

Autism Information Bundle



We have compiled a bundle that we hope will provide families with useful information about autism. Some pieces may be more relevant to you and your child. If you would like further information, please contact a member of the team.

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Information on Autism

The terminology for Autism has changed over the years. It can be referred to as Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Asperger's syndrome.

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD's) are a range of complex developmental disorders that can cause problems in thinking, feeling, language and the ability to relate to others. They are neurological disorders which mean that they affect the functioning of the brain. The frequency and intensity with which autism affects a person is different for each individual and no two people will be the same. Behaviours related to autism can range from mild to severe and can change over time with input.

It is usually first diagnosed in childhood. About 1 in 88 children are diagnosed with this condition. They are 3-4 times more common in boys than girls. It is a lifelong condition; however the needs of a person will fluctuate during this time and children and adults with Autism are continuing to lead fuller and more fulfilled lives. There is a huge amount of research that suggests early intervention will have significant positive effects within a child's life and teach them the skills that may not have naturally developed, but that can be taught and facilitated during individual, family, school and group input.

The core impairments in Autism are within:

1. Social Communication
2. Social Interaction
3. Social Imagination / Flexibility of Thought
4. Repetitive Behaviours or interests / Sensory Processing and/or Motor Planning Issues.

Autism is about the quality and consistency of certain difficulties, not necessarily about an absence of skills.

Many children with autism are attentive to routines and sameness and can have difficulty adjusting to unfamiliar surroundings and/or changes in their routine. Many children will have a normal cognitive/learning profile while others can experience learning and/or language difficulties. Some children with autism are at a greater risk for medical conditions such as sleep problems and/or seizure activity.

The needs of children and adults with Autism are best served within a multidisciplinary team. These disciplines usually include a Clinical and/or Educational Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Social Work, Nursing, Early Intervention Educator and Physiotherapy. These teams can be extremely busy so it is very important for parents of children with Autism to be proactive in seeking appropriate care for their child.

5 Myths about Autism

1. Myth: People with autism can't understand others' emotions.

Individuals with autism do not instinctively attend to and/or process social cues the same way non-autistic individuals do (such as eye contact, tone of voice, use of sarcasm). Explicitly labelling an emotion and what that physically feels like can help people with autism to understand another's emotional state ("I am happy. I can't stop smiling and feel good" vs. "I feel sad, I'm frowning/crying and my chest/tummy feels heavy"). Individuals with autism may initially have trouble understanding their own emotional reactions, but with support can learn to quickly understand emotions belonging to themselves and to others.

2. Myth: Autism is an intellectual disability.

Autism is a neurological condition where social development, and skills around initiating and organising an activity/behaviour ("executive functioning") are impacted. *Some* but not all individuals diagnosed with ASD may also be diagnosed with a co-morbid learning difficulty.

3. Myth: Vaccines cause autism.

The original study was fraudulent, removed from the journal it was published in. The doctor has since had his medical license removed. This myth has since been disproven through extensive and up-to-date research.

4. Myth: Children with autism won't grow up to experience meaningful futures.

Individuals with autism can grow up to have a career and explore their interests. Examples of successful people with ASD include Tim Burton (movie director), Susan Boyle (singer), Anthony Hopkins (actor), Bill Gates (founder of Microsoft), Temple Grandin (an animal science professor that has written books about her experience of living with autism).

5. Myth: Children with autism will have 'special skills' or be savants.

Only approximately 10% of individuals diagnosed with autism show savant characteristics.

Promoting Play and Social Skills

Below is a list of ways that you can help in facilitating your child's development of appropriate play skills. It can be useful to have visual aids and a reward system in place to support the skills being taught.

1. Turn-taking.

Children may not like relinquishing control in a game. It can help to have a visual aid that sets a structure in place of how long they must wait until it is their turn.

Social Stories were introduced by Carol Gray as a way of teaching children with ASD about different social scenarios, and how to understand and behave appropriately in them, reducing some uncertainty that may be encountered across contexts. These can be used to explain to children in advance about how you take turns with your friends in a game, because it is fair and keeps everyone happy/having fun together. Importantly, these stories should be kept short, so that there is little overload of information. Also, see apps such as those offered by www.socialexpress.com

2. Eye contact.

Encourage eye contact when the child is communicating with others. This can help with attentions and communication. In turn taking, if your child wants to take their turn, you may encourage them to look to the facilitator (e.g. the adult) to say whose turn it is, or they may be encouraged to look at their peer in the eye and say that they want to take a turn. Likewise, encourage them to make eye contact when handing over a turn to their peer, and acknowledge that in X many plays it will be their turn again. This can help with reducing any anxiety that may arise from turn-taking

3. Identity.

Encourage the child to use names when speaking to/about others, and to compliment others. This can help enhance peer relationships, and to build an affiliation network for exploring their interests (e.g. "I like Tim. Tim is great at building sandcastles. Tim likes toy soldiers. We can play in the sandpit and share our toys"). Keeping a photo album or scrapbook with names labelled under each could be useful for getting to know family members and friends with similar interests. As well, make a personal photographic profile for your child, showing them part-taking in their favourite activities, eating their favourite foods, or hanging out with their peers, so that they can refer back to these during functional communication.

4. **Functional communication.**

Another term for purposeful / goal driven communication. It is how we get our needs met. Play is an excellent way of developing functional communication skills, particularly in roleplay. For example, if playing with a doll, it could be that the doll is sick. What's wrong? (Tummy pain) What do they need? (Doctor/medicine/tummy rub). If you are using a reward system with your child and want to give them the option to choose an activity, the personal photographic profile could be used to show what options they can choose from.

For further strategies on language development, see Appendix B and Appendix C.

5. **Structure**

Structure is an important component to supporting children with ASD across contexts. Board games are a great way of providing a structure (rules of what you can and can't do) and turn taking (some with visual cues of how many turns until it is theirs again). Child friendly cards games like 'Snap' and 'Go fish' with some support can help with matching and be interactive.

6. **Emotional regulation.**

This is the ability to notice how we are feeling in response to an external cue (an action, something we see/hear). Children with autism can have difficulty understanding what their emotions are. During play, there is an opportunity to develop this skill by checking in with your child when they accomplish a task, and/or successfully navigate a social interaction (e.g. turn-taking / making conversation with a peer). Visual charts using colour and numbers can be used to help a child to communicate non-verbally how they are feeling (e.g. 1 and green for happy, 5 and red for angry/frustrated). These may initially include more information about what different emotions feel like (e.g. happy is light chest and smiling, angry is tension in tummy and hot, sadness is heavy chest, etc.). Further information around emotional and behavioural regulation is covered in a later section.



Promoting Symbolic Play Skills

Below is a list of ways to help your child with developing their symbolic thinking. This is an important skill for being able to think independently, problem-solve, and think from other perspectives. The following excerpt is taken from Kathy Walmsley and Mari Caulfield:

Strategies for Helping Your Child Build a Symbolic World

Some key points to remember. Through symbolic play we are supporting the child's capacity to:

- Come up with their own ideas and play them out
- Share their ideas with others
- Think about solutions to problems that come up in the play.
- Be able to plan and sequence motor actions for a purpose in pretend play.
- Increase their attention span in play
- Be aware of how they feel, and how their feelings influence their behaviour
- Have a positive belief in themselves and their abilities - sense of mastery over their environment
- Be able to accept and incorporate the ideas of another person with those of their own

When the child is just beginning to be symbolic:

- Identify real-life experiences the child knows and enjoys and have available to play out those experiences.
- Use specific set of figures / dolls to represent family members and identify other favourite figures with familiar names.
- Encourage role-playing with dress-up props, use puppets. The child may prefer to be the actor and role play before using symbolic figures.
- Use symbolic figures child knows and loves, such as Dora, Poppa Pig, etc. characters, to generate symbolic play. Re-enact familiar scenes or songs, create new ideas.
- Allow the child to discover what is real and what is a toy (e.g. if the child tries to go down a toy slide, encourage the child to try this out; if child tries to put on doll's clothes, do not tell it doesn't fit; if child puts foot in pretend pool, ask if is cold)

Give symbolic meaning to objects as you play:

- When the child climbs to top of the sofa, pretend the child is climbing a tall mountain

- When the child slides down the slide at the playground, pretend the child is sliding into the ocean and watch out for the fish
- Substitute one object for another when props are needed. Pretend that the ball is a cake or the spoon is a birthday candle.
- Respond to the child's real desires through pretend actions. E.g. If the child is thirsty, offer an empty cup or invite to tea party, If the child is hungry, open cardboard-box refrigerator and offer some food, pretend to cook, or ask if the child will go to the pretend market with you to get things. If the child wants to leave, give pretend keys or a toy car. If the child lies down on floor or couch, get a blanket or pillow, turn off the lights, and sing a lullaby.

As the child becomes more familiar with pretend play

- Get involved in the drama yourself! Men playing symbolically (rote playing, playing with characters) with the child: Be a player and take on a rote with your figure I or yourself with dress ups etc. Speak from the characters perspective
- If using figures, talk directly from the doll's perspective to the other dolls rather than questioning the child about what is happening or narrating in the third person.
 - Insert obstacles into the play. (E.g. make. your bus block the road. Then speaking as a character, challenge child to respond. If necessary, get. increasingly urgent (whispering to the child to encourage dealing with the problem, offer help if needed by becoming an ally).
 - When the child moves on quickly because it seems they are unsure of how to proceed (e.g. may have motor planning difficulties) - gently bring them back, or you stay with the initial problem and wait and give the child a chance to come back on their own
 - As you play, match your tone of voice to the situation. Pretend to cry when the character is hurt, cheer loudly when your character is happy, and speak in rough or spooky tones when you are playing the bad guy. Remember, drama, drama, drama to give the child affect cues.
- Expand the play for as long as you can. (Use all of the Who, What, Where, Why, When questions as appropriate to the language level of the child and keep them open-ended).
- Let the child be the director
- Focus on process as you play, asking which character to be, what props are needed when ideas have changed, what the problem is, when to end the idea, etc. Identify the

beginning, middle and end. It may help to “set the scene” at the very beginning. Ask - What will our story be? What are our characters?, Where are we?, What do we need?

Incorporate Problem solving in pretend play

When a problem comes up in the play, we as adult play partner I facilitators have to be complete blank slates, and let go of any of ideas of what we may have on how the child could solve the problem. This empowers the child to be able to problem solve themselves and thus develop a sense of mastery over their environment.

Ways to do this are:

- Play dumb, I don't know what to do next!"
- Ask open questions, I wonder what we should do next?" Or simply reflect the presence of the problem – “Uh oh, what a problem!”.
- Pause and took expectantly at the child - giving them the opportunity to come up with solution / idea on their own
- Asking questions where you do not know what the answer will be is a good way to keep yourself in check over whether you are giving the child the ideas / solution or not.
- If the solution the child comes up with doesn't sound right to us - then we can let them have a go with it and figure it out for themselves that it is not right!
- If the child is really struggling to come up with ideas/solution we can;
 - Give prompts or some cues to help them come up with ideas if they are having difficulty. Partial prompts are helpful.
 - Or give a few options the child still gets to make the final choice.
- If the child has processing challenges, give them time lots of pausing. and waiting to think and process and come up with an idea, rather than supplying the idea or solution yourself.
- When a problem crops up during play, create symbolic solutions e.g. get the doctors kit when the doll falls, so child can help the hurt doll, tool kit for broken car etc.

Support the child's emotional development through the symbolic play

- Reflect on the ideas and feelings in the story, both while playing and later on as you would with other real-life experiences. You might have opportunity to say:
 - "Wow, you look really proud to have saved the people from the fire!"
 - "You must feel so powerful right now"
 - "Oh man, you are really angry about that"
 - “It is so disappointing that that castle keeps falling down"

- When acknowledging and reflecting the child's feelings and emotions as they arise during the play:
 - Acknowledge negative feelings with empathy and understanding.
 - Let them sit with the emotion, while being there in that moment with them, showing that you understand and are there to support if needed.
 - By reflecting the emotion and being there to support your child while they are experiencing that emotion, you are helping your child to understand and master these challenging emotions (rather than meltdown, tantrum etc).
- Use play to help child ideas/themes, which may have been frightening.
- Notice and discuss or just reflect and help your child be aware (awareness comes before understanding), your child's abstract themes such as good guy/bad guy, separation/loss, and various emotions such as closeness, fear, jealousy, anger, bossy, competition, etc.
- Remember symbolic play and conversation is the safe way to practice, re-enact, understand and master the full range of emotional ideas and experiences.

Leaving our agenda at the door

It is important when doing this type of play that we leave our own agendas at the door. Common agendas, which parents or caregivers bring into those play sessions is the temptation to use the play as a teaching tool for the child and correcting them when they do something that is not technically or realistically correct, or if they do something that is morally wrong. This can be a real challenge for many of us and it is important to find your own comfort level in doing this.

The idea behind this is that in these play sessions, the child is in a safe and accepting environment to explore and play out scenarios and feelings that may otherwise be unacceptable or not allowed in real life situations. By allowing them to experience and gain awareness of these actions in a safe environment, research has shown that they are less likely to act them out in real life.

As a facilitator, when a child acts out something that is incorrect e.g. uses a tool for a purpose other than it was intended: we can reflect back to the child what they are doing and help keep them in the moment, join them. Remember the focus is on building self-awareness and self-regulating capacities. In another example if the child is intent on really hitting out at the soft toy who is the baddie - again reflecting back to them 'wow, you are really mad at that guy, oh you are just so unhappy with him at the moment, and you really want to get him. This helps the child understand and be aware of the emotional tone underlying their actions and

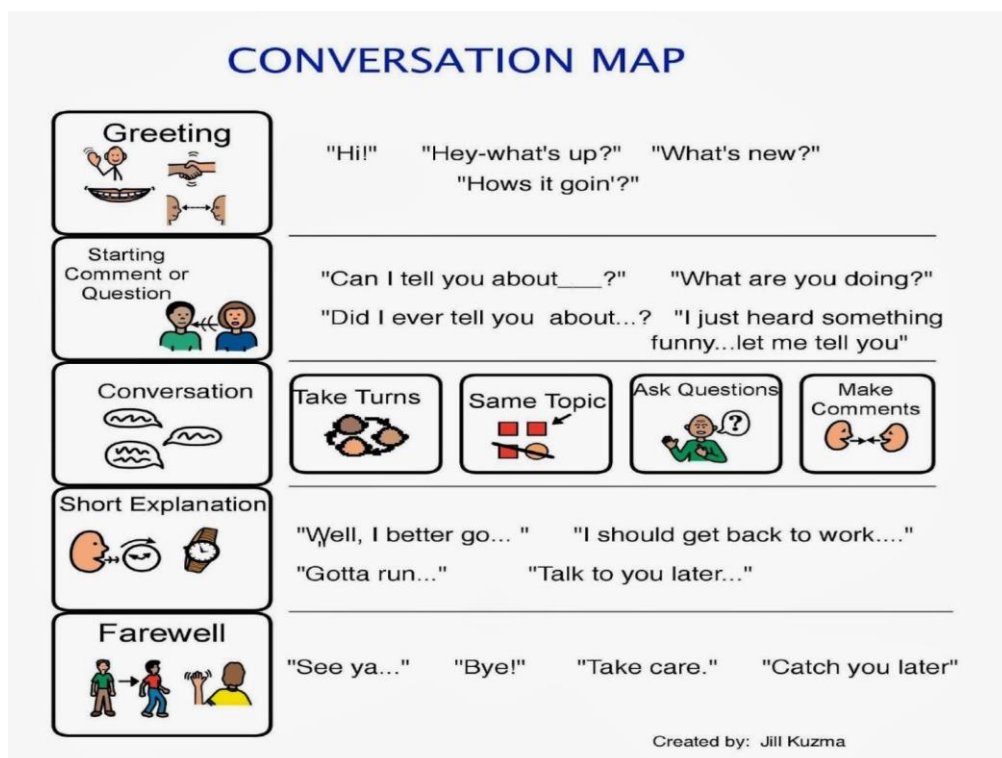
then later, if appropriate you can move into facilitating the problem solving and encouraging them to come up with a solution to their discomfort.

Boundaries can be set such that no people are hurt (physically or emotionally) or property damaged. You may personally feel the need to set more boundaries, depending on your own limits and belief.

Enhancing Social Interaction Skills

This section focuses on helping your child learn about conversational skills that are important in a social interaction. This includes teaching them about non-verbal cues, and giving them tips on the flow and rules of conversations.

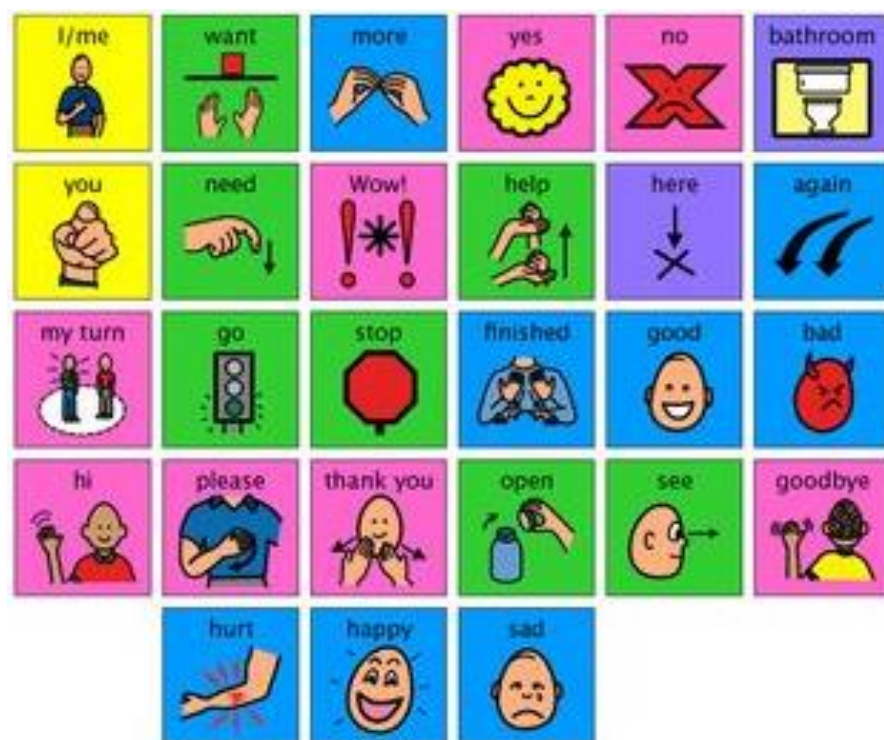
1. As part of emotional regulation development, it can be helpful to have a visual chart of different emotions that humans experience (happiness, sadness, anger, fear). Alongside this, explain the physical symptoms that can accompany these and the scenarios that may lead to them. This can be done through the use of social stories, and could be helpful for your child in identifying emotions in themselves/others.
2. Help your child by teaching them useful conversation starters. Irish people usually default to talking about the weather. For children, it could be that if they are about to start doing something, you encourage your child to ask “Do you like X? I like X. Let’s do this together”. Teach your child that maybe not everyone will like the same things they do, and encourage their curiosity in what another might like to do, so that they can explore other hobbies and maybe even find another interest in common.
3. Encourage the game “patty cake”. This requires little talking initially, and can be an opportunity to engage in eye contact. Over time, songs, rhymes, or even conversation could be included in the game. This is also one manner of providing tactile (touch) stimulation.



Promoting Effective Social and Functional Communication

Individuals with autism can often have trouble in 1) understanding their needs, and 2) communicating their needs to get them met. This section gives some suggestions on how you can help your child develop a system for understanding and communicating their needs. Make use of visual aids and a reward system that encourages appropriate communication.

1. Visual charts / cards for needs (food, drink, toilet, play/toy, wash, medicine).
2. Visual charts / cards for emotional states can help your child to express themselves. This should contain text and illustrations such as traffic lights (red for angry/bad feelings; green for happy/good feelings) or a temperature gauge (high levels for bad, low levels for good).



3. A step-by-step aid for how to ask for something (e.g. get your chart with what you want, get attention by using name and eye contact, show the other person on the chart what you need).
4. It can help to have a diary for keeping track of experiences where your child may feel upset/overwhelmed throughout the day. This can be used to identify triggers for anxiety, environments that may be over-stimulating, and outline cases where a system that facilitates functional communication is needed.
5. Modern society is designed primarily around language and giving verbal praise. Research however has shown that individuals with autism process speech at a much slower rate and do not process the emotional tone. Therefore, they need support from a young age to associate verbal praises as a positive reinforcement. This can be done

by always pairing verbal praise with every other form of reinforcement. This means always telling them “Well done/excellent job/you’re amazing” along with providing them with their reward (toy / treat / pat on the back / high five) immediately following a desired behaviour/response. In this way, they learn to both recognise praise in speech terms and also the desirable behaviours being taught.

6. Playing with block to make a tower can help with learning to complete goals in a sequenced procedure. For instance, have a series of steps in a picture of how to build a tower. Once your child has learned this skill of following a sequence, you can try applying it to other daily sequences, such as getting ready in the morning.



See Appendix A for further communication strategies and visual aids.

Reducing Behavioural Difficulties

Meltdowns are a result over sensory overload and best diffused through a time out from the triggers in the environment. But what about other difficult behaviours such as aggression? It is important to remember that these behaviours have a purpose, though they may not necessarily be appropriate. We therefore need to help the child develop an appropriate system of communicating and dealing with unpleasant experiences.

Don't: make warnings of consequences, threaten a punishment, raise your voice at them. What you want to do is provide intentional teaching and motivation.

1. Intentional teaching and motivation.

A familiar teaching style in parenting. It is the idea that if we want to encourage a behaviour to happen, then we must provide positive reinforcement *immediately* following the behaviour in some shape or form that the child will enjoy. This could be to get a sweet for successfully asking for help with getting their toys out; getting to play with their toys after completing a piece of homework; time to watch their favourite show after tidying up after themselves. Bear in mind to pair these with verbal praise (see point 5 on section *Promoting Effective Social and Functional Communication*).

2. Stimming behaviours.

It can be helpful to observe your child to see what senses they best like to stimulate. You can then make it part of their routine on a visual timetable that every x hours they will have a few minutes to engage in that behaviour. Over time, you may reduce the allotted time, or increase the inter-rim period. An example would be if they enjoy hand flapping, that they are allowed 15mins every 2hours to perform this behaviour. Overtime, this is 10mins every 2hours, 10mins every 3hours, etc.

3. Calming activities list.

Have a set of different activities that will soothe your child when they are becoming upset. This should be a set that varies in the senses being stimulated, and see which ones are the most calming to your child. Then use them in hierarchical order as needed (the least effective for minor feelings of upset, the most effective for higher instances of upset). These can include but are not limited to listening to music, playing with sand / putty / bowl of marbles, smelling essential oils, blowing bubbles, watching a lava lamp/kaleidoscope, playing with a fidget spinner / fidget cube, getting a massage/rubbing moisturiser into skin, art activities (painting, clay, paper maché).

Learning Self-Awareness and Self-Control

Below is a look at ways to help your child with developing their self-awareness and self-control. This is important for being able to know themselves, their thoughts, feelings, and also being able to exercise self-control over their actions (inhibitory behaviours). The following excerpt is taken from Mari Caulfield and Kathy Walmsley:

Learning Self -Awareness & Self -Control

Typical Development

When children developmentally reach the 18/24/36 months-age, a quest for independence emerges accompanied by an increase in assertion of 'who I am' in negativism ("No!"). Children with challenges in relating and communicating also go through this stage (failure to overdo so would be a 'red flag' for concern)

Children must try out both positive and negative feelings. They go through a period of intensely conflicted feelings that are inevitable and need to be expressed. A parent's role is to recognise them as a part of an important process and accept them, but also to help the child learn to contain them and exercise self-control & self-regulation.

Limit Setting & Discipline

A child who is testing limits is sending out very clear messages. They are saying that they need help sorting out what they can do and what they can't.

The purpose of discipline is to make children feel more secure, to learn how to control their wishes and impulses and understand their feelings. Discipline is about teaching (rather than punishing).

Take your own feelings into account. You may need to take your own 'time out' prior to intervening with the child (e.g. calm yourself by taking 10 seconds, to perhaps turn away and clear your mind; or asking a partner or relative to step in and help you become more objective). Reflect on your own childhood experiences of disciplining. How do these memories impact the way you are as parent now?

A firm, consistent approach to misbehaviour shows caring and offers security to the child. Be firm and consistent with certain limits and boundary setting (decide before what is non-negotiable and what may be flexible). Avoid changing your mind or giving in, once you have set a limit. This is confusing and unhelpful for the child.

Respect the child's stage of development & fit the disciplinary action to where the child is developmentally.

Take into account the child's Individual differences - their sensory processing ability; praxis (being able to come up with ideas and use their body to respond or problem solve); motor skills; receptive and expressive language processing – Ask how are these biological differences contribute to the child's challenging behaviour? For example if the child is experiencing increased stress relating to the greater effort that is needed in navigating everyday life then they may feel more need for control and this can come across as being rigid and inflexible.

Some Practical Suggestions for Limit Setting..

Consistency. Develop a plan about what limits you will enforce and what you will not. Decide on your rules ahead of time, and what your response will be. Avoid letting something go, if you know that you don't want to let it go next time. Be consistent across different contexts

Take time out for YOU. If necessary (e.g. 10 seconds) calm, turn away and clear your mind; or asking a spouse or relative to step in to help you become more objective

Use tone, simple language and gesture. Use simple phrases and clear, firm tones in your voice, such as "Uh ah..,"; "Not okay." (I.e. fewer words - let the tone of your voice convey the meaning).

For many children, the addition of a Visual - gesture, picture, photo, and symbol is very helpful for them to understand your meaning.

Acknowledge the child's desire, even though it is. 'not okay'. It is important that they are felt understood, even if they are not allowed what they want.

- Example "I know you want to climb up, but it's not safe, uh ah..," "I know you want to stay, you don't want to go home but we have to go home to see...."
- You may need to repeat this acknowledgement and also the plan of what needs to happen to allow time to register and process.

After acknowledging and reflecting the child's emotion, be as neutral as you can in your facial expression and body language. A neutral response is least likely to be a positive reinforcer for your child's undesirable behaviour.

In as far as possible, offer choices e.g.. Rather than "Put your shoes on" -> "Do you want to put you boots or sneakers on?". (Note: if your child is already dis-regulated choices may add more uncertainty and you may just want to let the child know of the plan rather than offer a choice).

Give clear, alternatives for undesirable behaviour (E.g. "You can climb on the slide or the frame but not the TV cabinet"). A visual may be very helpful to have here also. You may need to repeat this number of times quietly and firmly.

Predict when moments may occur, watch for the cues of the child and be prepared. It may help to rehearse rehearsing what will happen.

Time warnings provide predictability. They will enable the child to know what is coming next and when (they will not feel so 'powerless'), and also allow processing time.

- Give warning that XXX is about to happen in: 5 minutes, I minute... Give a count-down: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6—
- Use a visual timer for added support to understanding the context (when the sand finishes going down, when the red is all gone).
- Use a visual timetable to show what coming next, order of events

Acknowledge the child's feelings at the time (e.g. "Yes, you are mad right now" or "It is okay to be angry, but not okay to hit").

Make the tricky situation playful if you can, by creating a silly interaction around it, such as doing something unexpected or silly (e.g. if the child won't put their shoes on, then take their shoes and put them on teddy).

Support and take into account the child's individual differences. E.g. for your child who has trouble with processing spoken words limit your language to one / two key words, and use lots of visual support such as your facial expression, gestures, pictures. E.g. for the child with motor planning challenges you may need to provide a "just right" challenge and ensure that the resistance isn't related to praxis challenges that is the child is not able to do the task).

Give enhanced feedback cues to help the child notice the impact of his actions if the child has trouble with social monitoring that is in being able to attend and attune to others. E.g. if he knocks down his sister's block tower- cue him into his sister's feelings ('oh... Sally is sad', making a sad face yourself to help him cue into her feeling state).

Balance stressful experiences with pleasurable, connected experiences. If the child is experiencing more stress / anxiety throughout their day, really increase the amount of fun, pleasurable, connected experiences he is having with you. Anticipate stressful times, e.g. starting at a new school, and add in more play time during those periods including activities that you know the child loves as this will reduce their stress. E.g. rough housing play, bathing together, reading or cooking together.

Provide times when the child can have a sense of being the "boss". This is important for all children but especially those with individual differences. This can take the form of:

- "Special" jobs/ chores around the house
- Regular times where the child gets to choose/ decide within daily routine in a way that is acceptable and appropriate
- Increase the amount of Floortime child directed play times

TIME TO PLAY! The child needs more 1:1, individual playtime with his key caregivers during this phase of his development Regular times where you get to truly enjoy each other are essential and will reduce stress for both child and caregiver.

Find regular and frequent opportunities for individual Floortime play (e.g. a minimal of 30 min daily) with mum, dad or another close adult caregiver when you can feel very calm together and enjoy your relationship

Times when your child gets to be the boss, the leader, call the shots (within safety limits for people and objects)

Find your comfort zone in what activities, games you enjoy - find a common ground of enjoyment with the child, What are the activities, props, environments that you both love?

Allied / Helper play - become a helper, carrying out their ideas with them, showing them you are on his side

When adding your ideas, check in with them (although avoid asking permission - do it more gesturally), e.g. instead of asking "do you want to play with Mr Potato head (child is likely to say no because it wasn't their idea!) Just put the Potato head toy out and let them discover it!!

For children at the language /symbolic levels of development

- Model & reflect back to the child their underlying feeling (anger, sadness, fear, anxiety) using gesturing; simple words, or symbolic ideas, e.g. "oh that lion looks- really scary, lets hide in a safe place!"
- Set up play for opportunities for 'powerful guy play in pretend play, e.g. "Oh no teddy's caught in a fire! We need someone to save him!"
- Good guys (you & your child) working against the bad guys
- Reflect how powerful, strong the child is within play.
- "Wow, you are so strong! (You got him!) (You did it!) Yay!"
- Create symbolic solutions for the child's anger, fear, anxieties, e.g.: 'Noisy balloon! Go to jail! 'Or "Put it in the rubbish bin".
- Symbolic solutions can also help the child overcome challenges in their own routines e.g. engaging in 'feeding' teddy whilst having lunch; can support the child's calm and engagement in this activity.

Meltdowns & Tantrums

The aim is to support the child's ability to self-calm and soothe when your child is faced with a stressor i.e. co-regulate them - rather than move in quickly to remedy the situation or solve the problem to help them to 'be okay' again.

Ensure the child is in a safe place, & is not going to hurt themselves or anyone else. This may mean standing back and giving them the space to express their distress. This does not mean abandoning them, rather, keep as close to them as they will allow, so that they can see you and know that you are there, and when they are ready they can come to you for comfort.

Take Time out for YOU if necessary. It is okay to take your own 'time out' prior to intervening with the child (e.g. 10 seconds to turn away and calm and clear your mind; or asking a spouse or relative to step in to help give you time to calm and to become more objective)

Reflect how the child is tooling back to them with understanding and empathy.

- Using your facial expressions, and tone of voice and simple words - "oh you're cross.... oh so cross"; "Oh, you didn't like it when we had to leave"
- Be okay sitting with the feelings for while, avoid rushing too quickly into 'fix it' mode
- Soothing stroking, sitting quietly with the child may be effective in calming.

After the child has begun to calm, you can move into shared problem solving (If developmentally appropriate)

- 'How can we fix this/make it easier?' etc
- Provide a couple of choices if it is too hard for the child to come up with a solution

Use Distractions as appropriate for the child's developmental level.

- Favourite toys, songs, games.
- Try to match the child's tone as you do, e.g. if he is still quiet and a little grumpy - a quiet, favourite song.

- Consider the child's sensory profile here, what are their 'magnets'? (Sounds, movement, deep pressure etc)

Avoid being too conversational i.e. negotiating / reasoning / educating, until the child is completely calm (and only when it is developmentally appropriate). Rather, focus on the underlying feeling, and with helping them to be comfortable with a range of feelings and recover from upsets through your capacity to co-regulate with them.

Predict when meltdowns / tantrums may occur and be prepared.

- Give a time warning e.g. do a countdown (see above)
- Rehearse what will be happening to ensure the child has the sequence- e.g. first & then
- Have distractions on hand if you are away from home (favourite toy etc).

Calming and Behaviour-Regulating Activities

For the best outcome it is recommended that every 2 hours, for 10-15 minutes you would engage your child in some proprioceptive, vestibular, and deep-pressure input. Engaging in these activities can significantly regulate your child, therefore reducing negative behavioural presentations. The following is taken from Kathy Bingaman and Cheryl Mock:

General Guidelines: Allow the child to determine the intensity of sensory input and the length of time they can tolerate. Never force a child to participate in a sensory activity, especially if fearful.

Proprioception Input - Activities that promote active use of the muscles and joints to work against resistance, e.g. when pushing or pulling. This input tends to be calming and help organize thought processes. Also helps improve strength, coordination, and body awareness.

- Jump on a trampoline, mattress, pillows
- Push against a wall or adults' hands
- Stretch thick elastic or Theraband
- Lift or pull heavy items
- Fill up toy trucks with blocks and push
- Ride toys that have pedals
- Crash into pillows or bean bag chairs
- Climb a play structure
- Push cart or laundry basket filled with
- Pull wagon filled with toys or another child
- Play running and jumping games
- Play parachute games
- Make a cardboard house with small doors the child squeezes through
- Bounce on a bouncy ball with handle O
- 'Drive' a heavy box around canes
- Use spray bottles to clean or for crafts
- Climb cushions, pillows, mats, bean bag chairs, rock wall, large inflated cushions
- Walk uphill, upstairs or up ramps
- Swing from trapeze bar or monkey bars
- Squeeze fidget toys
- Carry books to another part of room
- Chores such as wipe counters and tables, sweep floors, push chairs under tables
- Play in sandbox with damp, heavy sand
- Climb under / over cushions; obstacle courses
- Construct a play areas with large boxes, cushions, pillows, and blankets
- Catch, roll or throw a heavy ball
- Colour large pictures on sidewalk with chalk
- Do art activities at an easel or paper on wall
- Fill pillow case with stuffed animals and pull, push and carry them
- Pull other children around on blanket
- Open and hold doors for others
- Crab and bear walk; army crawl
- Fill watering can to water plants, grass, flowers
- Do activities such as simple gymnastics, karate, and dancing

Vestibular Input - Activities that provide movement of the head. Vestibular movement tends to be calming if slow and rhythmic, but alerting if fast and arrhythmic (however some children may respond in the opposite way). These activities may also help muscle tone, postural stability and balance.

- Swinging, sliding, scooter board, tire swing do a puzzle, throw bean bags into a basket.
- Rocking back and forth in a rocker ○ Lying on back - roll child back to pick up items from floor and drop in basket.
- Sit and lean head back all the way
- Ride tricycles and riding toys
- The Egg - lie on back, hold knees to chest and roll back and forth ▪ Blanket swing have two adults hold two corners of a blanket and rhythmically swing child back and forth while lying in the blanket
- Twirling, running, log-rolling and jumping
- Large ball activities:
 - Lying on belly - roll child forward and back, e.g. to knock over tower,

Olfactory input— Provide smells to alert or calm. Use all natural extracts or essence.

- Alerting: pine, citrus, peppermint
- Calming: vanilla, banana, coconut

Deep Pressure Tactile Input - Activities that involve firm pressure over the skin. Deep pressure helps to calm, organize behaviours, and promote body awareness.

- Firm, long bear hugs, preferably initiated by the child
- Let child tightly wrap up in a blanket or quilt
- Pickle sandwich —Child lays on his belly. Ask him what he wants on his sandwich as you firmly roll a ball over his legs, arms, and back to 'add" each ingredient.
- Hide under a bean bag chair or crawl around with a bean bag chair on her back like a turtle.
- Rub arms and legs briskly with a towel, e.g. after water play
- Give firm but gentle squeezes down arms
- Have child rub lotion on arms and legs

Oral Input - provides proprioception input through the jaw muscles; helps develop oral motor skills

- Eat chewy or crunchy foods, e.g. dried fruit; gummy bears; Starburst; liquorice;

beef; jerky; bagels; string cheese; gum; raisins; soft pretzels; crunchy pretzels; popcorn; granola bars.

- Blowing activities: wind instruments, bubbles, whistles, 'snake' party favours, blow thinned paint across paper with a straw, blo-pens, blow bubbles in water/soap mixture with a straw.

- Resistive sucking: drink through a curly straw or sports bottle with along straw; suck lollipops or popsicles; drink milkshakes or applesauce through a straw; eat peanut butter off a spoon.
- Provide use of a Chewy-Tube or oxygen tubing tied into a "necklace".

Fine Motor Activities

- Play Doh, especially using tools and extruder to increase resistance and require muscle use
- Paint with squeeze bottles or squirt bottles
- String beads onto pipe cleaners
- Have child remove 1/4" beads placed half-in or completely hidden in clay
- Draw with broken crayons instead of markers
- Use hand fidgets during circle or story time: beanie animals; small squishy balls; balloons stuffed with flour or sand; Koosh balls; Silly-putty
- Chalk pictures by dipping chalk in water and colouring on black construction paper
- Stamping - large stamps especially
- Cut or tear heavy paper
- Spread modelling clay in tray, 1/4 to 1/2 inch depth. Draw designs, pictures, letters with large diameter pencil
- Colour on sandpaper

Environment and Routines

- Use a voice that is calm and quiet; strike a triangle or turn off lights for attention.
- Keep room decorations simple; use similar background colours on bulletin boards
- Use soothing music or no music if there is noise from others talking
- Provide a cozy corner with fidget toys pillows, bean bags, quilt, dimmed light
- Make clear traffic patterns around the classroom so movement is easier and safer,
- Reduce clutter in room, store toys neatly in bins; hang curtains over toy shelves
- Provide seating that fits the children so feet touch ground, box, or stool to provide support
- Use low lighting, natural lighting, or floor lamps to counteract flicker of overhead lights
- Sit on cushions or hold sand pillows on lap

- Review a visual picture schedule each day; use Velcro on pictures for easy changes in routine

Coping with Anxiety

Anxiety is particularly difficult for children with autism, as it requires the child to learn to understand what anxiety feels like, the cause of their anxiety, and how to cope with it that doesn't involve bolting. Some common causes of anxiety are change in routine, changes in the environment (e.g. moving furniture), meeting someone new, and public places (which can be loud, crowded, and over-stimulating).

1. Engage deep breathing.

Taking deep breaths helps to activate our soothing system (known as the “parasympathetic nervous system”). One creative way you can do this is by getting your child to blow bubbles when they are beginning to show signs of upset.

2. Reduce your language.

Talking can be overwhelming for children with autism because it is more information to be processed, and can be an overload when also having to cope with feelings of anxiety. Instead, you could direct them with gestures or touch to a calming activity, such as listening to calming music. Experiment with slow beat music that mimics a steady heart rhythm.

3. Sensory fulfilment.

It can be helpful to observe your child to see what senses they best like to stimulate, which can help to distract them when feelings of anxiety are rising. For example, if you notice your child bites when they become upset, have a rubber chew ring so that they can take out some frustration without causing harm to themselves.

4. Refer to your child's calming activities list (see section *Reducing Behavioural Difficulties*).

5. Remove them from an overstimulating environment.

If it's difficult for your child to communicate when they are feeling overwhelmed, it may be useful to provide them with a free pass card that they can give to the parent/teacher/carer to let them know that they need some down time in a safe space.



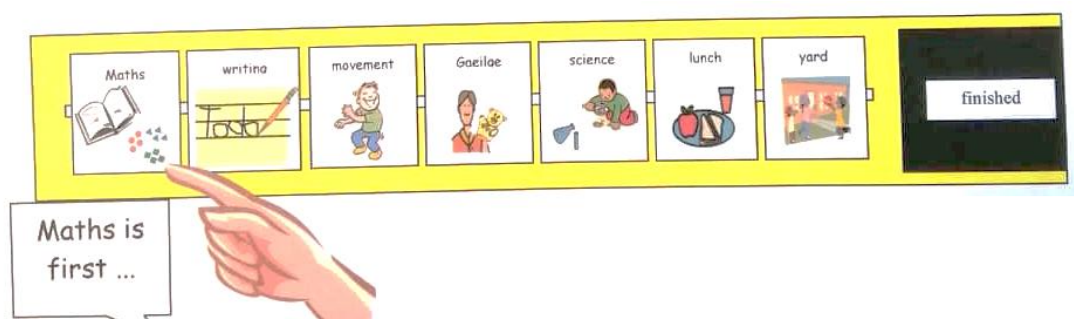
Appendix

Appendix A – Communication Strategies

Functional communication: Communication forms and communication means.

We use language in our everyday lives to do a number of things, such as communicate our needs, our feelings, opinions, and to socialise with others. As we have seen though, children with autism can struggle to grasp language, and do better if given a visual cue. Below is a list of the different ways in which we can communicate with others without relying totally on speech.

- Natural gesture and sign language (Lámh, Irish Sign Language)
- Objects of reference. An example of this would be to point or pick up an object that is associated with a follow-up action, such as picking up / pointing at their own cup to indicate they are thirsty. The object *refers* to what they are communicating they want / need.
- Transitional objects. These are more commonly understood as “security blankets”; a source of comfort in the absence of parent or caregiver. This could be a teddy, doll, toy, or an actual blanket. They can serve a communication purpose via the interaction the child has with this. For example, “Teddy is hungry. Wants a treat” could be used to communicate what the child wants.
- Transition strategies represent a change to take place by illustrating a sequence. This includes visual schedules / visual timetables, which can be used as an aid to support planning and organisation.



- Visual aids that symbolise something, that when presented to another can be accessed through this person. An example of this is PECS – Picture Exchange Communication System – and WECS - Word Exchange Communication System (Written text).

Talking mats

Child needs solid foundation of Engagement, Intentionality, and early Shared symbolic meanings. Comprehension is crucial.

Visual Supports

As Temple Grandin (a successful professor with autism) says “I am a visual thinker, not a language-based thinker. My brain is like Google images”. We can help improve understanding through use of visual supports when communicating, as well as trying to develop organisational skills.

Photographs, Pictures, and Text

These can be used to represent daily schedules, self-help routines, choice boards, behavioural reminders, transitions, instructions, calming and sensory schedules, feelings, academic activities, play schedules, and reward systems. For more on this, go to www.usevisualstrategies.com and www.5pointscale.com

- First, then.
- Choice boards
- Text boards
- Talk books – Family, friends, toys, likes, etc.
- Communication strips: What do I do at school? What do I do at home? Child communicates the day’s activities.

Visual Timer Reminders

These can be used to help with organisation and attention. When you can visibly see how much time is left (lots or little), it is more effective than being told how much is left.

- Time timer clock and watch
- Timer
- Sand timer
- IPrompt App, stopwatch, digital counter.
- Story sacks
- Bag books – multisensory stories

Personal reminders

- Power cards with text / story reminding child how best to support self.
- Post-Its
- Whiteboards, Magna Doodle, Notebooks.
- Use drawing, stickers, stick kids, symbols, text.
- Calendars, Planners, Maps, Labels.
- Visual arrangements.

Emotional Story books

To build on understanding emotions and promote empathy with different perspectives, it can be helpful to look at narratives. Stories in different forms can show how different contexts can set up for different thoughts and feelings which we have every day. It can also help for planning ahead, such as what I can do when I am upset, or what to do if I see someone is sad.

- Sensory choices or a page in PECS book or Choice Board “Sometimes, I get really frustrated and mad. I want to throw things...”. See also: www.therapro.com for PDFs of sensory stories.
- Video Modelling
- Social Thinking and Social Skills Picture Books
- Social Stories www.thegraycenter.org
- Comic strip conversations; speech bubbles, thinking bubbles.

Communication using Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ACC)

- PODD Pragmatic Organisation
- CORE BOARDS
- Alphabetic board
- Dynamic display
- Speech generating devices
- iTouch, iPhone, iPad apps
- GO Talk

Language Activity Monitoring (LAM) ACC Sample communication Apps

- Icommunicate
- JABtalk
- Proloquo2go
- PandaPal
- Grace app
- SoundingBoard
- Touch Chat
- Sonoflex

Appendix B – Strategies to Promote Expressive Language Development

- Respect all communication attempts.
- Reflect/respond with affect, sometimes in a whisper, what the child is doing or thinking (his idea and intention)
- Reflect/respond with sounds and treat all children's sounds as purposeful
- Respect/respond with simple language what the child is doing
- Comment respectfully and sensitively
- Ask questions with gesture, sounds and facial affect
- Give choices, and ask open questions such as “What now?”; “Who do you want?”
- Don't ask questions you know the answer to! Wait and Wonder.
- Choose words and phrases for comprehension focus within the affective context of the child's play & ideas
- Agree targeted language together, promoted within familiar and natural play opportunities, and developmentally based
- Use words connected to the child's intent & what is meaningful for the child – e.g. “Want juice?” when they are thirsty as opposed to labelling pictures to learn the word “juice”
- Once your child becomes verbal, aim to entice your child into long back & forth, natural conversations. Take turns in the interaction, without too much focus on the correctness of production. Support narrative.
- Use the language of emotion and thinking (‘idea’; ‘problem’, ‘confused’)
- Encourage the use of all types of ideas, and expression through symbols e.g. pictures, signs, AAC, construction (building a train out of blocks), drawing, and acting out roles oneself. Planning and Sequencing with language
- Encourage pragmatic skills: Self-awareness for older children when the children will initiate, maintain, repair, and terminate the topic.

Appendix C – Strategies to Promote Receptive Language Development

These are some strategies which can be used to facilitate a child's comprehension of language.

- Get the child's attention before speaking. You can try physical contact such as touching the child's arm or holding his hands (if it is not aversive), while calling his name. Or give the child gestural or verbal cues such as "Johnny listen (while pointing to your ear)" or "Look" while pointing to the focus of attention. Using enticing affect will also support your child's referencing and attention.
- Reduce your language to meet the child's language level "For example; if the child is using single words, speak to him in short sentences such as "Where's Mommy?" instead of "Let's go see if Mommy is waiting outside").
- Speak slowly and clearly. A slow rate gives the child a better chance to process what you've said.
- Some children also need more time to formulate a response. Allow enough time for a child to respond before you say the next thing or ask the next question. 10 second rule is the optimum – waiting for 10!
- When talking to the child repeat or rephrase something you have said e.g. "This tub has no bubbles. No bubbles here". Keep language in context and simple.
- Pair words and gestures to highlight the meaning. You might point as you refer to objects or places or use iconic gestures, which "pantomime" the meaning of words "e.g. making a squeezing gesture while instructing the child to squeeze). Remember the child needs to see what (s)he hears.
- Speak about the here and now context i.e. what the child is doing, and observe the intentions the child is expressing.
- Use pictures or photographs to support language directed to the child. This can be particularly important when talking about something outside the here and now.
- Pair language with child's actions in a natural way.
- Embed comprehension work in contexts that are familiar to the child and affectively strong
- Target particular words and phrases for comprehension work based on developmental information
- Present these targets in many familiar contexts to promote learning

- Use question forms the child understands
- Offer choices to clarify the child's intent if you are confused e.g. "Do you want a banana or a biscuit?"

Signs that the child does not understand the language include: Lack of response or behaviour that does not match the question/request e.g. confusion, doing something unrelated, frustration; quizzical facial expression, off topic response, reduction in facial tone.

Good practice communication between partners

- Sentence length: How long are my sentences relative to the length of sentences being used by the partner-in-communication?
- Language: An auditory stimulus. Be aware of partner's level of communication, comprehension, & sensory responses.
- Vocabulary: Is the vocabulary I am using at an appropriate level for my partner?
- Amount of language: Am I using too much language for the child's level of communication?
- Rate of communication: Is the pace and rate of my communication slow enough to enable language comprehension and to keep the conversation going?
- Use of intonation: Am I using appropriate intonation, stress and rhythm in my voice to enhance the conversation?
- Use of signs / symbols: Is the communication environment honouring the sign or symbol user?
- Use of facial expression: Is my use of facial expression rich and informative, and appropriate for the context and the communication?
- Use of Gesture: Is my gesture / body language usage adequate to enhance communication and understanding?
- Use of context: Am I using the context well enough to assure comprehension and assist in the communicative process?
- Giving attention: Am I giving full attention when I am communicating? Am I reading communicative cues adequately?
- Gaining attention: Am I getting the person's full attention to ensure optimum listening/looking and response
- Comprehension: Ensure (s)he "sees what (s)he hears", use visual strategies to support understanding and predictability is essential.
- **Remember**: Signs of not understanding. May lead to frustration, behaviour challenges, and dysregulation.
- Adequate response time: Do I have enough time to give to this communicative process (Remember that communicating with a person with communication needs

takes a lot more time, and may be a much 'slower' experience than average). 10 second rule!

- Comment & Reflect respectfully and sensitively
- Facilitating / Cueing: Is it of benefit to cue or facilitate the child to encourage a more rewarding communication?

Aim for *pleasurable* circles of communication / dialogue & back and forth both non-verbal and verbal as appropriate.