

Autism Support Resource



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AUTISM SUPPORT PACKAGE INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum disorder is a cognitive disorder characterised by difficulties with social communication, behaviour thinking and learning.

Difficulties in social communication can include;

- Rarely using language to communicate with people
- Not speaking at all
- Rarely responding when spoken to
- Not sharing interest and achievements with others
- No understanding gesture – repointing, waving
- Using limited facial expressions
- Not showing an interest in friends, having difficulty making friends
- Rarely engaging in imaginative play.

Difficulties with behaviour can include restricted and repetitive behaviours on interests or particular sensory behaviours. Signs of difficulties in this area can include;

- Lining up toys in particular ways over and over again,
- Frequently flicking switches or spinning objects,
- Speaking in repetitive ways,
- Having very narrow or intense interests,
- Needs things to always happen in a certain way,
- Having difficulty with changes of schedule or changing from one activity to another,
- Showing signs of sensory sensitivities such as becoming distressed by everyday sounds, not liking the feeling of clothes or licking or sniffing objects.

An Autism Spectrum diagnosis includes a support of severity level to indicate support required;

Level One – child needs support

Level Two – child needs substantial support

Level Three – child needs very substantial support.

These ratings are **not** related to Department of Education Disability Resourcing levels.

Positive Partnerships Program

The Positive Partnerships Program is federally funded and supports all stakeholders to meet the needs of young people with Autism. We have four staff who have completed the training and act as Autism support coaches for their colleagues, they are;

Jemma Win

Natasha Kelly

Terri Million

Jean Hale

The above staff have completed the Positive Partnerships training program and support meeting with teachers and parents, case management and transition. The program includes formal scheduled meetings and informal regular contacts and meetings as determined by the class teacher and coach. Class teachers are strongly encouraged to meet regularly with the parents.

Formal contacts include;

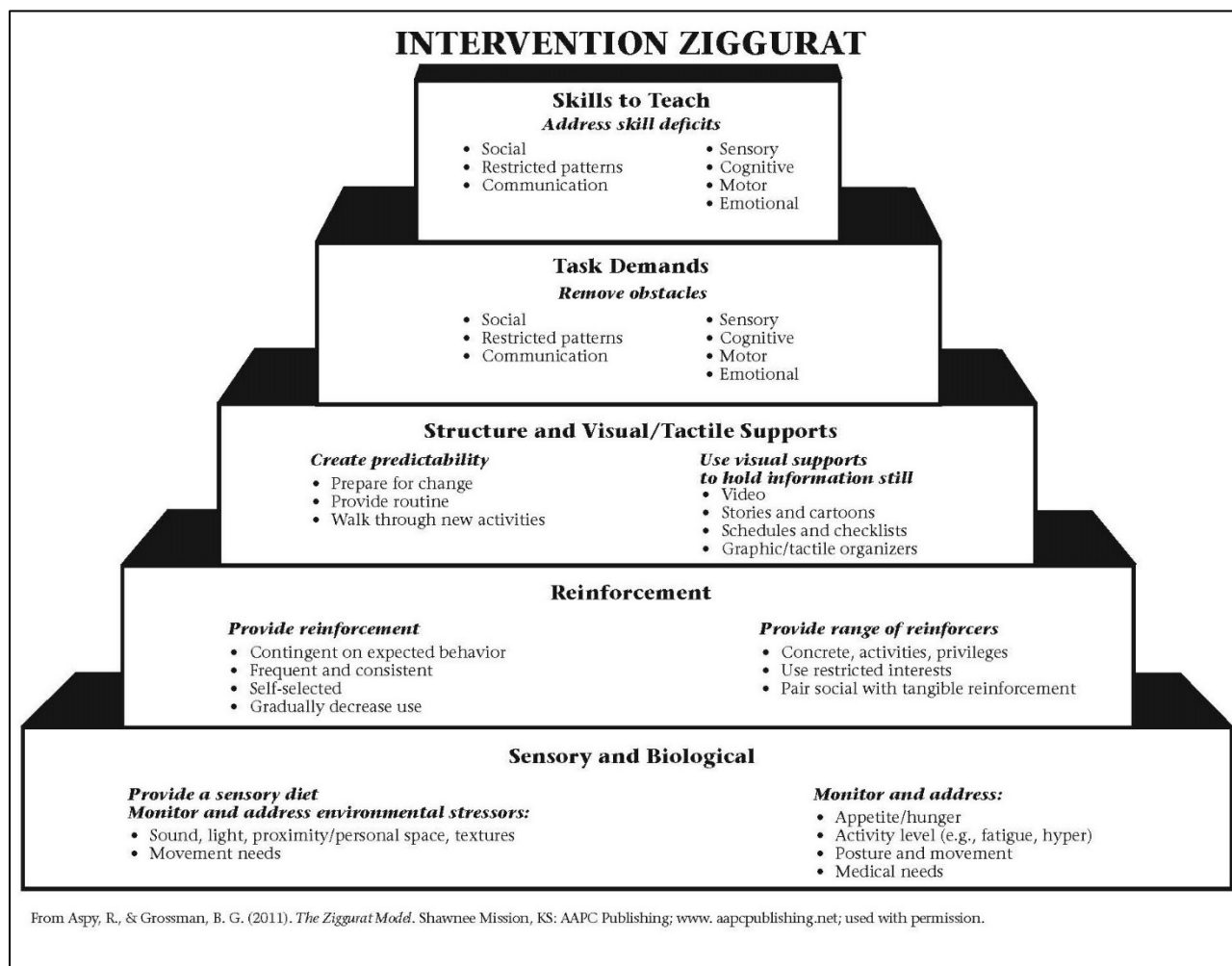
Term One, Week Four	Evening Parent meeting to inform parents about the program. Parents – Autism Support Teacher – Executive.
Term One, Week Five	Teacher/Parent/Autism Support Teacher meeting freed from class with teacher relief to review the Positive Partnerships Grid. A copy of the Grid is included in the appendices of this document. It provides an opportunity to report the child's communication, social, behavioural, sensory and executive fund needs. This information is used to develop the Case Management Plan. Planning Grids are located on the Shared Drive at All Staff/tracking/student file.
Term One, Week Six	Work with Autism Support Teacher to develop a Case Management Plan in light of previous teachers recommendations and the feedback from parents via the Positive Partnerships Grid. Review student profile document – copy attached.
Term One, Week Eight	Case Management Plan review with Associate Principal.
Term One, Week Nine	'A' Team staff half day review meeting.
Term Two, Week Seven	Case Management Review/update with class teachers and Autism Support Teacher. Staff freed from class with teacher relief.
Term Two, Week Seven	'A' Team staff half day review.
Term Two, Week Eight	Review Case Management Plans with Associate Principal.
Term Three	Ongoing informal adhoc support. Review Case Management Plan with Associate Principal.

Positive Partnerships Program (continued)

Term Three and Four	Support for transition planning for students as required. Adhoc teacher relief as required.
Term Four	Students in Year Six participate in the compass transition program. The COMPPAS planning template is located on the intranet under – A – Autism Resources. This process will be guided by an Autism Support Teacher.

Ziggurat Model

The Ziggurat Model provides a framework for responding comprehensively to the needs of students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The model recognises the need to address the underlying challenges for a student with Autism prior to address specific skills development – either in terms of social and behavioural learning or cognitive learning.



1. Address unmet sensory and biological needs such as health needs, noise management, sensory toys, sensory breaks.
2. Identify re-enforcers, positive rewards for desired behaviour. These need to be frequent and carried to meet the child's needs. A focus on re-enforcing desired behaviours is essential rather than a punitive approach to undesirable behaviours. Students only gain new skills when desired behaviours are re-enforced.
3. Build structure and visual supports for the child such as visual timetables, visuals for key routines i.e. entering class in the morning. Providing predictability for ASD student reduces anxiety and stress induced behaviour. ASD children often have stronger visual processing skills which makes visuals very useful.
Structure the child's learning environment with clear trays for work, visuals for task completion – then or task reward.
4. Manage task demands for the student. Consider the academic, social communication, organisation and sensory demands they may face. Ensure the expectation for the child is reasonable, that tasks are matched to the students' ability.
5. Skills to teach → The first four levels of the model are about meeting the fundamental needs of an ASD child. The final stage is identifying specific skills to teach the children. These skills may be cognitive i.e. literacy or numeracy but should also include teaching social skills, play skills, communication skills, self-regulation skills and organisational skills.

Top Tips for Supporting Students with Autism

1. Provide structure and safety – be consistent, stick to the schedule, reward good behaviour, create a safe zone in the class or wet area. A safe zone is a designated area for the child to self-regulate usually with task requiring little cognitive demand.
2. The relationship with the ASD students' parents is critical. Be proactive in communicating regularly and positively.
3. Find non-verbal ways to communicate – look for non-verbal cues from the child, identify triggers and sensory needs.
4. Create an individualised learner profile and case management plan – source children's interests, develop a predictable schedule, teach steps to routines and tasks and provide regular positive re-enforcement.
5. Find help and support – use the expertise of our 'A' team, Executive team or external services. Please ask for help and support including time if needed.
6. Be clear with your expectations and boundaries and re-enforce them positively.
7. Explicitly teach students to identify emotional literacy and self-regulation strategies. Using the concept of zones of regulation and appropriate responses for each zone for all students with ASD.
8. Give new routines, interventions or behaviour management processes time to work. A new routine or strategy is a change and ASD students need time, support and positive re-enforcement to manage change.
9. Maintain the dignity of the ASD child at all times. When children are distressed and deregulated we need to ensure we are calm and concise in our communication. We need to recognise that post a difficult period that we re-establish a positive relationship with the child. This should be done after the de-escalation and recovery stages of escalation. A copy of the escalation profile is attached.
10. Support the child's executive function needs by using timers, visual cues and timetables, breaking tasks down to discrete steps.
11. Support the child's social skills by specifically teaching social skills, using scripts, providing practice opportunities and controlled play experiences.
12. Identify triggers resulting in escalation and plan responses during the escalation profile tool.
13. Be aware of the concept of masking, children will contain behaviours at school but may still be experiencing significant sensory overload, anxiety, social or task difficulty. Masking is very common with female children with ASD. Parents are an excellent contact for determining if masking is occurring. Masking needs to be addressed at school

Resources

Resources on the Intranet;

- Positive Partnership Blank Grid
- K-3 visual timetable
- Years 4-6 visual timetable
- Zone of regulation materials
- Compass transition plan
- Individual learner profile.

Resources on the staff shared drive – Autism has a large set of resources including visuals, social stories, self-regulation tools etc.

Information sheets included in this booklet via Positive Partnerships Program.

What to consider/try when you have a student with autism

Sensory/Emotional Regulation:

- headphones
- hyper speed during warm-ups – remove child or alternatives
- too much in the environment (too many colours/images/posters)
- quiet place/calming place
- sensory tools
- find the trigger for dysregulation
- ZONES of regulation

Communication:

- set up a buddy
- use pictures / communication board
- display instructions as well as say
 - pictures/symbols/words
- say the student's name before giving instruction
- use technology for writing tasks
- are you using figurative language?

Executive Function:

- use a timer
- visual timetable
 - class timetable
 - individual student timetable
 - lesson breakdowns (baskets/folders/tasks 1,2,3)
- scaffolds/templates
- cut up sheets to smaller, more suitable, manageable chunks work

Social:

- set up a buddy
- social stories for new situation/events
- break down social skills/situations
- give scripting for specific situations

The smallest thing:

Triggers could be:

- sounds
- specific words (goodbye)
- a subtle action from another child
- a look
- raised voices

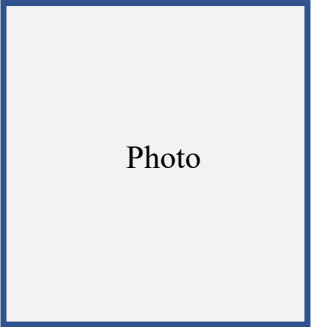
Planning Matrix

Name:

Date:

	Communication	Social Interaction	Repetitive Behaviours and Restricted Interests	Sensory Processing	Information Processing / Learning Style
Characteristics	1.				
Impacts	1.				
Strategies	1.				

Individual Learner Profile			
Name:			
TA:		Yr:	
Diagnosis:			
Strengths:			



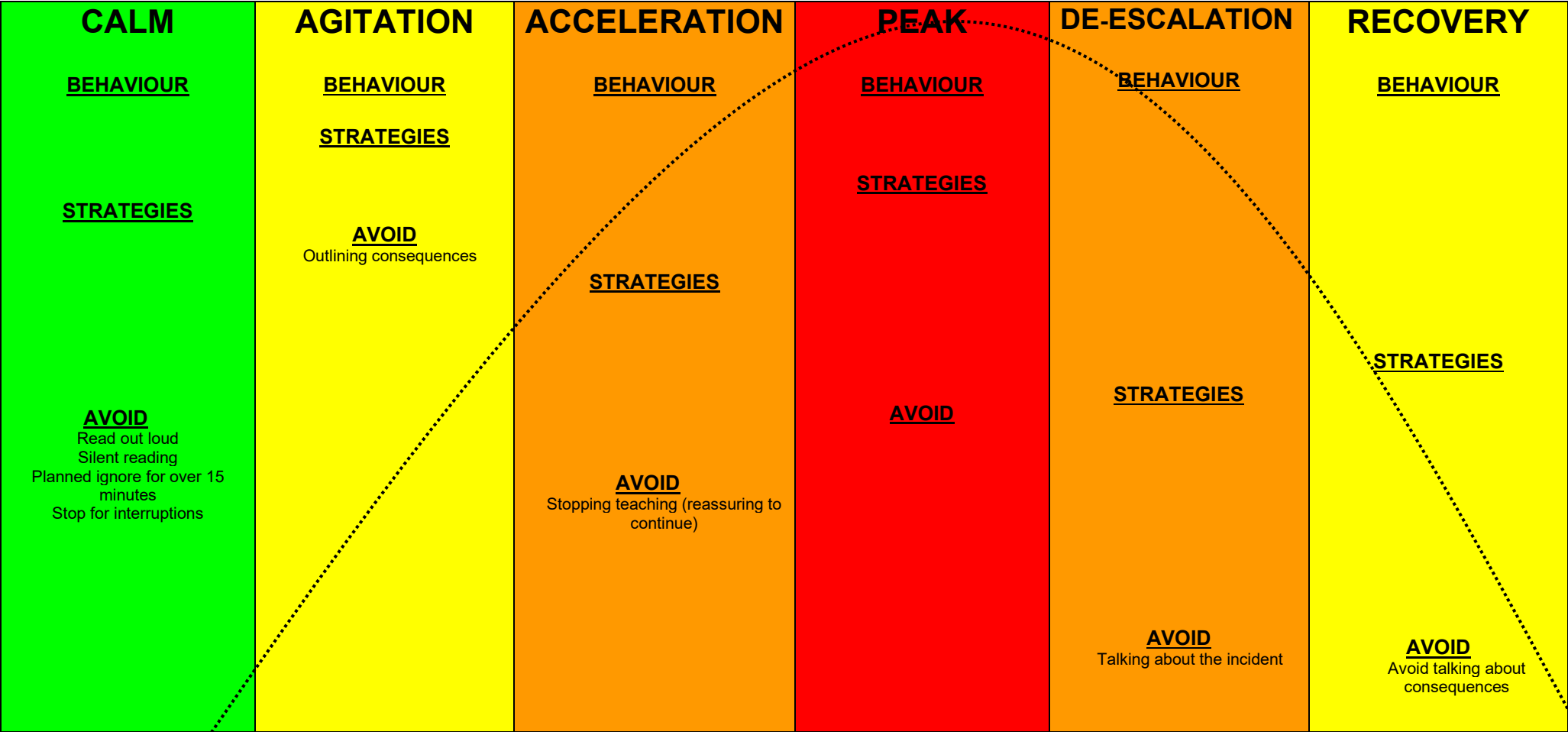
Implications in the Classroom				
<input type="radio"/> Communication	<input type="radio"/> Social	<input type="radio"/> Repetitive Behav ^s	<input type="radio"/> Sensory	<input type="radio"/> Info. Processing

List:

Key Adjustments Required			
<input type="radio"/> Instruction	<input type="radio"/> Curriculum	<input type="radio"/> Behaviour	<input type="radio"/> Environment

List:

ESCALATION PROFILE SUMMARY



TRIGGER



An Introduction to Visual Supports

"Any visual display that supports the learner...independent of prompts. Examples of visual supports include pictures, written words, objects within the environment, arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, [organisation] systems, and timelines"

Wong et al., 2014, pg.22

Visual supports provide a visual reference point that can be used as often as needed, and support the communication process. Visual supports can help people on the autism spectrum with their skill development and increase independence.

Visual supports need to be:

- Presented in a clear, uncluttered format
- Engaging and meaningful to the person using them
- Organised logically
- Reviewed frequently to ensure they are meeting the individual's needs
- Used consistently and kept on display so they can be accessed when needed
- Individualised to the autistic person's needs and comprehension level, some people may prefer print rather than object or photo symbols and vice versa
- Updated as appropriate, to stay meaningful, i.e. moving the arrow on a visual schedule

When making visual supports think about:

- Involving the young person as much as possible
- Basing the visuals on aspects of the young person's area of interest
- Consulting with the young person's parents/carers to understand what visuals might already be in use
- Matching the visuals to the young person's physical ability to use them e.g. ticking a list, moving a picture
- Carefully selecting your visual symbol or picture. The person constructing the visual needs to consider, the literal understanding of words, what is being taught and what is being focused on in a visual support
- Taking into account speech pathologist advice where possible

The type of visual support you use will depend on the young person's level of symbolic understanding. Review visual supports regularly as the individual's understanding changes. Visual supports can be made using one or more types of the visuals below.

Real object



Some young people will need real objects to understand. This is the most easily understood visual support.

Part of a real object



In this example a part of an apple is representing an apple.

Miniature of real object



In this example a toy apple is representing an apple.

Photo of real object



Ensure the photo is as clear from distractions as possible. This will support the young person to focus on the relevant details.

Abstract picture/ concept



When selecting an abstract concept, consider which picture represents your activity, lesson or task. For example, when an apple is chosen for fruit break, the young person may believe that an apple is the only choice of fruit, or always has to be eaten at fruit break.

Line drawing



If using a line drawing, which is hand drawn, consider how each person's drawing may differ. Drawings that are lost and replaced by a drawing from a different person may cause confusion for the person using them.

Printed or written word

apple

Consider the the literal understanding of words and the level of comprehension.

www.positivepartnerships.com.au



Transitions and Planning for Change

What is transition and change?

In our daily life we all experience change, such as changing activities, or going to different places. Another word to describe change is transition. Transition is a word often used by schools and other professionals to talk about changes in routine and the ability to stop one activity and start another.

Some people find change and transitions more challenging than others. Young people on the autism spectrum may feel very overwhelmed by the many changes that occur throughout the day, week, month, term and year.

Transitions may appear more difficult on some days or in some places due to other pressures and expectations. Each young person will cope with transitions and change in a different way. Some transitions will require more detailed planning than others.

Examples of transitions

Daily:

- Moving classrooms
- Moving from class to the playground
- Having a change in teacher
- Changes in home routines

Less frequent:

- Moving schools
- School excursions
- Going on holiday

Key milestones:

- Beginning pre-school
- Primary school to high school
- High school to post school options
- Moving out of home

Other:

- Moving house
- New sibling
- Death in the family

What is a transition plan?

A transition plan is a written plan to support changes to routines and/or the environment. It is important to plan for transitions as much as possible to increase student success. Transition plans can be brief or highly detailed, depending on the needs of each individual and the type of transition you are planning. Well developed transition plans may support a young person to successfully manage changes and transitions.



Executive functioning

Executive functions are skills performed by our brain that help us to control and manage our thoughts and actions. Executive functioning skills include how to plan and organise, shift attention from one task to another, think flexibly and self regulate. Executive functioning can have an impact on how a young person copes with changes and transitions.

Orientation vs transition

Many schools offer orientation days or visits. While these can be helpful, they often only occur once or twice. A more extensive transition plan, carried out over multiple visits, might be more appropriate for supporting young people on the autism spectrum when they are transitioning to a new school or environment.

'If your school doesn't have a formal orientation day, maybe you can create your own by visiting the school, talking to teachers, seeing where your locker is and practicing opening it, and getting your schedule early and walking through with your parents'.

Hayley Moss, Middle School:
The Stuff Nobody Tells You About.



Tips for creating successful transition plans

- ✓ Talk with the young person, or the people that support them and find out what has helped them transition and cope with change in the past
- ✓ Consider the young person's strengths, interests and challenges when planning how to approach a transition
- ✓ Discuss with parents/carers, teachers and other support people to find out what might support the transition
- ✓ Take photos of the new environment, the people who will be there and the activities they may be asked to do
- ✓ Use a map of an unfamiliar place and highlight areas of interest to allow the young person to familiarise themselves with the new location
- ✓ Identify a key support person that they can go to if they have a question or need extra support
- ✓ Ensure all people involved in the transition know the plan and the supports required
- ✓ Create any visual supports required
- ✓ Use a diary or calendar to countdown the days/weeks leading up to the change, if this would be calming for the young person
- ✓ Fill in and use the Positive Partnerships Planning Matrix to support the planning process



Executive Functioning

Executive functions are skills performed by our brain that help us to control and manage our thoughts and actions. Having the skills to organise and plan, shift attention, be flexible with thinking and self-regulate can all have an impact on how a young person copes with daily tasks. Some individuals on the autism spectrum may have difficulties with some or all areas of executive functioning.

Executive functioning skills include:



Planning: This includes deciding on what's important (and not important) and then making a plan to get a task done. It includes the ability to sequence sections of the tasks in order, to best achieve the overall task.



Organisation: This is about staying on task and the preparation of what is needed to undertake the task. For example; collecting equipment at the end of a lesson in preparation for a transition to another lesson.



Time management: This involves understanding how important time is and how to get jobs done on time.



Working memory: This is being able to remember information while working on other tasks.



Thinking about our own thinking: This includes checking on how things are going for ourselves.



Response inhibition & emotional control: This is about stopping ourselves from doing something so that we can think through what we should do next. It is about managing emotions so that we can finish a task.



Attention: This involves being able to pay attention to a task we need to do, even if we're bored or tired.



Flexibility: Being able to change plans and adapt to new situations.



Task initiation: Being able to start a job when needed.



Persistence: This is about being able to keep going to finish a job and re-visiting the job if necessary.



Friendships

Friendships are about:

- Enjoying spending time with each other, whether online or in person. Teenagers are more likely to spend time with their friends online on a daily basis, than to meet up in person (Pew Research Centre, 2018).
- Interacting in a way that is comfortable. Some autistics are more likely to have friendships that are based on chatting or texting, and other autistics may prefer friendships that are focused on a shared activity.
- Being able to interact with others who share your passions and interests can foster a sense of belonging as well as develop confidence and skills. It may be easier for some autistic children and young people to find others who share their passions or interests online.
- Having opportunities to be or play alongside others. Many friendships develop this way. Professionals call this parallel play.
- Developing confidence and improving wellbeing. Healthy friendships naturally nurture these (Narr, 2019).

Characteristics of healthy friendships:

- Kind
- Caring
- Loyal
- Sharing
- Supportive
- Respectful of each other
- Valuing each other and the friendship

In a healthy friendship, a child or young person should feel:

- Comfortable to be themselves
- Valued
- Cared about
- Heard
- Understood
- Able to share their passions and interests, likes and dislikes

Where can friends get together?

- Online: social media, gaming, video chat, watch parties etc.
- In person: school, home, clubs or groups based on the child or young person's interest or passion (e.g. dance, judo, art class, band), having a meal or going to the movies or another event, youth groups, lego clubs etc.

Making Friends



Children and young people on the autism spectrum may value different things in friendships than non-autistic people (Cresswell et al, 2015). To support friendships, provide opportunities to be alongside or near other children and young people. Individuals may need support to understand the 'hidden curriculum' or unspoken rules of a game or interaction. For example, why people throw the ball to the most popular student and not someone else, or how many times you can text someone.



Children and young people make friends for a variety of reasons and these may change across contexts. For individuals on the autism spectrum, some of these reasons may be confusing or highly desirable. For example, when children and young people want to be accepted into 'popular' groups, they may not initially understand the difference between being laughed at and laughing with their friends, or they may have a fear of being laughed at (Grennan et al, 2018).



When supporting children and young people to make friends, it is important that this support is focused on creating healthy relationships. When autistic individuals are comfortable in themselves, they are more likely to be comfortable interacting with others. Some children and young people on the spectrum really want friends and some prefer their own company. It is important to find out their preferences and to respect these.



As educators and parents, it is important to consider the right moment to support friendships. Structured social skill sessions may play a positive role, but need to be balanced with more natural opportunities. For some children and young people, it may be about choosing the right moment to support their friendships, taking into account the need for them to have a break from the demands of socialising.



Keeping Friends

It can be hard to keep friendships going for many children and young people. They may need support with how and when to contact or interact with friends to maintain a friendship.

However, individuals may also need support to understand why and when to end a friendship. If friends become unkind or disrespectful, then they should no longer be seen as friends.

Tips for supporting successful friendships

- ✓ Provide opportunities to do things the individual likes
- ✓ Express interest in the child or young person's interests
- ✓ Help them to find age appropriate people who share some of their interests to connect with, either online or in person
- ✓ Help the child or young person to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships
- ✓ Role model and talk about healthy friendships

Bennett et al. (2018)

Supporting young people on the autism spectrum with...

Bullying



WHAT IS BULLYING:

For some young people on the autism spectrum, it can be very difficult to recognise bullying. They may need support to understand that:

- bullying is about the misuse of power in relationships
- bullying is when someone experiences repeated verbal, physical and or social behaviour that causes harm
- bullying is mean and can be very hurtful there are different kinds of bullying
- no kind of bullying is ever OK
- bullying should always be reported
- adults will do all in their power to take it seriously and deal with it

Help the young person on the autism spectrum to...

- understand who can be a bully; a classmate or fellow pupil at school, a sibling, an adult or even themselves
- understand cyberbullying and the importance of being cyber-safe
- understand the actions of others and determine when, or if they are being bullied
- understand when they might be being perceived as being a bully
- identify when they are being set up to be a bully by people they consider to be friends

Be observant!

Each young person will react differently to bullying. It's important to look for changes in the following:



Emotional

- non-specific pains, headaches, abdominal pains
- increase in anxiety
- increase in anger



Physical

- unexplained bruises, scratches or cuts
- torn, missing or damaged clothes or belongings



Sensory

- These behaviours may change - the young person may seek out more sensory information (e.g. movement, deep pressure) or they may become more sensitive to noise, touch etc.



Behavioural

- becoming withdrawn
- unexpected mood change
- an increase in fixation on their special interest
- irritability and temper outbursts



Other

- unwilling to go to school
- routine change i.e. changing the way they walk
- home from school
- having few friends

No one deserves to be bullied. It's unacceptable behaviour.

And offer support when...

- they want strategies to help with bullying
- they want to join in with social games and activities
- they need to learn the concept of personal space
- they want to talk to someone about what is happening

What can you do to offer support?

A young person on the autism spectrum can be a victim or a perpetrator. It is equally important to support them in both instances. Listed below are some strategies you can try.



IMPARTIAL ASSESSMENT

Conduct an impartial assessment of the bullying occurrence. Focus on the facts.



CODE OF CONDUCT

Take time to understand the school (or club) code of conduct and approach to bullying.



TEAM APPROACH

Develop a plan within a team to reduce bullying. The team can include parents, teachers, support staff and the young person being bullied.



TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

Support the young person to learn social skills.



BUDDY UP

Provide the young person with a buddy who can support and encourage them.



MAP OUT

Create a map of the young person's world. Identify places where the young person is safe and places they may be vulnerable to bullying.



EQUITABLE JUSTICE

Ensure consequences are given for all young people who participate in bullying.



VISUAL PROMPTS

Use visual prompts to help the young person on the spectrum communicate their feelings.



EMPOWER

Encourage all young people to speak out about bullying.

For more information about bullying please visit:

Bullying. No Way! www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Office of the eSafety Commissioner www.esafety.gov.au

Department of Education and Training <https://www.education.gov.au/state-and-territory-anti-bullying-policies>



Provide the young person with a buddy who can support and encourage them

The home-school partnership

A healthy respectful home school relationship is so important for supporting young people on the spectrum. Regular opportunities to meet and discuss both positive and challenging aspects of schooling can help keep communication channels open and transparent.

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER FOR THE MEETINGS:

Prepare - have key points to discuss

- gather information
- consider a support person attending with you

Meet

- be confident in discussing issues and strategies
- remain objective and seek to be solution focused

Action

- be clear about your next steps and actions following the meetings

If issues continue to occur, ensure you explore other communication channels to discuss your concerns.

The Positive Partnerships Planning Matrix is a great tool that can be used to support conversations about how to best support your child.

To learn more about how to complete a planning matrix and download a template visit

www.positivepartnerships.com.au

You will also find exclusive online content, factsheets and information about our upcoming workshops.



positive partnerships

Working together to support school-aged students on the autism spectrum

www.positivepartnerships.com.au



autism
spectrum
AUSTRALIA



Girls and young women on the autism spectrum

Diagnosis - why don't some girls get diagnosed?

There could be many reasons for this, including; the belief that autism is a 'male condition', a belief that girls are more likely to 'grow out of' their difficulties and the lack of professional understanding of how autism presents in girls and women (Whitlock et al., 2020). It may also be the case that girls are diagnosed with anxiety or other mental health conditions rather than the professional or family considering autism.

For those girls and women whose autism goes undetected, the negative consequences can be far reaching. Autistic people who have lived without a diagnosis report that this results in greater social isolation and bullying, as well as feelings of being misunderstood or "not fitting in" (Bargiela, Steward, & Mandy, 2016; Portway & Johnson, 2003, 2005; Punshon, Skirrow, & Murphy, 2009 cited in Whitlock et al., 2020).

Can girls be autistic?

The current ratio of girls to boys with an autism diagnosis is 1:4, but research shows that some girls are being missed so the rate should be 1:3, girls to boys (Whitlock et al., 2020).

Women experience life on the autism spectrum in a range of ways that can be different from the experiences of men who are on the autism spectrum.

Some autistic girls and women may go unrecognised because they do not fit current, male-centric views of autism (Whitlock et al., 2020).



Autistic girls

- may have a great attention to detail
- may interpret language literally
- may be able to camouflage or mask their challenges which means they are not recognised or identified by others
- may or may not have additional disabilities or learning needs
- may experience much higher social communication expectations as they enter their teens and their difficulties in these areas may only be noticed at this point (Geelhand et al., 2019)
- autistic girls and women are more likely to internalise their difficulties which can result in anxiety and depression (Whitlock et al., 2020)



'The closest I can come to explaining masking to non-autistics is, it's like being on your 'best behaviour' when you are at a job interview and then being relaxed with your best friend. You are two different people in each of those situations, and neither is completely forced or conscious.' Dr Emma Goodall (autistic, author, researcher and parent)



Tips & strategies to support autistic girls and young women

- Get to know the young person you are supporting and find out the ways they like to be supported.
- Create a safe space in your home or at school where the young person can go to feel safe and secure when feeling anxious, upset or needing to get away from sensory input.
- Provide explicit teaching for how to make and maintain friendships. Support her to join in on groups or find peers with similar interests.
- At clubs and sports events, or in school, allocate groups and teams rather than asking the young people to put themselves in groups or choose groups.
- Regularly check for understanding of verbal instructions and written tasks, provide visual supports and scaffolding to support remaining on task and focused.
- Be clear, explicit and consistent. Explain any unwritten rules.

