



INTRODUCTION

Children/young people with ASD often struggle with everyday tasks which may seem simple and straight forward such as; organisation at home and school, washing and dressing, mealtimes, listening and attention. This pack is designed to identify some of these things and provide tips and strategies to help manage them.

There are a number of reasons why a child with ASD may struggle with such activities. Such as difficulties with; coordination, balance and body awareness; planning and sequencing; communication and coping with the environment.

Most of us are able to function in loud and busy environments as we have the ability to filter out the information we don't need - e.g. flickering lights, noises from outside, posters on the walls. We are also able to manage our own arousal level as we can calm ourselves down when something stressful or exciting has happened or make ourselves more alert when we are feeling tired and lethargic. These skills are part of what is called sensory integration. Children with ASD often find this very difficult and as a result find it hard to listen and pay attention in loud and busy environments such as a classroom or school hall. They also find it difficult to calm themselves down when they get excited or upset and some children find it difficult to alert themselves to be able to learn and concentrate. A balanced calm-alert state is the most successful level of arousal for learning and engagement in activities. Children with ASD sometimes find it difficult to find this state and therefore need our help to do this.

The strategies provided in this pack will remind you to take the environment into consideration when interacting with your child and helping them engage independently in various everyday tasks.

ORGANISATION



Children with autism often find it difficult to plan and sequence activities and can find it difficult to organise themselves. They therefore need some help with this, the best way to do this while promoting independence is by using schedules, timetables, prompt sheets and tick lists. Although these things may sound time consuming to set up, once in use they can save a lot of time.

Schedules:

Schedules are extremely important for children with ASD; they reduce the amount of spoken language and having to remember verbal directions. Schedules help the child focus on necessary activities and improve opportunities for learning. For children who can not read well, a picture schedule works well. For children who can comprehend that words or symbols represent certain concepts, written or icon schedules may be used.

Schedules shouldn't include actual times but rather a sequence in order of events.

Macro schedules - address larger segments of the day or week:

1. Wake up
2. Put on clothes
3. Brush teeth

4. Go downstairs and eat breakfast
5. Go to the bus stop
6. Arrive at school, go to classroom
7. Get on bus to go home

8. Arrive home and eat snack
9. Play outside on swing
10. Do homework
11. Get school bag ready for tomorrow
12. Eat dinner
13. Watch TV
14. Take a bath and put on pyjamas
15. Go to bed and read a book with Dad
16. Lights out

Mini schedules - focus on specific activities such as dressing, bathing, homework, dinner etc. There are examples of these throughout the pack. A child may also have a macro and mini schedules at school.

Checklists - useful to prompt children to remember certain things; a good example of this is for packing the school bag. Have a list of what is needed each day, laminate it and get your child to tick the things off when they have been put in the bag. This way nothing is forgotten.

DRESSING and UNDESSING



Many children with ASD find the planning and sequencing of activities difficult and therefore find dressing and undressing difficult. Some children can also be very sensitive to certain textures and therefore can only wear certain materials. Many children prefer loose clothes as they cannot tolerate things being too close to their skin. Some children with ASD also have difficulties with coordination, balance and fine motor skills and may struggle with fastenings.

HELPFUL HINTS

- It can be easier to buy clothes online rather than take your child to the shops; the fabric is usually specified as is the type of waistband.

- Think about buying a coat with a hood as some children prefer to wear a hood than a tight fitting hat.
- Boxers rather than pants may help a child not to feel restricted.
- Pyjamas should be loose and comfortable.
- Shoes with velcro rather than laces can be easier.
- Again mini schedules (verbal or picture) can be used to help the child
- remember what order clothes need to go on it;

1. Pants
2. Vest
3. T-Shirt
4. Trousers
5. Jumper
6. Socks
7. Shoes

SCHOOL



Break and Lunchtime

Children learn to play games with their peers during breaks at school, children with ASD often want to join in but lack the social skills to know how to join in and follow the rules to games such as football. As a result they often get left out and find themselves on their own at break times. Children with ASD need structure and this is usually lacking at break times.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Break times provide an opportunity for children with ASD to learn and practise valuable social skills.
- Children with autism need support from school staff to be able to do this.

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- Use the child's strengths to include them in games and engage them with other children.
- For example; if a child is good at running, they can join in running competitions. If a child is good at swinging, he can engage in a competition with another child swinging.
- Children with autism find it difficult to pick up the rules of sports and team games and how to use playground equipment. They need to be taught these things by teaching assistants or teachers. Photographs can be taken of each piece of equipment and scripts can be written for proper use. The scripts can be reviewed with the child before break each day. Reviewing it on the playground when it is empty can be useful.



HOMEWORK:

Children with ASD often have a low frustration tolerance; the school day can be an exhausting experience. There are a lot of expectations placed on them and they get overloaded with sensory information. They often spend the day holding it together so that they can relax and release when they get home. So when presented with homework, it is the last thing they want to do. Children with autism often have a very rigid way of thinking and so may think that school is where they do work and home is where they play and relax. Doing homework can help make the connection between home and school and reinforce skills learned in school.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Try using a schedule for after school activities and include homework on it. Start by including a 10 minute slot for homework, as their tolerance to this increases, increase the amount of time.
- Use a 'now and next' timetable so the child knows what activity they are going to be doing 'now' i.e. homework and what they will be doing 'next'.
- Try and make the 'next' activity something they enjoy doing so it can be used as a reward
- Children with ASD sometimes find it difficult to follow instructions so they may need their parents to break the homework down and present it to them in smaller chunks.



ORGANISATION:

Children with ASD often find it very difficult to find their way around school and get themselves organised for lessons.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- Post the daily routine and schedule, attempting to maintain a defined order of subjects and activities. Provide a copy of the schedule near child's desk.
- Allow time for your child to organise themselves during transitions to a new activity or lesson.
- Announce transitions in advance of their occurrence.
- Alternate activities requiring a high level of concentration with those that are more relaxed.
- Plan most challenging activities in the morning
- Talk to the child to identify what they need to organise such as stationary, books, diary, sports clothing.
- Use clear plastic boxes or clear pencil cases for small items so they can be easily seen and checked. Keep a list of items in the pencil case so that they can check items back into the case at the end of every lesson.
- When labelling each container try using pictures, photos or words of the items being stored. Different coloured containers offer an additional aid to remembering where specific items are kept e.g. blue for pens and green for rulers and rubbers.
- Always place items back in the same place for consistency
- Encourage the child to have a spare pencil case at home so the school one stays in his school bag. This reduces the risk of losing items or leaving them behind.
- Use visual symbol of the traffic lights to stop and plan activities. "red" is for "stop", amber is for "think and plan" and green is for "do". It may be useful to put this on a card in the child's diary etc. as a visual reminder.
- Rules and instructions should be clear and brief and wherever possible also presented visually in form of charts, lists, pictures etc. Relying on a child's memory and verbal reminders can often be ineffective.

- Encourage the child to repeat instructions out loud to ensure they have heard them.
- Provide verbal and non verbal encouragement. Set up a reward system in conjunction with home as appropriate.
- Make direct eye contact when presenting instructions.
- Consider "buddying" the child with an organised "helper" classmate.

LISTENING AND ATTENTION:

Children with autism often find it difficult to attend to activities which are adult led or something they are not interested in. This may be due to a number of reasons. It may be that they are easily distracted by all the sensory information around them which they find hard to filter out. You may find that children with ASD fidget a lot and find it difficult to sit still. This may be because they have some difficulties with body awareness and need to move about a lot to give feedback to their joints and muscles to tell their body what it is doing.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Sitting near the front will reduce the distraction in the child's visual field.
- Allow the child to sit beside the teacher and hand over items for discussion to help maintain attention.
- Using a 'defined' spot for them e.g. carpet square, sequencing spot during carpet time or assembly.
- A regular change of position can help the child to maintain their attention e.g. Lying on tummy, sitting on the floor, sitting on a chair during circle time, kneeling.
- Work with in success; if the child can stay in circle well for 20 seconds, use this as your baseline and increase your time from this point.
- Try a short walk around the circle and then try sitting again.
- Try and do some gross motor activities before getting the child to sit and focus on an activity, activities where the child is weight bearing through their arms can be calming to the system, such as; wheelbarrow and animal walks. Rocking forwards and backwards and jumping on a trampoline can also be calming.
- Other "heavy work" activities within the classroom are; getting the child to push the chairs under the table or carry heavy objects when it is clean-up time. This kind of input will help the child maintain a better state of organization.
- Fidget toys, such as a small squiggy ball/stress ball can help the child to concentrate while listening to an adult.

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- Sit fit cushions can help the child sit and attend for longer periods of time, these can be purchased from www.sissel.com.
- For the child who becomes over aroused by the classroom environment provide quiet, "time out" spaces to help the child to regroup and become organized (i.e. a reading corner behind a bookshelf, under a table with pillows, or a bean bag chair in a quiet corner).
- Try to forewarn the child of any loud noises before they occur (i.e. bells/fire alarms).
- To minimize auditory distractions, a classroom with a rug or carpet would help decrease extraneous noises.

