

TOOLKIT

OBSERVATIONS AND IDEAS

The most valuable tool to use when identifying a child's difficulties and seeking solutions is your own observations and ideas. By fully understanding the child's likes, dislikes, reactions and responses you will be best placed to make appropriate suggestions and solve problems as they arise. This information can then be combined with information from other people supporting the child.

UNDERSTANDING TIME



Time, like speech, cannot be seen. The words we use to talk about time change according to the context. This makes time is a difficult concept for children to understand. Words such as "yesterday" or "later" may have no meaning for them so be specific "we will do painting after tea".

Children experiencing difficulties understanding time may:

- Find it difficult to wait for things.
- Not complete tasks within the time required
- Not want to stop something they have started.
- Be anxious or ask lots of questions about when things will happen.
- Be upset by unexpected changes.

Remember:

- It is really helpful to make use of visual supports like diaries, calendars and timetables. These can be used to help show the child what is happening or is about to happen.
- Divide the day into segments marked by meal and snack times, mark shorter periods of time with an alarm or kitchen timer or a favourite piece of music.
- Make it clear how long something will last before it starts (e.g. favourite programme) e.g. "programme finished when you hear buzzer"
- Use photos (and videos) to make and keep records of past (and future) events, to help the child develop an appreciation e.g. of special times like Christmas and holidays.



Helping children understand time helps to reduce anxiety and make sense of everyday activities.

COMMUNICATION

When identifying solutions to problems, it is very important to think about communication. This can be the message you are giving to a child and it can be the message a child is giving to you.

Helping your child understand what you are telling them:

- Shorten sentences and emphasise key words e.g. "Coat, on" "Teeth, then bed", or "Look, dog".
- Give the child time to think & react/reply
- Give commands in the order you want them done e.g. "toilet, shoes on , then snack" rather than " you can have your snack when you've got your shoes on and have been to the toilet"
- Check that your child understands what you have communicated to him/her - remember words are only one way of giving your child a message, think about visual ways too.
- Keep language concrete and state exactly what you mean. Avoid words that may be misunderstood. Avoid sarcasm or language concepts that are difficult to understand.
- Always tell a child what to do, not what not to do e.g. "put the counters in this pot" rather than saying "don't throw the counters on the floor".
- Think about how we use questions as part of our communication and how we rely on children being able to ask and answer questions in many day to day activities:

Types of questions

- **Yes / No questions** - the child has to process the information correctly but has only a short answer to plan and respond with. Avoid yes/ no questions if there is really only one answer e.g. "can you come over to my desk now?" instead state "it's time to stop and come over here".
- **Forced alternatives** - the child is given a choice of two possible answers e.g. do you want or?
- **Closed questions** - these are questions that have an obvious answer e.g. "What are you eating?"
- **Open questions** - these are the most difficult e.g. What did you do at the weekend? The question provides no support or prompts to help the child understand and answer it.



Helping your child with the message they are giving you:

- Understand how and why your child communicates - this may be verbal (using words) or non-verbal (gestures, actions, behaviour).
- Often difficult or inappropriate behaviour can be a way of your child telling you they are tired, fed up, anxious, overwhelmed or simply not interested or motivated.
- Respond to what you think they are trying to tell you to reduce stress or anxiety.
- Show your child there is another way of communicating that is more acceptable e.g. introduce picture cards, teach key phrases.

INTERESTS AND MOTIVATORS

We all do things everyday because we are interested in them or motivated to do them. The motivation may be:

- money
- personal reward
- the feeling of being useful/appreciated
- getting something completed

These motivators will change according to the activity, our mood and other environmental factors.

Children also need to be motivated but this can be particularly difficult to achieve with a child on the Autistic Spectrum as typical motivators such as "to please the teacher", "to get out for break", "because the rest of the class are" may not be enough.

It is important to think, from the child's point of view, what is motivating and use this to make other activities worth while.

Every child will be motivated by different things

- Some may work for class points or stickers
- Some may love the computer and would do anything to get on the computer!
- For others the motivator may be playing with a favourite toy,
- It may be delivering a message to the office,
- Some may enjoy physical rewards such as bouncing on a trampoline or going for a walk.

The list is endless.

It is important to use motivators in a positive and balanced way. Avoid negative rewards such as "If you don't get your sheet finished you won't get on the computer" and instead use them in a positive, clear way "Sheet first then computer". Some children may be able to work all morning for a 5 minute reward before break. For others they may work for 5 minutes for the same reward. However any signs of motivation and achievement are worth while and can be extended over time.

SENSORY STRENGTHS / NEEDS

We constantly receive information from our senses. Our brain sorts and organises all of the sensory information it receives, often coping with a lot of information at a time.

This information is processed and organised so we feel comfortable and secure and able to respond appropriately to particular situations and environmental demands.

Possible Difficulties:

- Your child may be more likely to be frightened of every day harmless things - e.g. the hot air hand dryer, the school bell, the noisy swimming pool or dining hall, and certain things which he sees or feels.
- He may have reduced sensitivity to pain or temperature e.g. he may not be able to say how he feels or what he wants or be able to bring injuries to your attention and will therefore tell you through his actions.
- Fascination with the feel of surfaces, tastes or smells (may include licking or smelling objects),
- Excessive responses to being touched (may enjoy boisterous tickling but shy away from soft touch),
- Always be on the go and have to keep moving.
- Display jumping, flapping, rocking and grimacing when excited,
- Your child may display no fear of real danger, but excessive fear of harmless objects / situations.
- Laughing / crying / screaming / for no apparent reason.

Remember:

- Warn him that he is going to hear a noise that he does not like, allow him to put his fingers in his ears and reassure him whilst it lasts, give him a reward immediately afterwards for managing well.
- Introduce new sensory experiences gradually and allow him time to become familiar with them
- Make other people aware of the child's likes / dislikes to prevent unnecessary anxiety.
- Consider the child's environment from their point of view, think of smells, how much they have to look at (avoid too much) and feels. Think of the noises the child can hear, are they sensitive to them e.g. TV, traffic outside, heating / boiler.

VISUAL INFORMATION

Some children find it easier to make sense of things they can see rather than things that they hear.

Reasons for using visual information:

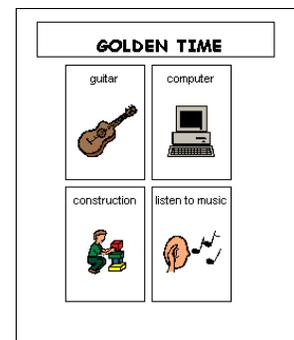
- To establish and maintain attention
- To give information in a form that the child can quickly and easily interpret
- To clarify verbal information
- To provide a concrete way to teach time and sequential concepts
- To give a structure to help understand and accept change
- To support transitions between activities and locations

CHOICE BOARDS

Choice Boards can be particularly useful to help the child decide what to do during less structured activity times e.g. Golden time, choosing time and playtime.

Choice Boards can:

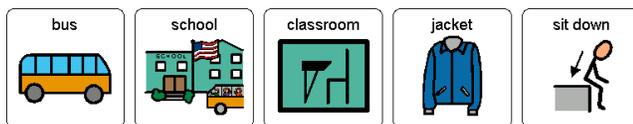
- Broaden the range of choices a child can have
- Help the child make a greater variety of selections
- Improve communication effectiveness
- Give the choices available at that time.



MINI-SCHEDULES

These can help children gain independence in daily routines.

Schedule for arriving at school



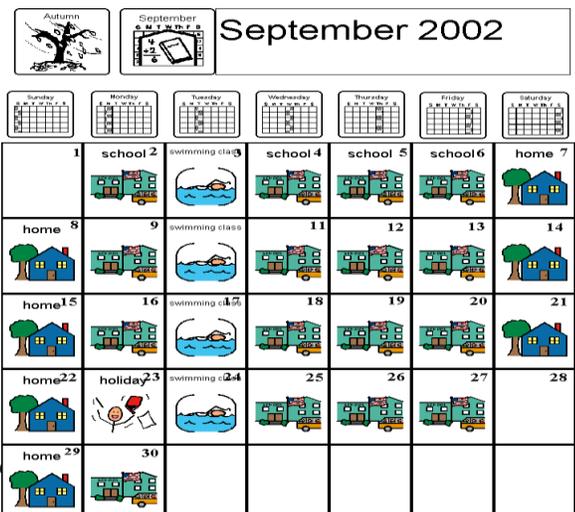
Schedule for getting up



CALENDARS

Calendars can be used to show:

- Which days are school days/ not school days
- When special activities happen
- Who will be home after school
- Which teacher is there (particularly relevant for job share posts)
- When to bring things to school e.g. swimming things.



SOCIAL STORIES

These explain a situation, event or activity to a child and must not assume prior knowledge e.g. describe the event through the child's eyes and include all details.

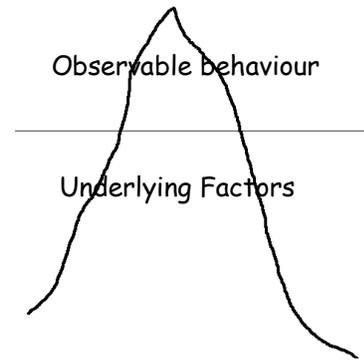
Social stories should be simple and visual with the child as the main character. They make use of photos, things cut out of magazines and pictures from the computer to tell a story about a confusing event or situation. The story should tell the child everything they need to know, in a style of language that they will understand.

Writing a social story

Key points	Example
Set the scene (where and who)	Jack is going to the shoe shop in the car with mummy.
What will happen (from the child's point of view, don't miss out things you know may alarm the child)	Jack can see lots and lots and lots of shoes. He sits on a big chair and the lady comes with a special tape measure to see how big Jack's feet are. What number are Jack's feet? Wow they are!
How might child feel	Jack is worried cos he doesn't want new shoes. Jack was scared when the lady came out of the cupboard carry lots of boxes
What will happen to reassure child	Mummy will give Jack a big cuddle. Mummy will help Jack put the new shoes on while the lady watches. The lady might want to squash the shoes to check Jack's toes are comfy.
Why it will all be okay	Jack won't be scared any more. The new shoes will feel a bit funny but they won't be sore and they won't make Jack cross.
How will the activity end	Mummy and Jack will take his new shoes home and show Mummy will let him run around in his shoes for a while to make them extra comfy.
How they and other adults will feel at the end	Jack loves his new shoes and mummy was really pleased with Jack for being such a brave boy. Well done Jack!

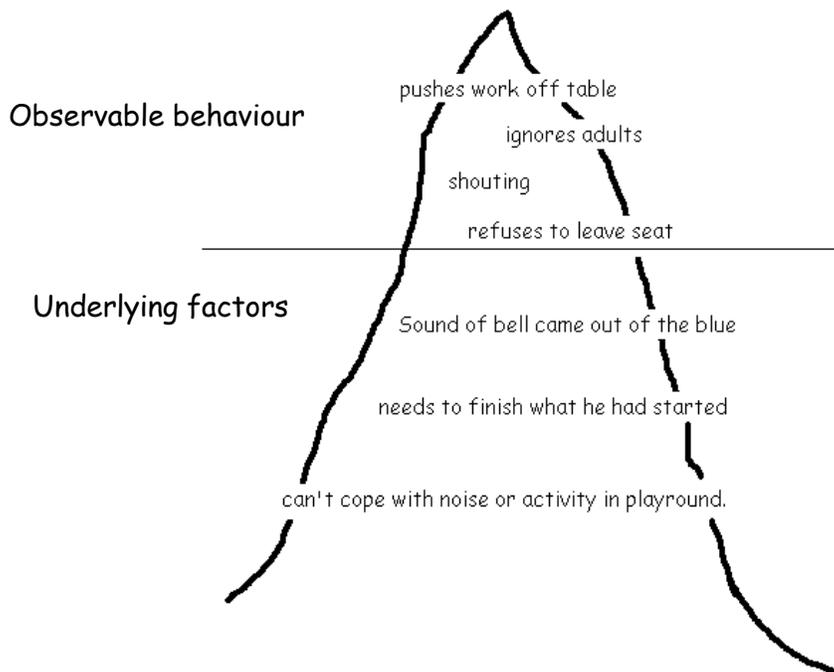
ICEBERG APPROACH

The Iceberg Approach is a recognised strategy used to help think about why things happen in a particular way and what can be done about it. We talk about the observable behaviour of a child as being the "tip of the iceberg". In order to do anything about this behaviour, we have to know what is under the surface.



For example:

Child becomes upset when bell rings for break.



By thinking about these underlying factors from the child's perspective, some solutions to managing the behaviour become obvious.

Child's Name:

Date:

Current Issue

I'm going to try:

- Observing my child to see what is going on **from their point of view**
- Understanding the problem using the Iceberg approach
- Helping my child to understand time
- Changing the way I communicate with my child to help them understand
- Thinking of others ways my child can communicate with me
- Identifying interests and motivators
- Thinking about my child's sensory needs
- Introducing visual information
- Using a social story to explain a situation to my child