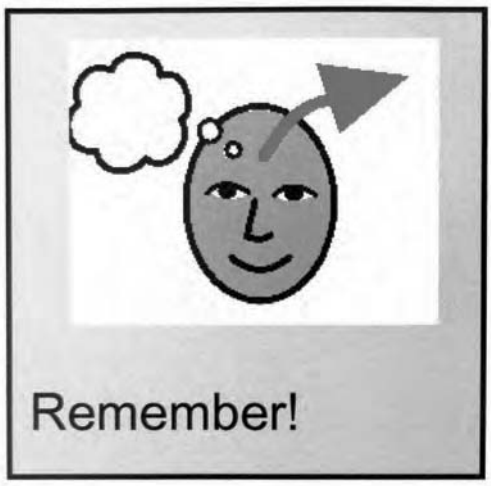

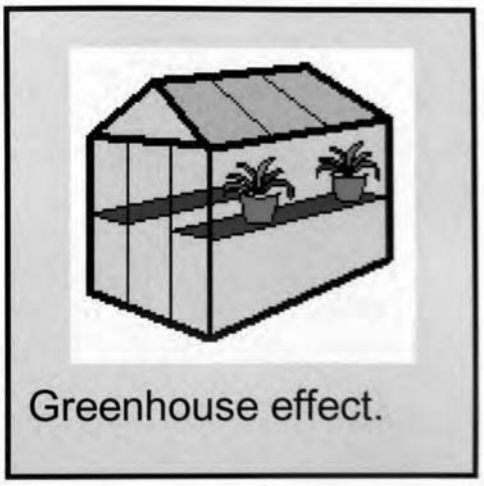

- **Social skills groups**

  Social skills groups can be a safe way for pupils 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. Pupils need to practice skills via role play or other methods.

  Role play provides an opportunity to practice a 'real life' situation, but the pupil should only play him/herself i.e. does not take on a character or role. It can also be helpful to teach some conversation opener scripts, such as "Can I play with you?" for use in the playground. 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 pupils on the autism spectrum to understand. Pupils 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.

  For example: "Your team is the blue team, they are wearing blue t-shirts. Your job is to work with the other pupils in your team to get the ball in the net. You are allowed to throw the ball to other pupils. You are not allowed to kick the ball or snatch it from another pupil."

  This information may need to be written down and reinforced several times before the pupil understands it. Be aware that some pupils on the autism spectrum find team games completely overwhelming due to sensory processing difficulties. These pupils may need to be given a separate activity or skill to practice.

- **Breaks from social situations**
  Pupils may find it difficult to be part of a social environment for extended periods of time. It is important to allow pupils 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 pupil or the pupil can show staff when the pupil needs a break can be useful. Alternatively a more subtle signal or prompt can be used which has been agreed by staff and the pupil. The area chosen for the 'break' should be one that the pupil finds calming and an agreed amount of time given. There should be a clear expectation that the pupil returns to the classroom or activity as soon as the time limit is reached.

An example of an 'I need a break card.'

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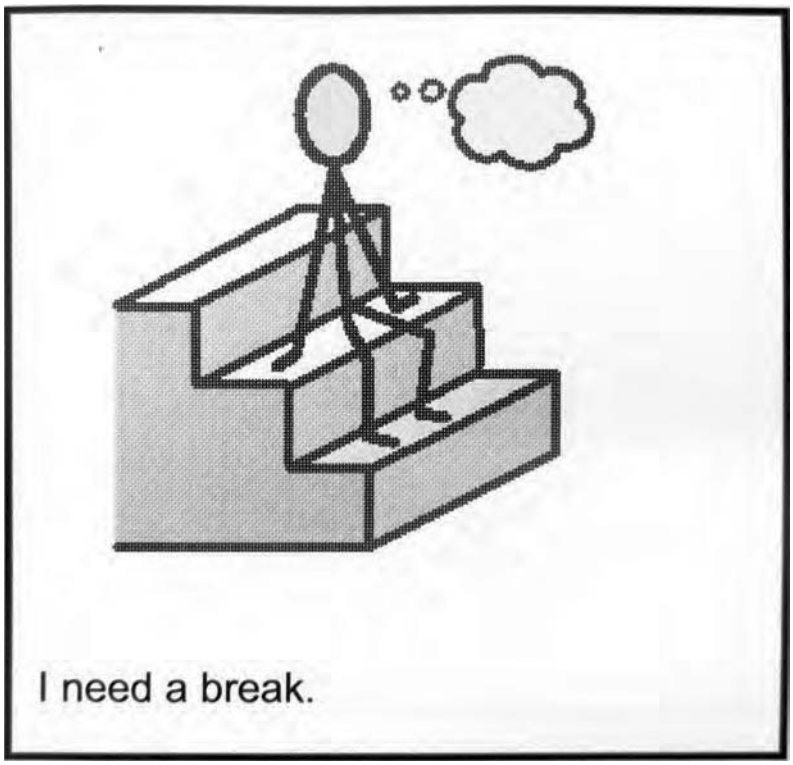


Section 6.1: Bullying

Many pupils on the autism spectrum are particularly vulnerable to teasing and bullying because their unusual behaviours and difficulty understanding social rules can make them stand out. Pupils may have no desire to conform with their peers which often becomes more noticeable with adolescence. For example, the pupil may choose comfort and practicality over fashion when choosing clothes; females with autism may not wear make-up or perfume because they are averse to the smell. These differences single the pupil out from the 'in crowd' and can increase the likelihood of being bullied.

Due to difficulties with social interaction and sensory processing difficulties some pupils on the autism spectrum may misinterpret behaviour as bullying. For example, if pupils are hypersensitive to touch, they may react badly to slight accidental touch from another pupil which they experience as rough and painful. Pupils' difficulty understanding language may lead to misinterpretation that the other person has been unkind to them.

Often the pupils' susceptibility to suggestion and literal understanding of language may make them carry out tasks or activities that are inappropriate. Staff should be aware that with older/more able pupils this can be extreme, particularly if the pupil on the autism spectrum is desperate to have friends and doesn't fully understand the concept of a 'friend'.

Pupils may, therefore, do exactly as they are told, even if they are aware that what they are doing is wrong. For example, pupils may be coerced into taking part in a sexual activity against their will, or made to participate in a criminal or anti-social activity. The pupil may have great difficulty communicating the distress caused by these problems.

Bullies may see pupils on the autism spectrum as a 'soft targets'. In addition, pupils often react very visibly so may be viewed as fun to 'wind up.' For example, pupils may have an angry or emotional outburst without warning, or may use behaviour that is seen as very unusual by peers. It is important to note that with some pupils on the autism spectrum, these reactions may occur sometime after the event.

All pupils in the school should be aware that bullying is not acceptable through a school policy of positive behaviour management. It is essential that the school policy on bullying and harassment is enforced to ensure that pupils on the autism spectrum are not discriminated against.

Schools can also support families by encouraging understanding and tolerance within the wider school population. For example, some parents or carers may feel victimised by other families' negative comments about their child's behaviour.

It is also important to be aware that some pupils on the autism spectrum may bully others. This may or may not be intentional and sometimes relates to a lack of understanding of 'bullying' and how their behaviour may be perceived by others.

Pupils may:

- have difficulty understanding whether the comments or actions of other young persons have malicious intent
- tolerate teasing from peers just to have company
- not understand if and when they are being manipulated
- break rules or behave inappropriately, sometimes putting themselves at risk because of a strong desire to have 'friends'
- be unable to tell others that they are being bullied
- not think about or understand the possible consequences of their behaviour.

Strategies:

- Set up a base or resource room for the pupil to retreat to when they feel threatened or anxious where s/he is able to access staff who understand the difficulties. This should be available during break and lunch times as many pupils on the autism spectrum find it difficult to engage with typical activities such as social 'chit chat' or group games. Ensure there are a variety of opportunities or structured activities taking place at break time which the pupil can access.
- Incidents of teasing and bullying can be reduced if a watchful eye is kept on the pupil. This could include the use of a buddy system, as well as school staff.
- Help the pupil to develop appropriate responses to unwanted or hostile approaches. Ensure that the pupil understands what bullying means, using language which is appropriate to their understanding. Key elements need to include that the other person is deliberately doing or saying something that makes him her feel 'bad' (upset, sad, uncomfortable, embarrassed etc) and that the other person is telling him/her to do or say something which s/he may not want to. Pupils also need to be told specifically that they must tell an adult what is happening, even if s/he has been threatened or told not to say anything.
- Pupils on the autism spectrum often need to be specifically taught the difference between friendly teasing or 'banter' and bullying as they find this confusing. This can be done in the following ways:
    - Have a range of simple scenarios, either written or role-played by adults and the pupil has to decide whether each is friendly teasing or bullying. The aim is for the pupil to be able to recognise which is which.
    - When the pupil is able to recognise the difference between friendly 'banter' and bullying, practice specific responses. Pupils on the autism spectrum may find it difficult to get banter right but can be taught not react in a negative manner.
    - Talk to a pupil as soon as an incident occurs about what has happened and why, whether it was friendly teasing or bullying, how they responded and whether an alternative response may have been better.

- Make sure the pupil has someone to talk to when they are upset whom s/he trusts. Ensure that the pupil knows how to ask for help, who to ask for help, and where to find those staff. It may be beneficial to provide the pupil with a prompt card to remind him or her who and where they can access help.
- If appropriate talk to the pupil's peers, explaining the characteristics of the autism spectrum and the related difficulties. However, permission must be sought from the pupil and parents first and care needs to be taken to ensure that this does not make the pupil more vulnerable.
- Many pupils on the autism spectrum have skills beyond their developmental age, such as memorising formulas. Encourage them to use their talent, for example by helping to 'tutor' other pupils alongside staff. Their extensive knowledge about a particular subject can engender a great deal of respect from their peers.

Section 6.2: Involvement in anti-social or criminal activities

Many pupils on the autism spectrum are extremely socially vulnerable as they do not fully understand the intentions and motivations of others. More able pupils may appear reasonably 'streetwise' but their difficulty in understanding others' communication and behaviour coupled with a strong desire to have friends can lead them into trouble. Pupils may be coerced to participate, or may willingly join in because they think that that is how 'friends' behave.

Another area of difficulty is that pupils may put themselves or others at risk because they may misinterpret others' responses. For example, if the other person looks threatening, the pupil on the autism spectrum may fail to notice this and act accordingly.

Pupils may:

- be 'set up' by others as the person who will get caught or take the blame
- fail to behave appropriately if caught and be unaware of the possible consequences
- have social interaction and/or communication difficulties which may be misinterpreted by the authority figure as defiance or rudeness
- become defensive, angry or refuse to accept others' concerns about their 'friends'
- be vehemently against any form of rule breaking and intervene inappropriately
- have particular difficulty with accepting authority
- approach senior managers to discuss incidents or issues, rather than the appropriate member of staff.

Strategies:

- **Work on the concept of friends**
  Make sure that the pupil understands that a friend is not someone who gets you into trouble or makes you do something that you are uncomfortable with or against your will. If the pupil is very focused upon wanting friends, support them to make friendships. These may be solely based upon the pupils' special interests or obsessions rather than about personal qualities. Pupils may need an element of adult support to monitor their interaction with others and 'step in' as necessary.

- **Be vigilant**
  Staff should be vigilant about who the pupil on the autism spectrum is spending time with. If unlikely pupils suddenly become 'friends' with the pupil on the autism spectrum, this needs to be questioned and investigated.

- **Encourage pupils to state their diagnosis or diagnoses**
  In the event of being involved in anti-social or criminal activity, older/more able pupils should be encouraged to tell police officers or other authority figures that they are on the autism spectrum. Alternatively they could carry a card stating this, such as 'autism alert' cards which are used in some areas.

Some adults have little or no training how to recognise and manage individuals on the autism spectrum so situations can quickly escalate. If the pupil is highly stressed and/or has taken illegal substances s/he may behave unusually and may be mistaken as being mentally ill.

- **Explicitly teach how to deal with others' rule breaking**
  Pupils who have difficulty with others breaking the rules need to be given specific strategies to deal with this. It is not generally acceptable to repeatedly 'tell on' others, nor is it wise to intervene directly if others are involved in criminal or anti-social activity. Encourage pupils to notice the details of what is happening and tell an adult or member of staff when they are a safe distance away. Pupils who shout out to anyone breaking the rules can sometimes be encouraged to write it down instead.

- **Reinforce 'real life' consequences**
  Many pupils on the autism spectrum have difficulty predicting possible consequences. An additional issue may be that they think that what they have seen on the television or in films happens in real life, or that the consequences will not apply to them. Pupils need to be encouraged to think about consequences whenever there is a suitable opportunity, but particularly when there is inappropriate behaviour.

  For example, if another pupil was climbing up a fence, by asking, "Do you think that climbing that fence is a good idea? What could happen?" For younger/less able pupils there are published resources available, or resources can be made relating to specific situations. Use cards or photos that depict a simple situation such as a pupil stealing an item of food from another child's lunchbox ask: "What might happen?" and have cards that show possible consequences.

- **Find out why the pupil has difficulty with authority figures**
  There may be specific reasons why the pupil finds dealing with authority difficult. It is important to explore these because they may be based upon a misperception or lack of understanding.

  Some pupils are also very focused upon the hierarchy of staff within school and so they may, for example, seek out the headteacher to discuss a minor incident rather than speak to their class teacher, or tutor.

  Sometimes this can be resolved by making sure that the pupil has a clear understanding of whom s/he should go to for what, written down if necessary. Other pupils cannot be discouraged from seeking out 'the boss', in which case all staff should be made aware of this and have a consistent strategy in place to redirect or respond to the pupil.

Section 7: Rigidity, routines and obsessions

Pupils on the autism spectrum tend to have rigid thinking patterns and can be very 'black and white' in their perceptions. The degree to which this affects the pupil may vary, dependent upon their cognitive ability, ability to understand the world and communicate their needs. Many pupils 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. When changing a routine, keeping some familiar aspects can help minimise anxiety. For example: learning a new skill within a familiar classroom with a trusted member of staff.

Some pupils 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. Preventing or altering routines and rituals should be considered and planned carefully. Discussion with parents and carers prior to making changes is helpful, as there may be implications for the pupils' behaviour and anxiety levels at home. See also Section Nine.

Older and/or more able pupils may not exhibit obvious rigidity but their inflexibility can become apparent in certain pieces of school work, discussion and social interaction. They may hold very strong, fixed views which they are unable to adapt in any way even if the evidence suggests that they are incorrect. For example, a pupil who believes that only her watch has the accurate time, therefore perceives all the school bells and other people's watches as 'wrong' and will not move on to the next activity because it isn't **time** yet.

The special interests (obsessions) of able pupils on the autism spectrum may be less obvious for a number of reasons. These pupils may have an awareness that their interests are not age appropriate so hide them from peers to avoid teasing. For example, a 16 year old boy who is still obsessed with Thomas the Tank Engine. Others may have special interests which appear age appropriate, such as a 13 year old girl who is interested in fashion but the extent of their 'obsession' differs markedly to their peers. Some pupils develop special interests which may not be considered appropriate.
For example: a male pupil who has a fixation about female feet. Obsessions may change over time, with some pupils on the autism spectrum moving from one obsession to another quite rapidly.

Pupils 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 objects ,either their own and/or those within the environment
- have obsessive thoughts or attachment to a certain ideology, for example, communism
- 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 pupils on the autism spectrum do have special interests, others have not or 'grow out' of them as they mature. Some pupils 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 pupil. For some pupils they are a self-supporting or calming strategy which helps to reduce anxiety and stress levels.

Factors to consider in relation to special interests/obsessions are as follows:

- The degree to which the pupil 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, if the pupil is approaching individuals at school to stroke their hair.
- How well the special interests can be fitted into the school day.
- Whether time spent engaging in the special interest is to be used as anxiety management, reward or both.
- How easily the pupil 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 pupil to partake in special interests activities can help reduce anxiety, as the pupil knows when s/he will have time to focus on obsessions. This can improve concentration levels for the rest of the school day. These sessions are most helpful at times when the pupil is very anxious, for example after lunch or break, or after a less favoured subject session. Always give a clear time limit for 'special interest time'. If necessary incorporate the use of a timer or other strategies. See Section Eight, 'changing task or activity'.

- **Use the special interest to actively engage in the curriculum**
  Many pupils on the autism spectrum will engage in learning if their particular interests or obsessions are utilised. For example, if the pupil likes washing machines, s/he could add up pictures of washing machines in maths, find out where washing machines are manufactured and plot them on a map, write a complaint letter to a washing machine manufacturer for English, make a collage of pictures of washing machines cut out from catalogues for Art 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. Pupils may be able to simultaneously think and write about their obsession but can have difficulty doing this with other topics.

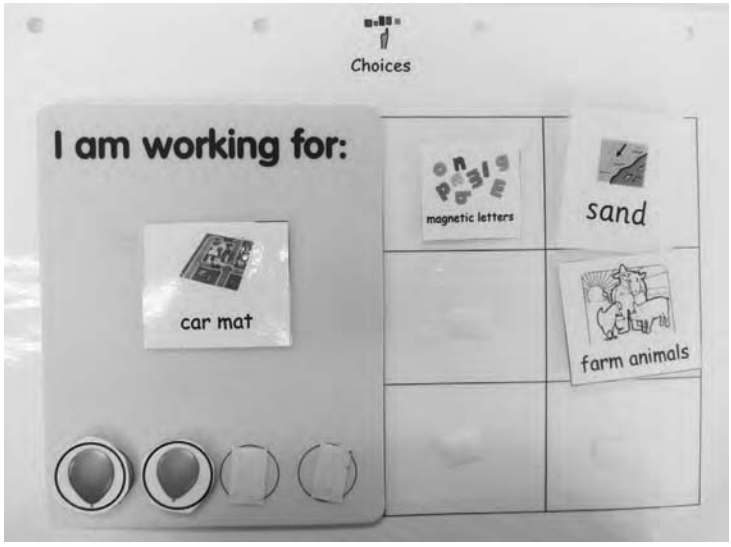
- **Try to channel inappropriate interests**
  For those pupils on the autism spectrum who have a special interest which may be deemed inappropriate, unacceptable or dangerous, it is often difficult to change this. Many pupils are unperturbed by others' reactions to their obsession or the probable consequences. However, it can be possible to change the obsession into something more socially appropriate. For example, it is not appropriate to touch people's hair or stare at a particular body part, but the pupil may enjoy cutting out pictures from a catalogue or looking at suitable images on the internet. This then allows the pupil to fulfil his/her need to focus on the obsession without getting into trouble with peers or staff.

- **Help the pupil understand that others may not be as interested in his special interest**
  Explain verbally, by using a social story or other visual support that other pupils may not want to hear about the same subject or do the same activity repeatedly. Teaching a script can be useful, e.g. teaching the pupil to ask, "Would you like to hear about..?" and giving them appropriate responses to use if the other person says "No!" Some pupils on the autism spectrum may continue to discuss their obsession regardless and expect others to share their fascination. Others can be encouraged to discuss their favourite topics only at particular times.

    - Where possible, re-direct the pupil to the task or another topic. Use very direct language and interrupt if necessary. For example- "Stop talking about X now. Time to..." Try not to become involved in repetitive conversations or questioning about the obsession.

- **Using special interests as motivation or reward**
  Many pupils on the autism 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.

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.
- Use special interests stickers/symbols on books and paper to encourage the pupil to complete written tasks.

Section 8: Sensory sensitivities

Pupils on the autism spectrum often respond differently to sensory information. They may be hypersensitive and avoid certain sensory input, or hyposensitive so seek sensory stimulation. Some pupils are hypersensitive to some sensations and hyposensitive to others, and may experience both extremes in the same sensory system. For example, are hypersensitive to touch on arms, but hyposensitive to touch on feet. 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 pupil's ability to focus on given tasks and access the curriculum and environment effectively. Whilst there are some common sensory differences associated with the autism spectrum, each pupil on the autism spectrum will have a unique individual profile. Pupils' reactions to sensory information can be extreme and may be difficult for others to understand. It is important to recognise that fluctuations and apparent inconsistencies in the way in which the pupil responds are common.

Pupils may:

- find some colours, contrasts or visual information distressing or stimulating
- focus only 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 they are in pain or ill; or they may 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.

Strategies:

- **Create a sensory profile**
  Ensure that staff are aware of any sensory differences. A sensory profile should be compiled on pupils which includes details about whether the pupil 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 pupils on the autism spectrum. However, careful observation within school 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 pupil and monitor this. All staff need to be aware of 'triggers.' Recognising the pupil's increasing anxiety or agitation means that it may be possible to intervene before overload occurs. If the pupil apparently 'overreacts' or completely 'shuts down' think about the possible cause(s). Older/more able pupils may be able to explain once calm but younger/less able pupils may not. These pupils need to be supported to recognise, understand and manage their sensory sensitivities effectively.

  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 pupil is overloaded, allow him/her time to recover in a calm, quiet environment or arrange for him to be left alone and not spoken to until ready.

- **Prepare the pupil for new sensory experiences**
  Include details of the likely sensory experiences that the pupil might have when preparing him/her for a new experience, such as a visit to a museum. Older/more able pupils may be willing to try new experiences if they have been prepared in advance about what they will see/hear/smell and so on. Many pupils also feel very reassured if they know that they can leave the room/area if necessary and are supported by someone who understands their sensory differences. Younger/less able pupils may need visual support to help them prepare- for example, 'things we might hear' 'things we might see'.

- **Accept the pupil's experience of sensation**
  Ensure that staff accept pupils' 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 pupil, a shower can feel like needles on his or her skin. Understanding how the pupil 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 pupils with high pain thresholds as they can potentially put themselves at risk. If pupils 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 pupil with low pain thresholds may need monitoring or different/reduced activities which cause discomfort.

The following information is adapted from Erbes (2011)

- **Think about background noise**

  Hypersensitive pupils may need to sit in an area of the classroom 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 pupils on the autism spectrum and may prevent them from paying attention. Playing quiet music in the classroom to block out background noise may help, or allowing the young person to wear ear plugs, defenders or listen to music through headphones for individual work.

  Ear defenders or ear plugs may help young people who are disturbed by background noise

  Hyposensitive pupils may need to sit in an area of the classroom 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 pupils 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 pupils who are unable to express what is causing distress it is important to consider this.

  Sometimes sitting or standing further away from the pupil is helpful, or using a classroom which is further away from the dining hall. Pupils may be able to use one scent to cope with another that is difficult to tolerate. For example, putting a strong preferred smell on a sleeve which can be held up to their nose when going somewhere where the smell is unbearable for them.

Hyposensitive pupils 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 pupil to develop understanding of the appropriateness of this behaviour in different contexts and explain how others may react. Older/more able pupils who seek this type of sensory feedback may need to be shown how to smell items more discretely. Using strong scented items as part of the task (e.g. scented pens) or as a reward is likely to be very motivating for these pupils.

- **Consider visual stimulation and lighting**

  Hypersensitive pupils 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. Avoid bright or visually cluttered worksheets and materials. Some pupils manage sensitivity to lights by wearing tinted lenses. Sunglasses can also be very helpful but ensure that staff and pupils are aware that this are allowed because of visual difficulties.

  Hyposensitive pupils may be attracted to bright lights, colours or reflections. Use visually stimulating materials and consider where the pupil is sitting in relation to lighting. For pupils who are fascinated by this type of visual stimulation, consider using it as a reward as it may be too distracting to use these materials as part of the task. For example, a younger/less able pupil could be allocated set time to play with have a bag of visually stimulating objects. An older/more able pupil might enjoy time to play a visually stimulating computer game, or flick through a brightly coloured catalogue.

- **Manage tactile stimulation**

  Hypersensitive pupils should not be touched unless necessary, and if there is a need to touch him/her always warn the pupil first. Be aware that the pupil 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 pupils this applies to, a reasonable adjustment may be to allow the pupil 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 pupils and staff why the pupil is allowed to wear a different item. Textures of seats and flooring will also need to be considered, for example, using a cushion on chairs, a specific chair for the pupil or a square of fabric to sit on that the pupil likes instead of the carpet or floor.

  Hyposensitive pupils may prefer the feeling of tight clothing and may respond well to weighted blankets or mats. Physical activities which involve tactile feedback can be incorporated into breaks and lunchtimes.

- **Plan for vestibular (balance) and proprioceptive difficulties (when the body is in space)**
  Hypersensitive pupils 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 pupil 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 pupil at the front or end of lines and queues.

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

- For **Gustatory** sensitivities see Section 11.2.

Section 9: Coping with change and transitions

Change and transitions take place throughout the school day and can cause huge anxiety. The majority of pupils on the autism spectrum prefer structure where they know what to expect, and 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 of classroom and teacher at 9.30 in the morning may still be causing considerable distress at the end of the school day, the next day or the following week. Other pupils may internalise their stress and anxiety and require close monitoring of their well being as well as opportunities and encouragement to express their anxieties.

Reactions to change are also very individual. Pupils on the autism 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 pupil 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 pupils 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 pupil needs to learn how to cope with change within a supportive environment. Many pupils on the autism spectrum are better able to manage change if they feel that others understand and accept their anxieties.

Pupils 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 school at the beginning of the day, and vice versa
- moving between activities within the classroom environment
- moving from classroom environments to other areas of the school, e.g. hall, science lab, ICT suite
- transition between class job shares
- transferring between different subject teachers
- moving year groups within a school
- moving from primary to secondary school
- moving from secondary school to 6th form or college
- moving from 6th form or college to further education, university or work.

Strategies for managing change and transitions:

- **Identify potentially difficult transitions**

  Discuss with colleagues and parents the possible times throughout the day, term or year that may prove challenging for the pupil. For example, the transition from weekend to weekday, holiday to term time, seasonal changes such as the clocks changing and Christmas activities. It can be reassuring for pupils to identify any familiar aspects which are going to remain the same. For example, identifying that Christmas lunch will still be at the same time, the child will sit in the same place but the tables will be arranged differently. 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:

  - Annotation of timetables to record how a pupil reacts to smaller transitions. This can help to identify patterns of behaviour and 'triggers'.
  - Formal and/or informal meetings 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 class and subject teachers to share information relating to transitions.

- **Use visual resources**

  See Section Four. Visual timetables are a clear way to show pupils that there will be a change. Alternatively the timetable may involve pictures, photos and or words.
  More able pupils may just require a written timetable with any changes highlighted and/or written and verbal prompts to remind them of the change and support them throughout the school day. Some pupils on the autism spectrum are happy to use these openly, others may require a more discrete approach. Give the pupil time to go through the timetable with an appropriate staff member and the opportunity to ask any questions or air concerns. 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 pupil for bigger transitions, for example, a new class book. If possible, allow the pupil 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 pupil is changing school or going to college.

- **Give advance warning of change**

  Wherever possible, inform the pupil 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 pupil. Some pupils on the autism spectrum need a long time to get used to the idea of a change and think it through, whereas telling other pupils well in advance simply heightens anxiety levels as they worry about it continuously.
  Sometimes a warning just before the change will suffice, for example, "In two minutes, I am going to ask you to tidy up your equipment."

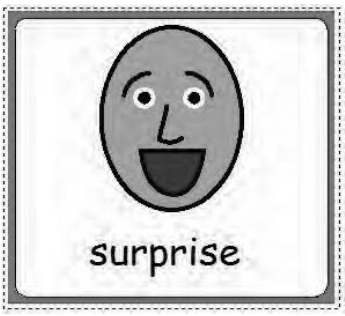
- **Prepare or rehearse**
  If possible, prepare the pupil in advance by for example, showing them the new classroom they will be in, practising how to get from one area of the school to the unfamiliar area, visiting the new school. Role-play can be helpful method for older/more able pupils to cope with an unfamiliar activity, e.g. going for a careers interview. The adult plays the role of the new person and the pupil has the opportunity to practise what they might say.

- **Provide structure**
  Many pupils on the autism spectrum respond best to a high degree of structure. Lessons should have a clearly defined structure so that pupils understand what is going to happen throughout the lesson and how different activities relate to each other. Ensure that key learning points are emphasised and understood by the pupil. More able pupils are often deeply upset or angry if their peers 'mess around' or break the rules. Pupils may challenge peers or staff if they are not following rules precisely. Be aware that pupils on the autism spectrum may not be aware of 'unwritten' rules. For example, a secondary aged pupil who takes a drink out in assembly and drinks it. When challenged by the staff member, the pupil looks puzzled and says "But it doesn't say that anywhere!"

- **Give reassurance**
  If faced with an unexpected change, tell the pupil 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 pupil what will happen after the unexpected event, for example, "After the fire drill, we will go back to the classroom". With more able pupils, 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 pupils on the autism 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 pupil is overwhelmed, do not make demands or question his/her behaviour.

  Some pupils may need a clear visual cue such as a surprise card, which can be shown to a pupil each time something unforeseen happens.



  Show the pupil the card and explain what the change is using the appropriate level of language. This might be very simple, such as, "Surprise. No swimming" or for a more able pupil, "Duncan, this is a surprise because we cannot go swimming - the pool is closed today. But it is ok. You will stay here with me to do some maths."

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  It may be necessary to allow the pupil 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 pupil reassurance, even if you do not know exactly what will be happening.

- **Changing task or activity**

  Some pupils may need support to change task, for example a 5 minute warning of when the next activity will start. Younger/less able pupils 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 pupils 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, pupils on the autism spectrum may need reminding or warning prior to the end of a lesson to enable them to prepare for the transition to the next lesson or activity. This can be verbal, or visual. Some pupils respond well to the use of a timer. Electronic timers, sand timers and kitchen timers can all be used. Consider what the pupil may respond best to. For example, a pupil who has a sensory sensitivity to lights may not cope with a timer that flashes.

  However, a pupil 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. Older/more able pupils may prefer more discrete methods. For example, small digital timers or their mobile phone timer which they can set independently once told how long they have to complete a task. Pupils may require specific 'transition time' in order to change from one task to another, such as five minutes quiet reading prior to starting the next task.

- **Changing between classrooms**

  Pupils on the autism spectrum may become distressed when moving through noisy, crowded areas particularly if they have sensory issues and intensely dislike others' touch. Many pupils find it difficult to tolerate the inadvertent bumping and jostling that can occur and do not always understand that this is unintentional. Other pupils have poor proprioceptive skills so cannot judge well where their body is within a space so may annoy peers by bumping into them or objects. Pupils on the autism spectrum are also at more risk of others exploiting them during these times, so may benefit from the following strategies:

  - Having permission to leave each lesson a few minutes early in order to get to the next lesson, or arriving five minutes later when the other pupils have settled down and/or being accompanied by an adult.
  - Specifically practising moving through the 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 pupil plays his or herself to practice how to move around and what to say if s/he is accidentally jostled or bumps into someone else.
  - Explicit advice such as explaining to the pupils that they may be less likely to bump into others if their school bag is carried on their back, rather than over one shoulder.
  - Use of a visual strategy to support appropriate behaviour, such as a language jig or social story.
  - Developing the pupil's understanding of 'accidental' versus 'deliberate contact.
  - Developing the pupil's understanding of the difference between their own and others' sensory experiences.

- **Support following transitions**
  Pupils 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 pupils' anxiety levels may remain heightened and that they may need additional support. Support can take many different forms and may include, for example:
  - allowing the pupil a set time or times every day to go through and discuss what is happening that day and/or how the day has been particularly if there are new or unfamiliar aspects
  - careful monitoring of the pupil throughout the day to identify any areas of difficulty in the new setting and strategies to resolve these ,such as allowing the pupil 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
  - specific practice of new skills required such as using a checklist to ensure that the pupil has the right items in his/her bag for different lessons.

- **Allow time for questions**
  Some pupils 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 pupil 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 pupil can refer to, can act as a concrete and visual reminder for the pupil. If possible the question should be phrased in the pupil's own words.

Question	**Answer**
Which class will I be in after the summer holidays?	I will be in Year 5. My teacher will be Mrs Martin.

Older/more able pupils may require verbal prompting. Avoid answering the same question repeatedly as this is counter-productive. Remind pupils that they have already been given an answer. If necessary write down key questions and answers for them to refer to.

If there is a range of questions it may be appropriate to create a 'Question Box'. This allows the pupil to write or draw the question, and post it in the box. The questions can then be dealt with at an appropriate and agreed time.

- **Allow for calm time**
  It is essential to be aware of and plan effective calming activities for pupils during periods of transition. For example, allowing the pupil to be met in the library by a teaching assistant or peer prior to entering the 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 pupil**

  When planning for phase transitions it is important to consider what the pupil 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 pupil 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 pre-school to primary, moving house or starting a club. Discuss how these new experiences felt and focus on the fact that the pupil coped with the change. Talk about how the change has enhanced their life, such as new skills learnt, greater responsibility or new friends. This may need to be drawn or recorded in an alternative visual format. For example:

  - "Do you remember when you started Chess club? You felt nervous. Now you can play chess every week. Last week you and Tom had a great game. Deciding to start Chess club was a good change."

  - "You have had a great year in Year 5 and you took part in the school play. When you are in Year 6 you might be in the school play again."

- **Plan bespoke visits**

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

  Ensure that the pupil is engaged in the process. Ask the pupil what they want to know and what they want to find out. Ensure that the pupil is aware of key places in the new setting, for example where the toilets, reception and dinner hall are. As detailed in other sections, it is crucial that the pupil is told who are where to go to if they are having difficulty. For younger/less able pupils a 'Things I want to find out book' can be created and items ticked off once completed.

- **Establish practical arrangements**

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

  - ensuring that the pupil is allocated a locker prior to starting which is close to their tutor group or support staff base, rather than at the other end of the school
  - considering where the pupil has to go when arriving at school and at the end of the school day
  - looking at the areas available at break and lunchtimes to establish where the pupil is likely to be most comfortable

- identifying any classrooms or areas which are likely to cause particular difficulty in terms of sensory issues and considering whether there is an alternative area that could be used or where the pupil could be sat to minimise the difficulty. For example, sitting the pupil next to an open window if s/he is hypersensitive to smells coming from the dining hall.

- **Get the right member of staff to support**
  Consider who supports the pupil during the visit. It should be someone who knows the pupil well, and the pupil has a good relationship with. This member of staff can support the pupil with introductions to new members of staff. Having a 'link' member of staff at the new school or college is also very helpful for all concerned.

- **Work on additional skills required in the new setting**
  Pupils may need to be specifically taught new skills, particularly when transferring from primary to secondary school. They may need to learn how to read and manage a timetable, write down homework, and organise their equipment and possessions.

  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 pupil can refer to as preparation for their move.

- **Highlight new or different rules**
  Ensure that the pupil and their parents are aware of any changes in rules in the different setting. It may be appropriate for the pupil to note down any questions about rules to ask a member of staff at their new school or college on one of their visits to the new setting.

- **Keep the pupil and the parents informed**
  Ensure that both the pupil 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 school or college 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 pupil'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 9.1: Puberty

Puberty can be a complex transition for all pupils, but may pose particular difficulty for pupils on the autism spectrum due to having to cope with considerable change. Limited understanding of what may happen and the reasons why may cause confusion or distress so it is important that pupils are well prepared and that the language used to explain is accessible.

Pupils may:

- not understand, be frightened by or unable to manage the changes associated with puberty
- be anxious about and reluctant to become a 'grown up'
- struggle to manage the practical aspects of puberty such as menstruation or body odour
- be unaware that the way in which others relate to them may change as they develop
- not be able to understand lessons about puberty because of their difficulties with understanding language, the amount of information given and the pace of delivery.

Strategies for managing puberty:

Many of the principles outlined in Section Fourteen are applicable. In addition:

- **Prepare the pupil**
  Ensure that the pupil is well prepared for any changes that will happen including:
  - what it will look like physically
  - what it might feel like
  - why the change is happening

Younger/less able pupils may need preparatory work before puberty is discussed. For example, ensuring that they have an understanding of clean and dirty, are able to label body parts, know that some parts of their body are private and have an idea of appropriate boundaries regarding personal space.

Pupils should also be told what to do i.e. practical strategies and who they should or should not discuss any issues about puberty with. Remember that in order to learn new information pupils often require repetition and reinforcement.

- **Provide clear information**
  Pupils on the autism spectrum need to be spoken to clearly and directly and any verbal information must be explicit. Ensure that they also have access to appropriate written and visual information to refer to when necessary. Individual sessions may be required for some pupils on the autism spectrum which are specifically tailored to their level of understanding and specific worries.

- **Explain emotional changes**
  Be aware that many pupils will have additional difficulty understanding the emotional changes associated with puberty as they may not be able to identify and recognise their own emotions accurately.

Pupils who already find it difficult to manage their moods may find this further exacerbated by hormonal changes. Remind pupils that their emotional state may be linked to puberty and help them to identify any patterns. This is particularly relevant to female pupils as moods may be linked to their menstrual cycle.

- **Consult a GP for advice**
  For female pupils who have difficulty managing their periods and/or suffer from severe mood swings associated with their menstrual cycle, it may be helpful to consult a GP about possible options to support them, such as the use of the contraceptives.

Section 10: Accessing learning within the classroom and school environment

Strategies for difficulties that pupils may have in the areas of language and communication, social interaction, rigidity and obsessions and sensory issues are covered in detail in Sections Five, Six, Seven and Nine. This section therefore only highlights additional issues which may occur in a classroom or the wider school environment.

A common difficulty experienced is that pupils on the autism spectrum may only wish to work on their own agenda. This is often due to pupils' rigid thinking. There is usually a very genuine reason why pupils will not do as asked, which the pupil 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 pupil to comply with instructions and work in the same way as their peers, this may need a gradual, staged and flexible approach. Many pupils 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 pupils will not attempt any activity, or offer their suggestions for fear of getting it wrong.

Pupils may:

- have problems maintaining and switching focus, and knowing where to focus attention
- be only able to listen to verbal language for short periods of time
- find it difficult to express their thoughts in writing
- it challenging to sit in close proximity of other pupils
- 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 difficulty planning and sequencing what to do
- have a strong fear of failure
- not be able to cope with making mistakes
- not obey or 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 their own agenda and wander round the room or be unwilling to complete work unless on their own terms.

Strategies:

- **Positioning in the classroom/ on the carpet.**
  It may be necessary to provide a marker or label to remind pupils where they need to sit. Younger/less able pupils 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. Pupils may require help to sit appropriately next to others without touching them or their belongings.

  Some pupils 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 pupil away from objects or other pupils that may be distracting and create an individual 'workstation' if necessary. Ensure that pupils 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 pupils in to when and where they need to pay attention**
  Within a busy classroom situation, pupils may need to be prompted about when and where to focus their attention. Encourage pupils 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 pupils to listen and look at the person speaking but the pupil 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'**
  Pupils who have difficulty with processing and understanding language are likely to 'switch off' or cause disruption to others. Where possible, do not expect the pupil to listen for extended periods of time. Pupils 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 pupil with another, non-disruptive activity to do whilst the other pupils discuss the topic, then provide key information. Older/more able pupils often benefit from being told in advance what information that they need to pay attention to so that they can 'listen out' for important details. Some pupils respond well to gradually building up the amount of time they are expected to listen by using a timer.

- **Encourage pupils to ask for help**
  Pupils may have difficulty knowing when they need support and/or requesting it. For pupils who are acutely anxious about being 'singled out' by peers a discrete signal may need to be devised. This ensures that when the pupil uses the agreed signal the staff member knows that she or he needs help and approaches the pupil. Younger/less able pupils 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 pupil holds up or puts out may be useful.

- **Give the pupil a specific role in group work**
  Many pupils find group work difficult because they are unsure what they and other pupils need to do. Giving pupils a specific role or job within the group can help create a structure. Younger/less able pupils may need adult support to manage some aspects of group work. When planning a group task, consider whether the pupil 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 pupils may require adult support or reassurance. Reinforcing the social rules verbally and/or visually is often helpful, for example, reminding pupils that everyone takes turns to talk.

- **Broaden the pupil's ability to follow others' agendas**
  If the pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil knows when the activity will start and end.
- Reassure the pupil 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 pupil and may enable him or her to engage.

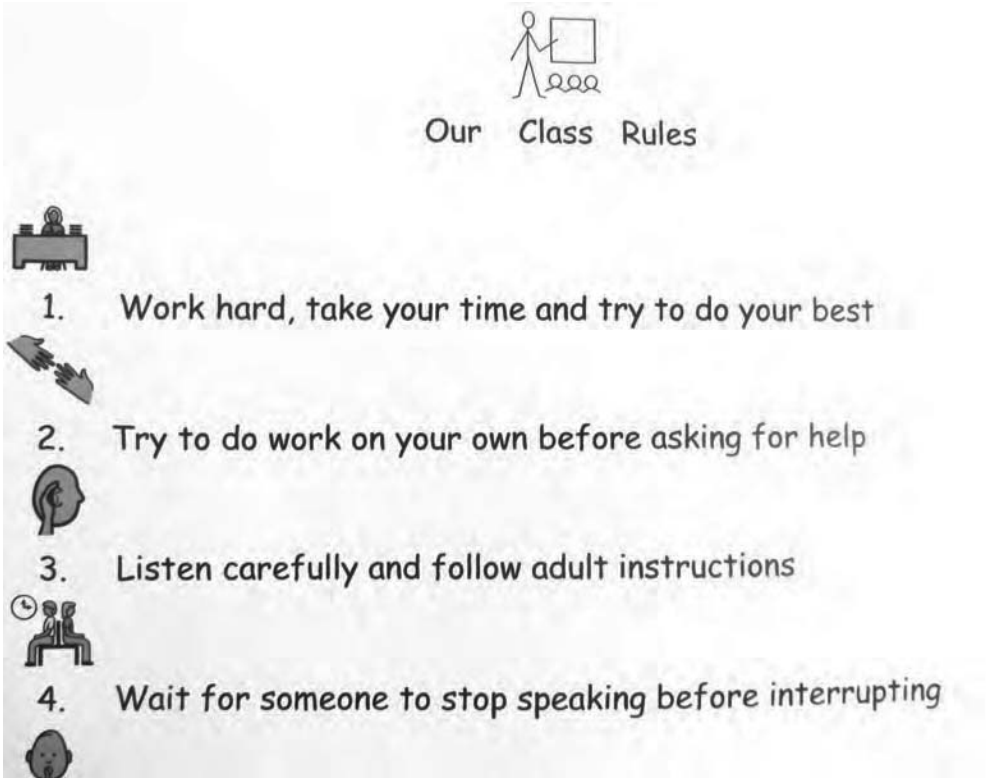
- **Make classroom rules explicit**
  Ensure that pupils understand the classroom rules. Have visual or written prompts displayed to remind pupils if necessary. If a pupil breaks a classroom rule, give him or her clear feedback.

  For example, if a pupil 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/less able pupils.

Example of visual representation of classroom rules: red card = wet break

red a

Examples of visual representation of classroom rules



- **Reduce or structure open-ended tasks**
  Pupils generally find open-ended tasks difficult as they many not know what information is needed or where to start. Tasks can also be problematic if they relate to something outside of the pupil's experience as s/he may not be able to imagine what it is like. Use visual information such as a DVD clip, objects, photo or picture material to give pupils an idea of what somewhere or something 'looks like' if appropriate. Break down tasks using written and/or visual prompts which ask for specific information. See also Section Five re types of questions to use.

- **Utilise the pupils' strengths**
  Many pupils 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 pupils those on the autism 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 pupils. Always encourage the pupil to try and reinforce that 'trying' is the most important aspect of a task, not necessarily the result. Provide reassurance before expecting the pupil to start the task, and throughout the task, if necessary. Other useful strategies may be as follows:

- Show the pupil 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 pupil feels it is achievable.
- Praise or reward success even if it is only a very small step.

- **Make explicit links to enable pupils to transfer skills or information**
  Pupils on the autism spectrum and those with communication difficulties often have significant difficulty in transferring or generalising information/skills learnt in one context to another. For example, if pupils learn how to measure distance in mathematics, they may not remember or be able to use this knowledge in geography or another subject.

  This difficulty with transferring knowledge can occur within task, if the task changes slightly or when moving from one task to another in the same lesson. For example, if the pupil has been practising column addition but then is given a word problem, which requires use of the same technique but is presented in a different way. This can cause immense frustration for staff but is a very genuine issue. Cue the pupil in by reminding them of the particular skill or information and when s/he learnt it. For example, “Do you remember that we learnt how to measure distance in maths. We used.... Do you think that we could use that in this lesson?” For younger/less able pupils, use visual cues or show them their book or worksheet from the other lesson.

- **Identify key concepts and vocabulary**
  Identifying the key concepts and vocabulary within a lesson that pupils need to learn can help them to focus on these rather than less important information. Many pupils will need repetition and reinforcement in order to learn new information. This may be achieved by:
    - Pre-teaching key concepts and vocabulary before the lesson.
    - Providing a book or resource containing key concepts or vocabulary using simple language.
    - Using a classroom resource mat or work mat to indicate key topic words.
    - Practising or learning key concepts or vocabulary as homework.

Section 11: Potential hotspots and triggers

The 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 pupil on the autism spectrum. The demands placed on a pupil to make sense of this environment can potentially overwhelm him or her. See the section on sensory differences.

Example of a busy 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 pupil is experiencing. It is therefore important to be aware of the demands and stresses certain situations within school may create for pupils on the autism spectrum. Whilst it is not always possible to pre-empt how a pupil 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: Assemblies, large group and special events

There are many assemblies and other events that take place throughout the school week and year. The structure, timing, content, presentation, rules and environment in which each of these gatherings takes place can be difficult for the pupil on the autism spectrum. Whilst the aim may be to eventually enable the pupil to be included in school assemblies and other events this will probably need to be worked towards via a number of small graduated steps.

Pupils may:

- find it difficult to be with a large group of people
- react to being in close proximity of other children or young people 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. Pupils 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 pupil and add detail that might be important to him/ her.

  Visual timetables can be used to plan ahead and prepare pupils for different events they will be attending. Use visual cue cards to remind pupils 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. Older/more able pupils may just need the opportunity to talk through what will happen and how to behave beforehand.

- **Backward chaining**
  Open ended situations that have no clear sequential steps or conclusions can cause a pupil on the autism spectrum to become extremely anxious. Backward chaining is a useful strategy for a pupil who finds it difficult to cope in these situations and may only be able to participate for a short time. This strategy requires a pupil 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. Very small steps may also be needed to help increase the pupil's tolerance.

  For example, if the pupil cannot sit at the lunch table for five minutes, over a period of time, s/he may need to sit at a table alone just outside the dining room, then at a table just inside, then at a table with one other peer and so on. Language jigs and timers may also be required to support the learning of routines, however once a pupil 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.

- **Use of positive role models**
  Pupils may benefit from having a buddy to provide examples of appropriate behaviours such as when to stand up, when to put hand up to answer questions and to help with practical issues such as finding a seat or exiting the room appropriately if needed.

- **Ear defenders or ear plugs**
  The pupil may be able to wear ear defenders, or ear plugs, to help reduce their anxiety about sudden or loud noises such as cheering and clapping.

- **Reduce waiting time**
  For events which involve the pupil 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 pupil has had his/her turn.

- **Jobs and responsibility**
  Giving a pupil a routine task such as handing out information may provide a distraction from anxieties and give a pupil something else to focus attention on. However, it is important that the task does not then prevent the pupil from focusing on the content.

- **Allow time**
  It is important that time is allocated to support pupils 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 pupil is able to spend at these events or provide alternate arrangements, such as allowing the pupil to read a book in a quieter location whilst the event takes place.

Section 11.2: Break and lunch times

Less structured times of the day can provoke increased anxiety for pupils on the autism spectrum. Pupils may be unsure how to behave, and there may be issues about the number of people, noise and social demands. Some pupils may seek interaction with others but lack the social skills and understanding to do this successfully. Others actively avoid other pupils and appear to retreat into their own world or behave in a manner that may attract negative attention. As a result the pupil may return to the classroom following break time too stressed and anxious to be able to concentrate or participate in the 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 pupils will need 'time out' from exhausting social demands and want to be left alone. Older/more able pupils 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 pupils on the autism 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 times pupils may:

- lack the social skills to make and sustain friendships which 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 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
- associate with the 'wrong crowd' due to their inability to make accurate character judgements
- be teased and provoked as a result of over reaction to seemingly trivial incidents
- be aware that they are different from others and find it hard to cope with the fact that they don't know how to make friends or' fit in'
- prefer their own company, pursuing repetitive activities or appearing to wander around aimlessly
- be unaware of 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 pupils may:

- not like the noise, bustle and close proximity of other pupils in the dining room
- be unable to stand in a queue due to other pupils 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 pupil to explain what will happen and when or explain socially acceptable behaviour. Older/more able pupils may just need a verbal explanation and may find role-play of a particular situation helpful.

- **Familiarise the pupil with the area**

  Visit the dining room/playground or other break time areas when quiet, if necessary. Point out ways in and out of the area or room so that the pupil knows where to exit quickly from if overloaded. This allows the pupil to look around properly and ask any questions when feeling calm.

  For younger/less able pupils 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. Pupils may also need to be prepared for any changes to the usual layout or routine. For example, the seating and the look of the dining room might be quite different for the Christmas meal.

- **Identify an appropriate place for pupils to eat**

  If the pupil 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 pupils 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. Older/more able pupils may be embarrassed about their limited diet and/or difficulties eating. For example, they may not be able to use a knife and fork well.

- **Gustatory issues related to sensory sensitivities**

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

Hypersensitive pupils 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 pupils 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 pupil 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 pupil has a plan to follow. Younger/less able pupils 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. Older/more able pupils can be given a clear outline, with a written 'back up' to remind them what they are doing when and where. For example, '12.30pm: Eat lunch in the canteen. 12.45pm: Work in the library. 1-1.30pm: Computer club in room B2'

- **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 pupils are not hurt. It is often beneficial with older/more able pupils to raise their awareness of less obvious 'rules' that other pupils learn instinctively. For example, pupils who want to break school rules will often go as far away from the supervising staff as possible so that they are not seen or heard.

- **Timers**
  Use timers to give a visual warning that the end of break time is approaching if this is a particular issue for pupils. For example, placing a sign on the classroom window which is visible to the pupil to indicate when there is 10 minutes of break time left.

- **Time out**
  It is important that pupils have a safe place to go and relax. This could be in a quiet area of the playground or elsewhere in the school. Some pupils 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. Pupils may enjoy having mats to roll up in, weighted blankets 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 pupil join in with activities or social interaction. This needs to be carefully managed with an agreement from the pupil and his/her peers about how and when the support will take place. It is often beneficial to teach games or activities in a safe environment before the pupil joins in with peers. Pupils on the autism spectrum frequently find social interaction tiring because of the need to think consciously about the rules so may also need time to relax.

- **Relaxation time**
  Offer pupils '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 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 pupil to relax or calm down. Many pupils have obsessions and special interests which provide a focus for activities or form the basis of a club, such as strategy games like chess.

- **Access to help**
  Pupils 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 pupil 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 teachers and visitors to school

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

Pupils 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 appropriately than usual because of their anxiety, which could include withdrawal, lack of cooperation, repetitive routines or disruptive behaviour
- communicate less effectively 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
- be more likely to get into a conflict because of how the visitor perceives their behaviour.

Strategies for supply staff and cover staff or visitors:

Also see Section 8.

- **Warn the pupil in advance**

  If a supply teacher or visitor is planned, inform the pupil 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 pupil know before s/he is faced with an unfamiliar adult. Younger/less able pupils will need simple explanation, visual support or a quickly sketched language jig. For older/more able pupils a verbal explanation may suffice, backed up with a quick note or a reminder on a mobile phone if necessary.

- **Reassure the pupil**

  Whether the change is planned or unexpected, pupils on the autism spectrum generally benefit from and require reassurance. The nature of the reassurance depends upon the individual pupil's needs and level of understanding.

  Younger/less able pupils may want reassurance that the routine will stay the same, they will still be allowed a comfort toy or time out for their obsession.

  Older/more able pupils often need to be reassured that the visitor or supply staff knows about their needs and anxieties, and that the same strategies still apply. If the pupil is likely to become extremely anxious and need to exit the room, make sure that s/he knows what to do.

- **Provide key information about the pupil**

  Ensure that there is an information sheet that is given to visitors or supply staff about the pupil. This should include an outline of the pupil's needs, what s/he finds particularly difficult, any triggers, how to communicate with the pupil and strategies which help.

  Ensure that the supply teacher knows what the procedure is if the pupil's behaviour becomes particularly challenging or the pupil becomes overwhelmed and leaves the classroom. This is particularly important if there are no other staff members around who know the pupil, as the wrong approach from supply staff may exacerbate the situation further.

Examples of 'Important information about me'

My Name is .....

Ms..... is my TA. She helps me say goodbye to my parents and settle down to work in the morning and during assembly in the afternoon.

My Class TA Ms.....helps me to remember things I have to do. She helps me to sort things out if I get upset.

When my routine is changed I might get very upset.

You might see me biting my nails,

refusing to move or do my work

or walking on my toes.

You can help me by....

1. **giving me some warning** of what's happening next
2. **using the class visual timetable**
3. Saying '**Go and chat to Ms..... or Ms .....** and they will help you to understand.

I often become anxious if I have a time limit to complete a task **or** if you ask me to stop before I have finished.

1. You can help by **giving me encouragement and saying ' Well done..... you are doing really well'**
2. **Breaking the task into manageable chunks that I can cross off as I go.**
3. **Giving me some warning that I need to stop soon.** I use a five minute sand timer for this.

I don't like making mistakes and don't like it if you say 'That's wrong!

You can help me by saying ....'That's really good ....., perhaps we could have a look and see if we could make any improvements'.

Or

'leave it for now ..... and we'll look at it together later.

I can find it difficult to take turns and share with other children.

and

I find it difficult to share an adult's attention with another child.

You can help me by saying.

' Go and look at your language jig with Ms .....

I sometimes shout out in class as I'm not sure when it's my turn to speak.

and

I find it difficult to wait my turn if I have something to tell you.

You can help me by Saying....

' .....you need to remember to put up your hand when you wish to speak'

or

showing me my 'Hand up' card.

When **I don't always respond to instructions**, I am not being rude or naughty.

It's just that I don't always understand that you mean me.

You can help by **always using my name** to get my attention before giving an instruction.

My Name is .....

This is my TA Mrs ..... who helps me in class.

Mrs .....is our class TA. She helps me to remember things I have to do and helps me to sort things out if I get worried when Mrs..... isn't here.

Sometimes my voice is too loud or I shout out and make noises.

I do this when I am feeling anxious, when I don't understand what is happening or because I am finding it difficult to concentrate.

You can help me by:
1.Showing me my **'Please be quiet'** card

I find it difficult to concentrate on tasks.

You may see me rolling on the floor, making noises or fiddling with things. If this is distracting other children I may need to take some time out.

You can help me by asking my TA to give me my activity card.
I will carry out my own activities for a short time but will then be encouraged by my TA to rejoin the group.

I find it difficult to cope at play time.

Mrs ..... supports me at lunch time and is helping me to play with other children.

Each day I chose a buddy to play with me.

I find it difficult to concentrate in assembly.
Mrs ..... is helping me learn to sit quietly and listen.
I go into assembly for the last 5 minutes. I use a timer to help me sit quietly for 5 minutes

I have difficulty in understanding instructions.

You can help me by simplifying them and repeating them to me individually.

I may become anxious if my routine is changed.

You can help me by asking me to look at my visual timetable with my TA or by asking my TA to make a language jig with me to help me understand what is going to happen.

I am learning to use the toilet. I have a visual timetable and reward system to support this.
Mrs..... helps me.

Section 11.4: School trips and residential visits

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

Pupils:

- may be uncertain about where they are going, who they are going with, and whether they will be coming back
- may 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
- may be worried about using unfamiliar toilets (particularly those with an electric hand dryer)
- may have a limited or heightened sense of danger and may cling to an adult for reassurance or wander off and approach strangers
- may 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
- May find it difficult to cope if things don't go to plan such as a walk on may beach being cancelled due to bad weather.

In addition, on residential trips:

Pupils may:

- have unusual or disrupted sleep patterns which may disturb others during the night
- find it difficult to sleep in an unfamiliar environment with different bedding, lighting, smells and sounds
- have sensory sensitivities with regards to food, its preparation and presentation
- find it challenging to cope with staying away from home or being part of a large group of people for an extended period of time
- find it hard to take part in new activities which require the wearing of specific safety equipment such as helmets.

- **Plan ahead**

  Photos and brochures can be used to show the pupil where they are going and what they will see. It is helpful if a member of staff and/or the pupil is able to visit the place prior to the visit, particularly if it involves residential accommodation, to check out toilet facilities, sleeping and lunch time arrangements in advance and take photos to share with the pupil.

- **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 pupil 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 4. These can include details of the stages of the journey, a visual plan of the journey so that pupils are engaged looking for landmarks and/or a timetable. Ensure that the pupil 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**
  When undertaking a residential trip the pupil may be reassured if s/he can bring items along such as own duvet covers or pillows which feel and smell familiar. On day trips pupils may have a particular item which comforts them. Pupils 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**
  Pupils may require 'time out' during trips from the constant contact with other pupils and expectations to join in and interact. Pupils 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 pupil.

Section 11.5: Swimming sessions

Swimming sessions can be very challenging for pupils on the autism spectrum because they involve a number of changes and exposure to a variety of sensory experiences.

Pupils may:

- be uncertain about times of departure and arrival
- be anxious about the journey to and from the pool
- find it difficult to cope with communal changing areas
- find it difficult to cope with sensory issues including:
    - the smell of chlorine and the smell of skin/hair after swimming
    - fluorescent lighting, reflections in the water
    - wearing of swim wear, hats and armbands
    - walking through footbaths
    - showers/ water splashing on face or body
    - different noises and acoustics of the building
    - physical sensations such as wet hair, wrinkled fingers and goose bumps
    - temperature of water
    - use of whistles to gain attention or warn of danger
- have problems with dressing, such as knowing the order for taking clothes off and putting them back on
- have no awareness of danger.

Strategies:

- **Make rules explicit and use visual support**

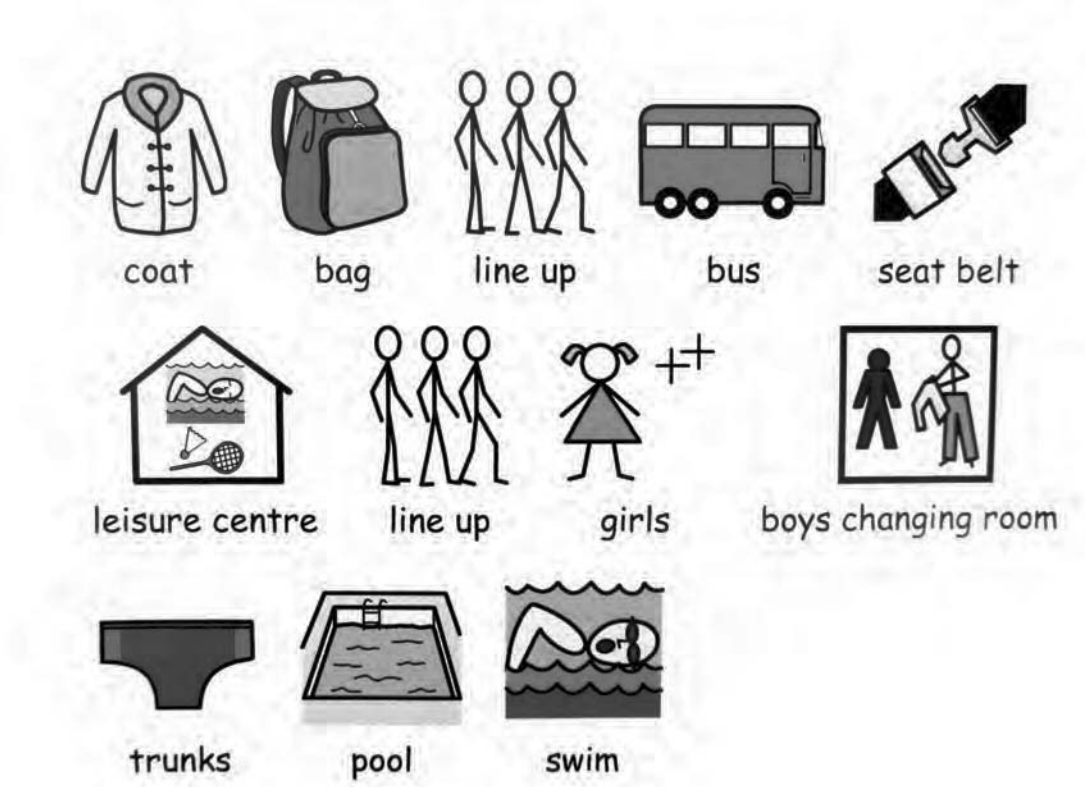
  See Section 4. Use visual cue cards or support to explain and remind pupil of rules and why they are important. Social stories™ may be helpful to explain specific rules and describe appropriate behaviour, particularly in regard to health and safety. For example, it may be necessary to explain why everyone walks through the footbath before swimming, why it is important to get out of the pool with everyone else at the end of the lesson or why fingers go wrinkly. Sometimes pupils have irrational fears which need to be explained and pupils need reassurance about. For example, a pupil may be worried that s/he will be sucked down the plug hole.

  Timetables can be used to plan ahead and prepare pupils for dates and times of swimming lessons. Use of a surprise card may also need to be incorporated, should arrangements change at the last minute.

Example of a swimming language jig using photos

Using photographs can be helpful to prepare pupils for what they are going to but can have drawbacks for younger/less able pupils due to possibility of change such as the bus being a different colour, or the weather being different to that depicted in the photograph. If this is an issue, use generic symbols to represent objects and events as in the examples below.

Example of a swimming language jig using symbols
Widgit Symbols (c) Widgit Software 2002-2013 www.widgit.com



- **Gradual exposure to new sensory experiences**
  Slow, planned exposure to sensory stimuli may help pupils become familiar with particular experiences and learn to tolerate them. They may need time to practice changing in and out of swimming trunks in the changing room or sitting on the poolside watching the swimming lesson routine. Pupils may also take time to build confidence to actually get in the water.

  They should be encouraged to do this via a series of small steps using visual aids, for example, dipping toes in a pool, pouring water on legs, or splashing faces. It is important to make these small steps clear to the pupil, stick to the targets set each week and reward accordingly. Pupils may be able to take a special book, or object to the pool to look at once the target(s) has/have been achieved.

Section 11.6: Homework

Pupils may have specific difficulties with completing homework, which is sometimes caused by a very rigid distinction between home and school. For these pupils, homework represents school work and therefore is part of 'school' so they will refuse or be reluctant to accept it as part of 'home' A flexible approach to homework, working in partnership with parents and carers may be needed.

Pupils may:

- find it difficult to transfer skills or remember information from school to home
- find it hard to work at home where the same, specific visual supports or equipment may not be available
- have problems with time management and organisational skills so spend far too long or not enough time on homework
- misinterpret or fail to write down instructions accurately for homework
- have difficulty starting homework, particularly if it is an open ended task
- be anxious about repercussions of not finishing homework in time, and meeting deadlines
- only be able to complete and hand in work if it is exactly right by their own standards
- be unwilling to take advice or accept help from a parent who 'is not' a teacher
- find the expectations of homework difficult because they are fatigued from the social, communication and sensory overload during the school day.

Strategies:

- **Ensure that information about homework is recorded correctly**
  Write homework on the whiteboard at the start of the lesson, or have it pre-written ready to put into a folder or stick into a book. Ensure that the pupil has recorded all of the information correctly including when, where and to whom it should be given when finished. Use a scribe if necessary and check that the pupil puts the homework information in the correct place before s/he leaves the lesson. Many pupils on the autism spectrum will not be able to write down the homework and listen to an explanation at the same time.

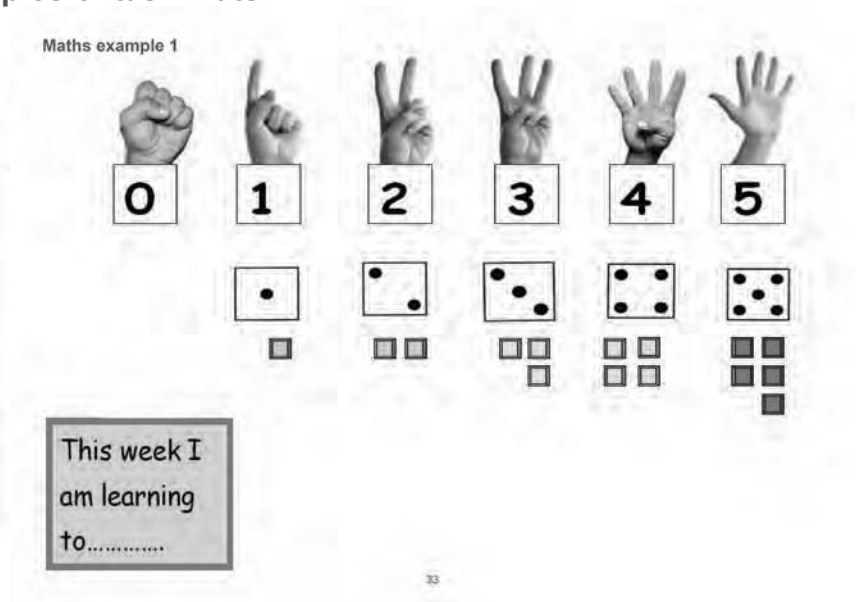
- **Make the purpose of homework explicit**
  Ensure that all pupils, particularly those on the autism spectrum are given a clear explanation of why they are being asked to complete homework. It is important to also make the links to other lessons explicit. For example, "For homework I would like you to learn the meaning of these important words **so that** you understand the DVD that we are watching next lesson." For younger/less able pupils this needs to be at an appropriate level using simple language and/or visual support.

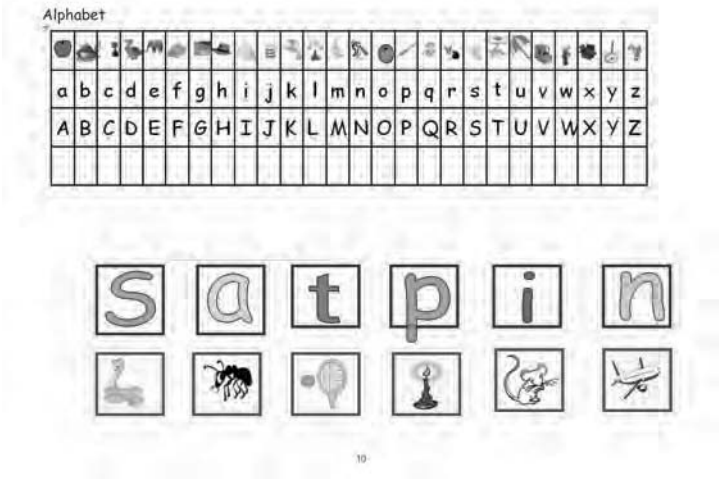
- **Ensure that there is good home-school communication**
  This is particularly important for parents of pupils on the autism spectrum. Check whether the pupil has a history of difficulties with homework. If there are established difficulties and the pupil refuses to work at home, an alternative strategy such as a homework club should be used. Ask parents to inform school staff immediately if specific difficulties with their child completing homework occur so that a negative routine or conflict at home is avoided.

- **Homework clubs**
  Offering homework/lunch time clubs may help enable homework to be completed at school. It is particularly useful if there is a member of staff who knows the pupil well present so that the pupils' individual needs can be met. For example, knowing how to explain or demonstrate homework tasks. All staff supporting the pupil should have access to information about the pupils' strengths and needs.

- **Chunk workloads**
  It may be necessary to break longer term projects into smaller manageable 'chunks' with clear timescales for completion and specific guidelines in terms of how many words, sentences, or paragraphs are expected. It is important to recognise that sometimes pupils on the autism spectrum take far longer than expected to complete homework tasks. For younger/less able pupils visual task mats with clear steps and details of equipment needed could be provided.

Examples of task mats





- **Set up a specific homework contract for the pupil**
  Sometimes having a clear set of written rules and expectations can be very helpful. This will need to be tailored to the individual pupil's needs. It may include how much time to spend on a piece of homework, what to do if the pupil needs help or doesn't understand what to do, or specific reminders about presentation.

- **Establish a set 'homework' time**
  For some pupils, identifying a defined time to complete homework at home is useful. This needs to be a time when there is adult support available, if necessary.

- **Make it relevant to the pupil**
  Homework time can be used to prepare and familiarise pupils with new topics or changes to routines such as trips or the school photographer's visit tomorrow. It could then involve developing a language jig or social story for use in the future.

  Where possible plan homework around pupils' special interests – maths problems involving time could be centred on train timetables, simple addition and subtraction could involve use of favourite character models. It may be that the pupil is happy to carry out pieces of homework that are of particular interest.

- **Support the pupils' organisational skills**
  Many pupils may be academically able but have difficulty with organisation, sequencing, planning and prioritising. Ensure that the pupil has the correct equipment for the task is in their bag and/or ready for when they start the task. Having a low distraction, uncluttered space to complete homework is helpful. Pupils may need a written checklist to tick off as they complete tasks. Older/more able pupils should be supported to compile a homework 'timetable' to help them manage their time effectively.

Section 11.7: Tests, assessments and examinations

Tests, assessments and exams can cause high anxiety for all pupils, but this can be heightened for pupils on the autism spectrum due to the unknown content, changes to routines and the unfamiliar environments involved. Revision may also cause difficulties for pupils because of poor organisation and time management skills or not understanding how to revise.

Language and communication issues are often exacerbated by the way in which questions are worded, difficulty with understanding the relative importance of information and the pressure of time constraints. For internal tests and assessments, pupils may need support to understand the meaning of questions. These may be misunderstood or interpreted on a literal level. For example, 'Can you name three elements on the periodic table?' may be answered as 'Yes'.

Consideration needs to be given to whether the main objective of the test is for the pupil to practice doing a test or whether it is about ascertaining the pupil's level of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum area. If it is the latter, a reasonable adjustment would to be ensure that questions are worded in a way that the pupil will understand either by using simpler written language or by an experienced member of staff re-wording the questions. Unfortunately, the language of examination questions cannot be modified for public examinations putting pupils with language and communication difficulties at a significant disadvantage.

Some pupils experience considerable difficulty with tests and examinations because of their limited understanding of other peoples' perspectives. For example, they find it hard to judge the information that the examiner needs to know. This can be a particular issue in mathematics or other subjects where pupils are required to show their working out. Pupils may not be consciously aware of how they work things out in their heads, so find being asked to do this particularly frustrating.

Pupils may:

- be anxious about working to a timescale
- have poor awareness of time and problems pacing themselves through questions
- interpret questions literally and have difficulty with those requiring inference and deduction
- be anxious about making mistakes
- find it difficult to understand examination rules such as how to seek help if a pen runs out or the need to be silent
- struggle to process verbal information quickly enough, particularly when undertaking oral exams or mental maths tests
- find it hard to cope with the examination environment due to sensory distractions or close proximity of others
- find written recording skills challenging
- fail to see the point of sitting an exam due to poor understanding of why they need to write down something they already know
- distract others by engaging in ritualistic behaviours such as extraneous movements and noises
- verbalise as they write which may be distracting for others
- have problems with planning and organising their time effectively
- find it difficult to sustain attention and remain on task.

Strategies:

- **The physical environment**

  Pupils may find it less stressful to do exams individually or within a small group. This allows levels of distraction to be reduced enabling the pupil to concentrate better. Pupils are more likely to feel at ease in a familiar room where their behaviour, noises or movements will not distract others. In this situation, the pupil may have opportunities to take a break or move around the room to relieve anxiety if needed. Pupils may also be comforted if allowed to take a familiar object into the examination room.

- **Access to instructions and information in different formats**

  For internal tests and assessments, pupils may find particular fonts and colours confusing. Presenting information in a visually simpler form can be helpful. Be aware that for pupils with language and communication difficulties and/or poor organisational skills key information needs to be given separately. For example, giving the pupil a table to refer to on a separate sheet of paper rather than expecting the pupil to flick back and forth through pages which makes sequencing and organisation more difficult.

- **Special arrangements and exam concessions**

  Many pupils on the autism spectrum are eligible for special arrangements and/or exam concessions. Schools should consider individual pupils' needs and consult individual examination boards about procedures. Exam concessions need to be applied for well in advance and schools will be asked to provide evidence to support their requests. This may include reports from professionals such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists or educational psychologists. It is important to allow enough time to gather evidence and arrange for professionals to see the pupil if updated assessment and reports are required. It is also crucial to practice over time with pupils any special arrangements that are agreed so that it becomes a 'norm' for them and they are able to gain maximum benefit.

Pupils may benefit from:

- **extra time**

Whilst extra time to process information in examinations can be helpful to some pupils on the autism spectrum it can be counter -productive to others. Working to a time limit can cause excessive anxiety to some pupils but others may feel they have to keep writing even if all questions have been answered. Short rest breaks may be helpful for some pupils.

- **prompts to stay on task and manage time effectively**

Pupils may require help to pace themselves through questions and prompts to stay on task or encouragement to move on if they are becoming too engrossed in one particular question.

- **a scribe (amanuensis)**

Pupils who have difficulty with handwriting or getting their thoughts onto paper can find the use of a scribe very beneficial.

Section 12: Working in partnership with parents and carers

Working closely with parents or carers is crucial for the successful education of all pupils, this is especially true for those on the autism spectrum. Parents/carers have a unique insight into the pupil'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 pupil 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 pupil.

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

For other pupils, 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.

Older, more able pupils are often acutely aware of the importance of appearing 'normal' at school. This can take a serious toll on their mental health and well-being and leave little energy for family relationships and activities. Pupils on the autism 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 pupil 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.

Pupils on the autism 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 pupil and experience a lack of understanding from other parents. An extremely strong dependency can develop between the parent and the pupil, which may not be appropriate for the pupil's age and ability.

Some parents understandably become protective, whilst others may be unaware of the extent of the vulnerabilities of the pupil. This can then make it very difficult for parents to respond to the needs of other siblings, who may resent the amount of time that parents spend on the pupil on the autism spectrum. Siblings themselves may become closely involved with supporting the pupil on the autism spectrum. There can be a significant impact upon anxiety levels if the supporting sibling is at the same school, then moves on to another school. It is therefore important not to underestimate the high levels of stress that the parents and siblings of a pupil on the autism spectrum may experience. School staff should be aware of this and work with families positively to support them as well as the pupil.

Strategies:

- **View the parent as a partner**
  Research shows that when parents are involved with their children's education pupils achieve more. It is helpful to work with parents/caregivers to ensure that school staff have an up to date profile of how the pupil 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 school, and any changes in behaviour/communication, however minimal.

- **Effective communicatio**n
  Parents of all children benefit from regular, detailed information about their child, especially if the pupil is on the autism spectrum. In some cases, this may need to be daily or several times per week 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 pupils on the autism 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 pupil can lessen the amount of contact needed subsequently.

- Identify clearly what is manageable and realistic for parent-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 autism spectrum themselves may have difficulty processing language during a phone conversation, for example, so writing information down can be more helpful. Parents are often appreciative of the information from school though may find it difficult to respond regularly due to the demands the pupil places upon them.

- It can also be helpful to state overtly to parents that misunderstandings can easily occur with pupils on the autism 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 school. As an example, a pupil 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-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 pupils on the autism spectrum have poor organisational skills so relying upon the pupil to transport the book can be problematic.

- For older and/or more able pupils a direct method of sharing potentially sensitive information such as an e-mail to parents could be more appropriate. Confidentially is obviously an important consideration for all pupils.

- Parents should be made aware of incidents and situations at 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 pupil 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 pupils to reflect back on when things worked out positively.

- Sharing effective rewards/incentives which are used at home with school can be very beneficial for the pupil and may increase motivation.

- **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 formal IEP focused meetings to discuss progress and targets, annual reviews of a statement of special educational needs and transition meetings. Pupils should be given the opportunity to contribute in a way that is appropriate for their age and ability.

  Generally, pupils should be included in all meetings about them, but it is also important to consider whether the pupil is able to manage the whole meeting, or is perhaps more comfortable to attend part of the meeting. It can be useful to allow some time for parents to talk without their child present, particularly when there are sensitive issues to discuss or conflict between the parent(s) and child. However, it is important that the pupil understands the purpose of parents and staff meeting together and is comfortable with this. Including the pupil in the meeting provides an opportunity to celebrate strengths and progress, and for consistent messages to be given to the pupil by staff and parents.

  Consideration should be given to where the meeting is held in terms of lighting, background noise and other sensory issues. Parents and pupils on the autism 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 pupil 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 pupil, as well as what is important **for** him or her.
  - Identify what is working and what is not working for the pupil 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.
  - Ensure that any meetings regarding the pupil are accessible and relevant to him or her, as described in the previous strategy.
  - Help pupils to participate and contribute in any activities which are important to them.
  - Recognise pupils' 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**
  Family members could be on the autism spectrum themselves, may be finding acceptance of the pupil'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 WPCC (Wiltshire Parents and Carer's Council), Carers' Support, Parent partnership services, local Autism groups or SWAPP (Support in Wiltshire for Autism: Parents' Programme). There is also wealth of information relating to the autism spectrum through books, the internet or other professionals and it can be useful to signpost parents towards informative and accurate resources.

  See Section 15.

Section 13: Working with support staff

Pupils on the autism spectrum, like many of their peers, may be supported by teaching assistants in some instances to access learning. Because of the particular difficulties some pupils on the autism 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 school approach is beneficial to support all pupils, regardless of need, as well as for those pupils who do not have additional needs. It ensures that any adults who may be in contact with the pupil during the school day, such as the caretaker, midday supervisors, office staff, or parent helpers are fully aware of the pupil's needs and support him or her in the same way.

Staff may require training to increase their understanding of the pupil'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 pupil is also crucial.

Strategies to support teaching assistants:

- **Clarity of role**
  Teaching assistants and all staff who may have contact with the pupil should be informed about the the areas where the pupil needs support and how this should be delivered. Strategies to support this may include:

- Ensuring that the teaching assistant is clear about who he/she will be working with at different times and why. For example, supporting the pupil at lunchtimes may be more important than in particular lessons where the pupil is able to work well independently.
- Emphasising that the teaching assistant is part of the staff team supporting the pupil 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 teaching assistant to discuss any aspect of the pupil'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 pupil based upon the pupil's profile of strengths and needs, which incorporate sufficient challenge.
- Sharing the IEP and other relevant information with the teaching assistant, including any changes to the pupil's profile. Ensure that s/he has opportunity to participate in discussions or meetings, comment on the progress towards targets and that s/he feels that any contributions are valued.
- Discussing the long term aim of the support and the level of independence that the pupil should demonstrate, or is working towards with the teaching assistant. There needs to be a clear understanding of the concept of 'enabling' the pupil rather than over-supporting. Over-supporting can lead to considerable difficulties with pupils achieving less than their potential and there being an inaccurate assessment of a pupil's abilities.

- **Ensure effective communication about change with teaching assistants**

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

- **Engage the teaching assistant throughout the process of transition**
  When a pupil on the autism spectrum joins the year group, ensure that the teaching 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 teaching assistant supporting the pupil as they transfer.

- **Time to develop resources**
  Visual aids and resources can be of significant support to the pupil 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 pupil.

- **Appreciate the challenge of the role**
  Working alongside a pupil 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 pupil. It should be recognised that staff may sometimes need to take a break from direct work with some pupils on occasion.

Section 14: Emotional health and wellbeing

Emotional health and wellbeing are important for all pupils, and often affect pupils' ability to access the curriculum and cope with the wider school environment. Accurately identifying the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils 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, pupils' facial expressions may not reflect their feelings and a change in behaviour may be mistakenly attributed to another cause, such as a sensory sensitivity. In addition, it does not always occur to pupils on the autism spectrum to talk to others about their emotional wellbeing, and responses to anxiety may be idiosyncratic.

Section 14.1: Stress and anxiety

Pupils 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. Younger/less able pupils on the autism spectrum are less likely to be aware of their differences with managing anxiety whilst older/more able pupils are often acutely aware that they are coping less well than other young people.

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

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. Inability to manage high anxiety levels can also lead to depression, conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, and self-harming. Pupils on the autism spectrum are at risk of developing a reliance on drugs, alcohol or cigarettes as a means to self-medicate. It is important to seek advice from medical or mental health professionals if pupils' mental health and ability to 'cope' appears to be deteriorating.

Pupils 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 own emotions
- have reduced coping skills
- have no close friends that they can talk to and confide in about their fears and anxieties
- have learnt ways of dealing with stress that are inappropriate but work for them, therefore see no reason for change e.g. being verbally abusive and walking out of the classroom
- base fears and anxieties on a single past negative experience.

Pupils, 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 effectively as they usually do
- only be able to think about or focus upon feeling anxious and/or the source of their stress
- not know or be able to explain what is causing anxiety
- experience more or additional sensory difficulties
- find it more challenging to exert self-control over their behaviour
- find it hard to use constructive problem solving
- be unable to make decisions
- resort to harmful behaviours or develop mental health difficulties.

Strategies:

- It is important that all staff are aware of the signs to look out for that the pupil is stressed or anxious as indicators may differ to other children and young people. Note these signs on the pupil's records. The cues may be very subtle. Look for triggers such as changes in posture, tone of voice, eye contact, amount of interaction, becoming tearful or restless or a repeated word or phrase. Stress may trigger challenging or repetitive behaviour. High anxiety may also result in a reduction in personal hygiene, risk taking or bizarre behaviour, tiredness, irritability and poor sleep.

- Ensure that parents/carers are aware of any changes in the pupil's behaviour or demeanour and check whether similar behaviours are occurring at home so that there is clear, regular communication about how well the pupil is coping. Some pupils who appear quiet and compliant in class behave very differently at home, which can be misinterpreted as 'coping at 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 pupil 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 pupil 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 pupil to start matching feelings and sensations to situations.

- Pupils 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 pupils who are unable to link their emotions to events, it can be helpful to suggest possible causes of anxiety. For example: "You look worried. I think you're worried because you don't understand what to do on this worksheet."

- Help the pupil to monitor and recognise positive feelings too. For example, “I bet you feel proud that you did that!” “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 as it reduces adrenaline and releases endorphins Stress balls or a ‘mad bag’ that the pupil can take their frustration out on, may also be useful. Older pupils can find using a punch bag a good way to reduce tension.

- Allow for a short de-briefing session with an appropriate adult to talk through the day’s events and/or after a stressful incident.

- It can be helpful for a pupil to be met at the beginning of the day to go through what is happening that day by a member of staff, then asking the pupil to check back at break/lunchtime/end of the day to report how the day has gone. Use this time to explain in more detail why certain things happened and rehearse what to do next time it occurs.

- Allowances may need to be made regarding homework. The school day can leave the pupil on the autism spectrum more stressed than some other pupils, and therefore they may need the evenings to unwind and relax. See Section 11.6.

- Encourage the pupil to keep a journal or record of their best work or achievements, which can include social and independence progress, as well as academic areas. This can be reviewed whenever s/he is feeling down.

- Information from sensory audits and profiles can be extremely helpful both at school and at home. See Section Nine. It gives direction to the modifications that are necessary to reduce anxiety. Some pupils benefit from having a space in which they feel physically comfortable and get the sensory feedback that suits them.

Section 14.2: Sexual behaviour

Difficulties understanding social interaction may also affect the ability of pupils on the autism spectrum to understand the nature of sexuality and sexual behaviour. It is important to explore these issues with young people in order to teach appropriate skills and strategies when interacting with others.
The onset of puberty can cause considerable distress for some pupils on the autism spectrum. Physical changes combined with a fear or lack of understanding of why these changes are occurring may result in anxiety.

Some pupils also have difficulty with the practical skills of managing, for example, increased body odour or sweating and the menstrual cycle. Other pupils on the autism spectrum have an intense fear of 'growing up' and may have no desire or interest in sex, whilst for others sexual matters become an obsessive interest. Pupils may need specific support in identifying and understanding their own sexuality.

It is important that all staff are aware that some pupils on the autism spectrum have a very poor understanding of sex and sexual behaviour. Pupils' behaviour should therefore be judged accordingly, i.e. the pupil may not intentionally be doing anything wrong and may be completely confused as to why there is an issue. Difficulties with understanding language, emotions and 'sex education' materials combined with social naivety can potentially cause pupils to misinterpret information.

Sexual behaviour is about appropriate boundaries and understanding how the other person might be feeling, both of which can be significant areas of difficulty in themselves. It is also extremely context-specific. For example, it is fine to share sexual fantasies with a trusted partner, but not acceptable to announce them during morning break!

Pupils on the autism spectrum can feel severely disadvantaged and frustrated that their peers 'get it right' whilst they are unable to. However, sex and sexual behaviour is not always an area of difficulty for pupils on the autism spectrum.

Pupils often do not pick up on subtleties or incidental learning. There is a need for staff teaching pupils about sexual behaviour to be explicit and clear, which may involve staff overcoming some of their own reservations. All teaching needs to be put into a broader context of relationship education and explicit links made between sexual behaviour and emotions.

Pupils may:

- not have the knowledge and understanding of sex and sexual behaviour that would be generally expected of other individuals of the same age
- touch themselves, masturbate or become obviously sexually aroused in public places
- not understand the difference between private and public places
- not recognise when other people are behaving in a sexual manner
- not realise how their own appearance, behaviour and comments may be construed by others
- use highly sexualised language without necessarily understanding the implications or possible consequences of this
- be fixated upon having a girlfriend or boyfriend but not understand how to achieve this or maintain the relationship

- not recognise or understand how to manage sexual desires appropriately
- be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation because of their lack of of others' intentions
- be very confused about their sexual identity.

Strategies for managing issues with sex and sexual behaviour:

Please remember that this teaching needs to be part of developing pupils' understanding of relationships.

- Establish what a pupil does or doesn't know about sex and sexual behaviour as this can help to avoid difficult situations later on. Also check the pupil's understanding of this in terms of different relationships, for example a casual relationship compared to a stable, long term relationship. This may sometimes require input from a professional experienced in working with pupils on the autism spectrum on this topic. It is important to start teaching pupils factual information when they are younger to make sure that they understand and fully absorb information before it becomes critical, or they need to use their knowledge.

Generally, the following principles should be adhered to:

- Avoid asking questions such as "Do you know about sex?" which result in a yes/no answer but check understanding carefully. Ask questions which are likely to reveal any 'gaps' in knowledge such as, "What happens when two people have sex?"
- "Is it okay?" questions are also useful. For example: "Is it ok to tell a girl that you like what she's wearing?" or "Is it ok if a boy touches your breasts in the corridor? Follow this by asking "Why?" so that it is possible to check if the pupil's understanding is sound.
- Be clear, direct and explicit. Pupils on the autism spectrum often do not understand inference. They need to be told exactly why a certain behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate, in what circumstances, and with whom. Pupils may need to be reminded about personal space, and which body parts are 'private.'
- Pupils on the autism spectrum may need to be shown, as well as a verbal explanation, e.g. by using an appropriate DVD. This is particularly important for masturbation as some pupils do not understand what to do to achieve an orgasm, or that they may need to clean up afterwards.
- Do not assume that pupils will have understood 'sex education' sessions. Many pupils on the autism spectrum will need to go through the same content individually, using simpler language and at a slower pace.
- There are a huge number of slang expressions associated with sex and sexual behaviour and it can be helpful to check the pupil's understanding of these and teach them or explore them openly. Otherwise the pupil may only learn 'medical' terms then be teased for not understanding terms used by other pupils or not have the means to talk to peers with 'teenage' language.
- Ensure that pupils understand the relative acceptability of slang terms. Whilst it is difficult to do this definitively, some terms are generally considered far more acceptable or offensive than others.

- Some pupils on the autism spectrum use very formal language and are unwilling to use any slang terms. Explain that this is their choice, but also make them aware that this may attract negative attention.
  - Tell the pupil not to use terms or sexual references that s/he has heard but does not understand and explain why not. Pupils need to be told explicitly about putting themselves at personal risk, as well as the risk of offending others.
  - Remember that some pupils on the autism spectrum will not have had the opportunity to ask their peers or experiment in the same way. They may therefore ask questions of adults which may appear shocking, or inappropriate. It is important that their question is answered in a calm, factual way where possible whilst also providing feedback. For example, "Most people your age wouldn't ask an adult that because... It is ok to ask me in this session.." and give an answer.
  - Be aware of giving the pupil a balanced view as s/he may assume that the view expressed is the only right one. Phrases like "Some people think that.. but others.." or "Some people like to...but others.." are helpful.

- For pupils who require visual support and reminders use Social Stories™ to explore appropriate interactions at the relevant level. This may include explicit reference to sexual behaviours, such as kissing, touching, and masturbating.

- Teach that masturbation is a normal way of coping with sexual arousal but ensure that the pupil understands that this must only be done in a private place.

- Explicitly teach the importance of gaining consent before all types of sexual touching, making clear the difference between sexual touching and other types of touch.

- Pupils also need to be told which part of their bodies are private and are not shown to others. Ensure that they understand that their private parts belong to them and it is not okay for others to touch them without consent unless this is in the context of a medical appointment.

- Explicitly teach that it is ok to say "no" to sexual behaviours even when in a relationship. Some pupils do not understand that they need to tell the other person that they do not want to engage in particular activities, for example they may stay silent which the other person takes as consent. This can understandably cause much distress. It can also be quite common for the pupil on the autism spectrum to think that s/he must do as the other person asks because they are girlfriend/boyfriend. Conversely, s/he may expect the other person to always do as s/he asks.

- Explicitly teach pupils about the risks associated with the internet, in particular exploitation by others and highlight the possible consequences. It is particularly important that pupils understand that, for example, by uploading an inappropriate image of themselves there can be very serious long term consequences as well as the immediate ones. Ensure that pupils are made aware that on certain websites they may not be accessing an appropriate or balanced view, and teach them to distinguish factual information from opinions.

- Female pupils on the autism spectrum may need to be given gender specific guidance about their dress and behaviour and an explanation about why it is important. For example, it may be deemed appropriate for a younger pupil wearing a skirt to sit with her legs apart at school, but this is not seen as acceptable for an older pupil. Female pupils in particular may be unaware that they are inadvertently exposing a part of their body and the possible messages this might give. Again it is important to be very specific and cover the concept of being sexually provocative.

- Male pupils on the autism spectrum may need to be given clear guidance about erections. Ensure that they understand that erections should be hidden if they happen in a public place and give them appropriate strategies. For example, sitting in a different position or focusing on a boring subject.

- Pupils of both genders may also need to be explicitly told that fiddling with their genitals in public places is not appropriate.

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's 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's 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.'

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's 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

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

Picture Exchange Communication System
www.pecs.org.uk

Small-steps teaching expressive language skills; see useful information leaflet
http://www.pecs.org.uk/general/documents/2011Infobrochure.pdf

TEACCH
www.teacch.com

The Autism Education Trust Transition Toolkit
http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources/transition%20toolkit.aspx

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

Advice available from the Specialist SEN Service
Particularly useful training for individual teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs) new to working with pupils on the autism spectrum - resource section includes articles aimed at leadership teams and facilitators e.g. Good Practice Guidance'

SWAPP – Support in Wiltshire for Autism: Parent Programme. Advice on this is available from the Specialist SEN Service and Educational Psychology Service: www.wiltshire.gov.uk/swapp

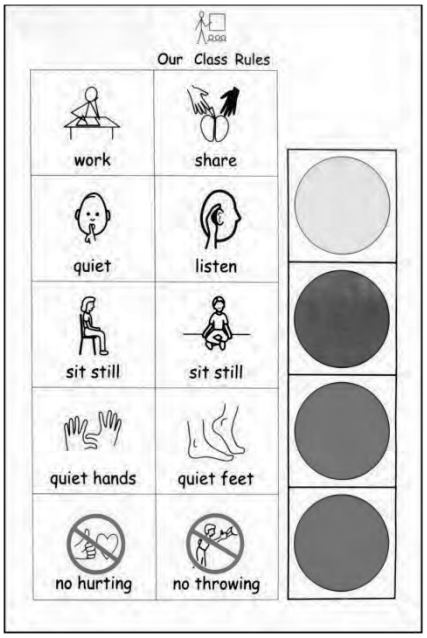
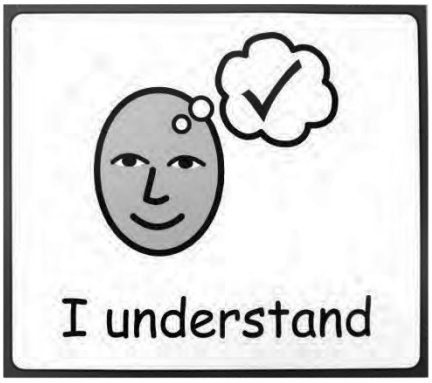
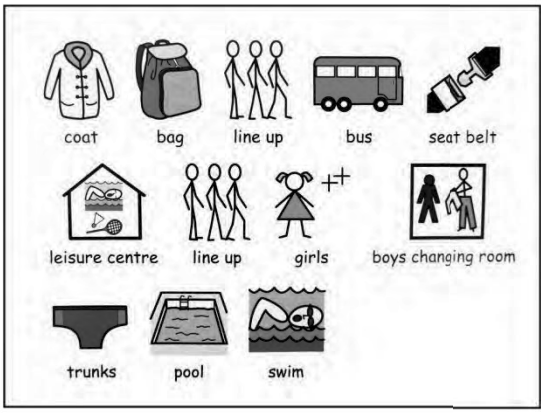
Online INSET. Advice on this available from the Specialist SEN Service. www.sentrain.net Useful for staff who do not have much experience of working with pupils on the autism spectrum.'

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