

**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 talk mostly 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/young person 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 as 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 for the information to be processed 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 the 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.

## **Tips to help the child/young person 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 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 (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 to understand them and want to join in.
- Talk about your worries (within reasonable limits to avoid causing unnecessary anxiety/worry) – set aside a specific time to talk about worries with your child/young person. Building this into your daily/weekly routine.

- 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.

### **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/objects
- Muscle relaxation or controlled breathing.
- Headphones or earplugs to block out background noise or voices.
- Technology, reading books, magazines, comics.
- Spend time with pets at home
- Spend time doing or talking about their favourite topic or special interest.
- Remembering positive events together – looking at photos of special interests together.

### **Ways to express feelings**

- Physical exercise.
- Multi-sensory toys/objects.
- 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 children and young people with social communication and interaction difficulties because of an impairment in flexibility of thought, alongside anxiety linked to the unknown.

Children and young people are likely to have difficulties in predicting what might happen in a new setting so prefer to stick with what is familiar. Difficulties in social understanding means that children and young people are 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.

Children and young people respond best to a consistent approach, and this is likely to be interrupted during a transition period; a period which can include working with new staff teams, new peers and a new learning environment.

Children and young people 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 children and young people experience can also contribute to the difficulties associated with transition periods as they can very 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

### **Useful website links:**

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

### **Recommended Reading**

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| • 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                     | Elaine 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                   |