

# TOOLS FOR TEACHERS COVID-19 EDITION



**Six essential  
tools for teachers  
supporting  
autistic students  
through home  
schooling and  
return to school**

[autismeducationtrust.org.uk](https://autismeducationtrust.org.uk)



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# INTRODUCTION

The AET has designed a wide range of practical tools to support teachers to work effectively with autistic pupils. We have extracted some of the most useful tools that are simple to use but also often the most effective. This is a shortened package of the AET Tools For Teachers that we hope you will find useful.

The package consists of 6 tools that fall under the following headings:

## UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL RULES

### TOOL 1 - SOCIAL STORIES™

## STRUCTURE AND TRANSITION

### TOOL 2 - VISUAL TIMETABLES

### TOOL 3 - NOW/NEXT OR FIRST THEN

## MANAGING EMOTIONS

### TOOL 4 - REWARD CHARTS

## SUPPORTING SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

### TOOL 5 - STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HYPO/HYPER SENSITIVITIES

## TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### TOOL 6 - COMMUNICATION CARDS

Alongside each of the tools in these areas we have provided guidance around how to implement each one successfully.



You can purchase the full Tools for Teachers resource, consisting of **44 tools**, via the AET website here: [autismeducationtrust.org.uk](http://autismeducationtrust.org.uk)

The tools provide further practical ways to support autistic children and young people to achieve success in an educational environment. This is an online resource that can be downloaded and used immediately after purchasing. The cost of the full package of tools is **£35.99**.

# UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL RULES

Autistic children and young people will struggle with understanding social rules. They have difficulties in areas such as starting conversations, talking in a group, disagreeing with someone or knowing how to behave in a social situation. It is important to teach autistic children and young people social skills so that they have a better understanding of how to behave when encountering different situations.

Pupils with autism often benefit from social stories that illustrate how to act in certain situations. These resources are ways for teachers to create simple stories that can be written and illustrated by anyone who wants a student with autism to learn quickly about a particular situation.

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## TOOL 1 – SOCIAL STORIES

### Social Stories™ (Carol Gray)

#### What is it?

A Social Story™ (Carol Gray) is a short description of a particular social situation, event or activity which includes specific and accurate social information about what to expect and why. They can provide a pupil with some idea of how others might respond in a particular situation, and therefore provide a framework for appropriate behaviour. The story is written to a specific structure and format includes social cues, perspectives and appropriate responses. Social Stories™ are designed to be reassuring for the pupil. Their aim is not to change behaviour but to identify and share information that supports alternate responses.

Social Stories™ answer “wh” questions:

- where and when the situation occurs
- who is involved
- how events are sequenced
- what occurs
- why

#### When would you use it?

To assist pupils on the autism spectrum to develop greater social understanding by identifying important cues in any given situation. Social Stories™ can be used for a variety of purposes including introducing changes and new routines, explaining the reasons for the behaviour of others, teaching situation-specific social skills, describing routines, rules, situations, upcoming events or abstract concepts, developing understanding around expectations, applauding accomplishments and assisting in teaching new academic skills. Social Stories™ also help peers to see things from the perspective of the pupil on the autism spectrum, and why s/he might appear to respond or behave in a particular way.

#### How to use it?

The process begins with the identification of pupil needs through observation and assessment. Once a difficult situation is identified, the practitioner observes the

situation and attempts to consider the perspective of the pupil in terms of what will be seen, heard, and felt. A story should be written at an appropriate level of comprehension for the pupil, and includes descriptive, directive, and perspective statements.

Social Stories™ can vary in presentation from sentences and pictures to newsletter format. They may be written from either a first-person perspective, for younger or more challenged individuals (presenting information from the individual's point of view) or a third-person perspective for older, more advanced individuals, adolescents or adults. These may be more akin to 'Social Articles' and resemble a newspaper article.

## Guidance for writing Social Stories™

- State behaviour positively (state what to do rather than what not to do)
- Avoid referring to negative behaviour
- Describe more than direct
- Tailor the Story to the individual's abilities and interests
- Beware of presenting literally accurate information

Begin by identifying the topic of the Social Story™. Topics are identified by the individual's experiences and responses to his social world.

The title may positively identify main topic.

When writing the Social Story™, keep three parts in mind:

- Introduction (clearly states the topic)**
- Body (adds detail by offering descriptions and / or explanations)**
- Conclusion (reinforces and summarises the information)**

Social Stories™ are written to a specific format which involves 6 different types of statement- descriptive, perspective, cooperative, affirmative, directive and control.

### 1. The descriptive sentence provides information on the setting, activity and people

Descriptive sentences

- are truthful & observable statements of fact
- identify the most relevant factors in a situation
- are opinion and assumption free
- are logical and accurate
- often contain answers to the "wh" questions

My name is \_\_\_\_\_  
(often the 1st sentence)

Usually children go outside at play time.

### 2. The perspective statement provides a description of the possible reactions of others. They refer to or describe the internal state of other people: their knowledge/thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, motivation or physical condition/health

My brother usually likes to watch cartoons. **(feelings)**

Some children work hard to finish their maths so that they can have some time at the computer. **(motivation)**

### 3. The cooperative sentence

- identifies what others will do to assist the individual
- reminds parents, peers and/or professionals of their role in the success of the individual
- may ensure a consistent response by a variety of people

My mum and dad will help me use the toilet.

The bus driver will remind me of where I sit on the bus.

My teacher will help me with my work.

#### 4. The affirmative sentence

- enhances the meaning of statements & may express a commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture (not of one individual or small group)
- stresses an important point, refer to a law or rule or reassure the reader

I will try to keep my seat belt fastened. This is very important.

The toilet makes a sound when it flushes. This is OK.

#### 5. The directive sentence

- presents a suggested response or choice of responses to a situation or concept
- gently directs the behaviour

On the playground I can play in the sandbox or go on the swings or climb on the monkey bars. I will try to stay quiet and listen. I may ask Mum or Dad for a hug.

#### 6. Control sentences

- are statements that are written by the individual with autism
- identify personal strategies the individual will use to recall and apply information

If my sand castle breaks, my friend can help me build another one.

I can keep a torch beside my bed just in case we have a power cut.

The sentences fit into two categories:

- Those that describe: descriptive, perspective, cooperative and affirmative
- Those that direct: directive and control

There should be more descriptive than directive sentences, so for every 6 sentences you should try and have 1 or 2 directive/control sentences.

Some people wear glasses. **Descriptive**

Wearing glasses is okay. **Affirmative**

Some people can hardly see at all without their glasses! **Perspective**

Sometimes, people take off their glasses to play sports, or go to gym class, or wrestle. **Descriptive**

It is a good idea for people to take off their glasses if they are in a gym or playing sports or \_\_\_\_\_. **Affirmative (partial)**

I can remind myself that it is important for people to wear glasses at other times, e.g. if they are at home, or in class, or reading, or driving, or \_\_\_\_\_. **Control (partial)**

Wearing glasses is a good thing because it helps people see clearly. **Affirmative**

Gray and Garand (1993) suggest three basic approaches for implementing a Social Story™:

For a pupil who reads independently, the story is read twice by an adult, followed by the pupil reading it back. Then the pupil reads it daily.

If the pupil does not read, the story may be recorded with a signal (i.e. bell) to turn the pages or videoed with one page on the screen at a time. The pupil is taught to read the story, and reads it daily. It is also useful to use visual images to illustrate the story.

Here is a link to Carol Gray's website:

[carolgraysocialstories.com/carols-club](http://carolgraysocialstories.com/carols-club)



# Children's story about coronavirus



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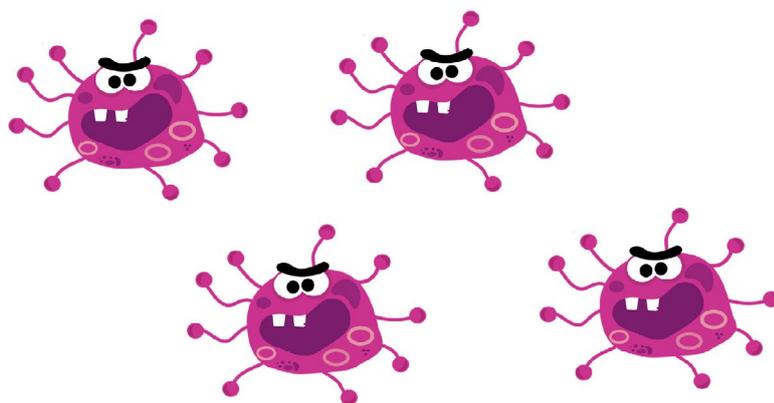


# Children's story about coronavirus

Coronavirus is a virus that can make people feel ill. For most people it is a mild illness.

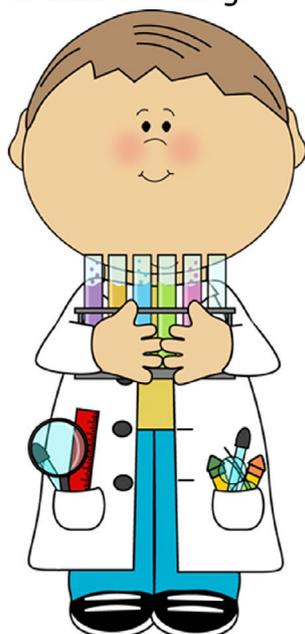
Some people get the flu and some people get colds. These are viruses too. Sometimes they can make you very ill and sometimes they make you just a little bit ill.

I bet you have had a cold or flu in the past! Did you get better?



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Nobody knows very much about Coronavirus because it is a new virus, but they do know that most people get it mildly and will get better from it. There are lots of people all over the world that have been infected by the Coronavirus. You might have heard about it on the news or from your parents or adults talking.



Scientists are working very hard to find out about Coronavirus so that very soon there will be a vaccine that will protect people against this virus.

Aren't scientists clever?



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# Children's story about coronavirus

What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?

You may not know you have it and just have a bit of a cough or

- You might feel hot and have a fever.
- You might get a continuous dry cough. A dry cough is when you cough and there isn't any phlegm. Continuous means you cough lots and lots.
- You might find your breathing isn't as easy as it is normally.

Just because you might have a cough now doesn't mean you have this Coronavirus. It is highly unlikely you have the Coronavirus right now. You probably just have a cold!

Dry cough



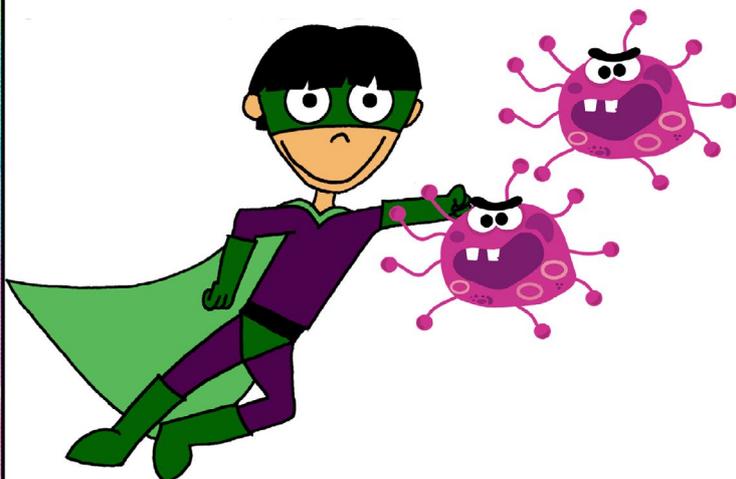
Hot and feverish

Hard to breathe

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**BUT** you can fight it off! Your body has antibodies that can fight a virus off! You are like a superhero and your body will work hard to get rid of the virus.

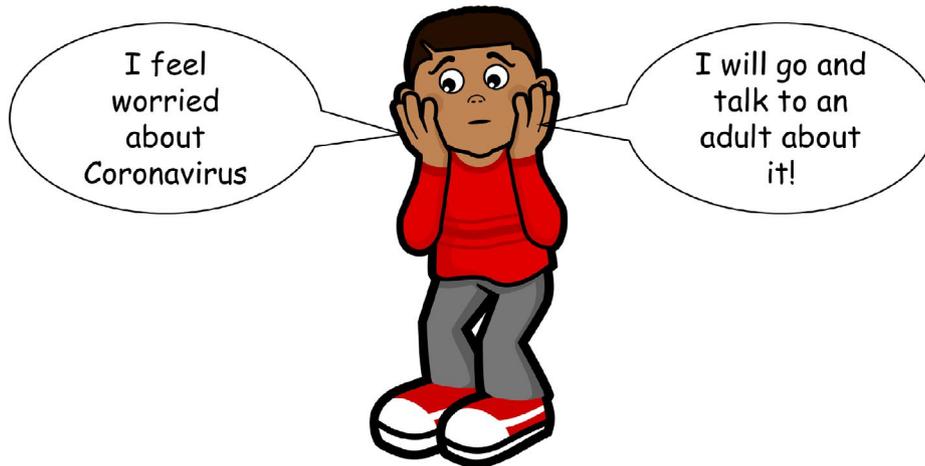
Our bodies are **AMAZING!** You just need to take care of yourself at home and let your body do what it is supposed to do. Make sure you drink lots of water, eat healthy food and rest as much as you can.



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# Children's story about coronavirus

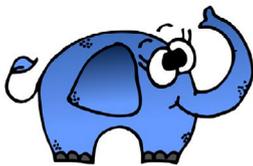
Sometimes you might feel a bit worried about Coronavirus because you have heard things on the news or heard people talking about it. It is normal to feel a bit worried about things like this but you need to remember that **MOST** people will get better from it. Your body is like a superhero and will **FIGHT** the virus off. If you feel worried you must talk to someone about your worries. They will help you to feel better about everything.



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There are things you can do though to slow the virus down and stop it spreading quickly.

You can wash your hands for 20 seconds. Can you count to 20 slowly as you wash your hands? If you say elephant in between each number it makes it into about a second. Make sure you use soap and water. You don't need to wash your hands **ALL** of the time but just when you have been to the toilet or when you are going to eat or prepare food. Also it is good to wash your hands when you get home from school or from being outside.



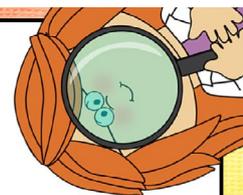
1 elephant 2 elephant 3  
elephant 4 elephant 5  
elephant .....20  
elephant

- If you sneeze or cough, then cough into your elbow **NOT** your hand.
- If you use a tissue, then bin it quickly and then wash your hands.
- If someone is unwell try not to go too close to them.

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# Children's story about coronavirus

The very clever and important scientists don't know exactly how Coronavirus is spread from one person to another. They know that droplets from one person to another can cause it to spread but there might be other ways too. They do know that it probably can spread by close contact with someone who has got the virus.



Coronavirus can make some older people or people who are already sick very ill indeed so it is important to try and stop it spreading.

If there is someone in your school that gets the virus you might be asked to stay at home for a while.

This is called self isolation. It means that you need to stay in your house for a while so that you don't catch the virus or if you have been infected by the virus it means that you won't spread the virus around so other people catch it. Staying at home means just that, no play dates, no going out to play (apart from in your garden), not meeting up with friends. It won't be a holiday! It probably won't be much fun BUT...

Your teachers will give you some activities to do at home.



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If everyone does their bit to help, hopefully it will slow the virus right down and help to stop it spreading to lots of people.

This will help all our doctors and nurses to cope in the hospitals. This will also help to prevent our older people and sick people from being infected.

If you do catch it though or someone in your family catches it, or someone you know catches it...

**REMEMBER** it is NOT your fault. That Coronavirus can be a bit sneaky and as we said earlier on in the story our very important and clever scientists still don't know exactly how it is spread from one person to another.

We just need to use our common sense and remember to use good hygiene to **HELP** fight the virus.



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# Children's story about coronavirus

So join the SUPERHERO team and HELP  
to FIGHT the virus and slow it right down!



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## COVID-19

### A new illness called Coronavirus

There is a new illness called Coronavirus and this is a story about it.

#### What is the Coronavirus?

## COVID-19

The coronavirus is a virus that is spreading fast across the world. Viruses are small. You can only see them with an electron microscope. This means we can't see the virus.



Lots of people around the world are getting ill with coronavirus and this is called a pandemic. A pandemic means that lots of people in a large area are sick. A pandemic is usually caused by a new virus.

#### What is the world doing about this pandemic?



Lots of people are working hard to learn more about this virus and to try to stop it.

In the meantime, people are being very sensible to stay safe.



We should wash our hands lots. We should try to not touch other people. We should cancel any trips or holidays and keep away from crowds.

If we are ill, we have to stay at home.

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Makaton**

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# Coronavirus Social Story



## How long will it last?



No-one knows how long this will last. But it is good to know that pandemics do not happen very often. They occur about every 25 or 30 years. It is important to remember that the Coronavirus pandemic will end; we just don't know when.

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# Coronavirus Social Story



Speaking Space

[www.speakingspace.co.uk](http://www.speakingspace.co.uk)

## COVID-19

### A new illness called Coronavirus

There is a new illness called Coronavirus and this is a story about it.

If you get the coronavirus you will get



a new **cough**



a **high temperature**



and **breathing difficulties.**



We are all trying to stop coronavirus spreading.

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# Coronavirus Social Story



This is what we can do to help.



Speaking Space

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## Wash hands

Clean hands are really important to stop the coronavirus

This means we will wash our hands:



when we arrive at school/ college/ day service/  
home



before tea break



before lunch



after using the toilet



when we leave school/ college/ day service/ home



If we are unable to wash our hands we may use a  
hand gel

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# Coronavirus Social Story



To prevent the Coronavirus we will try to keep our hands to ourselves. We will try to not touch other people.

This means we will greet people differently.

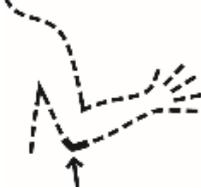
We could:



Smile



Wave



Touch elbows



Touch feet



Sign hello

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# Coronavirus Social Story



## Keeping clean



It is also very important to keep your building clean. Carefully clean the things you touch at the end of every day.



You should ask any visitors to stay by the front door or wash their hands if they need to come into the building.



## Feeling ill



It is really important to stay at home for 7 days if anyone is feel ill with a cough or a high temperature and 14 days if you live with other people.



you may need to take your temperature if you think you may be ill. If you are ill you should stay at home.

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# Coronavirus Social Story



## Feeling worried



If you are feeling worried, you can talk to family, friends, or staff within your school/ college/ day service/ supported living.



Family, friends and staff at your school or college or day service or supported living are happy to help you.

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# STRUCTURE AND TRANSITIONS

**Pupils on the autism spectrum experience high levels of stress and anxiety. The level of stress, the causes, and the ability to cope with it will vary from individual to individual, day to day and context.**

Because pupils on the autism spectrum find it hard to understand the world around them, it is often hard for them to predict what is happening next and to understand expectations. Providing structure, consistency and clear information will help.

You can help to significantly reduce anxiety and increase focus by answering these 4 basic, but essential, questions:

- 1. What am I doing?**
- 2. How long am I doing it for?**
- 3. What will I be doing next?**
- 4. When will I get to do the things that I really want to do?**

Many pupils on the autism spectrum will also benefit from knowing

- **How do I know I have started and finished?**

It is likely that the vast majority of strategies used to provide structure, support learning and promote independence will have a visual component.

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## What are visual strategies?

Visual strategies are a way of supplementing information which is supplied verbally with visual information. They can be used to accomplish a range of goals. You may use something visual to help a pupil to understand a situation,

or to provide a visual prompt so a student can accomplish a task more independently.

Visual strategies may take a range of formats including signs, symbols, objects of reference, photographs and writing, or a combination of the above. The needs and skills of the individual should determine the size, format, quantity and complexity of the information being communicated.

## Why use visual strategies?

Pupils on the autism spectrum have differences in communication, which means they may struggle to process and respond to information only supplied verbally. In addition, they tend to be visual thinkers.

As a result, they will benefit from the use of visual strategies to support their learning.

Using visual strategies will facilitate learning and independence by:

- Enabling the young person to “see” the task. They don’t disappear from them as spoken instructions do.
- Giving additional time for processing time
- Promoting independence by providing a tool learners can refer to in order to identify and carry out the stages of a task.
- In addition, they can be looked at, sequenced, rehearsed and learned.

## When you might use a visual strategy

Visual strategies can be used to accomplish a range of purposes. You may use something visual to help a pupil to understand a situation, or to provide a visual prompt so a student can accomplish a task more independently.

Visual strategies can be used effectively to:

- 1. Give information** – to answer the who, what, why, where, when questions.
- 2. Explain social situations** – Pupils on the autism spectrum find the social world confusing. Providing social information both verbally and through writing helps students understand.
- 3. Give choices** – Let pupils know what their options are, what is available/ not available.
- 4. Provide structure to the day** – communicate what is happening and when. Knowing this tends to reduce anxiety.
- 5. Teach routines and/or new skills** – Just as when we follow a recipe or the instructions for putting together flat pack furniture, following the steps in a routine is easier when the pupil can see what they need to do and in what order. This will help them to learn the routine and minimize mistakes.
- 6. Be more independent in the environment** – Providing an organised, structured and well labelled environment will help pupils to know where to find the things they need, and where to put them when it is time to clean up?
- 7. Organise the space in the environment** – Some pupils will benefit from visual supports to identify their particular space to work or play or sit? They may benefit from clear visual strategies to communicate the purpose of particular spaces (e.g. art, music etc.) and from knowing which parts of the environment can be used and which parts are “off limits.”
- 8. Support transitions** – Visual strategies can be very helpful in supporting pupils on the autism spectrum to stop one activity and start another, or move from one environment to another.
- 9. Stay on task** – Remembering what the current activity is and staying involved with it until it is completed. What does it mean to be “finished?”
- 10. Manage time** – How long is 5 minutes or one hour? How much time is there before a transition in the schedule? How long am I doing this for? Time is invisible. Timers and clocks turn time into pupils can see. Use something concrete and visual.
- 11. Communicate rules** – these might be generic rules (e.g. class rules) or social rules. Pupils on the autism spectrum might struggle to acquire an understanding of the social rules that many of us acquire instinctively. Visual strategies such as power cards, can help with this.
- 12. Assist students in coping with change** – Prepare for something that is going to change. Preparing students when something will be different from what they normally expect can prevent many problems from occurring.
- 13. Support self-regulation** – Pupils need to learn how to cope when they get anxious or encounter a problem. Strategies such as visual imagery can help with this.
- 14. Aid memory** – Remembering what to do and/or when.
- 15. Communicate emotions** – Although pupils with autism will demonstrate a variety of emotions with their actions may struggle to recognise and name their emotions, and this makes it harder for them to manage them. Helping them to translate those responses into pictures or written language gives an opportunity to explain, clarify or validate their experience.
- 16. Clarify verbal information** – Pupils on the autism spectrum can interpret language very literally and struggle to infer what is meant from what is said (the words used) and the way it is communicated. Making it visual helps clarify the message and helps to eliminate confusion.

## TOOL 2 – VISUAL TIMETABLES

### Whole day timetables and schedules

#### What is a whole day timetable or schedule?

A daily schedule or timetable is one of the most important elements of a visual support system. It provides accurate information about what will happen and when. It can be amended to include information changes from the expected routine or any other information that is important to or for the pupil. It should be adapted to reflect the pupil's level of ability and understanding.

#### When would I use it?

To support a pupil on the autism spectrum to be able to 'see' and understand what is happening across the day, including being aware of any changes to routine.

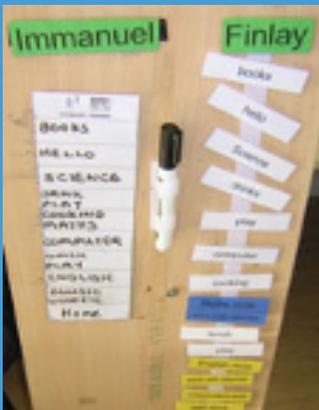
#### How to use it?

- Begin by dividing the day into segments. For example – Register, circle time, break/playtime, lunch, art, literacy, project time, PE, science, computers etc. For older pupils the time slots may match the hours of the day when classes change. In out of school environments the time slots will match the major activity changes in the day.
- Give each segment a name.
- Select a representation system.
- Consider objects of reference, photographs, line drawings or written words. You might find it helpful to refer to the 'guidance for using visual strategies' to help you to do this.
- Select a format.
- Is the schedule for a whole group or for an individual?
- Where will you keep it?
  - On a wall
  - On a desk
  - Pupil carries it in a book or clip board
- Decide when and how the pupil will use it throughout the day.
- Some pupils look at it once and remember all the information.
- Some pupils need to go back to the schedule at each transition point in the day to review what comes next.
- Some pupils will want to remove segments as they are completed/finished, in which case you need to have removable symbols. If this is the case, attach each object, symbol, photo, drawing or word onto the schedule with Velcro in the order to what will be happening each day. (Everything other than an object will need to be laminated). Once each activity has been completed, it is then taken off the timetable and placed in the finished box/envelope. This will help the pupil to understand what activities have been completed and what s/he has left to do.
- For pupils who require a more sophisticated schedule or for those who tend to move cards around, a full day schedule may be appropriate. This could be a one page image of the timetable, presented in a format the child understands. As the pupil progresses through the day s/he crosses through each activity as they are completed, with support if necessary.
- How will you present the information
  - vertical schedules work well.
- Teach the pupil how to use the schedule.
- Use the schedule to give the pupil information about what is happening, what is changing, and anything else s/he needs to know.



Symbol timetables offer visual support which can assist a child's understanding.

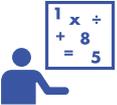
Object of reference timetables use objects to represent each of the sessions/activities the child will be participating in. Here we can see a ring to represent the sensory room, a paintbrush for art and so on.



For higher functioning children, word timetables may be more appropriate. These can either be typed words or the child may like to write the words himself. As he progresses through the day and the activity, he will cross off each activity once it is finished. Some pupils can cope with more complex information, and so their timetable could be presented across the week.

For some children photograph timetables may be appropriate. Ensure the photographs you use match the activity/session the child will be in. For example, do not use a photo of a blue plate for snack if the child will ultimately be using a yellow plate during snack time.

# Picture Timetable

			 		 	
<b>Maths</b>	<b>playtime</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Lunchtime</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>PE</b>	<b>Hometime</b>

<b>Maths</b>	<b>playtime</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Lunchtime</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>PE</b>	<b>Hometime</b>

## Weekly Timetable

	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>After school</b>
<b>Monday</b>			
<b>Tuesday</b>			
<b>Wednesday</b>			
<b>Thursday</b>			
<b>Friday</b>			

## TOOL 3 – NOW/NEXT OR FIRST/THEN

### What is it?

Now and next or first/then is a structured way of letting a child know what they will be doing first (**a work activity**) and what it will be followed by (**a reward activity**).

You can choose whether to call it 'now and next' or 'first and then', drawing on your knowledge of what will work best for the pupil and their level of understanding and vocabulary.

### When to use it?

As a means of motivating pupils on the autism spectrum who might struggle to understand what is required and to engage in a given activity.

### How to use it?

- Decide how you will represent the information in a way which is accessible to the pupil – this is likely to be a symbol, photograph, picture or line drawing. It is important that the pupil understands what the image represents.
- Work with the pupil, and those who know him or her well to select activities or items which the pupil enjoys, which can be used as a reward following completion of the work activity.
- Build up a 'library' of work activities to reflect the work activities the pupil is likely to be involved with, along with a range of suitable rewards which the pupil finds motivating.

- Laminate the First/then or Now/next Board, and the activity and reward cards.
- Stick the relevant work activity onto the 'first' or 'now' box using Velcro, and then stick the reward card into the 'then' or 'next' box.
- Explain this to the pupil, using the board as a visual support e.g. 'Michael, look. First writing, then train.'
- For older and/or higher functioning pupils, you might prefer to use 'deal cards'. These work in a similar way to 'First/then' boards.
- Place the activities to be completed on the left side of the deal board, and the reward to the right side.
- As the pupil completes the activities, the pupil can receive his reward.

'First and then' work well for pupils who will need a reward after completing one activity or one step on an activity, but 'deal cards' may involve more than one step or activity before the reward is provided.



# First/Then board

## First

Insert Activity

## Then

Insert Activity

# Now/Next board

## Now

Insert Activity

## Next

Insert Activity

# MANAGING EMOTIONS

**We all have an optimal level of arousal that keeps us alert enough to be able to pay attention, but not so stressed that we are unable to comprehend and/or engage in learning.**

It has been argued that pupils on the autism spectrum have a narrower window of 'optimal stress levels for learning' because of the high levels of stress and anxiety associated with differences in processing the world around them, including problems with sensory integration.

The level of stress, the causes, and the ability to cope with it will vary from individual to individual, day to day and context.

Causes could include:

- Sensory integration
- Differences in communication
- Uncertainty about what is going to happen
- Changes in routine
- Literal interpretation of situation
- Anxiety about failure
- Difficulties in knowing, understanding and applying rules, including difficulties understanding why rules are not consistently implemented (e.g. variation in the enforcement of rules from class to class, teacher to teacher)

It is widely recognised that none of us are able to concentrate, perform at our best or acquire new skills when we are in a high state of arousal.

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## TOOL 4 – REWARD CHARTS

### Building rewards into the behaviour management strategy

It is important to reward and reinforce appropriate behaviour. Pupils on the autism spectrum are not necessarily motivated purely by having pleased a teacher. They may need a more tangible reward, particularly if they are stopping using behaviours which they have engaged in over a long period of time, and which have proven to be very effective in achieving their aim.

You might therefore find it useful to draw on the following:

#### 1. 'I am working for' charts

'I am working for' charts act as a visual reminder of what reward a child will

receive once he has completed the work or activity set. They can also specify how long a child will need to work for before he receives a reward as is shown on the left.

#### How to use:

Offer the child a choice of what they would like to work for from a choice board of motivators. The number of choices offered will depend on the child's level of understanding. For some children this may be two, for others, six. Once the child has made his choice the object is stuck onto the "I am working for" chart with Velcro. Initially teaching will focus on cause and effect. For example, I do some work, and then I get a reward, as is demonstrated in the picture.

At first rewards will need to be immediate and the work task will need to be short and simple, however, over time as a child understands the system, the time spent on the task can be increased as can the complexity of the task.

NB: The same format can be used for sitting and waiting. For a child on the autism spectrum the concepts of sitting or waiting (for example, waiting for all the children to get dressed for outside play) can be very confusing and frustrating. Allowing the child to see they will receive a reward if they do good sitting or waiting will motivate them to do so. It is important to note however, that the child may well need to be taught how to sit or wait appropriately.

## 2. Token reward charts

Token reward charts are useful when extending the amount of time spent on task before a reward is given. When using token reward charts it is advisable to start with only two tokens. As the child's understanding of the reward system increases, more tokens can be gradually introduced until the child needs to receive 10 tokens before he receives a reward. (This is dependent on individual need – some children may only be able to work for two tokens before a reward is received.) Individualise these charts using pictures of favourite characters or toys as the tokens.

### How to use:

The child decides what he would like to work for. While the child is engaged in the task the teacher rewards him with a token. This maybe after every question is completed or after he has listened well. The reward schedule (the timings of when he is given a token) will vary from child to child. Again, initially while the child is learning how to use token rewards, tokens will need to be given very frequently and then gradually, as the child comes to

understand the reward system, the time between receiving tokens can be extended.

## 3. Motivator puzzles

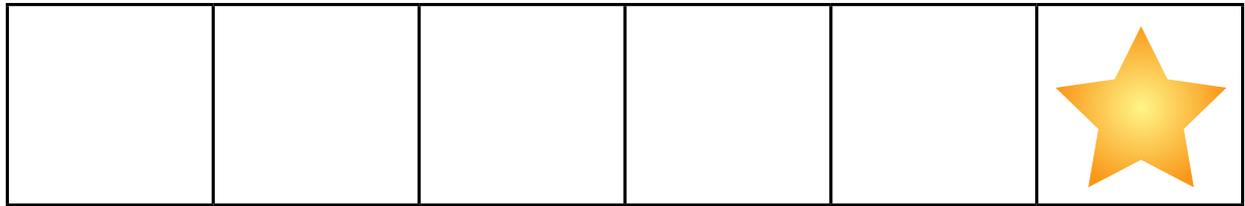
Motivator puzzles work in a similar way to that of reward charts.

### How to use:

Cut up a copy of a picture of a motivator into appropriate puzzle pieces. The number of pieces you cut the puzzle into will depend on the understanding level of the child. The child receives a piece of the puzzle in the same way he would a token and each piece is stuck on to the existing picture of the motivator with Velcro. The motivator puzzle is intrinsically motivating as each time he receives a piece of the puzzle he is building up a picture of his favourite toy or activity. Once all the pieces have been received the child can have the toy or activity. Pupils will benefit from clear guidance about what it is they need to do in order to secure a token. Using the ideas in the section on providing structure will help you to think about how best to do this. In the example, which follows, the pupil has been given clear guidance about how much s/he has to write in order to get a reward.



# Reward chart



Target	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Break	Lesson 3	Lunch	Lesson 4	Lesson 5

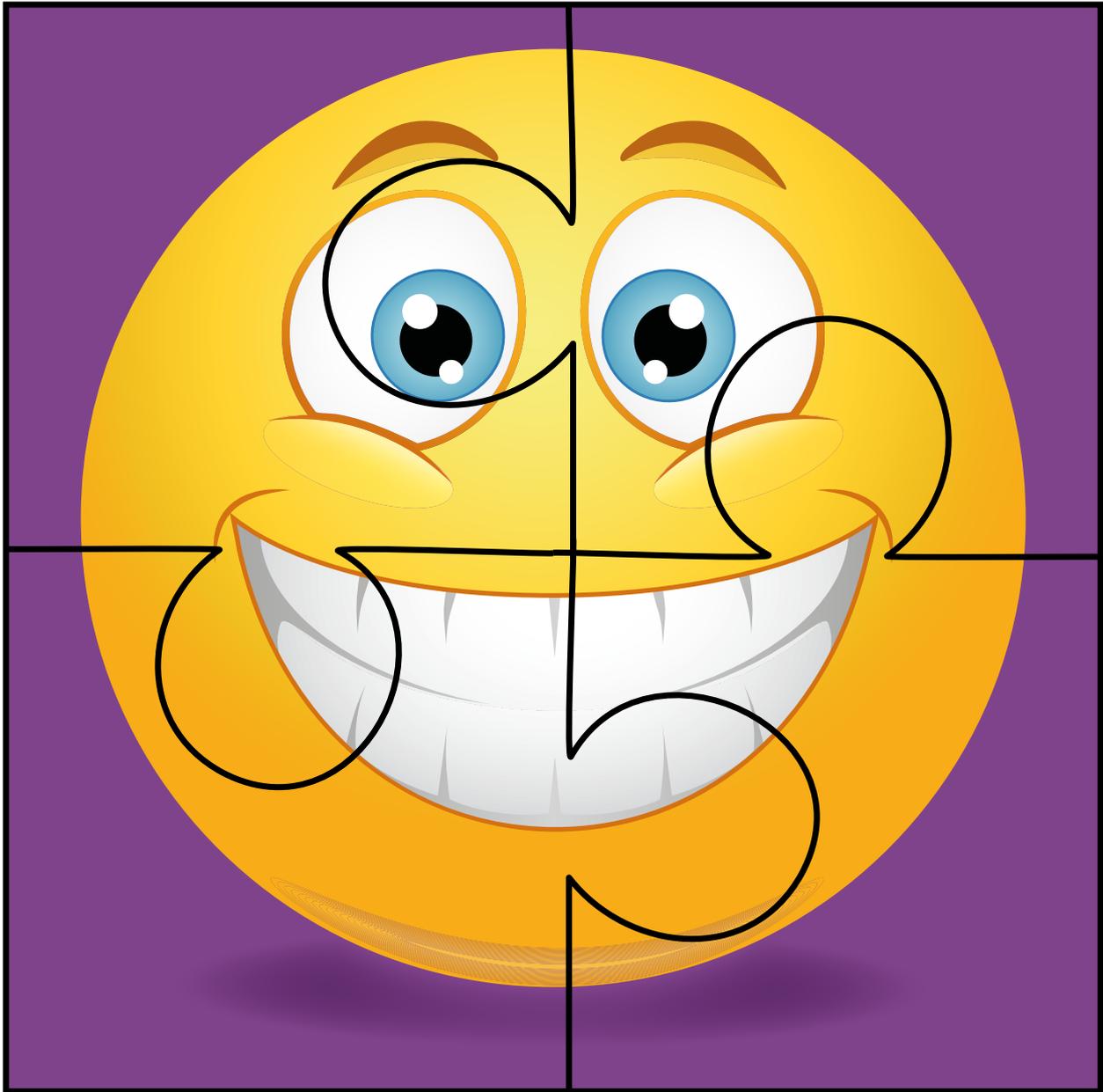
When I have completed my target/s for each session I will collect a smiley face.

When I have \_\_\_\_\_ smiley faces.  
I can collect my reward, which is \_\_\_\_\_

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## Reward chart



Pupil can earn a piece of jigsaw for agreed appropriate behaviour. Once the jigsaw is complete they may collect a previously agreed reward.

The smiley face can be exchanged for a picture of the reward they are working for.

# SUPPORTING SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

**The majority of pupils on the autism spectrum will have sensory processing difficulties, and may be over or under sensitive to a range of environmental factors depending on their individual sensory profile.**

They are likely to find it hard to organise the way they experience and use sensation – a process often referred to as sensory integration. They may also find it hard to modulate their responses.

In order to work effectively with a pupil on the autism spectrum, it is important to understand their sensory profile and offer strategies to address their sensory sensitivities/differences.

## Low arousal environments

Low arousal environments (not to be confused with no arousal) work to reduce distractions for a child on the autism spectrum. Creating a calm environment which works to reduce anxiety can be an effective strategy for success.

A low arousal environment will include measures such as clear table tops, equipment stored away in closed cupboards, clear walls excepts for notice boards and so on. Examples of low arousal environments are shown below.



While the above images are fantastic examples of low arousal classrooms, it is not always practical to recreate this in some school settings. The idea is to create a low arousal environment that is appropriate for your setting. For example, primary school classrooms are often full of colour with lots of pictures on the walls, objects hanging from the ceilings and lots of books and games on display. While this environment is appropriate for the learning needs of the majority of the children in the class, for children on the autism spectrum it can be overwhelming, full of distractions and even anxiety provoking.

Therefore, as is demonstrated in the images below, consider if it is possible to create a low arousal area or work station where a child can retreat to if the main classroom becomes too much to bear.



The guidance below lists suggestions of differences an individual on the autism spectrum may experience as a result of sensory sensitivities. They are aimed at helping you to identify the possible functions of behaviours. This list is not comprehensive, rather it is just a few examples to illustrate some behaviours which may arise as a result of sensory sensitivities.

# OBSERVING BEHAVIOUR TO IDENTIFY SENSITIVITIES

System	Example of hypersensitive behaviour	Examples of hyposensitive behaviour
<b>Tactile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Touch can be painful and uncomfortable and some children may withdraw from aspects of touch. This can have a profound effect on relationships.</li> <li>• Only tolerates certain materials for clothing</li> <li>• Dislike of having anything on hands or feet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holds others tightly</li> <li>• Has high pain threshold (pain/temperature)</li> <li>• Self harming</li> <li>• Enjoys heavy objects on top of them</li> <li>• Prefers tight clothing</li> </ul>
<b>Visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distorted vision occurs, objects and bright lights can jump around</li> <li>• Fragmentation of images, as a consequence of too many sources of visual stimuli</li> <li>• Focussing on particular details (sand grains) can be more pleasurable than looking at something as a whole</li> <li>• Distracted by certain lighting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May see things darker, lose features and lines</li> <li>• May concentrate on peripheral vision as central vision is blurred</li> <li>• Conversely, some say that a main object is magnified and things on the periphery are blurred</li> <li>• Poor depth perceptions – problems with catching or throwing</li> <li>• Flapping near eyes</li> </ul>
<b>Auditory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volume of noise can be magnified and surrounding sounds distorted and muddled</li> <li>• Inability to cut out particular sounds – difficulties concentrating</li> <li>• May have a lower hearing threshold which makes an individual particularly sensitive to auditory stimuli – hearing conversations in the distance.</li> <li>• Fingers in ears</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not acknowledge particular sounds</li> <li>• Enjoys crowded noisy places</li> <li>• Bangs doors and objects</li> <li>• Makes own noise e.g. humming</li> </ul>
<b>Gustatory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some flavours and foods are too strong and overpowering</li> <li>• Certain textures also cause discomfort, some children will only eat smooth foods such as mashed potatoes or ice cream</li> <li>• Only eats bland foods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference for strong flavours – like very spicy foods</li> <li>• Eats everything e.g. grass, soil, materials. This is known as Pica</li> </ul>
<b>Olfactory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aversion to particular smells</li> <li>• Smells can be intensified and overpowering</li> <li>• Toileting problems</li> <li>• Dislike of individuals with distinctive perfumes or shampoos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smells objects</li> <li>• May have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odours</li> <li>• May lick objects</li> </ul>
<b>Proprioceptive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes close proximity of others</li> <li>• Has difficulty with fine motor skills and manipulating small objects</li> <li>• Moves whole body to look at objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity – stands too close to others not knowing about personal space etiquette</li> <li>• Little awareness of hunger/pain cold/needing the toilet</li> <li>• Difficulties with navigating rooms and avoiding objects (bumps into things)</li> <li>• Bumps into people</li> <li>• Poor muscle tone</li> <li>• A preference for deep pressure for example tight shoelaces or pushing their chin into people</li> </ul>
<b>Vestibular</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes playground equipment (swing/slide etc)</li> <li>• Difficulties in activities which include movement (sport)</li> <li>• Difficulties in stopping quickly or during an activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for rocking, spinning swinging</li> <li>• Seeks opportunities for movement/ constantly moving/ fidgeting</li> </ul>

## TOOL 5 – STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HYPER/HYPO SENSITIVITIES

System	Hypersensitivity	Hyposensitivity
<b>Tactile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Warn the child if you are about to touch them</li> <li>Remember hugs may be painful rather than comforting!</li> <li>Gradually introduce different textures</li> <li>Allow individuals to complete activities themselves (e.g. hair brushing and hand washing) to allow them to regulate their sensitivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider tight clothing e.g. leotards underneath clothing</li> <li>Weighted blankets</li> <li>Sleeping bags</li> <li>Work with sand bag on lap</li> </ul>
<b>Visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce fluorescent lighting</li> <li>Sunglasses</li> <li>Create a workstation</li> <li>Use blackout blinds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use resources which stimulate visual system e.g. light sticks</li> </ul>
<b>Auditory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shut windows and doors to reduce external sound</li> <li>Prepare the child for noisy places</li> <li>Ear plugs/ ear defenders</li> <li>Walkman/iPod</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Auditory Integration Therapy (see references)</li> <li>Music therapy</li> <li>iPod/walkman</li> <li>Use visual cues to back up verbal information</li> </ul>
<b>Gustatory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow opportunities to taste lots of different things to aid sense development</li> <li>Encourage children to 'clean out' mouth with water between mouthfuls</li> <li>Puree foods</li> <li>Use ice pops to desensitise mouth</li> <li>Introduce very small bites of portions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow opportunities to taste lots of different things to aid sense development</li> <li>Provide oral stimulation throughout the day, crunchy foods</li> <li>Use vibration toys to stimulate the senses</li> </ul>
<b>Olfactory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use unscented detergents or shampoos</li> <li>Refrain from wearing perfume</li> <li>Make environment as fragrance free as possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use strong smelling objects as rewards</li> <li>Use strong smelling objects to distract from inappropriate strong smells (faeces) for example scented playdough</li> <li>Create a book of scents - match pictures to scented cotton wool for example lemon, coffee etc</li> </ul>
<b>Proprioceptive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Threading activities</li> <li>Lace boards</li> <li>Allow the child to stand at end of line when lining up</li> <li>Allow the child to sit on a stool instead of carpet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position furniture around the edge of the room to make navigation easier</li> <li>Put coloured tape on floor to indicate boundaries</li> <li>Use arms length rule (you must be at least an arms length away from someone when speaking to them)</li> </ul>
<b>Vestibular</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break down activities into small steps</li> <li>Use visual clues for finish lines or stops in movement activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage activities which develop the vestibular system – swing, roundabout, rocking horse, see-saw, dancing</li> </ul>

# TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

**Autistic children and young people may have difficulty developing language skills and understanding what others say to them.**

They also may have difficulty communicating non-verbally, such as through hand gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. Some autistic children develop good speech but can still have trouble knowing how to use language to communicate with other people. They might also communicate mostly to ask for something or protest about something, rather than for social reasons, like getting to know someone. How well an autistic child communicates is important for other areas of development such as behaviour and learning.

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## TOOL 6 – COMMUNICATION CARDS

### Building rewards into the behaviour management strategy

#### What is it?

A communication card is a way of supporting the pupil to communicate key messages to the teacher through a visual means. The pupil can show the card to the adult, and the adult should respect this communication and respond in the agreed and/or appropriate way. Teachers might also find it useful to use cards to communicate a message to a pupil in a non-verbal way e.g. a card which says 'good work'.

#### When would you use it?

Communication cards are useful for pupils who might struggle to communicate key messages

purely verbally, even though they may have good structural language skills. Communication cards are particularly useful when pupils are feeling anxious or upset as they are less likely to be able to use their language skills when experiencing stress.

#### How to use it?

Identify the situation where a pupil might find a communication card useful. This will vary according to the pupil and the setting.

Examples include:

- I need help
- I am ok
- I am feeling anxious
- I don't know what to do
- I know what to do
- I need to leave the room for 5 minutes

Teachers might also find it useful to use cards to communicate a message to a pupil in a non-verbal way e.g. a card which says 'good listening' or 'good sitting'.

Communication cards can be used very effectively to support pupils who may struggle at key time. For example, a pupil who struggles with queueing might have a lunch pass. This could be used to communicate to the teacher who is taking the class, or a teacher who finds a pupil in a corridor during lesson time, that the pupil has permission to leave the lesson 5 minutes early in order to ensure s/he is at the front of the queue.

A pupil who finds the sensory challenges presented at lesson change over overwhelming might have a break pass. Again this could be used to enable a pupil to leave the lesson early, or arrive late, and should be understood and accepted by the teacher taking the class and anyone who might query why the pupil is not in lessons during formal learning time. If a pupil has a break pass, s/he should be able to arrive late or leave early without having to explain why.

## Lunch and break passes

# Lunch time pass

**Alex can leave  
morning lessons at  
12.05 so that he can  
get to lunch early  
before it gets busy**

# Break pass

**Alex can leave  
morning lessons at  
5 minutes early or  
arrive 5 minutes late**

## Lunch and break passes

**Lunch  
time  
pass**

**Break  
pass**

# Communication Cards

**I don't know  
what to do**



**I don't know  
what to do**



**I don't know  
what to do**



**I don't know  
what to do**



**I don't know  
what to do**



**I don't know  
what to do**



# Communication Cards

**I know what  
I'm doing**



**I know what  
I'm doing**



**I know what  
I'm doing**



**I know what  
I'm doing**



**I know what  
I'm doing**



**I know what  
I'm doing**

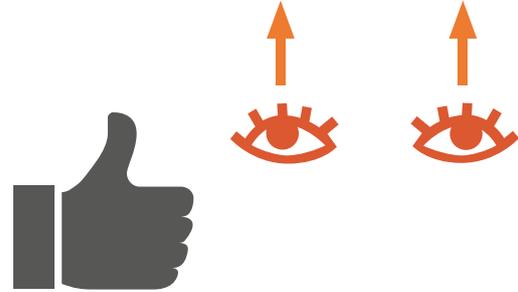


# Communication Cards

**Good listening**



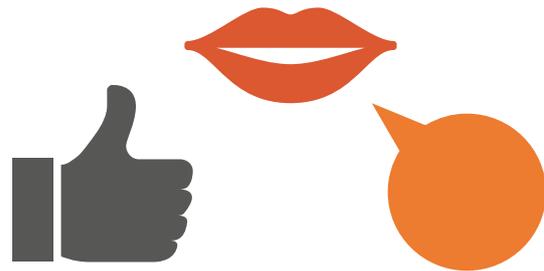
**Good looking**



**Good sitting**



**Good talking**



**Good thinking**



**Good turn taking**



These six tools have been extracted from the AET Tools for Teachers resource, to help you support autistic children and young people during the Covid-19 outbreak. The full resource, consisting of 44 tools, can be purchased via the AET website here: **[autismeducationtrust.org.uk](https://autismeducationtrust.org.uk)**

The tools provide further practical ways to support autistic children and young people to achieve success in an educational environment. This is an online resource that can be downloaded and used immediately after purchasing. The cost of the full package of tools is **£35.99**.

For award winning autism education training and free resources please visit **[autismeducationtrust.org.uk](https://autismeducationtrust.org.uk)**

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