



## Communication and Interaction Team

# Top Tips to support Children and Young People with Autism

In order to support children and young people with autism, it is important to build a relationship and work together to develop individualised strategies which can be used to support learning, communication and independence.

It is also important to understand that not every strategy works for every child or young person and that often strategies can 'wear out' or stop working, meaning that a new approach needs to be taken.

The following strategies are useful to include as part of your teaching 'toolbox' when working with children or young people with autism.

## Strategies to Support

### Schedules/ Timetables:

These show a sequence of tasks or events as an over view of part of or the whole of the day. This can give a broad overview of activities so the child or young person can understand, plan and prepare for transitions.

Timetables are a good way of introducing structure and routine, which take away uncertainty and help make daily life more predictable. By being reminded and reassured of what is coming next, anxiety is reduced. Schedules need to be bespoke to suit the individual child or young person. Some pupils will be able to follow a visual timetable which supports their routine across an entire morning, for example: Registration, English, Drink, Break and Toilet. Often it is useful to place an activity which a student enjoys after a work based activity, so that they have a reward and motivation for completing work.

### First - then (now – next) boards –

These are a concrete way of showing a two stage sequence: an adult directed activity followed by and activity that is favoured by the child or young person.

## How to Use

Decide the words to be used and write them on the card so all those supporting the child or young person use the same language.

When you want the child and young person to complete a task or activity place a photo of the task you want completed in the 'first' section and a photo of something rewarding in the 'then' section. The child or young person's preferred activity needs to be readily available to reinforce the principles of the 'first- then strategy' now and in the future. Show the board to your pupil and use minimal language "first x then y" and point to the pictures as you label the photos. When the first task is complete, remove the photo and show the child or young person the 'then' photo, and move it to the 'first' section and then quickly guide them to or give them that activity. When they are engaged with this activity you can put another photo in the 'then' section, this could be an overview activity like 'free time' or 'play'.

first



chores

then



gaming for 1 hour

## Reward Board/ Working For...

A reward or 'working for' board keeps in sight the motivating choice the child or young person has made. This can be differentiated for the individual's needs. The child can immediately receive the reward for completing the task or work towards an extended system: earning a token for each part of the activity they complete or for a number of whole activities. The length of each part for a token will depend on how long the child or young person's focus is.



## Language

Many children and young people with autism find processing language- understanding and following what is being said, quite challenging. It is important to remember that even if a child has good expressive language that this is not always matched by their receptive language skills- their ability to understand what is said to them. Remember to:

- Say their name first before any instruction or praise, this way the child or young person will know that you are talking to them. Keep language to a minimum using key words. Ensure your language is spoken at the right level for the pupil.
- Use concrete language
- Support language with visuals where possible – writing/ image/ object/ gesture / modelling
- Chunk instructions so they are given and processed one step at a time
- Give processing time - when talking with a child or young person allow them time to process the instruction before you repeat it

## Finishing an Activity

### Timers

These can be sand timers, on your phone/ tablet, an alarm, kitchen timer or a count down on your fingers & can enable children or young people to hesitate and develop their ability to wait (also known as delayed gratification). Begin by introducing timers/counting during situations where the child has to 'wait' for something that is motivating. If the child or young person is requesting 'iPad' support them to wait by using a timer as a reference: "when timer is finished then iPad." Try to avoid using the timer solely to 'finish' a favoured activity; this may become counterproductive as the child or young person may associate the timer with losing control which can lead to frustration and challenging behaviour occurring.

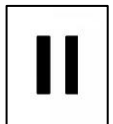
### Count back from 5

Another way to make finishing an activity more concrete is to pre warn the end of a task by counting back from 5: "X is going to finish then Y" - using a first-then will be supportive. After some processing time, begin to count down using your fingers as a concrete

support to aid transition; show a finished image or use Makaton signing if appropriate. Prompt the child to the timetable/ first- then or the next activity.

## 'Pause' Symbols

These can help children and young people to transition from a motivating activity to a less preferred one. A 'pause' symbol can provide the opportunity to come back and revisit the pupil's first (and preferred) activity and knowing this may encourage them to be more willing to transition onto another task. Using a pause symbol in conjunction with other strategies such as a first- then can make the sequence tangible.

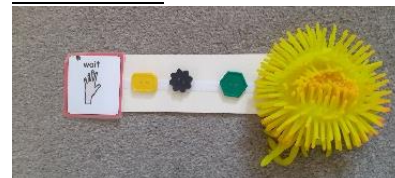


**How to Use:** If it is time for the child or young person to change activity give them warnings and use a visual to show what will be happening next (**see- First-then, timers information**) Tell them that the favoured activity will be paused and they will be returning to it, reassure them that you will 'keep it safe.' Place the 'pause' symbol onto the item and redirect the pupil to the new activity. Once the non-favoured activity is complete take off the pause symbol from the desired item and encourage the child or young person to re-engage with it.

## Waiting Prompts

Children and Young people with autism may find abstract concepts such as time illusive and so waiting can be extremely hard. You may have to teach 'waiting' skills.

### Wait Buttons



These are literally 'button/ tokens' on a strip of card – usually with the next activity displayed on it. The adult counts

down at intervals taking off a button until all 3 are gone and it's time for 'X'. These are particularly useful during situations when you don't have an exact idea on when something is due to change or expect to transition e.g. lining up, waiting for dinner, or when a person is going to return to work with them.



### Wait Cards

These can be useful for children and young people who are able to wait but may have difficulty with understanding how long they need to wait for, or get anxious that you may forget that they are waiting. Simply give the child or young person a card with the word or symbol for 'wait' – this is a visual reminder for them – and you – that they are waiting.

### **Pupil Voice**

The child or young person's voice should be at the centre of any strategy used to support them and staff should work alongside them in order to find out the things which are working well and not so well. In order to be successful, when plans for support are created, they should be in collaboration with the young person and their family.

Consider using a Sorting Page to capture pupil voice – this is a page with a thick line down the middle and opposite concepts in each section: I like/ I don't like. The pupil has a number of statements/ pictures/ timetable symbols and they sort them onto the page.

### **Environment & Support for Sensory Processing:**

Children and young people with autism can find different environments challenging due to the amount of sensory input. Environmental issues such as light/ noise/ smell/ movements/ textures can have a huge impact on them. The classroom environment should be well organised with display areas clearly identified to

support learning. Surfaces should be kept as clear as possible with resource areas labelled to support independence.

- Sensory Breaks- some pupils will benefit from accessing regular / timetabled breaks from their learning environment. The purpose of these breaks is to give the pupil the opportunity to re-regulate and so avoid dysregulation at later time; this may include sensory input- deep pressure, movement, calming/ uplifting scent, or sensory removal – time in a reduced stimuli/ quieter area engaged in a calming activity
- It is important to be aware of how the environment is impacting on the child or young person and it can be useful to undertake an environmental audit. The child or young person should also be consulted on areas of the environment they find challenging.

### **Mentoring**

It can be hugely beneficial for a young person to build a relationship with a trusted adult through regular meetings. A starting point for this relationship might be a child or young person's interests. It sometimes works well for a mentor to meet with a young person at the beginning and end of the day – to help the young person to prepare for the day and trouble shoot potential challenges, and also to reflect on the day once it has finished, celebrate successes and to review alternative strategies for things which might have gone better.