



SEND Early Years – Support Strategies for Inclusion Toolkit

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Slough
Borough Council

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*When a flower doesn't bloom
you fix the environment in
which it grows,
not the flower.*

Alexander den Heijer

Introduction

This pack is designed to support early intervention for pre-school age children that have been identified by your setting as possibly having additional needs, particularly with social communication and social interaction differences.

The interventions that are included are chronologically ordered so that there is a clear starting point and pathway for your staff.

We recommend that you try at least the first two strategies (or two strategies that you think will support your child accordingly) for a period of time and then if you still have significant concerns contact Cathie Woodbridge – Principal Area SENCo to discuss the next best steps for support and intervention.

We are more than happy to take telephone calls, hold Teams or Zoom meetings or have contact via email to problem solve with you and offer advice and guidance as you work to embed support strategies with your children and staff.

Also included in the pack is a 'request for support' form and pupil information form that should be completed and sent via email to: eyinclusion@slough.gov.uk and mark for the attention of either Cathie Woodbridge or Sarah Covell.

The first two interventions, Intensive Interaction and Adult Modelling do not require resources to be made therefore can be started almost immediately. With most of the interventions there are short accompanying YouTube clips that demonstrate the intervention. We highly recommend that these clips are viewed by the key person supporting the child and whoever is going to deliver the interventions that are chosen.

There are accompanying summaries of each intervention within this pack that should be pulled out, photo-copied and given to the member of staff who directly supports and works with the child on a daily basis.

It would be useful to skill up all of the setting staff with the support strategies that are included in this pack so that everyone feels confident enough to step in and support a child with any of the chosen strategies and the interventions become an embedded part of your SEND practise.

All of the recommended strategies can be included as targets within an IEP. Each strategy identifies the area of learning that it supports with suggested text to include as part of an IEP.

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SEND Inclusion – Code of Practise Summary

Inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in mainstream nurseries is a core principle. Mainstream nurseries must follow the SEND Code of Practice. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) is statutory guidance for early years providers, outlining how to identify, assess, and support children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It emphasises a graduated approach, involving assessment, planning, action, and review, to meet individual needs. The Code also highlights the importance of collaboration between professionals, families, and other agencies to ensure children with SEND receive the necessary support. Settings are expected to adapt to individual children's needs and provide support accordingly. Unless specific circumstances prevent it, children with SEND should be included alongside their peers during activities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

Here's a breakdown of key aspects:

1. Legal Framework and Principles:

- **SEND Code of Practice:**

All early year's settings, including school nurseries, are legally bound to follow the SEND Code of Practice.

- **Inclusion:**

A core principle is that children with SEND should be included in mainstream settings and activities, as long as it is feasible and does not impede their learning or the education of others.

- **Equality:**

Mainstream nurseries should ensure that children with SEND have equal opportunities to participate and learn.

- **Individualised Support:**

Recognising that each child's needs are unique, nurseries should tailor support and provision to meet those specific needs.

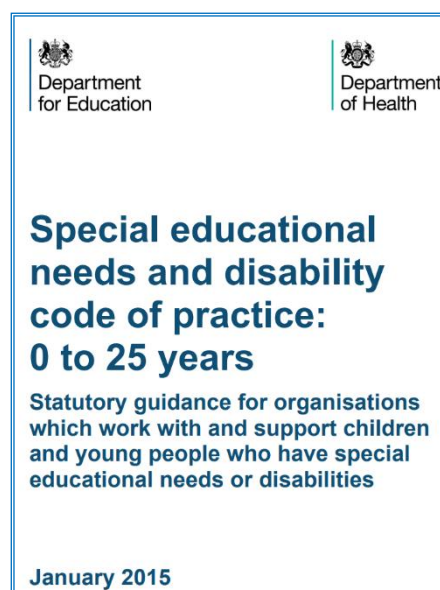
2. Key Practices and Support:

- **Assessment and Planning:**

Nurseries should assess a child's needs, develop a plan in collaboration with parents and specialists, and implement strategies to address those needs.

- **SENCO:**

A designated Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) is responsible for overseeing SEND provision within the setting.



- **Adaptations and Adjustments:**

This might include modifying the learning environment, providing adapted resources, and adjusting teaching styles to suit different learning preferences.

- **Positive Relationships:**

Building strong, trusting relationships with key adults is crucial for children with SEND to feel safe and supported.

- **Collaboration with Parents:**

Parents are key partners in the process and should be involved in planning and reviewing support for their child.

3. When Inclusion Might Not Be Appropriate:

- **Impracticality:**

If it's genuinely not feasible to include a child in a particular activity.

- **Hindered Learning:**

If inclusion would prevent a child from receiving the necessary support or would negatively impact their learning.

- **Disruption:**

If inclusion would significantly disrupt the education of other children or the efficient use of resources.

4. Key Considerations for Nurseries:

- **Create an Inclusive Environment:**

Adapt the physical environment, provide accessible resources, and ensure positive interactions among all children.

- **Focus on Strengths:**

Recognise and build on the child's strengths and capabilities.

- **Responsive Communication:**

Use effective communication strategies that support the child's individual needs.

- **Early Intervention:**

Address any emerging needs as early as possible to prevent them from becoming significant barriers to learning.

Mainstream nurseries play a vital role in providing an inclusive and supportive environment for children with SEND. By following the SEND Code of Practice, tailoring support to individual needs, and fostering positive relationships, nurseries can help children with SEND thrive alongside their peers.

What are reasonable adjustments? (The Equality Act 2010)

Reasonable adjustments in early years settings aim to ensure all children, including those with disabilities or special educational needs, can fully participate and benefit from their learning environment. These adjustments can be small, practical changes or more significant adaptations, and they are tailored to the individual needs of the child.

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/04/what-are-reasonable-adjustments-and-how-do-they-help-disabled-pupils-at-school/>

Here are some examples of reasonable adjustments in early years settings:

Physical Environment:

- **Modifying the layout:**

Adjusting indoor and outdoor spaces to be more accessible, like creating ramps, handrails, or wider pathways.

- **Providing supportive seating:**

Offering comfortable seating options, including those that can be adjusted to meet specific needs, like comfortable chairs or cushions, or allowing children to sit on the floor if that is their preference.

- **Sensory Considerations:**

- Modifying lighting, temperature, reducing noise levels, or providing quiet spaces for children who are sensitive to sensory overload.

- **Modifying uniform policies:**

Allowing for variations in uniform or clothing to accommodate sensory sensitivities or other needs.

- **Making objects more stable:**

Using non-slip mats, suction cups, or sloped boards to help children with motor difficulties manipulate objects.

- **Creating quiet spaces:**

Providing a designated quiet area or sensory room where children can retreat when feeling overwhelmed.

Teaching and Learning:

- **Providing visual aids:**

Using visual timetables, picture cards, or other visual supports to help children understand routines and instructions.

- **Giving clear and concise instructions:**

Breaking down instructions into smaller steps and using simple language, potentially paired with visual cues.

- **Offering differentiated activities:**

Adapting activities and materials to match the child's developmental level and learning style.

- **Providing extra time:**

Allowing extra time for tasks or activities, especially for children who need more processing time.

- **Using assistive technology:**

Providing tools like adapted cutlery, pencil grips, or communication devices to support the child's participation.

- **Encouraging movement breaks:**

Allowing regular movement breaks to help children regulate their energy levels and focus.

Social and Emotional Support:

- **Quiet Spaces:**

Providing designated quiet areas where children can retreat if they need a break from the group or are feeling overwhelmed.

- **Social Stories:**

Using social stories to help children understand social situations and expectations.

- **Buddy Systems:**

Pairing children with a supportive peer to help them navigate social situations or activities.

- **Flexible Routines:**

Adapting routines to accommodate individual needs, such as allowing children to enter or leave activities at different times.

Individualised Approach:

- **Collaboration:**

Working closely with parents, caregivers, and other professionals to understand the child's specific needs and preferences.

- **Flexibility:**

Being open to adjusting strategies and approaches as needed based on the child's progress and changing needs.

Important Considerations:

- **The Equality Act 2010:**

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e3237ed915d74e33f0ac9/Equality_Act_Advice_Final.pdf

Direct link to The Equality Act pdf

The Equality Act requires early years settings to make reasonable adjustments to avoid putting disabled children at a substantial disadvantage.

- **Anticipatory Duty:**

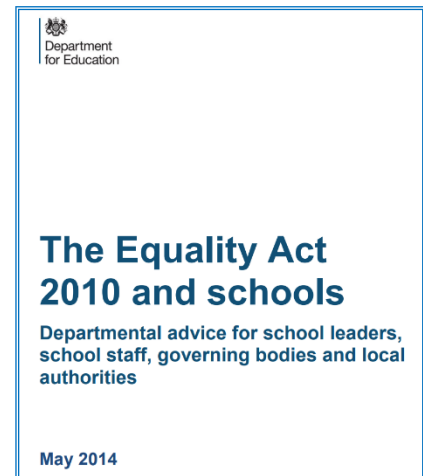
Settings should proactively consider potential barriers and make adjustments in advance.

- **Individualised Needs:**

Adjustments should be tailored to the specific needs of each child.

- **Cost and Practicality:**

While adjustments should be effective, they should also be reasonable in terms of cost and practicality.



It's important to remember that reasonable adjustments are individualised and should be developed in collaboration with the child, their parents, and other professionals involved in their care.

By implementing these reasonable adjustments, early years settings can create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all children can thrive and reach their full potential.

The New Ofsted Inspection Framework

November 2025 – Inclusion (Google AI)



The new Ofsted inspection framework, effective from **November 2025**, elevates inclusion from a general theme to a **standalone, graded evaluation area**. This change aims to provide a more detailed and nuanced assessment of how educational providers support all learners, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.

Key Aspects of Inclusion in the 2025 Framework

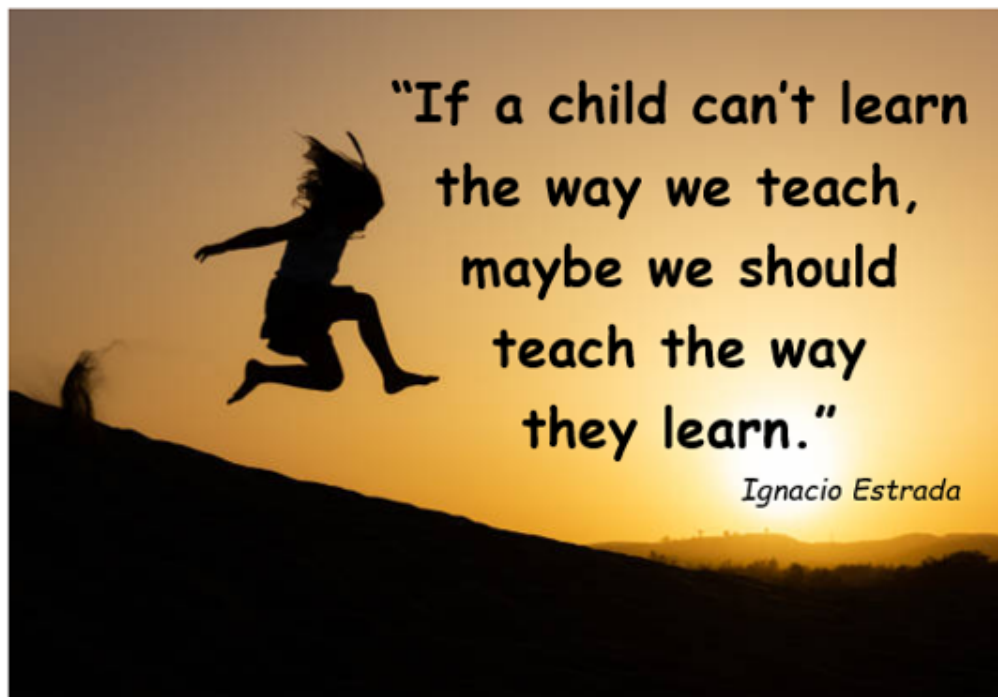
- **Standalone Evaluation Area:** "Inclusion" is now one of the core areas on which schools and other education providers will be explicitly graded using a new five-point scale (Urgent Improvement, Needs Attention, Expected Standard, Strong Standard, Exceptional).
- **Focus on Vulnerable Groups:** The framework places a sharper focus on how schools support specific groups, including:
 - Disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for pupil premium).
 - Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
 - Pupils known to or previously known to children's social care.
 - Pupils who may face other barriers to their learning or wellbeing, including those with protected characteristics.
- **Evidence of Impact:** Inspectors will be looking for practical evidence of impact, not just policies and paperwork. This includes:
 - How effectively barriers to learning are identified and removed.
 - The accessibility of the curriculum and the meaningfulness of adaptations.
 - The lived experience of inclusion from the perspective of learners, parents, and staff.
 - Impact on attendance, exclusions, and overall wellbeing data.
- **Threaded Throughout All Areas:** Inclusion will also be a key theme considered across all other evaluation areas, such as Curriculum and Teaching, Behaviour and Attitudes, and Leadership and Governance.
- **Role of SENDCo/Inclusion Leads:** These staff members are expected to play a more central role during inspections and will be directly involved in discussions about provision, strategy, and outcomes.

- **Contextual Considerations:** Inspectors will consider the unique context and circumstances of each provider, acknowledging local demographics and socio-economic conditions, to ensure a fairer evaluation.
- **Teacher Training (ITE):** Initial Teacher Education providers will be evaluated on how well they prepare trainees to teach pupils with SEND and from diverse backgrounds, ensuring inclusion is a central part of their training, not an add-on.

The changes signal a significant shift towards a more holistic view of education, where a culture of belonging and support for every pupil is considered fundamental to a school's effectiveness



For comprehensive information on the Education Inspection Framework: for use from November 2025 visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework/education-inspection-framework-for-use-from-november-2025>



Interventions in chronological order

1. Intensive interaction
2. Adult modelling
3. Play routines

Supporting Strategies -

4. Curiosity activities
5. Copy Box
6. 3 way joint attention activities

Supporting Strategies-

7. Adult led Table top First/Then/Finished activities
8. Adult led Turn Taking activities

Supporting Strategies-

- Supporting Strategies-
- Backward Chaining
 - Visual Communication
 - Attention Autism-Bucket Time

Intervention Timeline

The following interventions are chronologically ordered. Starting with the first strategies that can be instigated when SEND/Social Communication and Interaction differences have been identified.

1. Intensive Interaction

2. Adult Modelling

1. IEP Target example: child will engage with and share interactions with adult through **Intensive Interaction** on a daily basis (working on Social Interaction and Communication).

2. IEP Target example: Child will begin to observe and copy adult actions. When the child is observing or when they are engaged with activities of interest, the **adult will join the child alongside and model** language and extend play through their own actions. **(Working on Understanding, Cognition and Learning).**

3. Play routines

3. IEP Target example: child will begin to share attention and communicate using gestures, eye gaze and/or sounds or language while engaging in a motivating play routine. Adults will use simple, repetitive play routines using highly motivating activities to offer the child opportunities to communicate and interact. **(working on Joint Attention, Social Interaction and Communication).**

4. Curiosity activities

5. Copy Box

6. Three Way Joint Attention activities

4. IEP Target example: child will begin to share attention with an adult and take part in 1:1 time using **Curiosity activities** **(working on Joint Attention, Social Interaction and Communication).**

5. IEP Target example: child will select an item from the **Copy Box**, and share attention and interact with an adult through shared interest in the same toy.

Child or adult may copy the other's actions with the toy (child and adult will have same item each to play with). **(Working on Joint Attention, Social Interaction and Communication).**

6. IEP Target example: Child will begin to share **Three Way Joint Attention** with an adult using a highly motivating activity during 1:1 time. The activity will be adult led, and **child** will follow physical/verbal prompts and guidance from the adult when support is needed **(working on Joint attention, Social Interaction and Cognition and Learning).**

7. Adult led Tabletop First/Then activities

8. Adult led Turn-Taking

7. IEP Target example: child will begin to sit at a table and follow adult direction to complete highly motivating activities using a structured workstation model of First/Then/Finished **(working on Joint attention, Cognition and Learning).**

8. IEP Target example: Child will take part in a highly motivating activity with an adult, the adult will instigate **turn taking** with the components of the activity and will use physical/verbal prompts to support **child's** understanding **(working on Social Interaction and Communication, Cognition and Learning).**

Summary of Chronological Interventions



1. Intensive Interaction



2. Adult Modelling



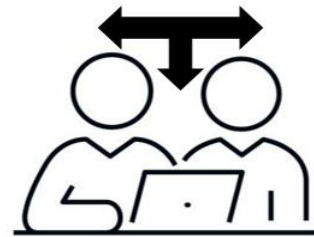
3. Play routines



4. Curiosity



5. Copy Box



6. 3 Way Joint Attention



7. Structured Table Top Activities



8. Turn-Taking Activities

1. Intensive Interaction



The Intensive Interaction approach involves creating moments of interaction with people who have communication needs, by imitating their behaviour, responding to them in a very highly responsive way, and mirroring what they do to communicate and interact with them.

The approach is based on the way we observe and respond to the actions and noises of babies and interpret these as communication. It helps a person and their communication partner to connect and enjoy each other's company more.

It's about watching closely how a child responds to different situations through their body language, voice, and facial expressions – and responding similarly to this.

Intensive Interaction is two-way communication and can be used at all times in all environments.

Intensive Interaction is an approach that can be used by everyone involved in supporting a child to interact with other people and develop communication skills in a natural, relaxed, and enjoyable way.

- Be available....be the most interesting thing in the room!
- Encourage your child's curiosity by being and playing alongside them.
- Watch...copy...wait...try again, be present in the moment.
- Have fun and enjoy....
- Model some movements and sounds yourself so that they can watch and may even copy you.
- Don't worry if, initially, you experience rejection...as you continue to offer these opportunities there will also be moments of success!

Useful YouTube links that demonstrate Intensive Interaction:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V5A6mSZew0> – Intensive interaction
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjKxu6QKjAo> - Intensive interaction

2. Adult Modelling actions and play



Modelling refers to the practice of teachers/care givers demonstrating how to perform a skill or think through a concept before the child has a go themselves. Modelling can also include introducing new concepts to a child already engaged in an activity to support and extend the development of learning experiences.

Effective modelling techniques can help young children become fully engaged in their learning experiences and confident in their own learning capabilities.

Modelling can be used in all stages to help learn a new skill, undertake a task more effectively in terms of the success criteria, develop thinking skills, and thought processes etc. Task modelling occurs when the teacher/care giver demonstrates a task the child will be expected to do on their own.

So, for example,

- You may join a child who is observing or taking part in water play at a water play table and begin to scoop up water in a jug and tip it into a funnel. You may accompany your actions with the words 'scoop' and 'tip'.
- You may join a child on the carpet who is lining up Lego bricks and collect some bricks of your own and begin to fix the bricks together to build a tower.

• **Other top modelling tips**

- Model play ideas for interacting with unfamiliar items/activities, or model ways to extend a child's play experience.
- Model positive actions to the child and verbally label: "Good sitting"
- Model problem solving when given a task: "I can't open it. Ah – pull here."
- Model what to do when stuck by trying or saying "help".
- Rather than tell a child to do something, model an action and explain the reasoning: "It's cold. I'm going to put on my coat."
- Model using communication aids for pre-verbal children. Hand over a picture of raisins at snack and say, "I want raisins".
- Try different activities and foods so children can see that trying new things is okay.
- Listen attentively and react positively to activities and stories – enthusiasm is contagious!

3. Play routines

How does play help with communication and language development?

Play supports language in so many ways, when children play, they learn to interact and express themselves. Play offers a low stress environment. This allows children to interact with others while practicing their language skills and building on their ever-expanding vocabulary.



How are play routines different from play activities?

A play routine is similar to a play activity because they are fun and interactive and allow for bonding, creativity, stimulation, and problem solving. However, a play routine is different than a play activity. Play activities do not have to intentionally follow a predictable order. They are not necessarily designed to trigger something to happen. A play routine, unlike a play activity, has been constructed to embed the learning through its actual structure. Each play routine should have a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning is marked by something that triggers the child to think, "We're starting something new and exciting." The middle is the real heart of the play and the longest part of the routine. This is also where you can challenge the child a bit because he is most likely warmed up and fully engaged in the play. At the end, the child is alerted that the play is soon ending based on a predictable action, word, or song. This should give your child time to process that it's time to clean up and get ready for the next event. It is in these play routines where you can embed language learning techniques.

Too often adults try to target too many new things all at once. This is overwhelming for both the child and the adult. The beauty about play routines is that the learning is facilitated in an organised fashion. And, once you become familiar you can create your own play routines with your child!

How do play routines facilitate language development in children?

A play routine is a purposeful way of playing and interacting with a child that follows a simple sequence. It involves predictability, repetition, and of course, lots of fun! Many toddlers like knowing what to expect because it gives them a sense of comfort, security, and control. When toddlers can anticipate what comes next, they are more likely to socially interact and communicate.

Having a routine implies that there is some repetition. Repetition allows for practice and multiple opportunities to acquire a new skill. Just like when we are learning something new (like playing the piano) we have to continually practice in order to do better; children who are not talking need that same preparation.

Also, repetition is not boring to toddlers. In fact, many of them love it! Have you ever noticed that your child likes to read the same book over and over again? Or, that he likes to play with the same toy all the time?

What is it?

The idea of play routines is to introduce simple, repetitive language and actions around a set activity and reinforce the idea that it is okay to go, do and then finish the activity. This helps children to develop and extend their play skills and language. The play routine is often introduced and finished using a first and then board and activity cards. When starting out it is often best to use a simple, uncomplicated and enjoyable activity with a quick exchange of turns if turn-taking is the focus

How do I do it?

Ready, steady....Go!

Create a simple play routine using the repetitive language of 'ready, steady...go!' Building anticipation by pausing between steady and go once the routine has been repeated several times and established. By allowing time with a pause, you are offering the child an opportunity to instigate the next step by verbalising, reaching, or using eye gaze etc. This simple strategy highlights the need for reciprocal communication in a communicative interaction, the very first steps towards conversation. Ideal activities for this strategy could be blowing bubbles, rolling a ball backwards and forwards to each other, simple cause, and effect activities. You can also create a play routine in this fashion using simple, familiar nursery rhymes or songs that your child enjoys such as 'Row, row, row your boat' and pausing at the same moments in the song to see if your child will attempt to fill in the missing word or phrase. Action songs can work well in the same fashion as they do not require verbal communication. Any items, toys or songs used will need to be highly motivating to your child so that they are motivated to share time and space with you.

Turn-Taking

Choose an activity that the child prefers and introduce a play routine (see example below) with a set phrase e.g., "build a tower" or "music time" and show the appropriate activity card (if you are using visual pictures to support communication), then play a simple repetitive game. Whilst pointing to the activity card, gain the child's attention using their name and the set phrase e.g. "Name, build a tower" and encourage them over to a quiet area. Once their stack 2 bricks while repeating "build a tower" then hand one to the child saying, "Name's turn, build a tower", support this to be successful by using physical prompts and/or gestures, then have a turn e.g., "Sarah's turn, build a tower"



quickly followed by Name's again (same language). When there are 5 blocks in total, start counting down, with waiting time so the child has time to make eye contact. Build up the excitement in your voice "5...4...3...2...1...CRASH" using your own or child's hand (as appropriate) to knock the tower down. Repeat. Finish the game before the child loses interest using "build a tower, finished" with clear gesture and remove activity card from the board. Communication boards: If you are using communication boards with your child, use this to model language that goes with the activity. Point to each symbol as you say the word/phrase e.g., 'more', 'blocks', and 'knock it down'. What next? Put out the equipment/resources used in the play routine as a

free play activity to allow the child to use the rehearsed skills and ideas independently. Build up a range of different play routines to introduce different skills.

It is worth remembering that if you are using a toy or item that a child has already established a pre-conceived way of play it may prove problematic to try and change the way the toy is used or interacted with. For example, if your child loves to lie on the floor by themselves and line up building blocks systematically, you may be met with resistance if you suddenly invite your child to come and sit with you and take turns with the bricks and building a tower! It is often easier to introduce a new, highly motivating activity so that you can establish that you are part of the activity and also how the activity is going to be used.

Choices

You can also give your child choices within an activity that has components- for example; 'do you want red or yellow' (brick) when it is their turn to participate if you are building a tower? - To elicit a particular word from him. There are SO many ways to model and elicit language during a simple, favourite play routine! It doesn't have to be complicated to be fun!

Useful video links to support the above strategies: YouTube: -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuOOR48aN6Y> - Play routines.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hIXvfxaa4Q> ready, steady, GO play routines.

4. Curiosity activities

Start with what your child enjoys doing... emptying and filling, building up and knocking down, posting, sprinkling, unwrapping, sorting, and lining up. The idea is to encourage your child to become curious about what you have or what you are doing. It is not a teaching opportunity per say, so you would not begin to count the items you are using or label colours etc., but more of a shared interesting experience between you and your child using materials/items that motivate your child to be curious.

To do this you will need....

- To be the most interesting thing in the room!
- A range of exciting everyday items to conceal in a range of visually appealing containers.
- To entice them yourself with a peek into a tin and encourage their sense of curiosity to explore.



Here is an egg box filled with pom-poms (you can use different types of items dependant on what you think would interest or motivate your child). You could firstly demonstrate by opening the box, playing quietly by yourself alongside your child. You could empty out the pom-poms, throw them in the air then put them back in and replace the lid. Leave the box within reach of your child but try not to push it towards them and don't worry if they ignore the first few attempts. You can always try something else!

There is no right or wrong way for your child to respond. If they decide to pick the box up and drop it so that everything falls out, you respond with interest and curiosity too! Don't be tempted to guide what happens and how the curiosity box, bag or container is used.



These ones are simply containers of coloured lolly sticks and pipe cleaners, which are surprisingly effective in developing curiosity, attention, and focus. These everyday items when presented in interesting containers appear very different to their normal use, they become great sprinkling toys!

For each box or bag, keep to one type of materials e.g., Straws, foil, pasta, or beads. This will keep the activity simple and also help you to know what your child enjoys exploring. When you know this, you can work with variations of similar things e.g., if they like exploring pasta you could introduce a box with lentils, tapioca, or rice.



Remember that very young children often do not yet understand object permanence, so you may need to start off with clear containers/bags etc., then move on to solid-coloured containers. You should aim to do x3 boxes/containers daily (these could be done at 1:1/focus time.) The containers could be placed in a decorated bag or box and brought out and explored one at a time.

Curiosity time is best delivered in a quiet, distraction free area or room with just you and your child.

5. Copy box



A Copy Box is a DOUBLE set of toys, presented to a child in a large container. The kind of toy you put in the copy box is relevant to the child's developmental needs and also what interests and motivates them to engage. The idea is to play with your child by offering the box, WAITING to see what your child chooses to do, and then copying alongside your child with the duplicate piece of equipment, and copying your child's actions.

This is a fantastic way to initiate conversation between peers or adults. The duplicate items allow for mirroring and positive modelling of interactions with objects and others in a gentle manner.

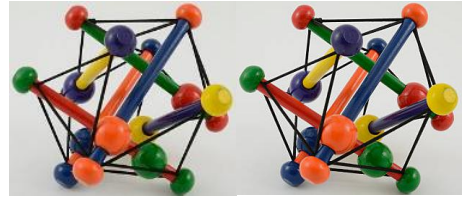
Copying is a very important skill to practise as it encourages eye contact and allows the adult and child to socialise together. It is good for children to take the lead in their play, and it provides valuable opportunities for adults to add simple language/gestures, and sometimes extend or develop the child's play skills.

A copy box could contain:

2 sensory balls 2 cars 2 popping circles 2 shakers 2 spinning tops 2 bead puzzles 2 mirrors

The list could be endless. You could even create different themed boxes based on child's interest or introduce toys or items that are unfamiliar to the child, offering you the opportunity to model the use of the toy or item to support their understanding of how to go about using them.





Who might benefit?

Copy boxes are particularly useful for children who tend to play on their own and don't easily respond to playful attention from adults or other children. How to use

- Put together a copy box that's likely to interest the child you have in mind.
- Show the child the box and its contents.
- Get down onto the same level as the child- if he/she is on the floor sit there together.
- Sitting opposite will allow for more opportunities to make eye contact, but some children find it easier if the adult sits alongside.
- Follow the child's lead; copy what he or she does.
- Don't ask questions. Use brief, simple language to describe what the child and you are doing e.g., "brushing hair".
- Some children may be more relaxed if you copy quietly.

What to watch for: -

- The child may look at you or show in some other way that they have noticed you are copying them.
- Once the child gets used to being copied in this way, he or she may keep looking at what you are doing.
- He or she may begin to pause and wait for you to copy. This is the beginning of turn taking,

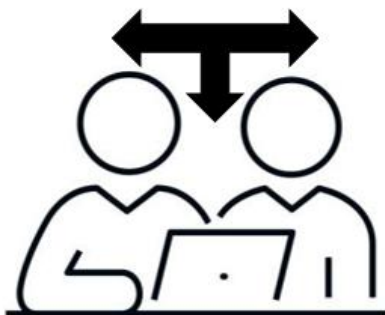
What next: -

- Try adding a little something to the play, something similar to what the child's just done, then pause and see if he or she copies you.



Create a relaxed enjoyable atmosphere and have fun!

6. Three-way joint attention activities



To begin working on joint attention and following an adults lead you will need to have a box of highly motivating activities put aside to use only at focus/1:1 time. It will be best to work with your child in a quiet, distraction free area/room, preferably the same area each day. Each activity that you use will need to have components that you can use to lead the activity; for example, the noisy shape sorter pictured.

You can sit on the floor with your child and hand each shape to your child one at a time (if all the shapes are readily available to your child, they are likely to take them all and complete the activity without your involvement, which is not the end goal!)

If your child is ready to sit at table to do the activities, then this could be your starting point.

It will be important to use activities that your child does not have free access to during the day as they will be less motivated to share the activity with you at 1:1 time. You may need some activities that your child does not have a pre-existing way of playing with. For example, if you choose building blocks and your child is used to lying on the carpet and sequencing them in a row and you decide that you would like them to stack them in a tower as you hand the bricks to them one by one you may be met with resistance! It will also be important that you set the tone for the activity, this could be that you take the first turn to demonstrate how the activity is done. You may also need to support your child by using prompts initially so that they are confident about how to complete the activities (see YouTube clip below for examples).

It will be important to have realistic expectations for your child when it comes to the amount of time/how many activities you do with your child. If your child is enjoying the activities don't be tempted to keep going until they get fed up or bored and leave the table voluntarily. Assess what is a good time frame for them to be able to successfully complete the tasks you have in mind and perhaps finish with a fun activity such as bubbles where they can move around and interact with you and the bubbles.

Be consistent with your approach and techniques so that daily 1:1 time becomes predictable, and expectations are clearly communicated in this way.

YouTube links to support three-way joint attention:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng3j8zIZRD8> using prompts.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-c50HnNpg0> joint attention play

7. Adult led Tabletop First/Then/Finished activities

First/Then/Finished workstation

Daily 1:1 time using the structured model of First/Then trays, a Finished box, a screen or quiet area, motivating activities, a picture sequence strip representing the activities to be completed and the order in which they are to be done (see examples below).

When working with your child you should try to reduce your language to functional language/instructions only. Say your child's name first, then give the instruction (sequence your language so that you give instructions in the order they are expected to happen e.g., John first puzzle then bubbles'. Initially all activities used at the workstation will need to be highly motivating while your child is learning the meaning of the system. Over time this can be moderated to first an expected activity then a reward activity.



Example Sequence strip of activities

Useful YouTube links to support three-way joint attention:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwBHCPbo5C8> - Matching work systems

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-uf1Xclt4> - First/Then structured working

8. Adult led Turn-Taking

To begin working on turn-taking with your child you will need to be sure that they are able to share joint attention with you and an activity (3-way joint attention). It is always best to work with your child in a quiet, distraction free area and at a time when you know your child is going to be receptive. For example, if your child has just come in from outside and is very lively and excited it would not be a good time to ask them to sit down with you and focus on an activity that you want to share with them! If your child comes into the playroom in the morning and always plays with a specific toy right away it would not be a good idea to attempt to get them to leave the preferred activity to come and join you. It is always better to build new activities into an established routine and try to communicate this to the



child beforehand to prepare them. Remember that routines are a form of communication, they also become familiar to your child and therefore predictable which can be helpful to an anxious child with communication differences. If you have already established a regular time for focus 1:1 time, then that would probably be a good time to introduce the concept of turn-taking. In fact, it will probably be the next step on from a well-established strategy that you have successfully embedded with your child. Remember that everything you are asking your child to do needs to be achievable so think about their skill set when you are planning your activities. Can they sit on a chair at a table? Would it be better to sit on the carpet? Do you need a rug or carpet square to show the child where to sit? What are their favourite characters and interests? Can you build these into the activities that you are going to use? What type of activities does your child particularly like to do; puzzles, posting, cause and effect, cars, dinosaurs etc.?

The activities that you use for the purpose of turn taking will need to be highly motivating to your child to encourage them to engage with you and stay focused. You may need to introduce some new activities so that your child doesn't have a pre-conceived way of using the toys/activities. The activities that you use for turn taking will need to be kept aside and only used when you are working with your child. If the child has free access to the toys throughout the day, they are less likely to want to come and share them with you and play with them in a specific way. It is a good idea to use activities that are simple and offer a quick exchange of turns. Remember to take the first turn to establish that you are going to take part in the activity and use verbal/physical prompts to support your child as is necessary. You will need to keep control over the pieces/components of the activity so that the child doesn't take over the activity and complete it without your involvement. You could do this by placing puzzle pieces into a bag, using a box, or simply passing a shape to your child to take their turn. Remember that the end goal is turn taking so don't hyper focus on teaching colours, shapes, objects etc., there is no harm in labelling these things as you go along if your child enjoys doing this.

Remember to have realistic expectations about the amount of time that you spend doing the activities. It is important that it is enjoyable and that you both have fun together, your child is much more likely to want to come and join you again when invited if the experience is positive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDS9PsS86C8> turn taking.

Supporting Strategies



3. The following strategies can be introduced once you feel your child is ready to sustain joint attention and follow adult direction: -

- Visual Communication
- Backward Chaining
- Attention Autism-Bucket Time

• Visual Communication-

Developing relationships through communication and sharing experiences supports personal, social, and emotional development. Being able to connect socially as well as use language to explain ideas and share thinking with others is central to successful learning in all areas. We therefore need to seriously consider when we introduce alternative means of communication for our children with social communication differences. The most important consideration is what type of alternative communication is your child ready to engage with and understand? Below is a chronological list of communication supports. One of the most important considerations when introducing visual communication should be; can your child share joint attention and if so, do they understand picture representation?

Objects of reference –

Objects of reference are real objects, such as a nappy for changing time, coat for outside, beaker for drink time etc., that are used to show your child preceding an activity that is due to take place. As with other visual communication systems you would build up a bank of objects to represent key activities that your child is expected to take part in.

1. Object & picture reference –

Introducing pictures alongside the objects that you have been using, working towards transitioning your child onto visual pictures.



Examples of objects of reference



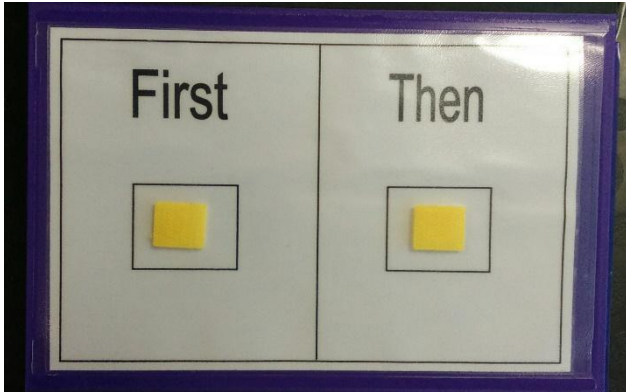
Object of reference timetable (pictures can be added in a Velcro sequence over the top of the objects to support object/picture transition).



Object, picture reference

- **Visual pictures/photographs –**

Visual pictures, usually photographs taken within the setting (with the written word underneath) used to represent daily activities that take place, and that the child takes part in. These pictures can be sequenced on two parts First/Then/Finished timetable folder.



YouTube clip demonstrating the use of First/Then/Finished visual timetable:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-uf1XcIt4> – Using First/Then visual boards.

N.B. when using different forms of visual communication tools in your setting, such as timetables, key ring cards, prompt cards around the environment, it is important that there is continuity in symbol representation. For example, if you have a 'stop' sign as a prompt around the school, make sure that the 'stop' sign on your key ring cards is identical.

• Last is First in Backward Chaining

Often when we teach a child a new skill we start at the beginning, move through the sequence of steps, and finish with the last step. Backward chaining is the reverse of this. Backward chaining involves teaching the last step first, moving backwards through the sequence of steps, and concluding with the first step, slowly reducing the amount of adult support/prompting as we go.



Benefits to Backward Chaining

Backward chaining allows a child to experience instant success every time. As each step is achieved independently, a child completes a newly taught step immediately, followed by the steps they have already successfully learnt. This reduces the expectation of completing the whole task all at once independently (which can often feel overwhelming), breaking down the task into small achievable steps gives the child a sense of success each time. This feeling of success increases their confidence and keeps them motivated to learn and complete the entire sequence of steps.

Example of Backward Chaining

To teach a child to put on their own socks, you might break down the steps as:

1. Pick up the sock.
2. Put it over the toes.
3. Pull it up to the heel.
4. Pull the sock up over the heel to the ankle.
5. Pull it all the way up to the knee.

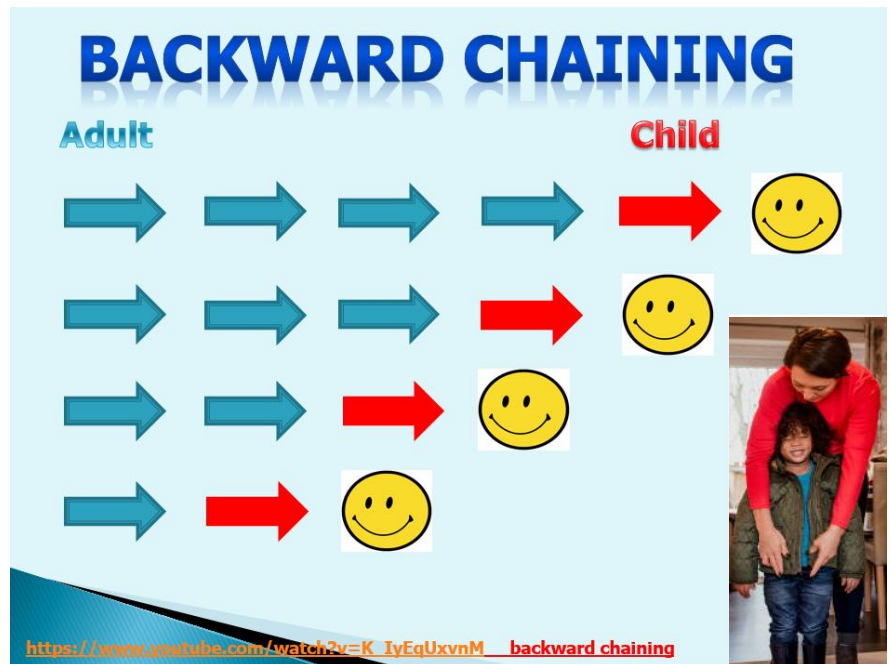
To start with, the adult would do steps one through four, with the child expected to do step 5, pull the sock up to the knee (this may initially require a physical prompt too). When that can be done consistently by the child, the adult would do steps 1 to 3, with the child pulling the sock up over the heel to the ankle. As the child becomes comfortable with each step, the step before it is introduced, always with the goal of having the child *finish* the task successfully.

Think about ways you can support success of the task, for instance, with the above task using a loose-fitting pair of socks would support success rather than a harder tighter fitting pair of socks.

Use physical prompts if necessary to show your child how to go about doing their 'step' in the task and then reduce the physical prompts as they understand how to go about their step.

Backward chaining can also be used to teach children all sorts of independence skills such as how to get dressed or undressed.

For example, at the end of the day when it is time to undress you would start by removing all your child's clothing and then let them put the clothes into the washing basket. Next time, you would take off all your child's clothing except for the last item and let them complete the task by taking off the last item themselves and putting all the clothes into the wash basket. With repetition and over a period of time the end goal would be that the child will be able to completely undress and put their clothes where they belong independently.



Definition:

When teaching life skills to children with special needs, it refers to breaking down task into small, achievable steps and teaching them each step in reverse order. This gives the child an experience of success and completion with every attempt. Instead of the child starting at the beginning and getting lost somewhere through, with the adult having to complete the task, the adult does all but the last step and lets the child complete the work. Then the adult fades back, doing less and less while the child does more, always ending with the child performing the final step.

We can use backward chaining to support a child with attending a structured group activity (such as circle time) in nursery if they are struggling to attend for the whole of the session. You would start by picking a realistic amount of time for them to attend towards the end of the activity so that they successfully attend to the end with their peers. You would then gradually, over a period of time, begin to build up the amount of time they attend by joining the group at an earlier point.

This is especially effective in reducing the potential for inadvertently re-enforcing challenging behaviour by joining the activity at the beginning and the child being unable to attend for the duration, then being removed from the activity when they can no longer sustain attention. The child may quickly learn what behaviour instigates the exit!

YouTube clip demonstrating backward chaining:

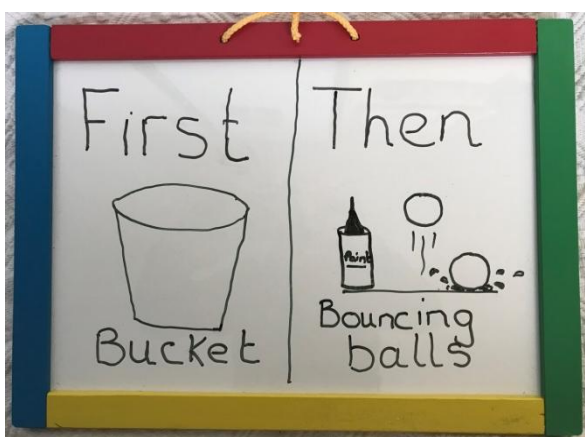
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_IyEqUxvnM - Backward chaining

the children, such as what the toy is, what it is doing (spinning, jumping frog etc.) Once the toy has been presented it should be placed back in the bucket and a new toy brought out.

The sessions should be timetabled into your children's daily routine and take place 4 or 5 times a week. Adults should start by showing 3 things in quick succession from the bucket, with the aim of building up to 3-4 minutes of engaged attention. The goal is for the children to show interest in the activities and to look frequently at them. Attention to the adult or maintained eye contact are not necessarily required. Nor are the children expected to verbally comment. It is a good idea to have supporting adults within the group of children who will 'model' interest and enthusiasm as the activities take part and guide the children away from touching the toys/activities.

When the majority of the group is happy, relaxed and show anticipation and interest when the session starts, they are ready to move onto stage 2.

Stage 2: The Attention Builder (sustain attention)



Stage 2 introduces the group to highly motivating and visually appealing activities.

The main goal is to build up and sustain attention for longer periods of time.

These activities can often be sensory based and messy so a large shower curtain spread onto the floor can protect the floor and also make clearing up easier!

Activities can include ideas such as the one mentioned below:


- **Shaving foam castles;** using flowerpots. Place 3 to 4 flowerpots upside down (these pots will need to be without holes.) Squirt shaving foam onto the upturned bottoms of the pots (perhaps topping off the shaving foam with different coloured food colourings) then forcefully place another upturned pot (with holes in the bottom) onto the shaving foam pots, as if stacking them together, and watch the foam shoot out through the holes of the pots!

Again, the activities should be presented by the adult enthusiastically, with fun and enjoyment in mind! The focus is on engagement; in whatever way the child demonstrates this.



YouTube clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jiv5ylt-Ak> Attention Autism Stages 1, 2 & 3

Summary – Top Tips



Top Tips:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

Top Tips to begin engaging with your ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) child: -

So here are our top tips; firstly, remember that each autistic person is different and unique and what motivates and engages one ASD child may not motivate and engage another. It is therefore important to firstly begin to recognise what motivates your child and what activities or items your child is engaging with.

Even though every autistic person can learn to communicate, it's not always through spoken language. Non-verbal autistic individuals have much to contribute to society and can live fulfilling lives with the help of visual supports and assistive technologies.

Strategies for promoting language and interaction development in autistic children:

Imitate your child (sometimes known as Intensive Interaction)-Mimicking your child's sounds and play behaviours will encourage more vocalising and interaction. It also encourages your child to copy you and take turns. Make sure you imitate *how* your child is playing – so long as it's a positive behaviour. For example, when your child rolls a car, you roll a car. If he or she crashes the car, you crash yours too. But don't imitate throwing the car!

Focus on non-verbal communication- Gestures and eye contact can build a foundation for language. Encourage your child by modelling and responding to these behaviours. Exaggerate your gestures. Use both your body and your voice when communicating – for example, by extending your hand to point when you say "look" and nodding your head when you say "yes." When asking your child to sit down on a chair you might say 'Jason sit' and pat the chair with your hand. Use gestures that are easy for your child to understand and imitate. Examples include clapping, opening hands, reaching out arms, etc. Respond to your child's gestures: When he/she looks at or points to a toy, hand it to her or take the cue for *you* to play with it; similarly, point to a toy you want before picking it up.

There are many forms of communication, not just language. When you are looking for a communicative response from your child remember to watch your child's physical responses such as, reaching for, moving an arm or leg, a fleeting eye gaze, a vocalisation and reward it with a response of your own. Respond promptly, the promptness of your response helps your child feel the power of communication.

Remember behaviour usually is communication! What is successful will usually be repeated whether it is appropriate behaviour or not. Try not to respond to a negative or unwanted behaviour (as much as is safely possible). Reward positive desired behaviour with an acknowledgement or response.

Leave “space” for your child to talk- It’s natural to feel the urge to fill in language when a child doesn’t immediately respond. But it’s so important to give your child lots of opportunities to communicate, even if he/she isn’t talking. When you ask a question or see that your child wants something, pause for several seconds while looking at him expectantly. Be aware that each ASD person has different language processing requirements. Try to gauge how long your child usually takes to process and respond to verbal communication, don’t be tempted to repeat questions too quickly as this may mean that your child then has to begin re-processing and de-coding what you have said all over again!

Simplify your language- Doing so helps your child follow what you’re saying. It also makes it easier for him/her to imitate your speech. If your child is non-verbal, try speaking mostly in single words. (If he/she is playing with a ball, you say “ball” or “roll.”) If your child is using single words, up the ante. Speak in short 2 key word phrases, such as “roll ball” or “throw ball.” Keep following this “one-up” rule: Generally, use phrases with one more word than your child is using. Remember to say your child’s name first to gain their attention (even if they do not look to you or appear to respond) and then give an instruction e.g. Jason sit’. Sequence your language in the order that you would like the child to complete the tasks in hand e.g., Jason first puzzle then iPad’.

Follow your child’s interests- Rather than interrupting your child’s focus, follow along with words. Using the one-up rule, narrate what your child is doing. If he’s playing with a shape sorter, you might say the word “in” when he puts a shape in its slot. You might say “shape” or “square” when he holds it. By talking about what engages your child, you’ll help him learn the associated vocabulary (labelling).

Encourage play and social interaction- Children learn through play, and that includes learning language. Interactive play provides shared enjoyment and the potential to create opportunities for you and your child to communicate. Use activities that include your child’s special interest if possible. Cause and effect toys are usually effective and also offer opportunities to verbally label items, colours, numbers, shapes etc. Also try playful activities that promote social interaction e.g., singing, reciting nursery rhymes and gentle rough and tumble. During your interactions, position yourself in front of your child and close to eye level – so it’s easier for your child to see and hear you.

Use simple play routines- Play routines are a great way of offering your child the opportunity to join in. They need to be fun, simple, and repetitive. For example, blowing bubbles; you might use ‘ready, steady, go!’ and then blow the bubbles. You would repeat this several times and then begin to pause after saying ‘ready, steady...’ to see if your child responds with the word ‘go!’, or an action (reaching for the bubbles) or eye gaze (making eye contact with you) to indicate they want you to blow the bubbles. They may show anticipation

by pursing their lips, in each instance this should instigate your response, and they should be rewarded with bubbles!

Offering guided choices- While interacting through activities with your child try to establish from the start that you are going to be part of the activity and lead from the start. Keep control over the items involved (you could put puzzle pieces into a bag or box for example) in the activity and offer each piece in turn.

If you have chosen to use a shape posting activity you could offer guided choices; offering a choice of two shapes for the child to select a preference and post e.g., ‘square or circle?’ (If they know their shapes) or ‘red or yellow?’ (If they know their colours) when the child reaches for one they can take it and post it (you can also verbally label their choice as they take the item to confirm their selection).

Turn-Taking- Introduce the concept of turn-taking when you feel your child is ready. After all social interaction requires the art of turn-taking! The activity you choose will need to be motivating, perhaps based around a special interest. It will need to be simple and offer the opportunity for a quick exchange of turns; for example, posting shapes, stacking bricks. You will need to lead the activity and keep control over any pieces that are used for the activity. Use structured, repetitive language e.g., ‘(adult’s name) Julie’s turn’ ‘(child’s name) Jason’s turn’ using a physical prompt to indicate which person you are referring to (placing your hand on your chest or pointing to yourself when it is your turn and vice versa). Once this skill has been learnt through play it can be transposed into other areas of communication and learning.

Use objects of reference to communicate to your child- This is the first form of visual communication you can begin to use and requires no significant preparation! Use real objects relevant to the activity you are about to do to communicate visually to your child; for example, you might show your child a puzzle piece and a DVD and say, “Jason first puzzle then DVD”. You can begin to generalise this into other everyday activities; showing them a nappy to indicate it is changing time, car keys to indicate you are going out in the car etc. It is important to use the same item each time to represent an activity, so if you are going to use a bowl to represent snack time you should use the same bowl each time (some children will need you to use the exact same item, including colour).

Lastly, remember to play with joy! Lose your inhibitions and enjoy what you are doing. You will need to provide an irresistible invitation for your child to join you!

Using a One-page Profile

One of the first steps to meeting the needs of a SEND child is to begin working with them closely to get to know them. This period of 'getting to know you' is an important time for gathering useful information to form a 'One page profile'.

It will also be important, as part of the information gathering process, to discuss with parents' information that they feel is important for people to know when working closely with their child.

"A detailed assessment of need should ensure that a full range of an individual's needs is identified, not simply the primary need.

The support provided to an individual should always be based on a full understanding of their particular strengths and need and seeking to address them all".

SEND Code of Practice: 96

A one-page profile is a simple summary of what is important to your child, strategies that work well when supporting the child, things that are specific and unique to that child that people who work closely with them need to know. The profile should provide a snapshot of the important information on a single sheet of paper.

All staff who are involved in supporting and working with the child should have a good understanding of the child's profile of strengths, differences, and specific strategies so that they can provide support for the child to be able to access participation and learning.

One-page profiles should be readily accessible to all staff who are working with the particular child, so that if a staff member is asked to work with your child on a particular day, they can read the profile and understand specific strategies that work well and be able to successfully support and engage with them.

The profiles should be 'live' documents that are regularly updated to reflect the current, relevant information on the child in question.

Please see the guidance for a One Page Profile below, as well as the blank version for you to use if you wish, you may already have a version of your own that you prefer to use.

One Page Profile Guidance

NAME: Date of birth: Class:		Curriculum support faculty Student passport Faculty liaison: <i>[name]</i> Last updated: <i>[date]</i>		Insert school logo	
I would like you to know that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • This means that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 		I find it difficult to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 		Add specific areas that are difficult, with a focus on in-class learning but also practical challenges that staff need to keep in mind.	
It would support me if you could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 		I will support myself by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 		Highlight teaching and learning strategies and practical support, as agreed in prior discussions.	
Additional support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		Data and attainment information		Provide details of the support you provide, such as SALT 2x30 sessions per week, in-class TA support or LEGO therapy once a week. Ensure this information is specific and quantified.	

Pupil Passport - blank (one page profile)

NAME:	Pupil Passport		<i>Previous Settings:</i> SoLT: OT:
	Date of birth: --/--/----	Nursery	Last updated:
photograph		Things that I like: • • • • • •	What do people need to know I find difficult: • • • • •
Logo		At home: Eating: Sleeping: Toileting/hygiene:	How do I show this? • •
How do I enjoy learning: • • •		How do I communicate? • • •	
Sensory experiences that I enjoy: • • • •		Notes (staff to add):	

Inclusive Practice in your Setting





Top Tips for creating an Inclusive Environment

Every child should have an equal chance of learning, regardless of whether they have a disability or special need. This could mean that the physical classroom environment is altered to meet the needs and fully include SEND children, or the teaching style and social society of the class are modified. Breaking down any barriers to learning and achievement should be at the heart of inclusion.

An inclusive environment is an environment that everyone can access regardless of need, learning style and ability. Materials and activities that are on offer are presented in different forms and for different abilities. Communication is also accessible in different formats. SEND is not a bolt on but an integral part of everyday learning and play.

Inclusive practice is a teaching approach that recognises the differences between students and uses this to ensure that all students can access educational content and participate fully in **learning**. It understands that no two pupils are the same and ensures that lessons and activities accommodate this. An **inclusive environment** is one where everyone feels valued.

Classroom

If you have children with specific SEND or disability needs, consider whether the strategies you are putting in place could make learning more positive for the class as a whole. This will not only help to make the

children you initially need to support feel more included with the rest of the children, but could also ease learning for others in ways that you would never have considered before.

For example, some pupils with dyslexia find it difficult to read pure black text on a pure white background. By avoiding black and white on your posters, displays, worksheets and signs, you will also make it much easier for all the children to access the classroom and any activities you set them. Generally, children with mild dyslexic traits often go undiagnosed, so you will be helping more students in the class than you may realise.

Don't be tempted to put out too many resources all at once, sometimes less is more. It is far better to balance the activities to engage and attract your little learners than to put out loads of different activities all at once in the hopes that something will attract them. Rotating activities is also a good idea, even during the day. So that things stay fresh and interesting. Making sure that activities are accessible to all styles of learning is also important.

One broad change you can make that will support both SEND children, and those without particular needs, is to create an environment of organization. Most children find organizing their equipment, space and time a struggle, and so anything you implement for specific children should be encouraged throughout the classroom too.

Clearly defined areas

Having an organised, predictable environment is environmental communication. To make a setting less confusing and more predictable, it is a good idea to have clearly defined areas for different activities. It should be obvious what each area is used for. So, for instance you could have a construction area, book corner, quiet area, floor play area, tabletop play area and these areas would be permanent fixtures in your room, staying in the same place. Make good use of any screens or separators to establish these separate areas. You may use different coloured tables for different activities, it is also a good idea to label areas with words and photographs of what they are used for. The addition of a large communication board, relevant to the areas function is also recommended as well as a large First, Then, finished 2-part timetable fixed to the wall or partition of each area. Practitioners should avoid changing areas around, as this is likely to be confusing or distressing for some children.

Many children feel more secure if they know exactly where they will sit. Consider giving children their own cushion or a carpet tile marked with their name for carpet sessions. By doing this for all children you can avoid singling out the SEND child. Where children attend a setting for a full day, you might prefer them to be able to choose where they sit for lunch, rather than having fixed places. Be sensitive to the needs of the SEND child, however, who may prefer to sit in the same place each day and may even find it difficult if the children sitting next to them change from day to day.

If children do not have fixed places, they can at least be given their own place mats, with their names or photographs, and then it is clear where each will sit, even if this is not in the same spot each day.

Labelling up coat pegs with names and photographs in the cloakroom area is also a good idea, give consideration to certain children's peg position; if a child struggles with crowded busy areas make sure that their coat peg is *positioned on the end*.

Create a calm, focused and unique learning environment.

Creating a calm environment in a classroom is often half the battle with teaching, we all know that a calmer environment can lead to enhanced learning for some and encourage social interaction. So, what can you do to nurture a more relaxed, calm atmosphere?

First of all, make sure that your classroom is fully resourced with toys, objects and opportunities which can soothe, and provide comfort, in times of distress or sensory overload. Fiddly items such as fidget spinners, Blu Tac, pipe cleaners and squeeze toys should be kept close at hand. Although you must try and keep items that specifically meet the requirements of children with IEP statements, do not underestimate how such objects could help to relax the rest of your children too. Just make sure you set some ground rules with how they can be used to make sure they are not abused.



Another important action you can take is to think of ways you can make the classroom feel and look more comfortable to play and learn in. If possible, consider different seating options in various areas of your room. Think about beanbag seats, rocking chairs, deckchairs, cushions, benches, stuffed footstools, armchairs, and even upturned buckets to give the classroom a softer edge, and a greater sense of relaxing homeliness. The same can be said for controlling the type of light in the environment, such as using only some banks of light whilst turning off others. Also, do not forget that comfort can be ruined by sound, and so consider ways you can reduce, or prepare your pupils for noises. Perhaps you can offer earplugs or headphones, fit sound proofing, sound clouds or carpeting where possible, and talk about fire drills with your children well before time so that they are prepared as much as is possible for the sudden loud noise of a fire alarm.

Create safe spaces



Most pupils, regardless of need or ability, react positively when there are safe or special places they can visit and use. Of course, it is a great strategy to make a sensory-friendly area for your SEND children, but as you get to know the individual needs of your pupils (can they tolerate a small number of other children with them?), consider how it may help their social mobility if others in the class can access it too. If areas can be shared, then your class will learn how to share and understand their responsibilities towards one another. With support, children with SEND may be able to build up their social skills in this space as a result and feel

less singled out when they use it.

Another area you can create is a breakout space. Using the different seating or comforting ideas above, make an area where students can discuss, socialize, read, and get away from each other if personal space is needed. You may find that children who do not normally talk to each other, start to mix more easily, and frayed tempers disappear after a time away from the normal learning space.

Teach the material in a variety of ways.



Not all students learn in the same way, and no doubt, after you have spent a few days with your class, you will see more clearly how each child does or does not access your activities. Planning sessions to meet their learning needs can often feel like trial and error, but if you introduce children to material in a variety of ways, then make a record of what works and what does not, and most importantly of all, keep trying. Ask the teaching staff around you for their advice and share your knowledge as well to make the setting an actively inclusive environment.

One way to make teaching in different ways successful, is to think about what the children's

strengths are, what they are interested in and what they would be excited to engage with.

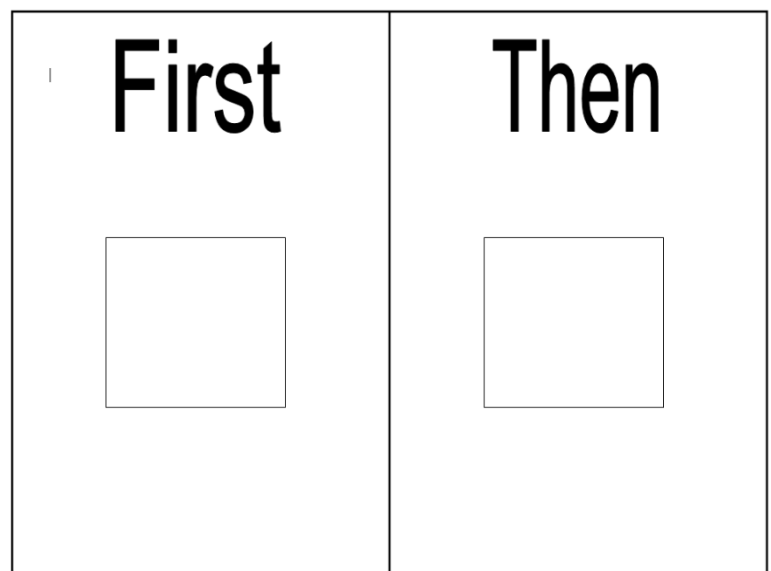
For example, writing can be a difficult challenge for autistic children. Although it is of course very important that all children begin to learn to write, you can make the process easier if you allow them to use an iPad, or computer. For some learners, typing helps them focus on the task you set them, rather than worrying about the physical process of writing as well. How much more energized and engaged would the rest of your class feel if they also got the opportunity to use these technologies too? Perhaps they would also be able to write more easily or produce their best piece of work with a break from pen and paper writing.

Clearly display timetables and key information

Following on from visual to-do lists, you can do much more with visuals around your environment that will help with both the general running of the classroom, and the activities you teach.

Often, children with dyslexia and autistic children can become distressed when they do not know what is going to happen, where they are meant to be or how they are expected to behave. If you can clearly display visual timetables and support their understanding, you will greatly ease their anxiety. You can replicate this on a larger scale for the whole class as well, placing it at the front of the room, by the whiteboard, or in a special area that is clear to see. As a result, all children can look forward to their favourite or prepare themselves for their least favourite activities, reducing the stress they may not feel able to talk about.

Actively incorporate the use of timetables (First/Then/Finished) into your key areas and your daily practice so that all the children become familiar with the function and use of them. After all as children move through school they are increasingly expected to self-manage their own time, usually through a timetable.





Clearly label up all your boxes of resources, preferably with a photograph and the written word. One step further would be to also glue a relevant item to the outside of the drawer or box. Try to keep your resources tidy and make sure that the correct items are placed back into the corresponding storage boxes.

Be as visual as you possibly can when it comes to communication with your children. After all we all benefit from visual signs, symbols, menus, to-do lists, diaries, calendars etc.

Empowerment continues if you can use Comic Sans, Ariel, or Dyslexia fonts on your handouts, rules, displays and key vocabulary cards. These fonts are particularly accessible for children with dyslexia, and so will be easy to process for all children in your class.

Creating an inclusive classroom both on a physical and social level can be a daunting task, and one which you have to alter and review as the year goes on. We hope that the ideas above will be useful to increase the inclusion in your class.

Dingley's Promise

Transforming the Early Years for children with SEND

Free comprehensive training programme for Slough EY's settings



Dingley's Promise Training is bringing about a fundamental change in early years practice across England.

Using our knowledge and experience of supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in our nursery settings for over 40 years, we have developed a range of inclusion training courses to help others supporting children with SEND in the early years.

These courses are funded by Comic Relief and are available to all those working with children in the early years in your local authority, at no cost to you.

Each course has been designed to enable flexible remote learning and includes webinars and resources for practical application of the learning within daily practice.

Current courses include:

- Introduction to Early Years Inclusion
- Early Years SEND Transitions
- The Voice of the Child
- Managing Difficult Conversations
- Behaviours That Challenge



Scan the QR code to sign up!



training@dingley.org.uk



Dingley's Promise Training

Useful Documents to support Inclusion.



- IEP template & example
- ABC behaviour analysis chart & example
 - Request for Intervention Form
 - Pupil Information Form
- SEND Code of Practice (see PDF below)

Individual Education Plans – Assess, Plan, Do, Review

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/childcare/providers/inclusion/iep>

Writing a plan

A plan is a written working document that enables all members of staff to see what the child's strengths are and which areas of their development have been identified as needing extra support.

With help from parents, the SENCo and staff should collect information about what a child can do and what they find difficult. For example, the child has good visual skills but may have difficulty understanding language.

The SENCo and staff would try a range of different strategies or teaching approaches to meet the child's needs. These would be part of the group's normal strategies; for example, most children will sit and listen to stories as they understand the social expectation, however some children need reminding, encouraging, and praising.

A plan would be written when it is recognised that a child has not responded to the normal strategies. In fact, the child may have great difficulty sitting and listening to a story because they do not have the necessary levels of understanding. A plan would be put in place to both enable the child to access books at their level and promote the child's understanding of language.

Strategies may include:

- **differentiating the curriculum;** for example, a child who cannot complete a 10-piece interlocking puzzle could try a five-piece interlocking puzzle.
- **Providing special equipment;** for example, a child who has difficulty using scissors independently would benefit from a four-hole pair of scissors, which enable an adult to guide the cutting.

When the setting has concerns regarding any aspects of a child's development, they will discuss this with parents. This will help to explore whether the same difficulties exist at home. If this is the case, then a discussion can take place about possible reasons for this. If the parents do not share the concerns or see the same behaviours at home, it is helpful to ask the parents about the approaches they use at home that could also be used in the setting. Parents need to understand and agree that their child would benefit from the process and be encouraged to contribute.

Reviewing the plan

The plan should be reviewed after a short period of intervention (2 to 6 weeks). New targets may be set according to the child's progress. Given that a plan is a working document, progress should be monitored and recorded at least weekly. This should form part of the graduated Assess, Plan, Do and Review approach.



Assess Plan Do Review Cycles

Pupil Name: _____

Class: _____

Year: _____

Assess:	Date:	Who:
Carry out child observations, hold discussions with key staff, parents/carers to identify & analyse needs e.g. IE 360°		
Any relevant assessments carried out by external agencies e.g. Health, EP, Social Care.		
Consider parent, pupil & staff questionnaires		
In- school screening assessments		








Do:	Date:	Who:
Implement the plan as agreed. Clearly show Who, What, When, How		
Continue to observe and record evidence of support and progress		

Plan:	Date:	Who:
Hold discussions & meet with parents, staff and any specialist services involved to plan for what needs to happen		
Ensure that the 'plan' is outcome focused e.g. improve, develop, achieve. Remember child and parents at the centre of the planning		
Outline interventions & support needed – Provision Map. Record expected impact on progress, development & behaviour		
Set time limits for interventions Set date for review		

Review:	Date:	Who:
Discuss with others e.g. SENCO, parents, colleagues, pupil about how effective the interventions have been and the impact on the pupil		
Analyse and compare data, observations and planned outcomes		
Think about next steps. Plan carefully with parents, other specialists and the pupil		
Does the APDR cycle need to begin again?		



My Individual Education Plan - Assess, Plan, Do, Review

<p>Assess</p> 	<p>Plan</p> 	<p>Do</p> 	<p>Who Will Help Me And When?</p> 	<p>Review</p> 
<p>Name Date of Birth Date</p>	<p>IEP Number IEP Agreed By SENCo</p>	<p>SENCo Signature Parent's Signature Review Date</p>		

ABC Behaviour chart

This ABC chart can be used to record behavioural concerns.

- 'A' stands for **antecedents**, that is, what happens immediately before the behavioural outburst and can include any triggers, signs of distress or environmental information.
- 'B' refers to the **behaviour** itself and is a description of what actually happened during the outburst or what the behaviour 'looked' like.
- 'C' refers to the **consequences** of the behaviour, or what happened immediately after the behaviour and can include information about other people's responses to the behaviour and the eventual outcome for the person.

It can also be a good idea to keep track of where and when the behaviour occurred to help in identifying any patterns. There are some filled in examples from page 2.

Day, date and time	Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence	Notes

National Autistic Society
Last reviewed 8 March 2016

Functional Analysis questionnaire –

Questions to establish the function of a behaviour (Adapted from Willis & LaVigna, 1993)

1. What happens during a behavioural incident (i.e., what does the behaviour look like)?
2. How often does the behaviour occur (i.e., several times per day, daily, weekly)?
3. How long does the behaviour last?
4. How severe is the behaviour?
5. What time of day is the behaviour most likely to occur?
6. In what environment or where is the behaviour most likely to occur?
 6. With whom is the behaviour most likely to occur?
8. What activity is most likely to produce the behaviour?
9. Are there any other events or situations that can trigger the behaviour (such as particular demands, delays, or transitions between activities)?
10. What is gained by engaging in the behaviour (i.e., what is the consequence or outcome for the individual)?
11. What is avoided by engaging in the behaviour?
12. Is the person experiencing any medical issues that may be affecting their behaviour (such as toothache, earache, sinus infections, colds, flu, allergies, rashes, seizures)?
13. Is the person experiencing difficulty with sleeping or eating?

14. How predictable is the person's daily routine (i.e., to what extent does the person know what is happening throughout the day and when)?

15. Have there been any recent changes to routine?

16. How does the individual communicate the following: -

- Yes/no/stop
- Indicate physical pain
 - Request help
 - Request attention
- Request preferred food/objects/activities
 - Request a break.

17. What objects, activities or events does the individual enjoy?

18. What skills or behaviours does the individual have that may be alternative ways of achieving the same function as the behaviour of concern?

Sourced from: <https://axia-asd.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Functional-analysis-questionnaire.pdf>

Request for Intervention from Slough Early Years SEND

Once you have identified a child may have additional learning needs you will need to start your cycle of Assess, Plan, Do Review and also pick 1/2 strategies from the intervention timeline to support this. When you have completed your first cycle, have attempted to embed the inclusive strategies, and perhaps recognise that there are significant concerns that warrant specialist support from our service we would ask you to complete the following form: Request for intervention Pupil Information Form and return it to either Cathie Woodbridge or Sarah Covell. We will then get in touch with you to discuss the next best steps which could include Online Teams/Zoom consultation, setting visit for an observation and advice.

Please complete the word document below 'Request for Intervention Pupil Information and return to either.

Email address: earlyyears@slough.gov.uk

**Slough Borough Council
People-Children
Early Years SEND
Observatory House
25 Windsor Road
Slough
SL1 2EL**

Please return to:	Please return completed questionnaire with 21 days. Before returning, please share a copy with the child's parents/carers.
earlyyears@slough.gov.uk and mark for the attention of either: Cathie Woodbridge or Sarah Covell	
Instructions for completing	
This questionnaire has been designed to provide information about the child in their environment with their peers and adults who are not their main carers. This helps us to form a complete picture of a child's strengths and difficulties. Please answer questions as fully and give examples where possible. Thank you for your help.	
Child's Name:	DOB:
Name of person completing the form:	Position of person completing the form: SENCO/Setting Manager/Practitioner
Date completed:	Current setting:
What Toolkit strategies have you tried to use to support the child?	
What is Working Well?	
What outcomes do you hope to achieve?	
Your message is ready to be sent with the following links and attachments: <i>Note: To protect against computer viruses, email programs may prevent you from sending or receiving certain types of file attachments. Check your email security settings to determine how attachments are handled.</i>	
Request for intervention pupil information	

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General

What are your main concerns?

What are their strengths?

What do they find more difficult?

Communication

When people call their name do they respond?	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
If you smile at them, will they smile back?	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
Do they give eye contact when communicating with you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistently	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
Will they point with 1 finger to ask for something?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they use gestures such as shrugging shoulders, shaking head? Examples of the gestures they use.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
Will they try to enter into a conversation with you? If so, do they use language, vocalisations or babbling?	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocalisation	<input type="checkbox"/> Babble
Do they get your attention to show you something that they find interesting or enjoyable spontaneously?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/> Never
Do they get your attention to gain help?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
During the session, they get your attention by ...			
• Looking at you	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	• Tugging without looking at you
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

• Talking to you	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	• Catching your eye from across the room and gesturing to you	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• Tugging while looking at you	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	• Other (specify) ...		
Do they use language more widely for their interests rather than for communication? E.g., may sing or label items to themselves but not use this language to request items			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Any unusual vocalisations, intonation, pitch, volume or using accents? Any echoing of words or phrases? Please give examples:			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Do they approach staff for comfort / reassurance?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
If "yes", then ...					
• In what circumstances might they do this?					
• What comfort is needed to help? (E.g., a reassuring look, a pat on the arm, removing him/her from the room, etc.)					
Do they show a natural range of facial expressions in response to being happy, sad, and amused, like other children in the same situation?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Are expressions appropriate to the situation?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Does this happen spontaneously, or is it copying other children?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Do they make any unusual faces, grimaces, or noises?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	
Is their response to other people's facial expressions appropriate?			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	

Play:					
What do they do if left alone to occupy themselves? Please describe the activity:					
Would they....					
• Flit from one activity to another?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	• Only play by her/himself?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• Generally, prefer to play with others?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	• Do nothing unless encouraged?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
• Only do repetitive activities • e.g., same toys and/or play themes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No			

Play with other children, e.g., with toys, role play, construction ...			
Do they...	• Know what to say to join in with other children's play?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Play alongside other children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Join a group of children without language?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Stand watching on the edge?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Have to be brought into an activity by an adult?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Get brought into an activity by another child?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Demonstrate an awareness of other children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they carry out activities which involve sharing and turn-taking like other children of that age?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they...	• Need adult support to access a structured game such as lotto?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Access a structured game such as lotto independently?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Need adult to support an unstructured game such as shop keepers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	• Access an unstructured game such as shop keepers independently?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they do pretend play such as pretending to drink from an empty cup, talking on pretend telephone, feeding a doll?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they show imagination in their play? Examples:		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Interacting with others:			
Do you feel they understand personal space?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are they happy for others to be in their personal space?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do they accept cuddles?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
What is their response if someone is upset?			
Does he/she eat in the nursery setting; if so are they fussy eaters, aversion to textures, colours, food touching other food?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is he/she toilet trained?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Patterns of behaviour		
Do they understand and follow the routine of the session?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If "yes", do they do this by ...	Watching the other children?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Following a group instruction?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	Following an individual instruction to him/her?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
How do they react to a change of routine, e.g., a change of staff, a new activity, and an absent activity?		
Do they have any more restricted or intense interests? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
If so, please describe:		
Do you notice any repetitive movements, hand flapping, spinning?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you notice any repetitive use of objects e.g., lining up toys, grouping items?		
If so, please describe:		
Do you notice any additional sensory needs? For example, adverse response to specific sound or texture or excessive smelling, touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Please give examples:		
What additional support is required in the setting? (please describe below)		

Thank you for your time and the information you have



Useful Articles to support Inclusion in Early Years














- **What is Autism?**
- **Autism – Misunderstanding Fear**
- **Autism-Learning how to Play.**
- **Joint Attention in Toddlers: Why it's important for Language Development**
 - **The Power of Turn Taking**
- **A Complete Guide for Using Prompts to Teach Individuals with Special Needs**
 - **Physical challenging behaviour**
 - **What is a Social Story?**
 - **Sensory Play in the Early Years**

What is autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world. One in 100 people are on the autism spectrum and there are around 700,000 autistic adults and children in the UK.

 What is autism? 

<u>What it is</u> 	<u>What it isn't</u> 
 A neurodevelopmental difference (different brain wiring), a natural variation	 A learning disability
 Affects every aspect of a person's being: how they perceive, experience, interact with and interpret the world	 An illness or disease
 A minority neurology	 Bad behaviour/willful defiance
 Lifelong	 Bad parenting
	 Affects only children

<https://www.livingoptions.org/what-is-autism/>

Being autistic

Autism is a spectrum condition and affects people in different ways. Like all people, autistic people have their own strengths and weaknesses. Below is a list of difficulties autistic people may share, including the two key difficulties required for a diagnosis.

Social communication and social interaction challenges

Social communication

Autistic people have difficulties with interpreting both verbal and non-verbal language like gestures or tone of voice. Some autistic people are unable to speak or have limited speech while other autistic people have very good language skills but struggle to understand sarcasm or tone of voice. Other challenges include:

- taking things literally and not understanding abstract concepts
- needing extra time to process information or answer questions.
- repeating what others say to them (this is called echolalia)

Social interaction

Autistic people often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. This can make it very hard to navigate the social world.

Autistic people may:

- appear to be insensitive.
- seek out time alone when overloaded by other people.
- not seek comfort from other people
- appear to behave 'strangely' or in a way thought to be socially inappropriate.
- find it hard to form friendships.

Repetitive and restrictive behaviour

With its unwritten rules, the world can seem a very unpredictable and confusing place to autistic people. This is why they often prefer to have routines so that they know what is going to happen. They may want to travel the same way to and from school or work, wear the same clothes or eat the same food for breakfast.

Autistic people may also repeat movements such as hand flapping, rocking or the repetitive use of an object such as twirling a pen or opening and closing a door. Autistic people often engage in these behaviours to help calm themselves when they are stressed or anxious, but many autistic people do it because they find it enjoyable.

Change to routine can also be very distressing for autistic people and make them very anxious. It could be having to adjust to big events like Christmas or changing schools, facing uncertainty at work, or something simpler like a bus detour that can trigger their anxiety.

Over- or under-sensitivity to light, sound, taste, or touch

Autistic people may experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light, colours, temperatures, or pain. For example, they may find certain background sounds like music in a restaurant, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. Many autistic people prefer not to hug due to discomfort, which can be misinterpreted as being cold and aloof.

Many autistic people avoid everyday situations because of their sensitivity issues. Schools, workplaces, and shopping centres can be particularly overwhelming and cause sensory overload. There are many simple adjustments that can be made to make environments more autism friendly.

Highly focused interests or hobbies

Many autistic people have intense and highly focused interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong. Autistic people can become experts in their special interests and often like

to share their knowledge. A stereotypical example is trains but that is one of many. Greta Thunberg's intense interest, for example, is protecting the environment.

Like all people, autistic people gain huge amounts of pleasure from pursuing their interests and see them as fundamental to their wellbeing and happiness.

Being highly focused helps many autistic people do well academically and in the workplace but they can also become so engrossed in particular topics or activities that they neglect other aspects of their lives.

Extreme anxiety

Anxiety is a real difficulty for many autistic adults, particularly in social situations or when facing change. It can affect a person psychologically and physically and impact quality of life for autistic people and their families.

It is very important that autistic people learn to recognise their triggers and find coping mechanisms to help reduce their anxiety. However, many autistic people have difficulty recognising and regulating their emotions. Over one third of autistic people have serious mental health issues and too many autistic people are being failed by mental health services.

Meltdowns and shutdowns

When everything becomes too much for an autistic person, they can go into meltdown or shutdown. These are very intense and exhausting experiences.

A meltdown happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by their current situation and temporarily loses behavioural control. This loss of control can be verbal (e.g., shouting, screaming, crying) or physical (e.g., kicking, lashing out, biting) or both. Meltdowns in children are often mistaken for temper tantrums and parents, and their autistic children often experience hurtful comments and judgmental stares from less understanding members of the public.

A shutdown appears less intense to the outside world but can be equally debilitating. Shutdowns are also a response to being overwhelmed, but may appear more passive - e.g., an autistic person going quiet or 'switching off'. One autistic woman described having a shutdown as: 'just as frustrating as a meltdown, because of not being able to figure out how to react how I want to, or not being able to react at all; there isn't any 'figuring out' because the mind feels like it is past a state of being able to interpret.'

Sourced from The National Autistic Society: -

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>

Graphic:

<https://www.livingoptions.org/what-is-autism/>

AUTISM - MISUNDERSTANDING FEAR

(Source of article unknown)

It's often said that fear is the number one emotion for autistic kids, because the world around them is a confusing, unpredictable, and threatening place to be. But that's only half the reason why they experience fear so often - it's not just that they feel more threatened, but that their reactions to those threats are very often misunderstood.

Autistic kids don't always experience fear in a way that most people expect or understand. This can result in three very common situations in which their fear is overlooked:

It's not recognised.

The behaviours don't look like fear and are misinterpreted as something else.

It's not expected.

The situation is one in which kids don't usually experience fear, so carers aren't prepared or watching for a fear reaction.

It's not acknowledged.

They seem afraid but the object of that fear is not something that most people find scary.

The result of all this confusion is that these kids tend to miss out on receiving protection and comfort when they need it most. Misunderstanding their fear means that they have to experience so much more of it, which is not only detrimental to long-term health but also to the trust they feel in the people who take care of them.

Let's take a look at these situations in more detail.

MISUNDERSTANDING FEAR IN AUTISM

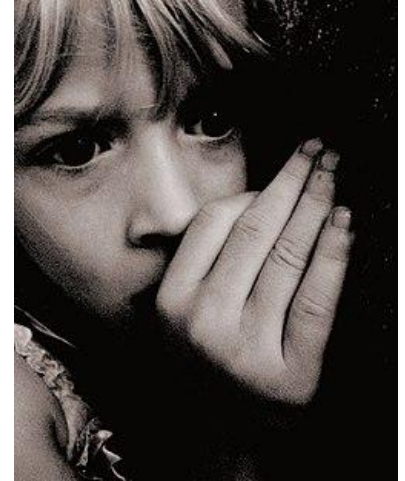
1. RECOGNISING THE FEAR

We think we know what fear looks like - rapid breathing, pounding heart, sweating, crying, hiding, wanting to run. But what about yelling? Refusing to do something? Ignoring you? Talking back? Standing still?

Fear is about escape and avoidance, and these reactions are not always as straight forward as they might seem at first glance. Clinging to routine, stimming, echolalia, aggression, toileting accidents, fidgeting, removing clothes, constant and repetitive questioning... these can also be reactions to feeling afraid.

As our bodies get ready to run or defend, we feel dizzy, queasy, fidgety, shaky, and tense - this sudden rush of sensations can be unpleasant and overloading for hypersensitive kids. Fear makes our throats tighten and we can have trouble talking or making ourselves understood, which can be uncomfortable and frustrating. It's hard to swallow too, and our digestion starts to shut down which makes it tricky to eat. Adrenaline kicks in - we're suddenly wide awake and our muscles tense up in preparation for battle, which can make settling down or sleeping difficult. The pupils dilate to take in more light, and we might get goosebumps and other sensations which feel weird and uncomfortable to little bodies, even painful for some.

All of these involuntary reactions are propelling the body into "I'm going to do whatever I can to protect myself from this threat" mode - which can look exactly like non-compliance, withdrawal, hyperactivity, aggression or being stubborn, as well as setting the perfect conditions for a meltdown.



2. ANTICIPATING THE FEAR

Kids with autism often experience fear in situations where it's not the usual reaction - sitting in the classroom, visiting the mall, eating a new food, singing Happy Birthday, a windy day at the park, a sudden change in plans.

Situations like these can be scary or even terrifying for them, but it's easy for that fear to be overlooked, trivialized, or misinterpreted when it's not the expected response. This is especially true in situations which kids usually enjoy, like birthday parties or getting a surprise or having their achievements acknowledged with a round of applause. We're so accustomed to assuming that everyone loves these things that we're less prepared to notice that some kids might in fact be afraid.

3. ACKNOWLEDGING THE FEAR

I hear these things all the time in reference to autistic kids...

"He has a lot of needless fears."

"She's really scared of things that are harmless."

"Why are they so afraid of things that aren't scary?"

Nobody is afraid of something that isn't scary... to them.

Fear is a natural survival response to things that are painful, confusing, unpredictable, or unbearable. And this is one of the reasons fear is such a common reaction for autistic kids - there are many things in their environment that are painful, confusing, unpredictable, and unbearable for them. This is evident in how strongly they cling to the things that can help to reduce those fears, like rules and routine.

Kids are expected to respond with fear to 'valid' threats such as moving cars, being separated from a parent, growling dogs and heights. But that same fear response in reaction to bright lights, sensory overload, waking up, smiling faces, lumps in your food, unexpected changes or the shape of a cracker is considered odd simply because these things are not threatening to most people.

The fact that these fears are less common doesn't make the reaction any less real or lessen the distress that they can cause for these kids. Something that seems harmless to one person may still pose a threat to others, and whether the threat is real or only perceived has no impact on the amount of fear that is experienced.

THE COST OF MISUNDERSTANDING FEAR

There are very few people who would ignore a frightened child or respond with irritation, anger, frustration, criticism, or discipline... but what about the times when you don't know that they're afraid?

Imagine that a terrified woman runs out of her office, being chased by a bear. Her boss stops her and says "Don't be silly, that's not a bear. Now get back in there or you're fired." This sounds ridiculous, and yet it's exactly the kind of reaction that these kids usually get when their fear is misinterpreted. Instead of comfort and support, their impulse to run, hide, avoid, or otherwise escape the perceived threat is met with disapproval, punishment or attempts to modify the behaviour.

Which is not only unfortunate but inappropriate, because fear is not a choice. It's a chain of chemical reactions, and no amount of reward, punishment or willpower is going to change an involuntary survival response. We don't choose to be afraid of threats and can neither consciously trigger nor shut off our physiological response to them.

Misunderstanding their fear can also be damaging in many other ways:

- * They have to experience it more often than they need to
- * They miss out on much-needed comfort and support
- * They believe that their reaction to fear is wrong or bad
- * They learn that there's no point in getting help when they're afraid (or worse, that they need to keep it a secret) because it will only get them into more trouble.
- * They lose trust in the ability of caregivers to protect them

This last one is so important. A kid who is afraid believes that they are in danger - without sharing your knowledge that they're safe, it's easy for them to assume that not only are you failing to protect them but you're actively putting them in harm's way... so now they need to defend themselves against both you and the threat.

All of this can be hugely detrimental to developing trust with autistic kids, especially those who are experiencing fear - they need to know that their caregivers are a reliable and consistent source of protection from the threats around them, whether real or only perceived.

4 STEPS TO HELP REDUCE FEAR FOR AUTISTIC KIDS

1. Learn to recognize what fear looks like for them - It might be different to what it looks and feels like for you.

2. Acknowledge and respect their fear

When you notice what you think might be a fear reaction, let them know that you understand. Reassure them that their reaction is okay, that you're not an adversary and that you're going to help.

3. Provide safety

Your job at this point is not to convince them that their fear is unwarranted or even understand why the thing is scary - it's to protect them from the threat in a way that feels like protection to them. Fears don't disappear merely because we're told to stop being afraid or that 'everything is okay'. We need to believe that there is no threat. We need to feel secure that there is a safe place for us to retreat to and that protection is available to us.

Threats feel scarier when we have no control over them or our ability to protect ourselves. A lot of autistic kids have fears which fall into this category - they'll break a rule they didn't know existed, someone else will break the rules, they'll randomly get in trouble for something, someone will suddenly start a conversation with them... the threats feel constant and unpredictable.

Providing some control over these things where possible can give a reassuring feeling of safety. For example, kids who are afraid that the fire alarm is going to go off may feel safer having both an advance schedule of any planned fire drills AND a response plan in the event that the alarm is accidentally set off by someone.

Oh, and make sure your solution doesn't inadvertently involve another fear. A common example of this is "Go and tell the teacher" or "Find someone to help you" - both of these things can be terrifying in and of themselves, even more so than the original threat that the kid is trying to get away from.

4. Investigate the threat

It can sometimes be difficult to understand exactly what's triggering the fear or why it feels dangerous to them, but identifying and avoiding potential threats will help to reduce the amount of fear that they have to experience. Keeping a diary of times, they seem afraid might reveal some clues you've overlooked, or help you to piece together a pattern. Some kids might be able to explain it themselves once they feel safe, but you may also never know why something feels like a threat to them... just remember that this doesn't have to stop you from providing protection from it.

The bottom line

Fear is a common emotion for autistic kids, partly due to the fact that the way they respond to perceived threats is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. It doesn't have to be this way - understanding, respecting, and acting on their fear reactions will go a long way towards making them feel safe and reducing the amount of time they spend feeling afraid.

So, the next time you're tearing your hair out because your son runs away from the blue socks and not the red ones, or your student runs out of the classroom at mat time, just remember that all he knows is that his body is trying to warn him about a danger that feels very real to him. He's trying to keep himself safe, and he's looking to you to help him do that.



Autism - Learning How to Play

[Autism Keyhole Intervention Book 2 Play.pdf](#)

Autistic children love structure and routine, they need to understand what they should do. It's usually when your child doesn't know what to do with himself that he will engage in inappropriate behaviour, get frustrated and become difficult to manage.

Structured play is often the beginning of your child learning how to learn. There are different kinds of play:



1. Sensory motor play

2. Constructive play

3. Pretend play

All children need to learn these types of play, but Autistic children will learn them in a different way. To be able to understand how your child plays watch him in a free play situation with a variety of toys.

Sensory Motor Play

Sensory motor toys e.g., blocks, sound makers, rattles, squeaky toys, bubbles, balloons, ball, playdough, water play in the bath, crayons etc. Large toys play outside. Swinging, rocking, rough and tumble play, interactive social baby games e.g., peek-a-boo, round and round the garden etc.

Sensory motor play is important for your child because it helps them to learn about turn taking, joint attention, being able to predict things, looking, listening, and paying attention. Even if you feel your child is beyond this level it is important to continue to play these games and help him to explore and understand his environment.

Constructive Play

This will start with your child learning to understand cause and effect. If your child does something to a toy - a press, a touch, a throw, something will happen as a result. Children need to learn to understand this, and you may need to prompt them in the early stages.

Pretend Play - Imitation and Copying

Autistic children need to learn to copy other people or imitate. We all learn through imitation. It is a very important step.

Don't expect your child to start to imitate you. You will have to take the lead and imitate him. Copy what he/she is doing with toys and objects, copy his/her sounds and movements and see if he/she notices that you are copying him/her.

For example: - If he/she bangs 2 blocks together you do exactly the same. If he/she claps his hands you do that. Even if he/she doesn't respond straight away keep trying. This may get his/her attention. It means that your child is starting to be aware of other people. This is the first important step in imitation. You may need to get another adult to help your child copy what you do for example if you want your child to copy you waving you wave first, then the other adult waves and helps your child using hand over hand movement to wave back and copy what you did.

Attention

At this early stage in play, you are aiming to develop shared interest and attention. The young Autistic child may not realise that you can both be interested in the same thing and can both enjoy the fun. This may mean you will have to: - invade his/her space, bring him/her close to you, attract his/her attention. **Example:** -

James tends to run around with a toy car in his hand. He does not respond to his name. His mummy was shown how to approach him with another one of his favourite cars, take him to a small table, both sit down momentarily, drop their cars into a box, then James chooses to get up and run again. Before he goes Mum praises him, claps hands, says good boy or good sitting. Then she lets him go for another run before repeating this simple activity over and over again. She has done well even though this looks to be limited, she has got his attention and encouraged simple imitation and cooperation.

This can be done in other ways using, bubbles, balloons, sound makers, rough and tumble play. Whatever your child's interests are. Your child is also learning a very important routine.

First - Then

Whatever he/she does from now on, he/she needs to know;

- **First**, I do this.
- **Then** I can do my own thing

When he/she is ready to work at a table, you can structure up activities (how you can structure activities is discussed later). If your child has difficulty in knowing where to play, you may need to give him/her somewhere he/she can play or do his/her work. If you can manage it, have a consistent and clearly defined place for a little table and chair where there are no distractions. Make sure the television/radio etc. are turned off.

It is important to get visual structure in place. Encourage your child to work from left to right i.e., have new activities placed to the left of the table and have a finished box on the floor to the right of the table. He/she needs to learn and understand that most activities move from left to right. He/she also needs to learn that all activities have;

- a start
- a middle
- a finish

When play activities are presented in this way your child can learn to complete them more successfully and also more independently. His/her difficulties with organising himself/herself to plan what to do, make decisions and complete things are easily overcome when the activity is set in an organised way with a clear start and finish.

Teach a Positive Way to Play

Using a structured play area and structured activities to develop play skills helps your child begin to understand because he/she can now see: -

- **What** he/she has to do
- **How** much he/she has to do?
- **When** he/she will be finished?
- **What** will happen next?



By always ensuring that you answer these questions in a visual way like this you will find that your child will become more cooperative and in some cases calmer.

Very often for the young Autistic child, structured play is the beginning of how he/she makes sense of the world, which up until now may have been a very unpredictable place. For most of the children who received Keyhole® Therapy, completing structured play activities was often the first skill achieved in the programme. Although they usually resisted the introduction of this new routine at the beginning, most of the children quickly came to look forward to their structured play times where they could experience a sense of satisfaction in actually completing something and learning new skills.

This is a positive play routine!

Autistic children try to make sense of the world by developing routines. They often choose their own individual way of doing things and usually these inflexible routines are non-negotiable! Autistic children like routines once you teach them a new way to do something using positive routines, they will usually follow that routine in the future. Knowing this, teach your child a positive play routine, which will help him/her learn to play more appropriately.

If your child is highly active, teach the routine with only one step at a time e.g., if you have a four-piece inset board, give it to your child with only one piece missing, therefore he only has to put one piece into the puzzle to finish. You can build up on this when you think he/she will be able to cope with more pieces.

You will be able to use this routine with other activities.

Play Activities for All Levels of Development

In most cases you can select appropriate play materials and activities depending on your child's level of ability. Here are some ideas that could be used to help young children, at each step of development, learn about structured play.

First Steps of Structured Play

Use wooden inset puzzles, posting/ 'put-in' task, stacking rings, shape sorters, large building blocks, peg boards, large beads on a spindle etc. There are lots of different toys on the market which may give you ideas about what to make, buy or borrow.

Put-in Tasks



Posting Pegs



Posting Cards

Building Tasks



Large Blocks



Stacking Rings

Puzzles



Simple Insert Puzzle



More Difficult Insert Puzzle

Do talk to other families and the professionals involved with your child about where are the best places to get the most suitable toys. You may already have plenty of toys at home which you just need to adapt to meet your child's structured play needs.

Structured Play as your child moves past the First Steps

Introduce activities with only one stage. Your child needs to learn 3 things to achieve independence in play. Autistic children are very good at learning skills, but often have difficulty in starting, working through and finishing an activity. Structured play will help them learn these.

- How to start
- What to do
- How to finish

Here are some examples of this type of structured play: -

Sorting Tasks

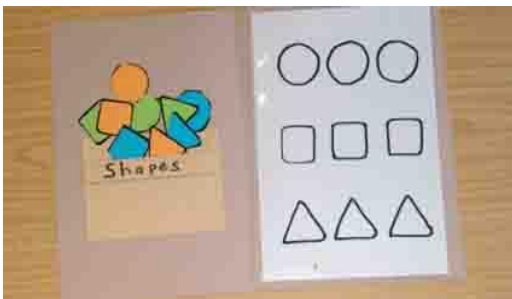


Size



Sorting

Object Sorting



Folder Activity for Shape Sorting



Colour Sorting

How to Take Play Further: Teaching Pretend Play

Your child will usually have a preference for logical play with a clear end goal. Pretend play is much more difficult for your child. To play in an imaginative way children need to have acquired;

- good attention
- some language comprehension
- the ability to organise themselves and their things.
- the ability to plan out what they are going to do.

It is possible to teach your child some simple pretend play sequences so that he/she will be able to play with other children when he/she is ready.

Is your child ready to learn pretend play?

- Has he/she established good attention?
- Can he/she imitate actions and/or words in a meaningful way?
- Does he/she understand simple directions and questions?
- Is he/she able to show joint attention during play with objects?
- Does he/she look at you when you play together?
- Is it easy to get his/her attention during free play?
- Does he/she show an appropriate interest in symbolic toys? E.g., tractors, dolls, tea sets, toy food, cash registers
- Don't be tempted to move on too quickly. If your child shows few of these indicators it is best to continue with structured constructive and sensory motor play as this is what will benefit your child most at this time.

If your child does seem ready for Pretend Play

- You must first assess what pretend play skills your child already has established.
- What type of play interests your child most e.g., home corner, farm, shop
- Teach a simple pretend play sequence that your child can imitate and repeat.
- Keep the amount of steps to a minimum to avoid your child becoming confused.
- Reduce the amount of language you use with your child to make it easier for him/her to understand.
- Reduce distractions.

Example of Pretend Play with Farm

- Hook up tractor and trailer
- Put animals onto trailer.
- Drive tractor and trailer
- Put animals in a pen.

Example of Doll Play

- Dress doll
- Brush doll's hair
- Give doll a bottle.

- Put doll to bed.

Example of Shop and Home Play

- Put shopping into the basket.
- Pay at the till.
- Take shopping to kitchen and sort out - Cook dinner for mum and dad - Pretend to clean house- Set table.

Once your child has learned the sequence you may want to teach him/her some repetitive phrases, which he/she can learn to say. If you say the phrase a few times he/she may echo it back and then begin to use the phrase as part of the routine e.g.

- Feed Dolly
- Wash dishes
- Dinner cooking/dinner ready
- Cows field
- Drive tractor

Your child's pretend play skills and interest in playing with imaginative toys will develop slowly when he/she is ready. Some Autistic children will not like pretend play. As always, be guided by your child when deciding what to help him/her learn.

Top Tips for Structured Play

- Prepare a distraction-free area where your child can learn new play skills.
- Use a left to right routine.
- Use a Finished Box
- Teach activities that are within your child's capabilities.
- Teach activities for independence.
- Fade out all prompts as soon as you can.

Allow your child to complete easy activities with you just supervising from a distance and using as few prompts as necessary.

- Vary tasks to keep your child interested and stimulated.

- Include your child's interests as long as they don't cause him to be too distracted or excited.
- Persevere with poor co-operation as you try to establish any new routine.
- If poor co-operation persists, review the tasks and the work routine.
- Teach pretend play when your child is interested and ready.
- Start and end with an easy task that your child can do with little help from you.
- Introduce new or slightly harder tasks in the middle of the structured playtime.

If things don't seem to be working, ask yourself: -

- Are the tasks too difficult?
- Are there any distractions?
- Are you following a consistent routine?
- Has he/she got bored? You may need to think again!
- Does he/she understand what he has to do?

You might like to make a record of your child's likes and dislikes. What he/she is able or not able to do now and also what he/she is not yet ready to do.

Sourced from: <https://www.autismni.org/keyhole-early-in>

Joint Attention in Toddlers: Why It's Important for Language Development



Article sourced from: <https://teachmetotalk.com/2017/03/02/joint-attention-toddlers-why-its-important-for-language-development/>

By: Laura Mize

Have you ever wondered if a child is “just a late talker” or if there’s a larger problem?

Research reveals that there are [several risk factors](#) that let us know that a child’s late talking is likely a part of a child’s developmental delay, rather than the only issue. I’ve started a series of articles to address these concerns. In this post, we’re addressing the second red flag which is:

DIFFICULTY WITH JOINT ATTENTION

What is joint attention?

Joint attention can also be called “shared attention”, and it occurs when two people focus on the same thing. Usually, an episode of joint attention begins when one person does something to alert someone else to an object or event using:

- *Words* such as “Hey mum!” or “Look!”
- *Gestures* like pointing or showing an item.
- *Nonverbal methods* of gaining attention such as eye gaze. For example, the child looks at something and then looks back at you as if to say, “That’s what I want you to notice!”

The examples above cover a child’s ability to initiate joint attention, but responding to others is an important aspect of joint attention too. This means that a child may be happily playing with a toy, but if

you call his name, he looks up at you. Another example is that she attends to what you're trying to show her. When you point to something across the room, the child follows your point with his eyes. A child recognizes and welcomes your attempts to engage her, to talk with her, and play with her.

When I explain joint attention to parents, I talk about a child's ability to shift his attention between an object or event and another person. Three participants are involved in this "triad" of attention – the child, you, and the item/occurrence. There's mutual focus. Beyond both people actively participating, both also understand that they are paying attention to the same thing and it's purposeful for both parties. That's what constitutes the "sharing" principle in joint attention.

Why is joint attention important for language development?

Joint attention is a social skill, meaning the way a child interacts with other people. That's what communicating is – a way of interacting with another person. Communication begins with this shared attention and engagement piece. When a child doesn't notice that you're trying to get him to include you or share an experience, there's not much real interaction going on between the two of you.

Babies and toddlers must regularly interact with other people before they begin to listen to your words. Over time with consistent listening and attending to what you're saying, they learn to understand what you're saying by linking meaning to your words.

This is how I "draw it out" for parents who have difficulty seeing the correlation between their child's lack of consistent interaction and delayed language skills. When I'm using this illustration, I draw an arrow when I'm saying, "leads to," as you can see here:

Interaction leads to listening.

Listening leads to understanding language.

Understanding language leads to using language...

Using language (such as gestures, facial expressions, eye gaze) leads to talking.

Of course, there are exceptions, (which point to different reasons a child isn't learning to talk), but generally, this is how speech-language skills emerge.

Frequency Matters

Another important consideration is the frequency of a child's ability to shift his focus and share experiences with others. A child's skills don't have to completely absent in this area before it's a problem. If a child's joint attention skills are best described as "hit or miss," there's still usually a language delay.

Here's why...opportunities for learning language are limited for this kid because he's not tuned in to what he can learn from others during exchanges virtually all day long. On closer inspection, much of this child's day may be spent "doing his own thing" rather than seeking out someone else to play and interact with or responding when someone tries to engage her. When a child doesn't demonstrate strong joint attention in hundreds of interactions with others every day, he is at a serious disadvantage for learning to talk. He's missing all of those potential opportunities for learning the language.

Signs of Difficulty with Joint Attention

Toddlers who have difficulty with joint attention inconsistently respond to your words, your gestures (such as pointing at something for them to look at), and your actions. They may appear to avoid others or ignore what's said to them. They seem to tune out their own names and other verbal directions. Things need to

be their own idea, or they're not really interested. Adults may have to work pretty hard to get and keep this child's attention.

Kids with joint attention issues don't use increasingly mature ways to gain attention from others. For example, a toddler over 12 months may fuss or cry when something is wrong, but she doesn't make attempts to tell or show you what's happened.

Contrast this with a child who has mastered joint attention. A typically developing toddler is quite adept at interjecting their will. They frequently interrupt and try to direct a parent's activities in order to get what they want, even before they begin to talk. They look toward, point, or lead parents, and then they continue to use any way they can to make sure that mom or dad complies with their request.

An issue with decreased joint attention is even more serious when a child also has difficulty with other social skills such as making eye contact with other people and sharing frequent warm, joyful expressions with others during close interactions.

Diagnostic Implications for Decreased Joint Attention

When a child doesn't consistently display joint attention, we become concerned about the social aspects of language development. Toddlers with various developmental delays can certainly show lapses of decreased joint attention, but when a child's joint attention is consistently limited or absent, we do become concerned about autism. We should look for other red flags or deficits of ASD (autism spectrum disorder) not to confirm the suspicion, but as a way to address a child's core issues.

Ways to Improve Joint Attention

There are plenty of things you can do to establish solid joint attention skills during everyday activities at home. Strategies to improve joint attention with young children begin by working on eye contact and his ability to look at your face when you're talking to him. I encourage parents to give a child something worth paying attention to – be fun to look at and listen to as you're playing or talking together! Use interesting objects to capture a distracted toddler's attention. Frequently model gestures, such as pointing and showing items, so that a child will first begin to understand these important nonverbal ways of communicating and eventually use them to initiate interaction with you. Position yourself to make eye contact and sustained interaction easier for the child. Get on the same level. For example, if he's up on the couch, sit on the floor so that your eyes are across from his. For additional ideas, [read more about joint attention](#). If you're more of an auditory learner, [listen to my podcast](#) about joint attention.

Recommendations for Parents

The most important recommendation I can make for parents of a child who is struggling with joint attention is to get professional assistance. Begin by discussing the concerns with your paediatrician or other healthcare professional. Ask for a referral for a developmental assessment. If your doctor dismisses your concerns, get another opinion! You know your child better than anyone else ever will and if you're feeling uneasy about your child's development, trust your instincts!

Early intervention is especially critical for a child with joint attention and other social skill problems since **maturity alone does not resolve these kinds of issues**.

By this I mean that a child won't "grow out of it."

Intervention is absolutely necessary and may look different over the course of a childhood for a kid with social interaction differences. In early toddlerhood and throughout the preschool years, I believe that specialized developmental services are critical. This period is when we can make the MOST difference in a child's outcome. It's when developing brains are most "ready" for growth.

Parents of a child with any kind of social-communication problem will benefit dramatically from having a professional or team of professionals teach them ways to successfully address their own child's needs at home. When this happens, intervention isn't a once or twice a week thing limited to therapy or preschool. By working with therapists and teachers who have had experience treating other children with similar backgrounds, you'll be able to trust that you're doing everything you can to help.

Special note for/about professionals...

Sometimes a speech-language pathologist may be reluctant to discuss the importance of joint attention and other red flags for autism with parents opting for more general terms such as "language delay" or "late talker." This can occur when a therapist is unsure if a child would meet the diagnostic threshold for receiving an official diagnosis of autism. A therapist may be afraid of being "wrong" or overstepping their bounds. In some states, therapists are discouraged from offering a diagnosis and must refer a child for further testing from a developmental paediatrician, neurologist, or another medical specialist.

While I understand these issues, it's not an excuse not to talk honestly with families. As I've stated in [previous posts in this series](#), when we don't share the full extent of a child's issues with parents, I believe that we're essentially withholding important information. I don't want to be that kind of professional (or that kind of person) so I have "the talk" with parents, even when it's uncomfortable for everyone.

If you're a parent and working with a professional who you sense may be holding back, be direct. Bring up the subject yourself. Take a deep breath and ask, "Do you think this is more than late talking?"

WRAP UP

In summary, a toddler with limited joint attention may have difficulty acquiring a broad range of developmental skills including learning how to interact with others and make friends, how to talk, how to understand words, and how to process and use incoming information. These challenges may overlap into additional areas of development, but early intervention (when the child is young – before 5) can be highly successful for significantly improving, and in some cases, even eliminating these problems.

If you're a parent, I hope that this information will help you understand what may be going on with your own child. If you're a therapist, this is the kind of information that doctors, and other professionals may not be sharing with parents of a child with a language delay due to limited social skills. It's up to us to help families understand the depth of a child's issues and provide hope that therapy, along with consistent parental commitment, can make a huge difference!

The Power of Turn-taking: How Back-and-forth Interactions Help Children Learn Language

[The Power of Turn-taking: How Back-and-forth Interactions Help Children Learn Language \(hanen.org\)](https://www.hanen.org)

By Andrea Lynn Koohi
Hanen Staff Writer

Having a back-and-forth conversation with a child may seem like a small thing, but it turns out it's everything when it comes to helping them learn language.

A new study has shown that the more children participate in back-and-forth interactions with their caregivers, the more activity they have in the part of the brain responsible for language production and processing. The study also showed a strong connection between the number of turns children take in conversation and the scores they receive on standardized language tests [1,2]. The more children are involved in back-and-forth exchanges, the greater the impact on their language skills.



What makes back-and-forth interactions so powerful?

There's a lot children learn when they're involved in back-and-forth conversations that they couldn't learn if they just listened to someone else speak. This comparison chart shows just some of the advantages of conversation:

Learning opportunity for children	Just listening to words (e.g. watching TV or videos, or just listening to an adult talk)	Participating in a conversation
Hear a variety of words they may use on their own later on	Maybe	Yes
Learn to pay attention to someone else	Maybe	Yes
Learn how to start an interaction	No	Yes
Learn how and when to take a turn in an interaction	No	Yes
Learn how to send a message effectively	No	Yes
Learn to clarify or repeat a message if it wasn't understood	No	Yes
Practice using words and gestures	No	Yes
Learn to ask questions	No	Yes

Draw on previous knowledge, experience and problem-solving skills to articulate a point of view	No	Yes
Build confidence in communicating	No	Yes

So it's easy to see why back and forth interactions have a greater influence on children's brain development and language learning than just hearing words. While it's important to expose your child to lots of words, what's much more important is involving him in high-quality, enjoyable interactions where he has the opportunity to take as many back-and-forth turns as possible.

How to set the stage for turn-taking

Parents and caregivers are in the best possible position to encourage the back-and-forth conversations that help children learn. That's why the focus of all Hanen Programs and resources is helping these important adults engage children in high-quality interactions. Here are a few ideas and strategies we share with parents to help them set the stage for an enjoyable interaction with lots of turn-taking:

When and where to do it

The best thing about high quality interactions is that they're most likely to happen during everyday situations like having a bath, walking to the park, or getting ready for bed.

Anytime and anywhere! The best thing about high quality interactions is that they're most likely to happen during everyday situations like having a bath, walking to the park, or getting ready for bed. Basically, any situation in which your child is having a good time and is enjoying your company is the perfect time to have the interaction.

Some helpful Hanen strategies

- **OWL™ (Observe, wait and listen™)** – This key strategy allows the child to lead the interaction. It gives him the opportunity to take the first turn about something that interests him and allows you to respond to what has captured his attention. This is a critical first step because children are much more likely to take another turn and stay in the conversation when they have started the interaction:
 - **Observe** – Get face-to-face with your child and don't say anything. Just pay close attention to what he's interested in. His eye gaze, gestures, facial expressions, and sounds are important clues.
 - **Wait** – Without speaking, wait to give your child a chance to send you a message. Remember that he doesn't need to use words – he might just give you a quick look or make a gesture. Pay close attention or you might miss it.
 - **Listen** – Your child may also send a message with words or sounds. Treat any sound, look, or gesture as your child's first "turn" in the interaction. [3]
- **Follow Your Child's Lead** – Now that your child has taken the first turn, respond immediately by saying or doing something that's directly related to what he just communicated. For example, if he stacks a few blocks on top of each other and then looks at you and smiles, you could say, "Wow, you're building a tower!" Then wait quietly again. If your child takes another turn on the same topic, take another turn as well. Then wait without speaking for him to take another turn. When he does, that's success! You've established a back-and-forth interaction. Keep it going for as many turns as possible by sticking to what your child is interested in, responding by building on what he has said or done, and remembering to wait to give him a chance to respond. [3]

As the back-and-forth turns continue, you'll know he's learning a lot. But you'll also be able to see that he's really enjoying the interaction and connecting with you. He'll have no idea how much he's learning or that his brain is doing important work – he'll just know he's having fun!

A Complete Guide for Using Prompts to Teach Individuals with Special Needs

<https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/04/22/a-complete-guide-for-using-prompts-to-teach-individuals-with-special-needs/>

Years of research has demonstrated prompts to be an effective teaching tool for Autistic people.

Prompts can be equally useful for helping people both with and without special needs. Have you ever pointed your finger to direct a person's gaze in the right direction? If so, you've prompted someone. And have you ever used an alarm clock to wake up or set a timer to remind you to take something out of the oven? Consider yourself having been prompted!



What is a prompt?

Prompts have been defined by world-renowned behaviorists, Lynn McClannahan and Patricia Krantz of [Princeton Child Development Institute](#) as: "Instructions, gestures, demonstrations, touches, or other things that we arrange or do to increase the likelihood that children will make correct responses."

Why use prompts?

Prompts usually go hand-in-hand with errorless teaching. There are many benefits to this approach:

- The utilization of prompts is a positive way of teaching and therefore encourages learning because students continually make progress and aren't thwarted or discouraged by hearing the word "no" time and time again.
- When the word "no" is overused, learners can easily become desensitized to it. Using an errorless approach, "no" is infrequently used and therefore still retains its meaning which is especially important in potentially dangerous situations like quickly stopping someone from touching a hot stove, running in front of a moving vehicle, etc.
- Because there are so many different types of prompts, there is a wide selection from which to choose to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. Learners who are excellent readers can benefit from written prompts; those who are visually impaired can be assisted with hand-over-hand prompts, etc.

9 Types of prompts

As mentioned, there is a wide range of prompts from which you as a teacher, parent or therapist can choose. You can base your selection on how much assistance your learner requires as well as by taking into consideration his unique learning style or challenges:

1. Gestural prompt

A Gestural Prompt can include pointing, nodding or any other type of action the learner can watch his teacher do.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “What is something you drink from?”

Teacher prompts learner by pointing to a cup.

2. Full physical prompt

A physical prompt is where the teacher provides physical contact to guide the learner through the entire requested activity.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “Clap your hands.”

Teacher prompts learner by holding each of the learner’s hands in his and then moving the learner’s hands through the entire action of handclapping.

3. Partial physical prompt

The teacher provides some assistance to guide the learner through part of the requested activity.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “Clap your hands.”

Teacher prompts learner by gently touching each of the learner’s two hands and gently nudging the learner’s hands toward each other.

4. Full verbal prompt

The teacher provides the learner with a spoken, complete response to the question just asked.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “What comes after Thursday?”

Teacher prompts learner by stating “Friday.”

5. Partial verbal prompt or phonemic prompt

The teacher provides the learner with part of the response to the question asked or just says the first ‘phoneme’ or sound.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “What comes after Thursday?”

Teacher prompts learner by stating “Fr.”

6. Textual or written prompt

This can be in the way of a list or some other type of written instruction.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “Do your chores.”

Teacher prompts learner by presenting him with a written checklist of his chores.

7. Visual prompt

A visual prompt can include a video, photograph or drawing on a medium like paper, a whiteboard, or an electronic device.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “Clap your hands.”

Teacher prompts learner by playing a video of a person clapping his hands.

8. Auditory prompt

This can include any type of sound the learner can hear like an alarm or timer.

Example: Teacher asks learner, “Clean up your toys in 5 minutes.”

Teacher prompts learner by setting a timer to go off in 5 minutes.

9. Positional prompt

This type of prompt involves the teacher putting the correct response closest to the learner.

Example: Teacher shows the learner three objects... a ball, a shoe and an apple and asks learner, “Point to the one that you eat.”

Teacher places the apple closest to the learner.

Important Prompting Tips

Always **use the least amount of prompting necessary** to get the job done. This is important in order to avoid having your learner become “prompt-dependent,” meaning that he relies on prompts too much. When this happens, prompting becomes counterproductive as it diminishes a learner’s independence by making him only respond with the assistance of a prompt. For example, if you feel that he knows a word but just needs a bit of help, use a phonemic prompt instead of a full verbal prompt.

For this same reason of avoiding prompt dependency **use prompts that are the least intrusive** whenever possible. A gestural prompt, for example, is much less intrusive than a physical prompt so if you feel that a gestural prompt will do the trick, use it. Resort to the more intrusive prompts only when absolutely necessary.

Be sure to **fade prompts** as quickly as possible to try to reduce prompt-dependency. For example, if you make a request for your learner to clap his hands and need to follow it up with a full physical prompt, the next time you ask him to clap his hands, go with a partial physical prompt. Hopefully the time after, you’ll need no prompt at all. The situation will vary from learner to learner in terms of just how quickly you can fade your prompts but just keep in mind the basic rule that your goal should always be to reduce and ultimately eliminate the need for prompts.

Use prompts when your learner:

- is **about to respond with an incorrect response** (e.g., you see him reaching for the wrong object, start uttering the incorrect answer, etc.)
- responds with an **incorrect** response.
- **doesn’t respond** at all (we usually give my son about 3 seconds to respond before intervening with a prompt)

Vary your praise and rewards:

- Give some praise and a smaller reward for a correct response that is achieved with a prompt.
- Give a huge amount of praise and a much greater reward for a correct response that is achieved without a prompt.

Avoid saying “no.”

- If your learner errs or makes a mistake, get in there with a prompt and assist him, and then repeat the request while fading your prompts as much as possible until they become unnecessary.
- Whenever possible, **try using mechanical prompts instead of human prompts**. Research has demonstrated that for Autistic people, mechanical prompts are easier to fade and are less likely to create prompt dependency than those that are delivered by a person. An example would be to choose an alarm instead of your own voice as a reminder to clean up.

Physical challenging behaviour

Sourced from: <https://www.supportincornwall.org.uk/kb5/cornwall/directory/advice.page?id=NEor-Eeu7gA>

Physical challenging behaviour includes biting, pinching, slapping, spitting and hair pulling.

Causes

There may be medical, sensory, behavioural or communication-related reasons why a person on the autism spectrum does these things.

Physical pain, discomfort, or medical issue

The person may feel unwell, tired, hungry, thirsty, or uncomfortable. Biting may be due to pain in the mouth, teeth, or jaw. Spitting may be related to a difficulty with swallowing or to producing too much saliva. Aggression may be due to adolescent hormonal changes.

Developmental stages

Some biting behaviour may be a continuation of infant mouthing behaviour, or a later occurrence of the mouthing phase.

Seeking sensory input

Chewing and biting provide sensory input to the proprioceptive system, which regulates what different parts of the body are doing at different times. The person may enjoy the way saliva feels.

Communicating

The person may be using this behaviour to communicate that something is causing distress and to get it to stop. They may have no other functional way of communicating their needs, wants and feelings.

Frustration or distress

Life can be exceptionally overwhelming at times for people with autism, and the behaviour may be an expression of sheer frustration or distress in response to a range of different stressors. This can include difficult demands, meeting new people, experiencing unpleasant sensory stimuli, a change in routine,

switching activities or having to wait for something – some people have difficulty with the concept of time and sequencing.

Learned behaviour.

The person may have learned that the behaviour can be a very powerful way of controlling the environment. A behaviour which was initially a response to physical pain or frustration could eventually become a way of avoiding a demand or ending an undesired situation (e.g., turning the television off, interrupting an argument taking place nearby). The person may have learned that they enjoy the reaction or interaction they get as a result of the behaviour.

Strategies

Think about the function of the behaviour.

Complete a behaviour diary, which records what is occurring before, during and after the behaviour, or a functional analysis questionnaire (ABC chart). Make notes on the environment, including who was there, any change in the environment and how the person was feeling.

Rule out medical and dental causes

Visit the GP or dentist and seek a referral to a specialist if needed. Bring along notes about when the behaviour happens (i.e., what time of day and in which situations), how often it happens, when it first started, and how long it lasts.

Provide sensory opportunities.

Find alternative activities, or provide a bum bag of alternative objects, that provide a similar sensory experience to that provided by the challenging behaviour, and build these into the daily routine. For a person who bites, you could provide chewy tubes, gum, carrots, raw pasta or sultanas. For a person who pinches, you could provide playdough. For a person who hits, you could do a clapping song/rhyme. For a person who pulls hair, tie long hair back and find something to replicate the pulling sensation, e.g., 'row your boat' game, tug of war, climbing up a rope.

Introduce communication tools.

Support the person to use other ways of communicating their wants, needs and physical pain or discomfort, e.g. by using a visual stress scale, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), pictures of body parts, symbols for symptoms, or pain scales, pain charts or apps.

Use social stories to explain why it's not appropriate to bite/spit/hit, and describe alternatives.

Some people use communication boards to indicate how they are feeling. This could be a blackboard or a Velcro board with key emotional words or emotional faces. Every time the person engages in challenging behaviour, encourage them to use this form of communication instead.

Some people may find it easier to communicate by text or email.

Remove physical and sensory discomforts.

Provide relief for physical discomfort, e.g., pain killers. Remove unpleasant sensory input, e.g. use ear defenders to block out noise, use sunglasses to reduce light, and reduce strong smells, replacing them with smells that the person prefers.

Prepare for change.

Prepare the person for any changes in routine or for meeting new people. You could use visual supports, showing photos of new people and places, introducing them in small stages. A child or adolescent with autism may find physiological changes associated with puberty difficult to cope with, and you may need to prepare them for this.

Structure transition times

The previous activity may have been something the person greatly enjoys, or it may be that once focused on an activity, they find it difficult to adjust to something else. You could:

- use a visual timetable showing the day's activities, or a now-and-next board.
- use a timer to indicate when an activity is finished.
- encourage the person to put the activity into a finished tray or to put the symbol for the activity into a finished box to signal that the activity is over.

- use visual supports to show the steps leading up to each activity.
- make the waiting time between activities as short as possible.
- have a visual, concrete representation of how long the person needs to wait before the activity is going to begin - this might be an electronic timer, sand timer, or stickers on a clock face.
- consider making enjoyable activities available during transition times - a transition box, containing a number of different activities, could keep the person focused during these times, making an unstructured timeframe much more structured.

People with Pathological Demand Avoidance may need a less directive and more flexible approach than others on the autism spectrum. Consider reducing the demands placed on the person at difficult times of the day.

When a particular person is targeted

If a particular family member or support worker seems to be the target for challenging behaviour, think about what might be triggering it. It might be that a perfume scent is overwhelming, or that the other person is associated with a distressing activity.

Maybe the person is upset when the support worker or family member spends time with other people. If so, you could try scheduling some time specifically for them to spend together and showing this on a visual timetable. Very strict boundaries need to be kept as to when this will happen and for how long. It may be useful to have a sand timer so that the person knows that the time is up when the sand runs out.

There may simply be a personality clash between the person and a staff member. If this may be the case, consider whether this staff member could work with other people instead?

Provide support for managing emotions and relaxation.

Look at anger/emotions management and create opportunities for relaxation. You can do this by, for example, looking at bubble lamps, smelling essential oils, listening to music, massages, or swinging on a swing.

Challenging behaviour can often be diffused by an activity that releases energy or pent-up anger or anxiety. This might be punching a punch bag, bouncing on a trampoline, or running around the garden. If the person has low self-esteem, highlight all of their achievements and strengths in an achievement book of photographs and certificates. Counselling or joining an autism-specific social group may also help.

RESPOND QUICKLY AND CONSISTENTLY

Respond quickly and consistently, e.g., for spitting, wipe away saliva immediately. Limit verbal comments, facial expressions, and other displays of emotion, as these may inadvertently reinforce the behaviour. Try to speak calmly and clearly, in a neutral and steady tone of voice.

Redirect

Tell the person what they need to do instead of the behaviour, e.g., "David, hands down". Use visual cues such as picture symbols to back up instructions. Redirect to another activity that is incompatible with the behaviour (e.g., an activity that requires both hands, or that occupies the mouth, such as sucking a sweet) and provide praise and reinforcement for the first occurrence of appropriate behaviour, e.g., "David, that's excellent playing with your train".

Reward appropriate behaviours

Provide frequent encouragement to the person for engaging in appropriate behaviour and for periods in which they did not engage in physical challenging behaviour. This will help the person to learn that other, more appropriate behaviours bring positive outcomes.

Rewards can take the form of verbal praise and attention, preferred activities, toys, tokens or sometimes small amounts of favourite foods or drinks. Ensure that you clearly name the behaviour that you are rewarding, e.g., "Jane, that's good waiting!" and ensure that rewards are provided immediately after the behaviour that you wish to encourage e.g. "You can spend 10 minutes on the computer now".

It should be noted that some people with autism do not enjoy social attention. In these circumstances, verbal praise can cause distress and actually stop the person engaging in the desired behaviour in the future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If the physical challenging behaviour is presenting significant risks to the person or those around them or is resistant to intervention, try to get specialist help to deal with the behaviour. Arrange an appointment with the GP to discuss the issue and to request referral to a behavioural specialist if appropriate.

What is a social story?

A social story is a short story written in a specific style and format. They are used to support the development of social skills and social understanding (particularly for autistic children and young people). Social stories are used to help a child understand a small part of their social world and how to function appropriately within it. Each story provides a child with clear, accurate information about what is happening in a specific social situation, outlining why it is happening and what a typical response might be; or what people do, why they do it, and what the common responses are. The story describes what is obvious to most of us but not obvious to those with impaired social understanding. The stories are written with the individual child's needs in mind.

The objective of a social story is to share information that will help a child understand a particular situation; they should not be used as 'bossy' rule books.

The goal of each story should be to teach social understanding, not rote compliance; to describe rather than direct.

Social stories can be used to: -

- Provide positive feedback to a child so that they can recognise their own appropriate skills and responses (in an affirming style).
- To support the development of self-care skills (e.g., how to clean your teeth, get dressed etc.)
- To prepare a child for a new experience.
- To help a child customise themselves to a new situation and to give information about appropriate responses within the particular scenario.
- To help prevent extreme responses that may be triggered by a lack of social understanding.

The writing of a social story should be suited to match the language and vocabulary levels of the child in mind. The story should be written in the first person and present or future tense and should contain one aspect or step per page.

Basic social stories use three kinds of sentences: -

- **Descriptive sentences:** are truthful and observable sentences (opinion and assumption free) that give accurate information about the environment or setting. They provide, in words, the basic facts about what can be seen. They often answer "why" questions. Example: 'There is a waiting room at the doctor's surgery'. 'The waiting room usually has a row of chairs around the edge'. 'The people sitting on the chairs are waiting to see the doctor'.
- **Perspective sentences:** refer to or describe the internal state of other people (their knowledge/thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, motivation, or physical condition). These sentences give the child insight into the heads and hearts of those featured in the story, so that the individual can learn how others perceive various events. Example: 'The people usually like to sit quietly, because they don't feel very well'. 'The people will be happy if I sit quietly and wait'. 'Dad will be happy if I sit quietly next to him'.
- **Directive sentences:** present or suggest, in positive terms, a response or choice of responses to a situation or concept. Example: 'I will try and sit quietly next to Dad and wait'. 'It is good to sit quietly in the waiting room'.

The ratio of these sentences used within a story are; 1 directive sentence for every 2-5 descriptive and/or perspective sentences. (There are seven sentence types that may be used in advanced social stories).

Example social Story: -

What do I do in the waiting room at the doctor's: -

There is a waiting room at the doctor's surgery.

The waiting room usually has a row of chairs around the edge.

The people sitting on the chairs are waiting to see the doctor.

The people usually like to sit quietly because they don't feel very well.

The people will be happy if I sit quietly and wait.

Dad will be happy if I sit quietly next to him.

I will try and sit quietly next to Dad and wait.

It is good to sit quietly in the waiting room.

Notice the non-directive language used; usually, I will try, it is good to (rather than you will!) Other good examples could be; sometimes, most, my teacher will be happy if.

Social stories were developed by Carol Gray (1994). <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

For further information: <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>
(National Autistic Society).

Recommended reading:

The New Social Story Book by Carol Gray

Writing & Developing Social Stories – Practical Interventions in Autism by Dr Caroline Smith

Sensory Play in the Early Years: 25 Amazing Activity Ideas for You to Try

27th May 2022 by [Louise Jackson](https://www.blossomeducational.com) www.blossomeducational.com

What to find on this article:

1. What is Sensory Play?
2. The Benefits of Sensory Play
 - 2.1. Independent Play
 - 2.2. Language Development
 - 2.3. Fine and Gross Motor Skills
 - 2.4. Self-Regulatory Behaviours
 - 2.5. Social Skills
 - 2.6. Problem Solving and Abstract Thinking
3. How Sensory Play Can Help SEND Children
 - 3.1. Sensory Processing
 - 3.2. Social Skills and Speech and Language
 - 3.1. Mindfulness
4. The Science behind Sensory Play
5. 25 Easy Sensory Ideas and Activities



What is Sensory Play? Sensory play involves any activity designed to stimulate a child's five main senses of touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste. The touch element can also incorporate physical movement along with balance.

There are 5 main senses, although heavily debated that there are more. We discuss movement within the umbrella of touch, sensory play can however be considered as just different textures to squish, pull, and handle. This is only the tip of the sensory iceberg; in this



article we delve into why sensory play is important, the benefits behind facilitating exciting sensory activities for your nursery children, as well as equipping you with 25 easy and cheap sensory ideas to try for yourself.

What are the Benefits of Sensory Play in the Early Years?

Think about how we, as adults, process our senses to help us make everyday decisions. Through real-life experience we have been able to use our 5 senses to express certain things like: when there is potential danger (fire and smoke, emergency sirens, unsafe footing); our likes and dislikes (favourite foods and foods that make your stomach flip, certain materials we love or loathe); and finally our senses can spark memories (the smell of certain scent, the scenery of a favourite area). We can use our senses to inform our brain of all of these events due to concrete understanding and knowledge surrounding our senses. Therefore, sensory play and activities are vital to helping young children to do the same.

There are countless benefits attached to encouraging children to participate in quality sensory play. Let's look at some of those benefits!

Independent Play

When enjoying sensory activities, toddlers to school-starters can develop their independent play skills. Learning to explore without the confidence of others can begin to strengthen their likes, dislikes, and interests.

Language Development

Similar to the Curiosity Approach, the use of sensory play can encourage language development through social play. Opening up endless games and activities to play with the sensory equipment, this language can build on everyday discussions and questions between peers and also encourage vital back and forth discussions between adults and children.

Fine and Gross Motor Skills

By 12 months, children are continuing to explore the world with their hands and mouths. They will begin to show a preference for a dominant hand and can begin to hold smaller objects with precision (pincer grip). The use of sensory activities can develop their fine motor skills in a fun, exploratory environment with no expectations. This all eventually builds up towards securing learning skills (such as holding a pen or pencil). A number of touch activities also incorporate balance and movement, developing necessary gross motor skills needed to develop healthy habits with nursery-aged children.

Self-Regulatory Behaviours

Self-regulation can be a difficult task for adults and children alike. It is personal to the individual how they can regulate their extreme feelings and emotions. Some may choose a physical activity, calming music, reading in solitude as well as engaging in sensory activities.

Social Skills

For children to develop holistically, they require regular opportunities to develop socially. This may be with a friend or a small group, and by engaging with sensory play, children can remove intimidation involved in social interactions. By mirroring others' behaviours and language, sensory play is a perfect opportunity to teach about sharing and cooperative play.

Problem Solving and Abstract Thinking

Wrapped up in messy play, problem-solving can be the underpinning of most sensory play activities. Linking with the Curiosity Approach, open-ended activities (listed below) can inspire all types of games, language acquisition and abstract thinking. Try to highlight on your nursery communication platform the option for 'Messy play near you' experiences away from the nursery base.

How can sensory play help SEND children?

Some children can feel overwhelmed when responding to information passed to their brain from their senses. This can be a developmental journey or maybe signs of additional needs (Sensory Processing Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Visual or Hearing Impairment). Sensory play can help to gently expose children to different experiences linked to their senses as well as being used as self-regulation strategies.

Sensory Processing

Challenges associated with sensory processing can be due to a child having over or under sensitivity to particular or multiple senses. Your role is to ensure your nursery setting is inclusive in culture to support these preferences and needs. It may be that these children benefit from more than a sensory soft play area or sensory table within the nursery and would benefit from incorporating sensory play into everyday activities.

Social Skills and Speech and Language

Social skills can be particularly challenging for some children who require additional support due to communication and interaction delays or disorders. Using the vehicle of sensory play can allow children to remain in a comfortable activity, whilst introducing the challenge of social interaction and communication. This allows for friendships and relationships to be built.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be defined in a variety of ways; it is the process of focusing on the now. Participating in an enjoyable activity such as reading, yoga, sports, painting can help a person to find their flow. Mindfulness is an excellent strategy for those children who experience more extreme emotions as well as those within a typical range. A number of the ideas and activities listed below are ideal for introducing and encouraging mindfulness, which can be used as a calming strategy.

How does sensory play help brain development?

Sensory play is interesting, engaging, and tactile learning and what's even better is the science behind the use of sensory activities in assisting with children's brain development. Let's look at the science behind the play.

When learning with our senses, our brain stores the information in the sensory memory. This is where we begin to process and understand the world, progressing into short term memory and finally into long term memory. When problems are solved and novel ideas are created, this develops cognitive skills. Sensory play strengthens sensory-related synapses and functions which are vital for the development of sensory processing capabilities. This explains why it is so essential to facilitate sensory activities with new-borns and toddlers alike.

25 Sensory Play Ideas and Activities

Sensory Bins

Possibly one of the easiest and cheapest activities to create; you will need a large container and a selection of objects with different textures. They can be natural objects (rocks, twigs, leaves) or small toys of different textures. You can fill the bins with water, rice, and cotton wool or leave the objects uncovered. Add a blindfolded element for more sensory exploration.

Sensory Bottles

Sensory bottles are an excellent strategy for both mindfulness and self-regulation. They are made up of water, clear glue, food colouring and glitter, and can be tipped upside down to see the glitter fall slowly down to the bottom. Just be careful to check the lid is tightly glued shut!

Cotton Ball Art

Hang some large pieces of paper onto an outdoor surface (a fence is perfect), dilute water-based paint with water on a paper plate and place some cotton balls in the paint. Your children will aim and fire at the paper, creating an abstract masterpiece whilst exploring sensory textures.

Zip lock Painting

Messy play without the mess! Place blobs of thick paint into a sturdy ziplock bag with a piece of paper inside. Your child will move the paint around with their hands, feeling the squishy sensation whilst creating artwork. Double win!

Giant Bubbles

Hoola hoops or a wire coat hanger are the best for creating giant bubbles. Dip them into a washing up liquid and water mixture and swirl them in the air. The shiny colours from sunlight bounce off the bubbles creating a sensory feast for the eyes.

LED Lights

Lava lamps or LED lights around a darkened room are excellent visual stimulation for young children, as sight is their first explored sense.

Water Sensory Table

The introduction of a water sensory table is recommended for nursery settings. With a large, deep-water tray and different sized containers, children can use funnels and pipettes to collect the water. It is an excellent introduction to capacity in early Maths.

Oobleck

The logic-defying science experiment is perfect for sensory exploration. You will need cornflour and water (you can add non-staining food colouring but take care with regular food colouring as it will stain). Once the water is mixed into the cornflour, the mixture becomes both a solid and a liquid!

Water Beads

Water beads expand when submerged in water, children can place them in water and watch them grow. They are a soft yet slimy texture that can be very calming for them to run their hands through.

Slime

Slime can be created a hundred different ways, mainly from kitchen-based products like bicarbonate soda, pva glue and non-staining food colouring. Research different recipes as some slime can be soft and squishy whilst others slimy and sticky- offering a sensory range!

Mud Pies

Back to the roots or the ground with this next idea, good old fashioned mud pies. This involves a selection of movements for push and pull stimulation as well as the difference in soil when it is wet and dry.

Soap Foam

Following perfectly on from messy play, this activity can promote handwashing habits as well as engage with sensory stimulation. Place some washing up liquid, some non-staining food colouring and water in a blender. This will create soap foam. Lay it in a shallow tray and explore the texture.

Find it Tubes

You can add small objects (sequins, small toys, shells, buttons) into a large bottle and fill it $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way with dry rice. The children will shake the bottle to try to find the objects. It can be useful to record which items you put in as you do it to create a checklist for searches.

Ice Cube Painting

Using an ice cube tray, pour different paint into each section. When semi-frozen you can place an optional lollipop stick in for fine motor skills. Using a large piece of card or paper, wipe the melting paint cubes to make an image.

Food Play

There are studies to support the use of messy play with food and the increased likelihood of a child then trying this food. Away from the dinner table, try mashing and spreading different food to explore textures- if they want to give them a taste, that's okay too!

Sound Tubes

Creating musical instruments is a sensory treat! Add some dried beans, rice or pasta into different sealable containers. Ear defenders can be used to reduce overstimulation.

Balance Beam

Balance and movement are often thought as additional senses, this very well may be the case! Encompassing in the 'touch' category try to develop their sense of balance by using a raised beam or even a 'beam' masking taped to the floor.

Swing

The motion of swinging can be an act of self-regulation for many children with ASD. Encourage children to safely try swinging in different methods: lying on their belly, being gently swung from side to side.

Sandbox

A firm favourite in nurseries, due to the difference in dry and wet sand textures as well as being able to grab and crush sand between hands and even bare feet.

Tasting Fruit

Fruit can be tangy, sweet, or even a little sour. With parental consent, begin to introduce different fruit during snack times. This can be an optional addition or substitute, always make sure they have the safe option of their known snack.

Tasting Sweet Food

Sweet food is often preferred over tangy or sour if you have children with overly sensitive palettes. Try some food where sugars are naturally occurring or limited like some fruits and yoghurt.

Planting

Green fingers can stimulate lots of sensory experiences as well as increase responsibility and fine motor skills. Introduce the use of a trowel or other digging implement to further their coordination skills.

Bread Baking

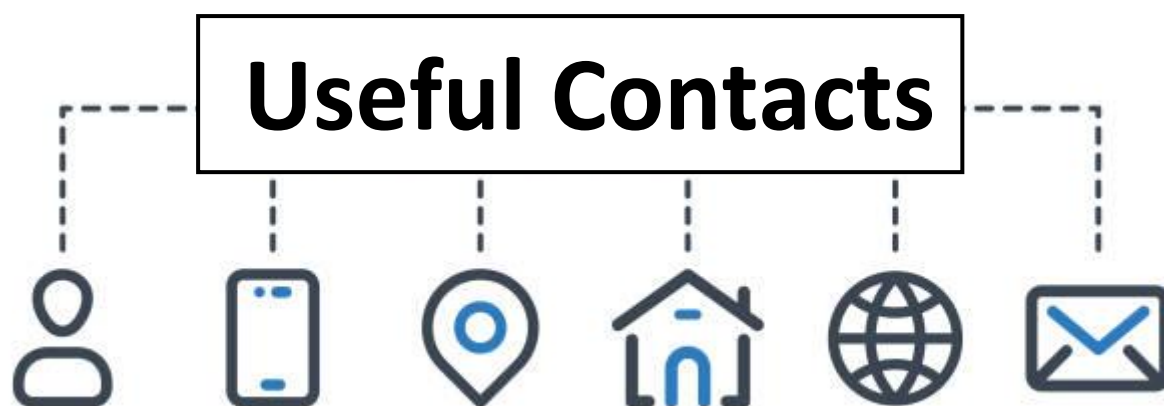
This is an unusual sensory opportunity to interact with both soft and squishy material (dough) as well as the finished product (harder external material). Although this can take longer to complete, this is an activity that offers endless sensory exploration.

Bubble Wrap

Find yourself with bubble wrap you need to recycle? Add paint to the mix and we have a bubble wrap paint party! Your child will need some adult supervision in case the surface becomes slippery. Place a piece of paper or card on a wipe able floor, blob a mixture of paint colours to the page and lie the bubble wrap on top. The children can pop the bubble wrap and make art!

Frozen Toys

Place some small, plastic toys in a beaker of water and allow them to freeze. Your children can explore the different touch feelings of cold and warm. Explore smashing the ice from a height if they enjoy the additional push and pull sensory feelings.



- **Slough Local Offer**
- **Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Children & young peoples Integrated Therapies-Online Toolkits**
- **‘Let’s Talk!’ – Early Years Speech & Language Enquiries Line**
- **SENDIASS-Slough Special Educational Needs & Disability Information, Advice & Support Service**



Slough SEND Local Offer

[Slough Information and Services Guide | Slough Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Local Offer \(sloughfamilyservices.org.uk\)](#)

Slough SEND Local Offer provides information for:

- parents and carers
- children and young people
- professionals.

Parents and carers can check Slough SEND Local Offer for information on:

- [what to do if your child has SEND](#)
- [types of SEND](#)
- [education and training](#)
- [Education, Health & Care Plans](#)
- [family safety](#)
- [help and support services](#)
- [Start for Life offer](#)
- [childcare and leisure](#)
- [health services](#)
- [courses for parents](#)
- [SEND laws and Code of Practice](#)
- [money and benefits](#)
- [how to get involved](#)
- [Slough Children's Disability Register](#).



[Children and young people can access the SEND Local Offer](#) for information on education and training, health and wellbeing, help and support, travel and transport, becoming an adult, finance and benefits and activities.

Practitioners can check the [SEND Local Offer professionals section](#) for useful resources and services, ways to get involved and training opportunities. The SEND Local Offer also has a [News and articles](#) section where you can find out what's new both in the Slough area and nationally, and a [Consultation and feedback](#) section.

If you offer services or events, please [register for an account on the Slough SEND Local Offer and add details of your service](#).

For further information contact Slough Family Information Service on 01753 476589 or email FIS@slough.gov.uk.

[Slough Information and Services Guide \(sloughfamilyservices.org.uk\)](#)

01753 476 589

The Slough Family Information service website has lots of information about local services; you can select to access the information as a parent/carer, professional or child/young person

The FIS website hosts Slough SEND Local Offer

[Slough Information and Services Guide | Slough Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Local Offer \(sloughfamilyservices.org.uk\)](#)

Slough Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Local Offer website provides information for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families.

It gives information and advice about education, health, social care and other services that are available in Slough, neighbouring areas and nationally.



Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT) Children and Young Peoples Integrated Therapies (CYPIT)

Online Toolkit Links



Communication and Hearing

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/communication-and-hearing/>

- [Auditory processing](#)
- [Babbling and baby talk](#)
- [Basic communication strategies](#)
- [Deafness and hearing loss](#)
- [English as an additional language](#)
- [Expressive language](#)
- [Grammar](#)
- [Listening and attention](#)
- [Sequencing and narrative skills](#)
- [Social communication](#)
- [Speech sounds](#)
- [Stammering](#)
- [Steps to talking](#)
- [Toddler talk](#)
- [Typical speech sounds](#)
- [Unclear speech](#)
- [Understanding language](#)
- [Vocab](#)

Child Safety

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/child-safety/>

- [Burns and scalds](#)
- [Button batteries](#)
- [Choking](#)
- [Poisoning](#)
- [Safe sleeping](#)
- [Sun and heat safety](#)
- [Water safety](#)
- [Winter safety](#)
- [Window safety](#)
- [Suffocation and strangulation](#)

Eating, Allergies and Healthy Lifestyle

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/eating-allergies-and-healthy-lifestyle/>

- [Allergies](#)
- [Asthma](#)
- [Coping with lumpy foods](#)
- [Finger feeding](#)
- [Fussy eating](#)
- [Healthy lifestyle](#)
- [Introducing solid foods](#)
- [Using cutlery](#)

Developing Independence

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/developing-independence/>

- [Buttons and zips](#)
- [Dressing skills](#)
- [Organisation and planning skills](#)
- [Putting on socks and shoes](#)
- [Switching tasks](#)
- [Paying attention](#)
- [School readiness](#)

Fine Motor Skills

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/fine-motor-skills/>

- [Fine motor skills](#)
- [Hand skills](#)
- [Handwriting](#)
- [Letter and number Reversal in writing](#)
- [Pre-writing activities](#)
- [Scissor skills](#)
- [In hand manipulation](#)
- [Visual perception](#)
- [Shoulder stability and fine motor skills](#)

Gross Motor skills

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/gross-motor-skills/>

- [Balance](#)
- [Bilateral integration - co-ordinating left and right](#)
- [Catching and throwing balls](#)
- [Confidence and self-esteem in movement](#)
- [Core stability](#)
- [Hypermobility](#)
- [Pelvic stability](#)
- [Planning movement \(motor planning\)](#)
- [Riding a tricycle](#)
- [Standing and stepping](#)

Toilet Training and Bedwetting

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/toilet-training-and-bedwetting/>

- [Toilet training](#)
- [Bed wetting](#)

Sensory Processing

<https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/health-and-development/sensory-processing/>

- [Touch - tactile system](#)
- [Vestibular \(movement\) system](#)
- [Proprioception](#)
- [Auditory \(hearing\) system](#)
- [Visual \(sight\) system](#)
- [Sensory Circuits](#)



Healthier Together

Local advice and support to help manage and improve the health and wellbeing of babies, children, and young people

All information and more can be found at <https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/>

Further information about CYPIT services can be found at <https://cypf.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services/children-and-young-peoples-integrated-therapies/about-our-therapy-services/>

These documents are to support the promotion of child development and child safety. For more information about all aspects of your child's health please access the Frimley Healthier Together Website <https://frimley-healthiertgether.nhs.uk/>

Concerned about a child's communication skills?

How can I help my child
learn more words?

How can I help them
listen to me?

How can I help them
play with me?

Am I doing this right?



**Call our Enquiries Line to get advice from
a Speech and Language Therapist:**

0118 904 3700

Lines are open Tuesdays and Thursdays 9am - 3.30pm.

Available for parents/carers of children aged 0-5 years with a Berkshire GP.

Slough Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support (SENDIASS)

Providing information, advice and support to children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities, and their parents and carers.

For Information please call: 01753 787693 Email: sendiass@slough.gov.uk Website: www.sloughsendiass.org.uk.

Slough's Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) is a free, impartial, and confidential service that provides information, advice and support to children and young people (up to the age of 25) with SEND, and their parents and carers.

How we work?

- SENDIASS has a friendly team of fully trained staff who are experienced in supporting children, and young people with SEND, and their parents and carers.
- The service provided is **confidential and impartial**. This means any personal information you give us will only be shared if we have your consent.
- The service is provided independently by Slough Borough Council and works in partnership with the local parent/carers group. This ensures the information, advice and support given is impartial.

We provide information, advice, and support on:

- all aspects of SEND, from initial concerns and identification to ongoing support and provision.
- the law on SEND, health and social care.
- Slough's local policy and practice
- personalisation and personal budgets
- resolving disagreements and mediation
- the Local Offer

How we do this

- Signpost you to other sources of information or advice.
- Help find, understand, and interpret relevant information.
- Support you to make your own decisions.
- Attend meetings with you, support with letters.
- Provide information about mediation.
- Ensure your views are heard and can influence local policies.

What sort of situations can we help you with?

- Supporting a child, young person or their parents following a diagnosis of SEND.
- Requesting an education, health, and care assessment.
- Supporting you to work in partnership with your educational setting, Slough SEND service and other services.
- Provide support around exclusions.
- Helping to find a suitable education place, including school visits.
- Supporting in SEND appeal processes such as transport, school placement or plans.



Printable Resources



Contents

- ❖ **First/Then Visual Timetable**
- ❖ **Choosing Board**
- ❖ **Finished Sign**
- ❖ **Example Communication Board**

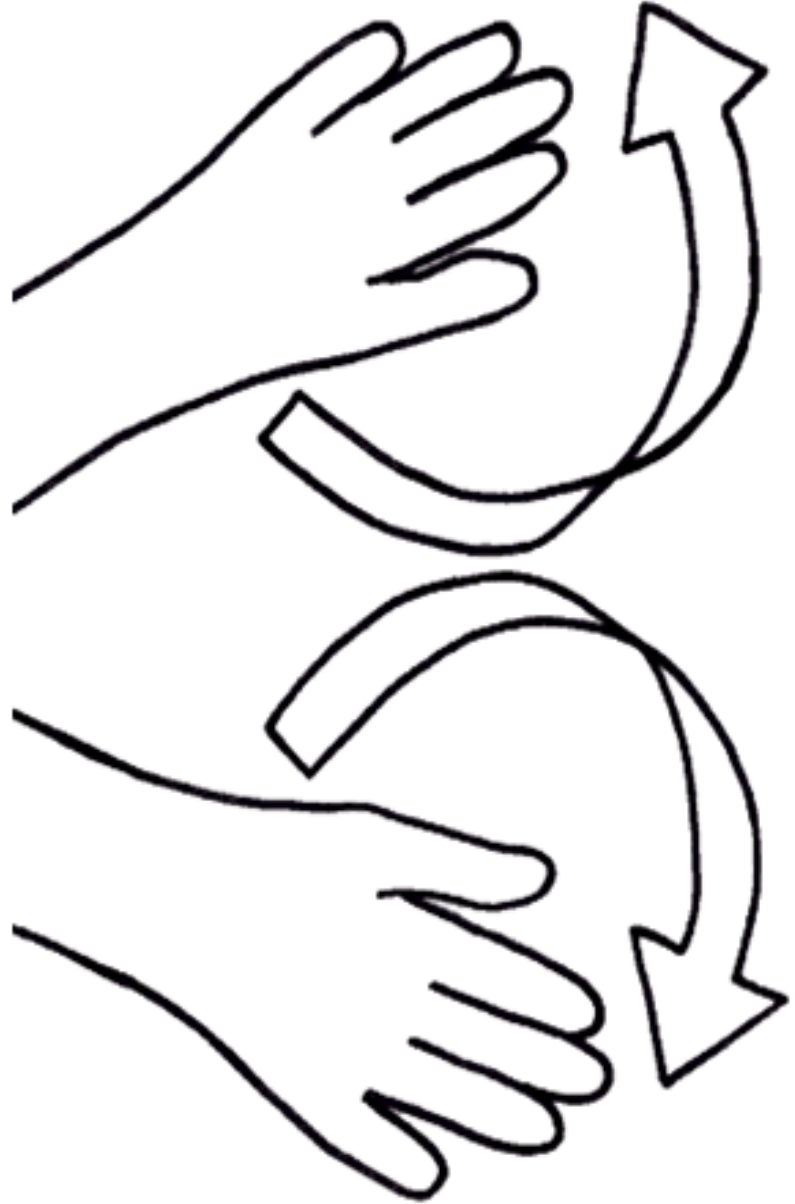
Then



First



Finished



Choose

choose **or**

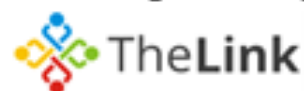
I want



Early Years and Prevention

The Early Years Service consists of the following functions: Family Information Services (FIS), Quality, Care and Learning, Children's Centres and Early Help.

Each of these teams, working collaboratively, offering a range of services to the early years sector in Slough.



For further information visit: www.thelink.slough.gov.uk

TheLink Website <https://thelink.slough.gov.uk/>

TheLink website for education professionals in Slough. We hope that TheLink will become a powerful tool to strengthen the education system in Slough by supporting the communication of education priorities and facilitating collaboration across schools and settings.

TheLink website is funded by the Education Directorate in Slough Borough Council and is managed by the Business Support Team. It is aimed at current and future education professionals in Slough, particularly teachers and Early Years practitioners.

We have a strong and vibrant education system in Slough characterised by good educational outcomes for children and a growing spirit of collegiality and [partnership working](#) across schools and between schools and the LA.

TheLink will further strengthen the education system in Slough by improving the communication about provision, services, and local priorities. TheLink is a publicly available site, but staff and governors in Slough schools and Early Years settings are invited to become registered users to gain the full benefits of the website.