

General Hints and Tips

There are many strategies and interventions that can be used to support these pupils to understand, communicate and behave in a way that is more effective for them and those around them. Some ideas and strategies that staff, parents and carers need to think about when supporting pupils with social and communication needs, such as autistic spectrum conditions, are listed below.

□ **Know the child and try to understand a situation from their perspective**

If we want to support people with social and communication difficulties effectively, we need to understand how the pupils that we work with perceive and experience the world. To do this, we might spend time learning about their areas of special educational need, observe and spend time with the child and collect information from those who know them e.g. parents/carers and professionals. We also need to try to see the world from their eyes. For example, when dealing with a problematic behaviour, it is important not just to look at their behaviour, but to look at the possible triggers and try to understand what is causing that behaviour. We are then more likely to be able to better support them effectively. It might help to sit in their seat and look around the room. Listen carefully to all of the sounds and use all your senses. This might help you view the world from their perspective. The IDP includes some helpful strategies on this area - [Know the Pupil: IDP](#) .

□ **Talk directly to them**

We need to think about really focusing on our written and spoken language to ensure our meaning is not lost. When speaking, we can use students' names before we speak so they know that we mean them and to ensure we have their attention. We need to be clear, concise and not use extra information. We can also make sure we encourage eye contact and have left enough processing time to allow understanding and wait for their response.

□ **Teach to all their senses**

Children with social and communication needs tend to be visual learners so they benefit from the use of props, photos, pictures, symbols, and written words to reinforce what is said, and that they can refer to afterwards. Think about using sound, touch, and smell in lessons, too. Visual props and demonstrations and real experiences tend to be far more powerful than just words for these pupils. Make sure any images used are clear and unambiguous. They should not convey a misleading meaning. For example, a symbol for playtime should not have toys that the child cannot play with on. Some practitioners use actual pictures of things rather than symbols if symbols could mislead.

□ **Use structure and routine to reduce anxiety**

A clear structure and routine helps to reduce anxiety and frustration. For instance, a visual timetable can be used to outline the day. Our spoken language should be very structured, for example, 'Now Register, then Carpet Time.' Use a clear sign or word to indicate the end. It is also important to teach flexibility within routines and show that sometimes timetables change or there are 'whoops' moments when things go wrong or overrun. We can also use structure to support the acquisition of new skills e.g. a visual aid sequencing different clothes could help a child get dressed. Fade out how much you use the visual aid as the skill is gradually mastered.

□ **Focus on the positives rather than the negatives**

Focus more on the positive and expected behaviours, rather than negative ones and punishment. Say, "Now, Good Listening" rather than "Stop talking".

□ **Use Rewards or Motivators**

Rewards or motivators might be appropriate if the student successfully achieves a skill or completes the task, or even if they have tried to do so. They might be rewarded for managing their anxiety rather than for the action itself. The reward or motivator will need to appeal to that particular child and might differ from a typical reward. For example, a child might be given reward stickers with a particular car on or be allowed to do a certain thing for 5 minutes they enjoy. The timing of the reward is important so the child associates the reward with the appropriate behaviour or skill. Often it might be immediate, but progressive successes might build up to a later reward e.g. getting star of the day or a valued sticker if they have got 25 stars. Rewards can be far more effective than punishments if used appropriately.

□ **Allow them to choose when appropriate**

Students are more likely to respond appropriately in some situations if they are given choices rather than just being told what to do. For instance, you could say "Would you like to read this book, or build a Lego tower?" during free play. A visual choice board can give non verbal and/or younger pupils the ability to recognise and communicate their choice.

□ **Help them cope with changes**

Pupils might have a dominant and fixed association when it comes to particular words, people, routines and/or situations and might need help to be flexible. For example, a child might always associate playtime with playing with a particular toy, child or game in the playground and may need support to play less rigidly. They may need support to manage changes and transitions in their life such as transitions from home to school, dealing with a new teacher or unexpected changes to their day e.g. Sports Days or trips.

□ **Be clear and concrete**

It is important to clarify as much you can. When giving verbal instructions, you might use specific information such as 'Open the yellow book'. When giving written homework, you might provide information under subheadings to provide clarification on the timings and what exactly is expected of them. Make sure that visual materials e.g. worksheets and images are clear and not misleading, even if it means they are less attractive.

□ **Be consistent**

Make sure the different staff, parents and carers who support a child use similar support strategies and language to avoid anxiety, confusion and non compliance. If you are addressing a new area or issue, make sure that all parties are involved and are aware.

□ **Use small steps**

Pupils will be supported better if exercises are broken into small steps so they can learn a bit at a time rather than what might seem to them like one, big, impossible task.

□ **Be aware of their environment**

This can be difficult in a busy school, but it is a good idea to try to create an environment which is clear, predictable and takes account of sensory issues (e.g. not too visually overwhelming or generally noisy). We can also make changes to the environment if they cause problematic behaviours or situations.

□ **Try to be patient and understanding**

It is important not to try to 'fix' the issue. There might be problems, but it is vital to support the child in understanding the situations and finding strategies and solutions that work for them. The key is to accept them and prioritise their happiness and mental and emotional wellbeing, whilst supporting them, rather than to change them into their peers.

□ **Do some research**

There are many strategies and interventions that have been produced to support pupils or people with social and communication issues such as those with autism. It is important to learn as much about the different theories, interventions and strategies that you can so you are able to tailor and select support appropriately. These include the below:

- PECS
- Picture symbols
- Structured teaching (TEACCH)
- Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations
- Visual timetables and schedules
- Interventions for autism such as Applied Behavioural Analysis and Pivotal Response Training

It is also a good idea to contact organisations like the National Autistic Society or outreach teams or SEN teams in your local authority to get further support and information on training programmes available.