



High Tunstall Autism Toolkit

This toolkit has been produced to support staff to further develop their understanding of strategies for students on the Autism spectrum and with social communication & interaction needs.

These strategies are offered as a starting point.

Contents

Communication	3-5
Autism friendly environment	6
Visuals	7 – 8
Differentiation	9-11
Social Skills	12
Emotional Skills	13-15
Managing anxiety	16-17
Crisis/Meltdown	18-20

Communication

Students on the autism spectrum/with social communication and interaction needs may have a wide range of communicative ability. It is very important not to make assumptions about an individual student's skills solely on the basis of their diagnosis.

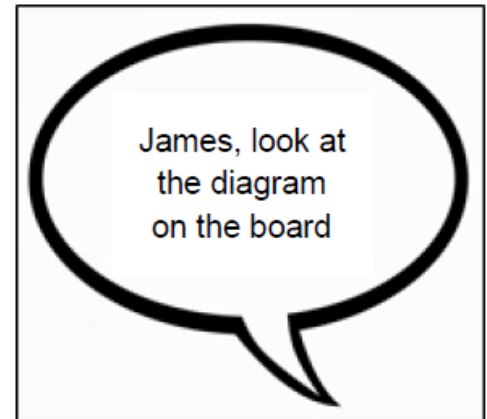
Verbal ability may well be ahead of their understanding e.g. using words and phrases that have been learnt or heard in one context.

Students:

- 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 and non-verbal communication (gestures, body language)

Attention and Processing

- Use the student's name and wait until they give you their attention (some students may not be able to look directly at you).
- Students may not recognise instructions given to the whole class. Give individual instructions.
- If you are pointing at the board or at a resource, make sure the student is looking at the right item – highlighting can help with this.
- Allow time to process verbal information – this can vary but may take up to 20 seconds.



"Put your home learning in the box on my desk labelled '752' ✓
 rather than
 "Give your home learning in" ✗

Use clear, non-ambiguous language

- Language should be as concrete as possible.
- Say what you mean – and mean what you say.
- Put in pauses to regulate the pace of verbal delivery.

Supporting a student

- When supporting a student in class, use MINIMAL language supported with the use of a mini white board, post its, mind maps, bullet points, checklists and visuals.
- Do not talk when the teacher is – model good listening behaviour.



Sarcasm, humour and idioms

- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs can be very literal and phrases such as 'Put a sock in it', "That's cool" or 'I'll be back in a minute' may be interpreted in a different way.
- Sarcasm can be very confusing and students may not understand your intention.
- Analogies can be useful e.g. does it help if we talk about the brain as if it is a computer? You may need to explicitly explain this.



Facial Expressions

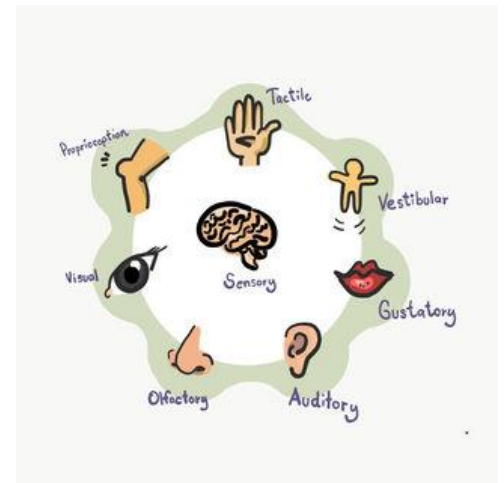
- Students on the autism spectrum/with social communication and interaction needs may not look directly at faces or correctly interpret facial expressions and body language. Don't assume they will know the names of others in their class or who different teachers are.
- This can be interpreted as rude behaviour.
- Students may not understand your subtle body language i.e. the look, tut, sighs.
- Make your expectations clear and explicit.

Other comments

- Poor language skills are not necessarily an indicator of ability across the wider curriculum.
- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs can have a very uneven profile of skills.
- All students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs will have communication differences – they may also have additional language impairments.

Autism Friendly Environment

- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs may find noisy, crowded spaces highly stressful.
- Some hotspots include stairs, corridors, canteen, changing rooms and toilets.
- Schools can make their environment autism friendly by using clear visual signposting.
- Challenging behaviour which is driven by sensory need is best managed by using a graduated response i.e. finding a more appropriate replacement or modifying the environment.



Preferential seating

- Seating next to good role models.
- Give the student additional space if needed.
- Could be sat at the front or back – student may express a preference.
- May need their own desk/space.
- Discuss with the student.

Movement Breaks

- E.g. Walking across the classroom to hand out books, sharpen pencil, open a window or taking messages.

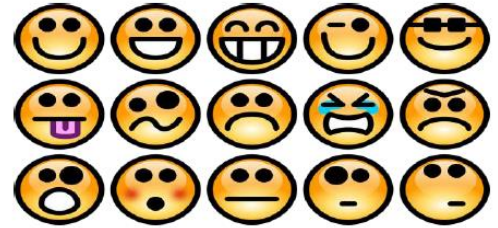
Labels

- Label areas and equipment clearly.
- Use pictures alongside words

Visuals

Visual prompts can be used to help students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs. They are adaptable, portable and can be used in most situations.

- We see and use visual prompts every day, for example road signs, maps and shopping lists.
- Visuals help us understand the world around us, and provide us with valuable information.
- Many students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs are thought to be visual learners, so presenting information in a visual way can help to encourage and support communication, language development and ability to process information.



I NEED A BREAK

I really need to stop working for a few minutes and take a break. Once my body and brain calm down I can re-join the group and get back to work.

- During my break I can go to.....
- I can do the following things
.....
.....
- I need to avoid.....
.....

Visuals through an Interactive White Board

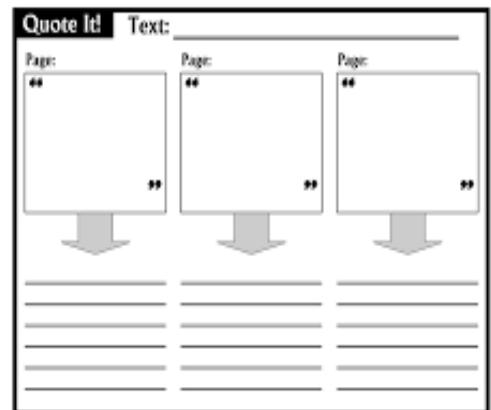
- Countdown Timer
- Noise Levels—colour change

RED = too noisy ORANGE = working noise
GREEN = silent

- Lesson outline - to show progress through the lesson
- Highlighter and coloured filters

Organisation

- Bag packing, equipment check list.
- Organising help with writing (graphic organiser), mind maps, templates, vocabulary boxes, sentence starters, focus questions.
- Task Breakdown (post It notes/white board).



Revision Calendar

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
10.00	Maths		
11.00	TV		Blank
12.00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.00	Blank	Computer	
2.00		English	

Maths Task

Nov 2014
Paper 1
Answer question
2-6

Blank

Catch up time
unexpected
interruption

English Task

Read chapter 3
of 'Of Mice and
Men'
Summerise Key..

Exam Revision and Homework

- It is useful to use visuals to show the time needed for revision. A student on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs may find it hard to manage time and put the workload into perspective.
- It is necessary to show 'down time' and periods when the student can do their choice of activity.
- It is useful to plan in additional time for unexpected events (such as: being ill or supply teacher).
- Using abstract terms like 'Revise' are not helpful.

Differentiation

- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs can have a very uneven profile of skills and challenges.
- Writing is often a problem and reducing demands may be necessary.
- Organisation of thoughts, ideas and seeing the purpose of the task can be difficult.
- Many students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs struggle with flexible thinking and being able to consider things from another's perspective.

Questions

- Use questioning techniques such as think, pair, share.
- Allow thinking time.
- Avoid open-ended questions.
- Use mini white boards to write answers down on.

Using Structure

- It is helpful for teachers to show a written outline or overview of the topic.
- Show why the learning is important – relate to real life and the students interest.
- Have success criteria explicit from the start.
- Help students structure learning and writing using templates, writing frames, graphic organisers etc.
- When setting home learning/independent work ensure tasks are specific and larger projects are broken down into bite size chunks.

Example of Lesson Structure

L.O

Starter Activity/Warm up

Teacher input

(what you are going to teach – main task details)

Follow up

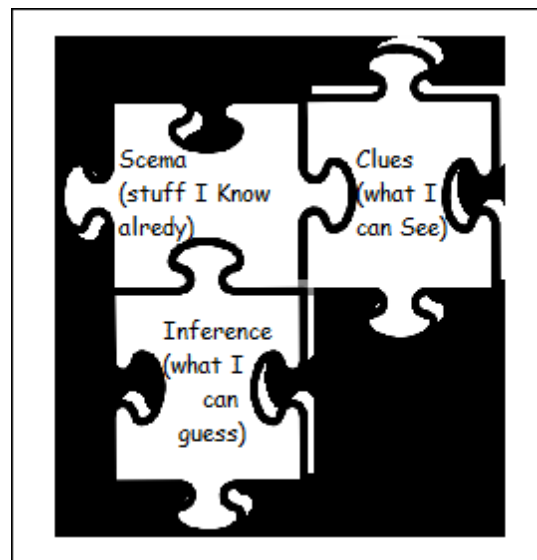
(details)

Plenary + rewards

Perspective

Imaginative work will need much more scaffolding. Factual work will be easier.

- Students may find it hard to understand, infer and interpret emotions from text.
- They may find it hard to understand the whole story/picture and how parts of the narrative relate to each other.
- Use of character cards and plotting the story on a graphic organiser or mind map will help students make sense of the information.
- Actively teach the importance of showing your thinking. E.g. Working out or planning stage in English
- Activate what the student knows about the subject.
- Look for clues.
- Make a guess (inference).
- Many students are perfectionists and hate to get things wrong, so are reluctant to make a guess and risk failure.
- Making a Mistake Social Story
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oh42WldyHUw> (see Rachael, Fiona or Heather for support with this)



Token System

Targets

1. Arrive in school
by 8.30am



2. Have equipment for
lessons



3. Complete.....



- Earning time tokens to spend on a special interest can be an effective motivator.
- Consideration needs to be given to where on the timetable this can be given—some flexibility will be required but is usually worth it.
- This system can be linked to academic, social or behaviour targets.
- Some students are motivated by seeing a larger reward being built up in steps.
- Clear targets to be met are essential.
- You will need to consider how you might deal with disappointment if the student does not earn many tokens.

Rewards

- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs may not respond to or see the point of whole school motivators such as house points, positive points, certificates or praise.
- Linking a student's special interests to rewards can be highly motivating.
- Reward systems need to be reviewed frequently to monitor impact.

I am working for



Social Skills

Social skill differences are a key challenge for students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs and will occur across the curriculum.

Direct teaching of a social skill can occur within subject lessons, during specific social intervention, during tutor/form time, lunchtime clubs, around the school and through peer support.



Using a scale

- A 5 Point Scale can be used to categorise behaviours and rate 1 - 5 according to seriousness and intensity.
- When used as a whole class or group activity it can show perspective i.e.: a student may rate a behaviour as a 2 when the rest of his peers would rate it as a 4.
- It can also show, the size of the problem should match the size of the reaction.
- It can be used to show hierarchy and describe levels of intimacy.

CHECK IN

5	
4	
3	
2	
1	

Using speech and thought bubbles

To facilitate the understanding of perspective it can be extremely effective to add speech and thought bubbles onto drawings of stick people to show social situations in a range of contexts, for example:-

- Post incident debrief
- Understanding a student's perspective
- Correcting students mistaken perspective
- Showing the thoughts/feelings of others
- Solutions and problem solving e.g. distinguishing between an accident and a deliberate act
- Showing that thoughts and beliefs lead to actions
- Can be used to gather information to write a social script



Emotional Skills

Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs 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.

Students may need encouragement to:

- Ask for help
- Recognise their emotions and those of others
- Talk about their feelings
- Manage their emotions
- Develop coping strategies and calming techniques

RAG/Independent working cards

A visual way to communicate their confidence and understanding of a task.



Feelings board

Feelings boards allows a student to communicate how they are feeling to others.

They are particularly useful when discussing incidents that have occurred.

How to use:

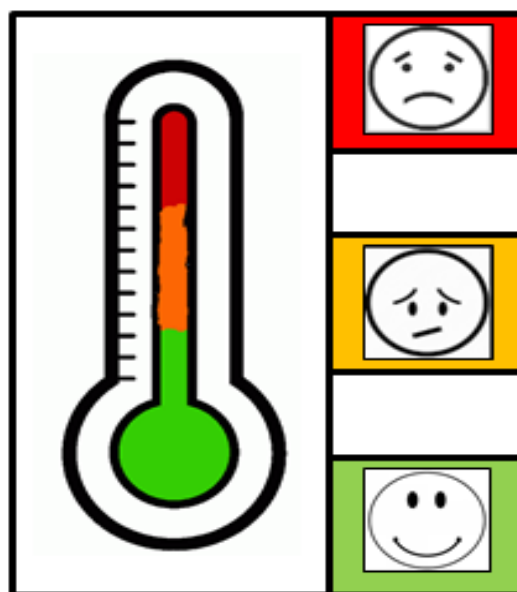
- Encourage the student to point to or verbalise the emotion which is relevant to them at the time using the board as a visual support.
- Use the board in conjunction with a feelings book (see below) to enable the student to increase their understanding of emotions.

How are you feeling?



Emotions thermometer

- These encourage a student to think about changes in how they are feeling.
- The student 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 student at all times.
- It can also be used as a whole class resource.



Break Card

I am feeling upset. I need to calm down. What do I do?



I can take deep breaths.

1 2 3 4 5

I can count to 5.



I can use my break card and go to a quiet place.

I need a break cards

- “I need a break” cards allow a student to communicate that they need downtime or access to a safe haven/safe space.
- All staff need to know that a student has a “break card” and responds by staff to these needs to be consistent.

Feelings book

- Create a “feelings” or “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 student or other students showing a particular emotion in different situations and contexts, or cut out photographs from a magazine.
- Stick these in a book, exploring and recording how a student is feeling.
- Ensure that the student is also taught how to manage emotions, for example, ways to calm down if feeling “angry”.

- Visual tools help students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs to communicate their emotions and adults working with them to identify/recognise these emotions.
- A student's facial expressions may not reflect their true feelings and a change in behaviour may be mistakenly attributed to another cause, such as a sensory sensitivity, heightened anxiety etc.
- It does not always occur to students on the autism spectrum to talk to others about their emotional wellbeing, and therefore their responses to anxiety may be individual and unexpected.

Managing anxiety

Physical tools and energy management

- Running, walking, fresh air
- Exercise, sport
- Punch bag or pillow
- Drumming

Relaxation tools

- Drawing, reading
- Music – listening and playing
- Solitude – a quiet space
- Repetition and routine (tidying and ordering)
- Visualising a calm, happy place
- Using picture cards, anything the student finds calming.

Common sources of anxiety

- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs can easily become overwhelmed and overloaded due to having academic work and social pressures.
- It can be easy to get things out of proportion (calendars, timetables and charts can help).
- Homework can be a point of major stress and anxiety. It helps to have time limited tasks that are well structured and scaffolded. Long term projects will be particularly challenging.
- Access to a supported homework club (not in lunch time) can help students to manage workload more easily.
- Having open channels of communication with parents regarding homework is useful.
- Timetabling in some 'down time' during the week is often necessary – remember that many students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs find unstructured break and lunch times most stressful.
- Frequent key working sessions including a check in and check out can pick up and monitor levels of anxiety avoiding possible crisis points.

Social tools, thinking tools and special interest tools

Social tools

- Enjoyable interaction either with a key person, mentor, friend or animal.
- Playing cards, chess or a structured game.
- Going for a refreshment or equivalent.

Thinking tools

- Positive affirmations
- Social scripts
- Positive thought cards e.g. (I can do it)
- Mantras

Special Interest tool – a quick way of preventing escalation and providing distraction

- Fan magazine/catalogue.
- Special box containing sensory objects (lavender, material, fabric, pictures, bands, koosh ball, feathers etc.) The sensory objects should be appropriate to the student.
- Timetabled period for special interest.



When a student goes into crisis or a 'meltdown'

- A meltdown is triggered by an overwhelming experience from which the student cannot escape, such as a confusing social situation, a change of plans or sensory overload.
- Students on the autism spectrum / with social communication and interaction needs have great difficulty regulating their feelings and working out solutions when things go wrong, and so can quickly escalate to a meltdown.
- Once a meltdown has been triggered, this is a complete system overload, which the student cannot control or manage, no matter what the consequences.

Note the triggers

- Being aware of what triggers a meltdown is absolutely key to avoiding these in the future.
- Also key to helping the student learn how to identify the triggers themselves, so when a meltdown happens, try to identify the trigger or what appeared to be the starting point.

Keep a record

- ABC charts are a good way to record meltdowns, so that patterns can try to be identified.
- Once the meltdown has been managed, it is best to record it while the incident is still fresh in people's minds.

See Rachael Gray for a template of an ABC chart

ABC Behaviour Diary

Date	A (Antecedents) Setting/task/who else was around/other	B (Behaviour) What did he actually do? Describe without interpreting. Include duration of behaviour.	C (Consequence) How did you and other adults respond? What did you and they do?	Initials

Action plan and risk assessment

Once a “meltdown” has been triggered, a student can escalate rapidly into a full meltdown.

It is important to have a clear Action Plan and Risk Assessment in place that all relevant staff have been made aware of, and which has been discussed with parent/carers in advance.

The primary considerations should be:

- o Keep the student safe
- o Keep other students safe
- o Keep yourself safe

Safe Place

Ideally, when experiencing the overwhelming physical and emotional symptoms of a meltdown, the student needs to be removed from the situation, and taken to a safe place where they will feel enclosed and sheltered, and can begin to recover.

- This should be an already established and familiar place to the student, and needs to be clearly identified in the Action Plan and Risk Assessment.
- It may not be possible to safely move the student, in which case you should create a safe place where s/he is. You may need to remove other students from the situation.

Give it time



- Meltdowns have a huge impact, both physically and emotionally, and the student will need time to recover.
- The amount of time needed will vary depending on the individual student and the severity of the meltdown – it can be as little as 30 minutes or as much as the whole day.
- The student will not be ready to talk about what happened when they are feeling emotionally and physically drained.

Recovery may include any of the following :-

- o Time in their safe place
- o Time spent engaging in a low-level classroom activity
- o Re-joining peers but with reduced expectations and with support

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a deep breath and remember that however hard this is for you, it is hard for the pupil too. • Make sure other members of staff have been informed of the situation, so that the pupil can be monitored and supported by adults during the period post meltdown. • Stay quietly with the pupil, and use short, soothing phrases that offer reassurance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't get angry and raise your voice. It just adds to the noise and stress. The pupil is not being naughty or trying to get his/her own way. • Don't attempt to deal with the "meltdown" on your own, but also don't have too many adults in close proximity as this may cause further distress to the pupil. • Don't try to reason with the pupil, issue reprimands or ask what's wrong while they are in the grip of the meltdown. Their system is in shutdown and they will not be able to respond.