

**Supporting children and young people with social communication and interaction needs (with and without a diagnosis of Autism)**

**Tips to support understanding of your communication:**

- Before talking, get the child/young person's attention by saying their name first.
- Reduce your language - Use simple words and short phrases.
- Try to mostly talk about things that the child/young person can see in the here and now.
- Use a quiet, calm voice.

**Step by step -**

- Break instructions down into smaller chunks of information.
- Instructions should be given one step at a time, by one person at a time. Say things in the order that they are going to happen.

**Use "then" -**

- Use "then" to help the child/young person to understand what will happen next, e.g. *"Shoes on, then coat, then play outside"*.

**Use "finished" -**

- Use "finished" to help the child/young person to understand the duration of an event.
- Teach "finished" in positive situations. Praise and reward the child when an activity is finished, e.g. *"Group time finished, now bubbles!"*.
- Then use "finished" to discourage negative behaviour or encourage the child/young person to move on.

**Allow time to process -**

- Children/young people with Autism may need longer to process spoken information.
- Try counting to 10 when waiting for a response.
- Don't layer language this makes it difficult for a child/young person to process the spoken word – one adult should give the child/young person an instruction once, then give ample time to process the information before repeating it.

**Be positive -**

- Tell the child/young person the behaviour that you want to see rather than telling them what not to do.
- Young children do not always understand "no" or "not", i.e. *"do not jump on the chair"*.
- Try to avoid saying NO, e.g. say *"Josh, sit down"* rather than *"No! Don't jump on the chair, you'll break it!"*.

- Telling the child/young person what we would like them to do, rather than what we would not like them to do can teach them how to behave and will make your expectations clearer.
- **Make it visual -**
- Use visual cues such as objects, pictures, photographs, symbols or the written word alongside speech: visual timetables, now/next visuals, task/reward visuals.

### **Tips to support emotional regulation:**

#### **Adapting our communication -**

- Make less eye contact.
- Keep your voice at a lower pitch and volume.
- Use fewer words and simple gestures or signs.
- Make fewer requests.
- Use slower, controlled breathing.
- Slow down your movements, relax your posture and don't tower above the child/young person.
- Keep your distance and avoid touching.
- Remove any audience.
- Go at your child/young person's pace.

#### **Provide Structure -**

- Creating structure for your child/young person can help reduce anxiety and angry reactions.
- Make sure your child/young person knows what is going to happen daily.
- Use visual supports and timetables – these allow the child/young person to become more independent and also reduces anxiety about what is going to happen next.
- Have clear places for things and use labels.

### **Helping the child/young person to manage their feelings –**

#### **Ways to communicate feelings**

- Write or draw how you are feeling on a piece of a paper.
- Have pictures of feelings/faces to discuss moods on the wall so family/teacher can say which 'face' they are feeling.
- Time out/chill out/break cards.
- Door signs – useful for the child/young person to use to let others know how they are feeling e.g. 'Do not disturb' or 'I am in a bad mood'.
- Introduce rating scales for the child/young person e.g. traffic light systems (green=happy/red = angry) or numerical scales (one to five). The book *The Incredible 5 Point Scale* by Kari Dunn Buron has some useful ideas.
- Use stories and books – there are a variety of books aimed at explaining emotions and anger to children/young people (see list below).
- Introduce ideas for the whole family – if all the family use some of the ideas mentioned then it might help your child/young person understand them and want to join in.
- Talk about your worries – set aside a specific time to talk about worries with your child/young person. Building this into your daily or weekly routine may help.

- It may benefit some children/young people to write a diary or blog or post their worries into a 'worry box'.
- Use different means – some children/young people may find it useful to talk through things like puppets or pets. Others may benefit from having something to tell the worry to, like puppets or worry dolls.
- Talk about good things – for some children/young people with low self-esteem, it is important to remind them of the things they are good at and enjoy. This can be done with prompt cards of alternative positive thoughts.

#### **Possible ways to relax**

- Chill out time, time alone.
- Regular breaks in the garden or safe outdoor space.
- Physical activities such as walking, bike riding, star jumps.
- Multi - sensory toys.
- Muscle relaxation or controlled breathing.
- Headphones or earplugs to block out background noise or voices.
- Technology/Reading books, magazines, comics.
- Spend time with pets.
- Spend time doing or talking about their favourite topic or special interest.
- Remembering positive events together – e.g. looking at photos of special interests together.

#### **Possible safe ways to express feelings**

- Physical exercise.
- Multi-sensory toys.
- Cushion, teddy, beanbag.
- Write out your anger – then rip up the paper.
- Shouting, talking, ranting!

#### **Tips to support transition and change for children and young people with social communication and interaction difficulties (those with and without a diagnosis of Autism):**

Change is difficult for many children/young people on the Autism Spectrum because of an impairment in flexibility of thought, alongside anxiety linked to the unknown. Children/young people with Autism have difficulties in predicting what might happen in a new setting so prefer to stick with what is familiar. Difficulties in social understanding mean that a pupil with Autism is likely to take longer to understand the expectations and social rules of a new environment or social situation. The need for routine and familiarity leads to anxiety when interruptions occur.

They respond best to a consistent approach, and this is likely to be interrupted during a transition period which can include working with new staff teams. Children/young people with Autism often have an intense focus once engaged with a task, and it can be difficult for them to disengage from one task and re-engage in a new activity.

The sensory processing differences that many pupils on the Autism Spectrum experience can also contribute to the difficulties associated with transition periods as the person may quickly become overwhelmed with sensory stimulus in a new environment.

Create a Child/young person's passport with some of the following headings:

- Personal Interests
- Important people

- Things I am good at ...
- Things I need help with ...
- How I like to communicate
- Difficulties I have with communication
- How adults can help me to understand
- How to help me when I am stressed

**Some Useful links:**

[www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources](http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/resources)  
[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)

***Recommended Reading***

- Can I tell you about Asperger's Syndrome? Jude Welton
- Can I tell you about Autism? Jude Welton
- Can I tell you about Anxiety? Lucy Willetts & Polly Waite
- The Huge Bag of Worries Virginia Ironside
- When my worries get too big! Kari Dunn Buron
- The incredible 5-point scale-Kari Dunn Buron
- A volcano in my tummy – Eliane Whitehouse & Warwick Pudney
- What to do when you worry too much – Dawn Huebner
- What to do when you grumble too much – Dawn Huebner
- What to do when your temper flares – Dawn Huebner
- The big book of calmers – Jenny Mosley & Ross Grogan
- The complete guide to Asperger's Syndrome – Dr Tony Attwood
- A martian in the playground – Claire Sainsbury

**An Additional List of Autism Resources (updated June 2020)**

**Autism Alert Cards Get a South Yorkshire Police Autism Alert Cards** – see below.

Autism\_Alert\_Card@southyorks.pnn.police.uk.

The cards are Free, credit card sized and let blue-light staff and partner agencies know that the card holder is either on the autism spectrum or has a learning disability and may need extra support. The cards are designed • to reduce anxiety in stressful situations, • aid understanding • enable the card carrier feel more comfortable in stressful or frightening situations. • Help when the card holder is experiencing a meltdown by providing contact details Anyone with a formal autism diagnosis or awaiting diagnosis can apply for an autism alert card. There is no age limit on this.

**COVID-19 INFORMATION SOURCES**

**Explanations & help for Families**

NAS COVID-19 updates, tips & advice.

NHS a clinical guide for frontline staff to support the management of patients with a learning disability and autism during the corona virus epidemic they have now produced an easy read version.

NHS (YouTube) COVID-19 on YouTube - explanation using animation

WHO and Rakuten Viber Fight COVID-19 misinformation with interactive chatbot

NHS Surgery (YouTube) Animation – about COVID-19  
INEQE Safeguarding Group Animation – What is the CORONAVIRUS? (YouTube)  
St. Lucia Govt. Animation – about COVID-19 (YouTube)  
LingoKids Animation – Explained for Kids (YouTube)  
Sesame Street Animation – how to wash your hands (YouTube)  
Peekaboo Kidz Animation – safety measures (YouTube)

### **COVID-19 SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

UK updates INSTAGRAM UK Updates  
10 Downing St. PM Office Facebook UK Prime Minister  
Coronavirus Disease Covid-19 UK Facebook Advice – created in UK  
NHS – UK Facebook Protect yourself & others  
WHO (Facebook) Facebook Reduce your risk  
WHO (Instagram) INSTAGRAM WHO advice

### **AUTISM resources - advice, support, communities, Q&A's, social media etc.**

NAS Home page NAS Home page  
NAS COVID tips COVID-19 updates, tips & advice  
NAS Community Forum Local community forum  
NAS (Homepage) About autism, behaviour, education care, communication & more...  
NAS (FB) Facebook  
NAS (Instagram) Instagram  
NAS (YouTube) YouTube  
Autistica UK (Homepage) Home page  
Autistica UK (FB) Facebook  
Autistica UK YT) YouTube  
Autistica UK (Twitter) Twitter  
Research Autism UK Home page  
Research Autism UK (FB) Facebook  
Research Autism UK (YT) YouTube  
Research Autism UK Twitter) Twitter  
Prof. S. Baron-Cohen (YT) YouTube Autism / Asperger syndrome  
Prof. S. Baron-Cohen (Twitter) Twitter Autism / Asperger syndrome  
Dr Tony Attwood (YT) YouTube Autism Hangout Q & A videos  
Ambitious about Autism Home page  
Ambitious about Autism (FB) Facebook  
Ambitious about Autism (YT) YouTube  
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