

# The Secondary Teacher's Toolkit

for  
Including Young People with

## **Social Communication Difficulties**

(including Autism Spectrum Disorders &  
Asperger Syndrome)

Wiltshire County Council

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With particular reference to

Children with Autism: Strategies for Accessing the Curriculum, KS3/4  
North West Regional SEN Partnership, DfES, 2003

and building on

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# Introduction

This Secondary Toolkit has been developed to help secondary schools to include young people with Social Communication Difficulties (including those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Asperger Syndrome).

More and more parents are asking that their young person have the opportunity to be educated alongside their peers in their local secondary school. Some of these young people will have a diagnosis whilst others will not. Some will already have a Statement of Special Educational Needs when they start at secondary school. The strategies and ideas in the Toolkit are suitable in all these circumstances. The Toolkit is organised into sections that make it easy to use and offers a range of ideas & strategies that are practical & solution-based.

Throughout the Toolkit, 'he' is used, as it is recognised that more boys than girls have Social Communication Difficulties. However, these strategies and ideas are equally suitable to use with girls.

Enough time needs to be given to really try a strategy as change often comes over time. If you feel that the problem is not resolved, go back to the Toolkit and try something else. What works in one situation may not in another. As the young person grows, something that used to work may not be so effective. Be flexible and make changes that keep pace with the young person's needs.

In addition most positive behaviour management techniques can also be used with these young people and many normal teaching methods will be effective in supporting learning.

It can be very rewarding to teach a young person with Social Communication Difficulties. Joining the young person on their learning journey can be exciting and allows you glimpse the world from a different perspective. The Toolkit will provide you with tools you need to complete that journey successfully.

This document needs to be read in conjunction with the document:  
**Children with Autism: Strategies for Accessing the Curriculum, KS3/4**  
North West Regional SEN Partnership, DfES, 2003

# Glossary

Throughout this document, the following abbreviations are used

## **SCD - Social Communication Difficulties**

An umbrella term that includes all the Autistic Spectrum Disorders and conditions, which often occur alongside [or co-morbid with] the Autistic Spectrum. Examples might include ADHD, ODD [Oppositional Defiant Disorder], and Semantic-Pragmatic Difficulties. SCD is a descriptive term which encompasses pupils with specific autistic diagnoses and those for whom a formal diagnosis has not been made, or where parents do not wish to seek [or feel the need for] diagnosis. The strategies described in this document should address many of the needs of pupils with SCD.

## **ASD – Autistic Spectrum Disorder**

A medical diagnosis, which can range from mild to severe along a continuum. Diagnostic criteria include impairments in imagination, social communication and social interaction. This diagnosis can often be given as a working diagnosis when it may not be clear whether the pupil has High Functioning Autism or Asperger Syndrome.

## **AS – Asperger Syndrome**

An Autistic Spectrum disorder which includes generally good verbal and cognitive skills, though individual profiles may be spiky and vary considerably. Often co-morbid with a degree of fine motor skills difficulty, and sometimes ADHD, most pupils with AS can have their needs successfully met in mainstream schools. Individual pupils may have skill areas in the gifted and talented range. Again AS is a medical diagnosis. Often pupils want to have friends and make social contact, but don't know how to do this successfully.

## **Autism, Classic Autism, Kanner's Autism**

A medical diagnosis noting the 'Triad of Impairments' in social communication, interaction and imagination, usually accompanied by a level of learning difficulty which can range from moderate to severe. Some individuals may never develop spoken language and require augmentative systems such as PECS. Frustration can lead to challenging behaviours.

## **HFA – High Functioning Autism**

A medical diagnosis of classic autism where there is less impairment of verbal language and/or cognitive skills. Many pupils with HFA can have their needs met in mainstream schools but may have very different individual presentations of strengths and difficulties to pupils with Asperger Syndrome. Sometimes such pupils are reluctant to engage in social activity.

SECTION 1

BEHAVIOUR

# Aggression, frustration and temper tantrums

## Why does this happen?

- Not all young people with SCD/ASD have behavioural problems. Those that do are often reacting to a world that they find confusing and unpredictable.
- He may not understand that other people are able to help him with a problem. He may struggle with a difficult task until he reaches the very limit of his tolerance level, never seeking help.
- The young person may find the social environment of school confusing and unpredictable, leading to tension and stress.
- Aggression can be triggered by hypersensitivity to certain sensory stimuli. This might be something that adults do not even notice, such as a flickering light or the sound of the school bell.
- Aggression may be used by the young person to avoid something he doesn't want to do.
- Aggression might be used to gain attention, especially if the behaviour causes a great deal of fuss and excitement.
- The young person may have a very low tolerance of frustration
- Frustration can result from the lack of an appropriate skill. For example, the young person may hit out at others when he is touched or receives a pat on the back; he doesn't realize he should say "Let go."
- The young person with SCD/ASD may have difficulty anticipating future events. He may be fearful that if his needs are not met immediately, he won't ever get what he wants. This can cause him to lash out or have a tantrum.
- Short, intense outbursts of rage or aggression may be associated with epileptic seizures. Epilepsy is very common in children with SCD/ASD. Onset of seizures can occur at any age.
- Angry outbursts may occur if the student is being bullied or teased. He might lack appropriate coping mechanisms to deal with peer pressure, especially if he does not have close friends.

## Tools

- Remain calm, remind yourself the behaviour is an attempt to communicate – don't immediately assume that it is mis-behaviour.
- A review of the young person's stress level should always be undertaken when behavioural difficulties occur.
- Reinforce your expectations for behaviour. Give the young person clear, predictable routines. State clearly to the student the consequences of aggressive behaviour before it occurs. For example, "If you hit or kick anyone again today you will sit here for 5 minutes."
- Note which activities the young person finds difficult and simplify or modify them. On the other hand, the disruptive behaviour may be due to boredom if the young person finds the task too easy.
- Make a list of rules for acceptable classroom behaviour and stick it into the young person's diary.
- Help the young person to recognise and interpret feelings of unease and act on them before an 'explosion' occurs. Use an 'emotional thermometer' and have the young person visually identify where he is on the scale. Talk about different scenarios. For example, if the young person loses his pen, he might put himself at 2/10 on the scale, if something really bad happened, it would rate a 10/10. This can increase the young person's emotional understanding; i.e. there is no need for a huge emotional reaction to a minor incident.
- Disruptive behaviour is likely to reduce as social and communication skills improve.
- Offer positive reinforcers for appropriate behaviour.



- Remember that the young person may have outbursts of aggression just like a much younger child due to delayed emotional development. It can be hard for teachers to accept this type of behaviour, particularly if the young person is talented in others areas of learning.
- Removing the young person from the environment (i.e. time out) may work as a last resort. See Behaviour modifications – what works and what doesn't [p11-13]
- Talk to the young person's parents. If this behaviour is out of character, he may need a medical checkup to investigate whether the behaviour is caused by epileptic seizures.

### **Aggression towards others**

- Immediately after the incident remain calm and direct the young person to a quiet space. Pay attention to the 'victim' and totally ignore the young person who hit.
- Deal with the behaviour at a later date. It is important that both you and the young person are calm when talking about the behaviour as there is more chance the young person will process the information. When stressed or angry, the young person's ability to understand language decreases.
- Often young people on the spectrum find it difficult to talk about situations when they are 'personalised' and find it easier when the discussion is 'de-personalised' so try talking about the situation in the third person.

### **Tantrums or 'meltdowns'**

- Remain calm and look at the tantrum as an act of communication. Try to establish why the behaviour is occurring. Try not to give any verbal or visual messages until the tantrum has stopped, then give full attention to the young person. Praise the good behaviour. Use time out if appropriate - see Behaviour Modifications – what works and what doesn't [p11-13]
- Resistant or oppositional behaviours - gaining compliance. Ask yourself if the student could be behaving this way out of anxiety, fear of failure, lack of comprehension, lack of interest or attention seeking. Treat the behaviour according to the cause.
- The young person may try to distract you from the request by arguing. Try not to become involved in the argument. It wastes time and the young person can become more confused due to the increase in language.
- Check your requests. Are they statements and not questions? Don't give too many at once. Is he too busy? Have you failed to gain his attention?
- In some cases the behaviour may be due to a lack of understanding - the behaviour is produced to mask the inability to complete the task. Repeat the request in a simplified form and then ask him what he has to do to check his understanding of the task.

### **Refusals**

- If the young person constantly refuses to perform a particular task give him the opportunity to do it for a very short period then heavily praise him. Over time, gradually increase the period he engages in the task and decrease the amount of reinforcement.

### **Follow through**

- If you have set up a particular consequence such as time out, then you need to make sure you (and other staff) apply the consequence each time the behaviour is displayed. This can be tiring and time consuming, so make sure you are prepared. If you have asked him to do something then you need to see that he follows it through and does it, even if you have to physically do it with the student.

### **Keep your sense of humour**

- This can be really difficult but it's important to keep your sense of humour and use it in appropriate situations. Not only will this help you see the funny side of situations, it will prevent *you* from becoming too stressed. Acting the fool can often be really effective as you are doing the exact opposite of what he expects.

# Attention and Concentration

*Megan's teacher wears a perfume that overpowers her sense of smell to the degree that she cannot concentrate and wants to get out of the classroom.*

## Points to note:

- Students with SCD/ASD tend to be easily distracted. The young person might find it hard to concentrate if he is disturbed by background noise, flickering lights or the movement of others about the room. Classrooms that are very bright and colourful can overload the student with visual information. Many young people find it particularly hard to 'filter out' background noise and visual information.
- Stress and anxiety will affect concentration levels. See Managing Behaviour for more information.
- Strong perfume or deodorant may be overwhelming to the student, leading to an inability to concentrate.
- The student may have trouble understanding what he needs to focus on; he may be unaware of the 'big picture', concentrating instead on small, irrelevant details.
- The student is likely to have an obsessive interest that can intrude on his thoughts. He may pay little attention to an activity that does not fall into his particular area of interest.
- The student may ignore group instructions because he doesn't think of himself as part of the group.
- Attention may be poor where there is a receptive language difficulty. The student may not take in what is being said; he may just 'tune out'.
- The young person with SCD/ASD can have difficulty predicting how long an activity will last; this uncertainty may cause anxiety which will affect his concentration.
- During an activity the student may get stuck but won't ask for help and starts doing something else. Teachers may interpret this as poor concentration.
- It is common for people with SCD/ASD to be very rigid and selective in their choice of food, i.e. he will only eat foods of a certain texture, taste or colour. A diet that is nutritionally inadequate will affect his ability to concentrate.
- You will find that the young person may be far better at absorbing information from a documentary program or using educational software, than purely listening to a teacher in class.

## Tools

- If appropriate, play background music to mask out unwanted noise.
- When demonstrating an activity you'll need to remind the student what he needs to focus on. He might need frequent reminders. Visual cue cards may be more effective than verbal prompts because words 'disappear' quickly.
- Try to incorporate the student's particular topic of interest into activities to increase his attention and motivation. This could be as simple as placing a sticker related to the student's interest in the corner of a worksheet.
- Use the young person's name frequently when addressing the class as a whole. This will help him to recognise that he is part of the group. If the student has an aide, ask them to repeat the instruction to him individually if necessary.
- Keep your language clear and uncomplicated, giving one instruction at a time.
- Give the young person sufficient time to process the instruction, and then check that he has understood.

- Try to keep tasks as relevant and functional as possible. The young people might have little motivation to complete a task that has little relevance or meaning to him personally.
- Make sure the young person understands the activity, knows how to start and when to finish. Use a kitchen timer or clock to show how long the activity will last; this will help him develop a concept of time.
- Place a visual cue card on the student's desk as a reminder to ask for help. It doesn't necessarily have to say 'help' as long as the student knows what it represents.
- If concentration deteriorates throughout the day, it could be due to low energy levels. Talk to the young person's parents and suggest they consult a dietician if you suspect poor eating habits.
- If all else fails and the student just won't pay attention, he may need some time out of the classroom. Remember we all have our bad days!

# Behaviour modification:

## What works, what doesn't?

### Points to Note:

- It is far better to put strategies in place to prevent or minimise inappropriate behaviour than to react to that behaviour *after* it has occurred.
- All behaviour has a purpose or function that produces a result. For a child with SCD/ASD, the desired result may be to reduce stress or move themselves out of a stressful situation.
- Young people with SCD/ASD need a support plan to address behavioural issues. Generally, as inappropriate behaviour increases, so too does punishment. Punishment teaches the child that he has done something wrong. However, it doesn't teach what is appropriate or acceptable. This is especially important for children with SCD/ASD.
- The young person should not be punished for inappropriate behaviour arising from his disorder, such as being inattentive, unorganised or misinterpreting verbal instructions.
- Time out may be ineffective for some young people with SCD/ASD. In timeout, the 'punishment' may be seen as a break from a task that the student wanted to avoid in the first place. He is then allowed to sit in peace and quiet which can be a great relief if classroom noise causes him stress and anxiety.
- Short term strategies may keep the behaviour under control but long term strategies are required to avoid an increase in problems over time.
- When trying to decrease behaviours they will tend to get worse before they get better. In fact it is a good sign that the method is working if you notice increases in frequency and intensity for a short time.
- Remember to stay positive and look for small steps in the increase or decrease of the behaviour.

### Tools:

- Complete a behavioural profile checklist and student summary form. Questions to ask during information-gathering:-
  - *Which* behaviours are most difficult or disruptive?
  - *What* is happening immediately before and after the behaviour occurs?
  - *Who* is present?
  - *When* does it occur? (i.e. only in the morning)
  - *Where* does the behaviour occur? (i.e. only in certain classrooms)
  - *What* do you believe is being communicated by the behaviour?
  - *What* skills does the young person lack that may contribute to the inappropriate behaviour?
  - *Describe* the consequences that have been tried to stop the behaviour?
  - *Which* consequences have failed? Which have worked?
  - *What* motivates the young person? Think of his interests and obsessions.
  - *What* might be an effective reward system for good behaviour?
  - *What* strategies could be implemented to prevent this behaviour?
  - *What* consequences will be used when the behaviour occurs in future?
- Maintain a consistent approach to inappropriate behaviour. Good communication between parents, teachers and support staff is essential in ensuring a consistent approach. Use a communication book.
- Remember lecturing won't alter the behaviour. Try not to use threats.

- Only tackle behavioural issues that affect the young person's ability to learn, if it interferes with other young people, or if it is a safety issue. Obsessive or odd behaviour may keep the young person calm and does not necessarily inhibit learning. For example, the young person may hum softly to himself or flick his fingers in front of eyes to keep himself calm. If you tell him to stop he is likely to become even more anxious and upset as he tries to control the compulsive behaviour and cope with his stress at the same time.
- Introduce any changes gradually to minimise disruptive behaviour and use visual cues wherever possible. See Visual Support.
- Identify the consequences of behaviours. A negative consequence would be punishment, a positive consequence is something the young person looks forward to happening. Positive consequences are far more powerful to either increase or decrease a behaviour. Sometimes the consequence you are giving the young person may actually be *reinforcing* the behaviour, such as the time out example above. Another example might be telling the young person 'Well done!' in a loud voice. If the young person is sensitive to noise this become more of a punishment than a positive reinforcement.
- Most young people with SCD/ASD have an obsession or preferred area of interest. This interest can help teachers to identify appropriate rewards or motivators. Everyone involved with the student must be consistent in their approach to inappropriate behaviour. Good communication between parents, teachers and support staff is essential in ensuring a consistent approach. Use a Communication Book.

### **Some important points about time out:**

- the area the young person sent to should be devoid of any interesting or distracting objects,
  - it should never be a dark room or small space that will scare the young person,
  - an empty hallway or a chair in a corner of the room works best,
  - use time out immediately following the inappropriate behaviour,
  - use clear, precise language to tell the young person he is going to time out and state the reason why. "Time out, no hitting."
  - remain calm,
  - take him to the time out area,
  - do not lecture the young person,
  - ignore him for the duration of time out,
  - if he leaves the timeout area escort him back as many times as necessary until he has calmed down or the time limit has been reached,
  - once the young person is calm or he reaches the time limit act as normally as possible and do not reprimand him again.
  - if you sent him for time out because he refused to comply with an instruction, he should be asked to do the requested behaviour when he returns,
- ALWAYS check whether you think time out could be reinforcing the behaviour, instead of deterring it. If timeout is necessary, the young person should have a clear understanding of the kind of behaviour that will result in timeout. He should be able to explain, write or draw the behaviours that will lead to timeout.
  - An analysis of the negative behaviour needs to be undertaken, specifically looking at the *communicative intent* of the behaviour. When this intent has been identified, teachers and support staff can work on the skills the young person needs to acquire to prevent this behaviour from re-occurring and put reward systems in place that will motivate the young person to behave in an appropriate manner.

- As with any behaviour change the child's poor behaviour may increase before it decreases and as such any tantrums will increase. You have to continue to ignore the child and this can be very trying. If he puts himself in danger of being hurt then without talking remove him from the situation and continue to ignore him.
- Don't give in at the wrong time! This can make the original problem worse.

### **Offer choices - give the child control**

Many inappropriate behaviours occur due to requests or expectations that are too difficult for the young person to accomplish. Constant commands and directions can also be frustrating for him. It is important to give him choices so that he does not feel that he is constantly being 'bossed' around. Keep the choices limited to two and use visual cues as some children may only state the last or first thing they are offered rather than what they really want.

### **In summary**

An analysis of the negative behaviour needs to be undertaken, specifically looking at the *communicative intent* of the behaviour. When this intent has been identified, teachers and support staff can work on the skills the student needs to acquire to prevent this behaviour from re-occurring and put reward systems in place that will motivate the child to behave in an appropriate manner.

# Classroom interaction

*James is disruptive when working in groups and at learning centre activities. He dislikes the lack of defined space and is threatened by situations that are unpredictable.*

## Points to note:

- In the classroom, a student with SCD/ASD will have difficulty reading the intentions of the teacher and understanding why things happen the way they do.
- The student may find the social dimension of shared learning to be confusing, which is why many students with SCD/ASD learn a great deal from educational computer programs. Computer programs present information in a logical and sequential format, perfectly suited to the unique learning style of the young person with SCD/ASD. The same applies to documentary programs.
- The young person may not understand that he/she is part of a group and may ignore instructions given to the class as a whole.
- The young person will need to be taught how to pay attention, and importantly, what to pay attention to.
- The young person may have sensory processing difficulties that make him feel uncomfortable or threatened by the close proximity of other students. Group work may cause anxiety and the young person may insist on working alone.
- The young person may have difficulty with turn taking and waiting his turn. He may ask a lot of irrelevant questions and constantly interrupt the teacher or his peers.
- The young person may seem to 'switch-off' at times and seem incapable of tuning into classroom activity.

Be aware that the young person who seems quiet and well-behaved may be most at risk in the classroom; problem issues that are unseen may well go unaddressed until intense frustration results in verbal and/or physical outbursts.

## Tools:

- The young person will respond best in a classroom environment that is ordered and quiet, with an atmosphere that is encouraging, not critical.
- It is essential that the classroom teacher has a positive and supportive approach toward the young person with SCD/ASD as other young people will pick up on this and also adopt a welcoming attitude.
- Watch for peers who may obviously or subtly annoy the student and ensure they do not sit together. Some peers may feed off or feed back inappropriate behaviours to the young person with SCD/ASD. While the young person with SCD/ASD may like these peers, the relationship is not necessarily desirable.
- Consider taking the young person out of the classroom to a quiet area for short periods to teach new concepts in a setting free from distraction.
- Avoid doing things for the young person that he/she can do for himself.
- Written instructions, or a combination of text and pictures or diagrams, should be used to support verbal instructions where possible.
- Be very explicit when giving verbal instructions – don't assume that the context in which it is given will make the meaning clear.
- Don't assume that the young person will read your intentions from your behaviour.



- Make sure the young person clearly understands the daily routine. Use a written timetable reinforced with images if necessary.
- Take advantage of the number of quality educational computer programs available – if the young person has a particular interest in computers, he/she could be rewarded for good behaviour with extra time on the computer. Young people who have difficulty with written tasks can type and print their work.
- Don't automatically assume misbehaviour if the young person is not responding to an instruction. He needs to understand that he/she is part of the group. Say his name to get his attention before giving instructions, even when giving group instructions. If the young person is embarrassed by this, agree on a signal, such as a hand clap, that alerts him to attend.
- The young person may not focus on what you consider to be the obvious focus of attention. Again, be explicit. For example, you might need to say, "Look at what I'm holding." Not simply, "Look over here."
- Sit the young person in the most appropriate place in the classroom, where he/she is unlikely to be disturbed by the movement and close proximity of others. If the young person resists working in small groups, have him work with an integration aide or classroom assistant, if one is available. Then progress to working with one other young person, before attempting group work.
- Use teacher-selected groups for classroom activities to ensure the child with SCD/ASD is not left out by his classmates.
- Allow for periods of solitude. The social demands of the classroom can be demanding and frustrating.

# Dealing with Changes in Routines – picking up the pieces

Young people with Social Communication Difficulties usually learn best in a structured environment where routines are learned and followed. In mainstream school, changes in routine are inevitable and can throw him 'off track'. A Visual Timetable (see separate section on Visual Supports p98-99) and careful preparation for any change can minimise difficulties and have a positive effect on behaviour at home and at school.

## Tools

- Be friendly and reassuring. Tell the young person you will help him and he will be ok. e.g. when there is a supply teacher in class, school trip, new classmate, special Assembly. This approach shows the young person we understand a change in routine is difficult for him to accept.
- Use **Language Jigs** or **Social Stories**) as visual representations of the sequence of events to expect.
- Understanding of concepts such as before/after, why/because are often problematic. Explicit visual information works best to support this learning.
- Consider how best to use the **Language Jig/Social Story** with the young person e.g. 1:1, during lesson time, for homework

Discussion with parents immediately prior to a change is often most helpful. Parent's are often in the best position to know the best way to use the **Language Jig/Social Story** with their young person and are able to reinforce the information.

- Role play can make new routines visual e.g. school photographer's visit. Classmates enjoy being involved and gain from learning how to give support.
- Using a timer placed on a picture of the unexpected event may cue it sufficiently in advance to lessen anxiety, e.g. "When the timer goes off, it will be time to ....." This is a useful tool for transition from one activity to the next in a known routine or when there is a change of room or staff.
- Count down to the end of one activity and the beginning of the next, especially if the student responds positively to number sequences
- Make a transition project book as preparation for changes between schools, e.g. transfer to sixth form or college.

*Arranging extra visits and taking photographs of 'Faces and Places' in the new class/school can smooth the transfer. Well-planned extra induction will pay dividends by lowering anxiety.*

When a change occurs without the opportunity for preparation, the young person may be unable to cope. He may have what appears to be a tantrum but is best viewed as a panic attack. In which case.....when all else fails...

1. Do not make demands, ask questions or tell him off, e.g. avoid “Come here!” or “What’s the matter?” or “Don’t do that again!”

*He feels overwhelmed; asking more of him can make things worse. Back off, if everyone is safe. This can be the beginning of the cool down period.*

2. Should he or others be in danger, it may be necessary to intervene by holding his lower arm, avoiding the wrist area, and leading him confidently to a pre-arranged place of safety, e.g. quiet room, library or in a corner of the corridor.

*It is often best to use no words at this stage, until calm descends.*

3. Use a calm, non-emotive voice to reassure

*This ensures he knows he has a friend alongside.*

4. Consider allowing some solitary time, doing nothing in particular or a favourite activity, e.g. drawing, sharing a book or watching fish in the school aquarium.

*Gives young person and adult time to re-adjust and is not a reward in the traditional sense, but a chance for reorientation.*

5. When the time is right, consider re-visiting the problem scenario, e.g. taking calmly, draw the events using stick figures and including speech and thought bubbles or flow diagrams

*This may reveal how he viewed the situation and why he behaved differently to his classmates – vital to planning how to prevent a re-occurrence.*

## Case Study

Jamie's teacher explained that later that week they would be changing from swimming to sessions in the Sports Hall for PE. Jamie became inconsolable and screamed repeatedly, "I'm not going to the Sport's Hall!"

**Action.** The TA and Jamie viewed the Sport's hall during a break time and again when a lesson was taking place. They compared similarities and differences between the changing facilities for swimming and the Sport's Hall and ways of showing you were ready and places to wait for activities to start. They discussed and drew out that PE included a range of physical activities designed to exercise the body, which might occur in differing settings depending on the requirements for the activity. This could be the pool, Sport's Hall or sometimes the field or other outside areas.

Jamie was able to appreciate better that different buildings in the school had different functions and that physical exercise or sport could occur in different places.

## Effective rewards and motivators

### **Points to note**

- Some young people with SCD/ASD lack an inbuilt desire to please others.
- Rewarding positive behaviour helps the young person understand what is acceptable behaviour.
- The young person may become anxious when asked to do something that is unfamiliar, preferring the activities he knows, as this makes him feel safe and secure. It's important to identify and use appropriate rewards and motivators to encourage development of new skills.
- The rewards that motivate neuro-typical young people may not appeal to a young person with SCD/ASD.
- The usual things we say or do to praise a young person for a job well done may have no real meaning to the young person with SCD/ASD. For example, "well done" or a pat on the back.

### **Tools**

- Assess the young person's interests to establish what will be the most effective rewards and motivators. Talk to the young person's parents also. This information can be listed on the young person's pen picture. Conduct regular reviews as interests can change over a period of time.
- Creative teachers can work the young person's preferred interest into lessons and activities.
- Allow the young person free time at his preferred interest if he completes his work before the other young people. He may like to read about his preferred interest, from books and magazines brought from home.
- Give the young person 'behaviour stickers' as a reward for good behaviour or use the school's reward policy in an adapted form.
- A young person that particularly dislikes homework may be motivated to improve his behaviour or complete class work if offered a 'pass card' that excuses him from homework for one day.
- An extension of the pass card is a reward system with positive reinforcers printed on cards. The cards are given out at random for good work/behaviour. The young person can then trade these in at appropriate times.
- Another tangible reward system is a sticker card with a grid of squares. The young person earns one sticker for good behaviour. When the grid is full it can be traded in for a reward. Use stickers that relate to the young person's interest.
- When the young person is working toward a reward have a picture or photo of it as a visual reminder. Make sure the young person understands exactly how many points he needs to earn his rewards. A social story can help the young person understand the reward system. See social stories p124-5.
- Use a communication book between home and school to report on progress, skills learnt, behaviour etc. This will give parents the opportunity to learn about, support and praise their young person's good behaviour.
- Initially offer the young person frequent rewards to improve motivation - you can be more selective later.
- Change the reward system regularly to keep up the young person's interest and motivation.

- A young person with challenging behaviour may hear nothing but negative comments, so be quick to praise even minor improvements in behaviour. This will help improve self-esteem.
- Make your praise meaningful. Instead of 'Good job' or 'Well done' try these phrases;

You've certainly worked hard.

*Good remembering.*

You must have been practising.

*You're really learning a lot.*

Now you've worked it out.

*You're doing much better today.*

That's a real improvement.

*I'm happy to see you enjoy working.*

You're getting better at it every day.

*You remembered everything!*

You're very good at that now.

# Emotions Curriculum

Young people with Communication and Social Communication Difficulties often need to be taught to recognise and how to cope with their own emotions as well as other peoples' emotions.

Refer to Appendices

## Step 1

Define the emotion (in language appropriate to the age and understanding of the young person) and record your description. Look at photographs of faces showing that emotion (LDA produce photo card packs and photographs can be downloaded from the Internet). Get the young person to try to show the emotion on his own face whilst looking in a mirror. What happens to the eyes? Mouth? Nose? Eyebrows? Skin? Record on the face template. Annotate e.g. "the eyes are screwed up and the eyebrows are pointing down".

## Step 2

Think about times when you feel the emotion. What happens to make you feel the emotion?

## Step 3

What happens inside your body when you feel the emotion? Focus on the feeling in your head and tummy. Use analogy to describe if helpful e.g. "excited feels like lots of people are dancing to loud music inside my head".

Record on an outline template of a body. Draw and annotate. Use colour if helpful e.g. "excited is the colour ...?"

## Step 4

Talk about how an emotion causes you to behave. If the behaviour is not acceptable, discuss alternatives. Form an Action Plan to try and behave in acceptable ways in response to this emotion. Link to a reward system. Write a Social Story if helpful.

You may wish to keep this work in a special book or file so that it can be referred to in the future. In time, you can extend the curriculum to cover body language and responses to the emotions of others.

# Health and Safety: minimising the risks

Young people with Social Communication Difficulties can be unpredictable. This makes risk assessment more difficult but being prepared can help you overcome any problems. There may be extra considerations and plans need to be made to ensure the Young person with SCD/ASD can be fully included: Risk Assessments are vital.

## Tools

- Risky situations in school.

*If a young person with SCD/ASD is putting themselves at risk e.g. by climbing to the top of the bars in the Hall, when his class does PE/games, or putting others at risk e.g. by pushing them off the play equipment at break time, you need a plan to make things safer. This might mean using visual explanations (**Social Story/Language Jig**), targeting a change in behaviour and linking to a reward system, providing extra adult support at tricky times or providing an alternative activity at break. You need to be positive and creative in finding a solution that means the young person continues to access the activity. Only if these additional and different approaches were not working would a young person be removed from a situation.*

- Activities that take place offsite.

*Activities such as swimming mean that young people may have to leave the safety of the school site and travel further afield. Good, detailed and visual preparation (**Social Story/Language Jig**) will reduce the anxiety of the young person with SCD/ASD and allow him to ask questions before he goes. Talk to parents to discover if there are any particular issues of which you need to be aware e.g. he likes to run and jump into the pool. Extra help for the first sessions will ensure there is someone on hand to deal with the unexpected.*

- Trips and visits

*Once again, preparation is everything! As for activities offsite, visual support is needed, with the addition of maps or routes showing where you are going, a plan of the site, the day's itinerary and the time you will return to school. An adult assigned to be with the young person with SCD/ASD lessens risk considerably, as they are available to deal with the unexpected. Visit the site before hand if you can, so you can see if there is anything that might be a particular difficulty. Have a backup plan for a situation where the young person has become over-anxious e.g. somewhere to retreat to, like the coach and consider which staff will be available to supervise.*

- Residential trips

*It's all in the preparation! A young person with SCD/ASD will need far more information than other young people to reassure them. Make a book about the trip some weeks before you go. Put in photos, maps, daily timetables, details about accommodation, the young people he will share a room with, what food we will eat etc. Have some 1:1 sessions with the young person to go through the book. Give him the opportunity to ask questions and include the answers in the book. If possible, take him (or ask the parents to take him) to see the place you will be staying prior to the trip.*



*Have backup plan e.g., if he isn't coping, a parent/carer or an adult from school can come and bring him home. Consider how this will be triggered and have appropriate phone numbers. Send the book home to share with parents. Ask them for as much information as possible e.g. about bedtime routines, fears/phobias, food dislikes, ability to look after his personal hygiene etc. Make plans to cope e.g. an adult to help him pack his rucksack, with a visual equipment list, for a day's outing. The benefits of the young person being included will make this preparation very worthwhile.*

### **Case Study**

Tom's Year 7 class were going to stay at Braeside Residential Centre in Devizes for five days, to complete a local study. He wanted to go but was very anxious about staying away from home.

#### **Action:**

A meeting was held with Tom's mum and a book prepared. Tom went to visit Braeside with his Teaching Assistant. Despite reassurances, Tom didn't want to sleep there so it was agreed that his Mum would bring him daily, in time for breakfast, and collect him again at bedtime. Provision was made for Tom to stay on the last night and he managed to get ready for bed, but was too anxious to sleep, so his Teaching Assistant took him home.

Everyone was careful to praise Tom's attempt, so that he did not view this as a failure. His inclusion in the daily activities was highly successful.

# Interrupting, repetitive questions and talking too much

## Why does this happen?

- A young person with SCD/ASD may ask questions repeatedly because it helps relieve anxiety. Questions about 'what will happen next' may be due to anxiety about the future; the young person may have difficulty anticipating what might happen next.
- Sometimes, a young person will be reassured by hearing the same response to his question over and over. He may become distressed if the answer differs in any way from what he wants to hear or what he heard the first time.
- An articulate young person may want to engage in conversation but lacks the necessary skills to do so. Questioning may be his only way of holding a conversation.
- The young person who talks incessantly may miss the cues from others that it is inappropriate to continue with a conversation that is boring or repetitive. He may also interrupt conversations and talk over others because he doesn't know how or when to join in.
- Repetitive questioning may be a result of mimicking the conversation of others – "What are you doing?" "What's that for?"

The young person may go on and on about the same topic when it is something he is passionate about. This is because this is one instance where he knows just what to say; however he doesn't understand that others may not be as fascinated as he is.

## Tools:

- Be sensitive to the young person's attempt at communication. Remind yourself that this questioning may be a means to counter anxiety. Questioning is often a phase children with SCD/ASD experience before they develop more meaningful communication.
- Some people with SCD/ASD love the repetition of asking and getting the same answer every time. Try varying your answers, while still answering the question. For example, "When do we have Art?" answer "At 11 o'clock," "On Tuesday and Thursday," "After break," "Before lunch" etc.
- Move the conversation on but still answer the question. For example, "You have Art at 11, you will be studying life drawing today – what do you like to draw?"
- Create a visual timetable for the young person. If he knows what will happen each day, hopefully he won't need to keep asking. When he asks, point toward the time table rather than answering. You can find a range of printable images on an educational site called [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com)
- List the times the young person is allowed to ask obsessive-type questions on a timetable.
- You may need to place a limit on the number of times you will answer the same question. Make a clear rule – "You can ask that question three times only." After that, suggest more appropriate conversation, "We've finished talking about that now. Ask me about ...." Give the young person a card with a list of alternative questions.
- Tell the young person you will respond to his questions when he has completed his work; this may help to motivate him, especially if he is doing a task he does not enjoy.
- The young person might need help learning when it is appropriate to join a conversation, i.e.: when there is a pause or gap. He may need to be taught specific phrases such as "Excuse me."
- Use role play scenarios to practice conversational skills, such as how to pay attention and appear interested, without asking questions, i.e. by making positive comments, eye contact, nodding etc. Model and practice commenting, rather than questioning. For example, 'You're drawing a ...' instead of 'What are you drawing?'

# Lack of self control

## Why does this happen?

- A young person with poor verbal skills may 'lash out' or destroy things as a means of communication. The behaviour may be his way of saying, "I'm bored" or "It's too noisy in here." The young person may lose self control when he is stressed.
- The young person may appear to lack empathy and experience difficulty understanding the consequences of his actions. He may also have little understanding of his own mental state and that of others – so he will struggle to understand how his actions affect others.
- The young person might have a low tolerance of frustration. He might struggle with an activity beyond his point of frustration. He may not seek adult help.
- The young person may not understand or recognise social conventions. He might have poor emotional development, despite being quite talented in other areas. He may be unable to adjust his own behaviour in a way that is appropriate in a certain social context. He may not understand how his own behaviour looks from someone else's perspective. He might be unconcerned by what others think of his outbursts. Adults may find it hard to understand these outbursts as this type of behaviour would normally be seen in a younger child. Emotional development is delayed in children with SCD/ASD.
- The young person might laugh or cry inappropriately when he is highly aroused or anxious, including when being told off.
- The young person may be particularly vulnerable to being teased or bullied and he might also have poor assertiveness skills. This can result in a sudden, angry release of tension. This may occur some time after the incident.

## Tools:

- Try to identify the trigger for the behaviour. If the behaviour is in response to stress there may need to be some adjustments to the student's environment.
- The young person can be taught a standard phrase or signal to cue his teacher when he's overwrought or needs help. He might prefer a subtle non-verbal cue if he feels uncomfortable drawing attention to himself. Another alternative is a laminated pass card that the student can give to his teacher when he is feeling overloaded. This system might work well for some students but you may need to impose a limit on the number of times it can be used each day. Help the young person to develop coping mechanisms for other times.
- Consider having a quiet area in or just outside the classroom. This can be a safe, secure area for the young person when he needs 'down time' from social pressures and classroom noise.
- If the young person spends recess and lunch breaks in the library, computer or resource room he may do very little physical activity throughout the day. A solo run around an open space after lunch break or recess can help release tension and reduce outbursts of aggressive behaviour.
- Try traditional approaches to coping with stress like instructing the young person to take a deep breath and count to ten. Consider teaching relaxation techniques.
- If destructive behaviour is occurring, you can try to change the behaviour by managing the environment. This involves pre-empting the behaviour and planning ahead.
- The young person might need help to develop self-awareness of his mental state, that is, to recognise feelings of stress or discomfort. Help the young person understand and interpret emotions and encourage him to share his feelings and communicate this to his teacher or TA.

- Breaking down tasks into more manageable parts can prevent some problem behaviours.
- Respond calmly. If the young person discovers that his behaviour causes a great deal of excitement and fuss it may become a hard habit to break.

Try to find out whether the outburst is a result of teasing or bullying. The young person may need supervision or strategies to help him cope with breaks.

# Managing Behaviour – A positive approach

Young people with Social Communication Difficulties have a different perspective from the rest of us, so they can seem to see the world differently from us. This often causes them to behave differently, so going against the norm. Specific teaching of appropriate behaviour in different situations is essential.

## Tools

- Use specific praise regularly when he is doing something right.
- Use phrases such as 'good sitting' or 'putting your hand up, was an intelligent idea.'

*A visual thumbs up or handshake can reinforce appropriate behaviour.*

- Be positive: e.g. 'Book in your rucksack, please,' rather than 'Don't throw your book around' or 'Stop that.'

***When a young person is behaving inappropriately, pause to think: "What do you want her/him to do?" (rather than, what you want her/him to stop doing) – then use a concise, positive instruction.***

- Use visual prompts to accompany spoken language: e.g. 'Andy, ready to work, please' whilst showing him a picture of a student sitting appropriately.

**The young person may find it difficult to accept another person's idea :- a picture is easier for him to process and takes away the personal element of the instruction i.e. it's not what the teacher wants but what is shown on the picture.**

- "Speak and Spin": e.g. 'Speak' by saying "Ben, equipment out, please!" then 'Spin' by turning away.

This ensures he knows what is required of him and prevents you paying attention to irrelevant talk/behaviour, which he/she may use as an avoidance tactic.

- Use his obsessions to motivate.

*A student who is a train enthusiast may access considerable mathematical work through train timetables and planning routes, whilst having an opportunity to share his experience and expertise.*

- Give warnings of change or an end to an activity, e.g. use clock, timer, or countdown.

**Remember he may be engrossed and unaware of time passing. Sudden transitions can be very challenging for a child with SCD/ASD.**

- Don't make an issue out of inappropriate behaviour. Avoid showing shock/disgust. Stress the appropriate behaviour: e.g. "Brian, you need to say 'I want to be on my own'" when Brian has pushed a friendly student away.
- Be non-confrontational e.g. 'It is time to .....'. A friendly adult, sitting alongside, is more likely to be able to 'get through' and keep him on track.
- If in a confrontational situation, remove the personal element by referring to a visual timetable or Language Jig (see separate section)

*He/she may respond to, "It says here, Science, then P.E. Time to get changed."*

- Use a calm, non-emotive tone of voice when drawing attention to inappropriate behaviour. Explain that they have made a mistake. It's ok to make a mistake, but it may be a good idea to try to.....(appropriate action)

*Some children may understand the meaning of appropriate/inappropriate when discussing behaviour. Others may respond better to discussing behaviour, which is ok/not ok.*

- Identify what triggers inappropriate behaviour, e.g. by using an ABC analysis (Antecedents, Behaviour, Consequences)

*A Teaching Assistant needs to record what happens before, during and after an incident. Analysis may indicate how to change circumstances to avoid the problem or how to avoid inadvertently rewarding poor behaviour, e.g. by getting angry and wagging your finger!*

- In some schools and small group settings the use of 'Traffic lights' – circles of laminated card, one green, one orange, one red, usually displayed in the classroom may be helpful.

The adult puts the student's name on the green to denote 'I am doing the right thing,' onto the orange to denote 'I am not doing the right thing and have been warned.' and onto the red to denote 'I am still not doing the right thing and will therefore get a sanction.'

This technique teaches self-monitoring of behaviour – generally children do not like to be 'on the orange' and, once they have experienced a sanction, they avoid being 'on the red'. As an extra incentive, an extra yellow circle can be added, positioned before green in the sequence, to use at the end of a session to show 'I have been really good and will be rewarded': e.g. with a sticker.

### **Case Study**

During Science, Kieran was disrupting the lesson by calling out. He was trying to change /turn the conversation to his special interest, mini-beasts. He was insistent that the teacher answered his questions, getting more and more agitated, when she tried to ignore him.

**Action:** The teacher calmly said, “Kieran, we are talking about electricity. You can talk to me about mini-beasts at 2 minutes to 12 for 2 minutes.” She was able to keep her promise and Kieran was rewarded for not interrupting.

# Managing unusual behaviour

## Why does this happen?

- Many inappropriate and difficult behaviours can be linked to high levels of anxiety, such as humming to mask out disturbing sounds, finger flicking or tapping a pencil to stay calm when feeling anxious. This behaviour is often the student's way of controlling an unpredictable world, hence reducing anxiety.
- Repetitive and self-stimulatory behaviour may be a kind of hobby for the young person – he may enjoy the sensation. It may also help to keep him feeling safe and calm. As sensory thresholds vary in children with SCD/ASD, those with high thresholds will seek out stimulation, i.e. stimulate themselves.
- Time out may be ineffective as a means of controlling inappropriate behaviour in some pupils with SCD/ASD.
- Self-injurious behaviour may be seen when the student is experiencing extreme anxiety or frustration.
- Self-injury may be an attempt to mask the physical pain of a medical condition.
- Self-injury has been associated with epileptic seizures.
- Inappropriate behaviour, such as public masturbation or touching peers in a sexual way stems from poor social awareness. The young person may be indiscrete with his sexual arousal or interest and he might have difficulty understanding why this behaviour is unacceptable in public.
- The onset of unusual and dangerous risk-taking behaviour may be a sign of depression or an anxiety disorder.

## Tools:

- Attempts to stop repetitive or self-stimulatory behaviour are unlikely to succeed. The behaviour serves a purpose (i.e. to reduce anxiety) so it is important to *replace* it with something more acceptable. Telling an anxious young person to stop humming or tapping his foot is likely to cause him greater anxiety as he will have to try to control his compulsive behaviour as well as cope with his anxiety. Be alert to the physical signs that the young person is becoming anxious and communicate this information to the SENCo to help build a profile of the pupil.
- Identify any sources of anxiety. Note when and where the behaviour occurs. If possible, make changes to the environment to reduce stress on the student.
- Help the young person to develop greater self-awareness by interpreting emotions and encouraging him to communicate feelings of distress.
- Lecturing will not alter the behaviour. Avoid using threats.
- Reward and pay attention to the young person when he is working well and displaying good behaviour.
- Repetitive behaviour can be modified by allowing the young person to perform this behaviour only at certain times or in a particular place.
- Give the young person an alternate behaviour so that he knows what behaviour you are asking for. Instead of saying "Stop tapping your ruler" you might say "Keep your hands still." Some young people with SCD/ASD just don't know what they should do when told to stop an inappropriate behaviour.
- When trying to decrease an inappropriate behaviour it might get worse before it gets better. If the behaviour does increase in frequency or intensity for a short period this is often a good sign that the method is working. Stay positive and look for small improvements.



- Where there is inappropriate sexual touching of self or others, it can be helpful to discuss the young peoples' difficulties with others in the class. (Always ask permission from the parents and young person.) Disclosure of the disability to other students is a sensitive issue and requires planning and discussion at a PSP meeting. When disclosure is handled sensitively, other students in the class can work as a team to help the young person with SCD/ASD develop greater understanding of social rules and appropriate behaviour.
- Talk to the young person and their parents regarding a referral to a Mental Health Practitioner if you suspect mental health problems remember you will need to contribute evidence to support your thinking.

# Not responding to instructions

*William doesn't respond to group instructions because he doesn't realise that he is part of the group.*

## **Why does this happen?**

- Most young people with SCD/ASD have poor receptive language skills. They interpret language literally and have difficulty with long verbal instructions.
- Sometimes a young person will have difficulty with group instructions. Possibly he does not think of himself as part of the group, so he doesn't realise the instruction also applies to him.
- However some young people will respond better to group instructions. Those that recognise group instructions tend to adhere strictly to rules, and will rigidly follow these rules in preference to being singled out.
- Auditory processing may take longer. A young person with SCD/ASD may need more time to respond to an instruction.
- The young person may have an overriding desire to do what he wants to do, not what he is told to do. This compulsive behaviour can make it hard for him to stop what he is doing. Sometimes a young person has a strong need to control his environment as a means of making the world more predictable, thus lessening anxiety brought on by uncertainty.
- The young person might be easily distracted and irritated by even a minor level of background noise. This makes it very difficult for him to interpret instructions and distinguish your speech from other sounds. The young person may only be able to attend to only one stimulus at a time, i.e. visual, auditory or tactile.
- Sometimes instructions can be given in a question format rather than a directive. This type of instruction will confuse the young person as he may interpret it literally.
- The young person may follow an instruction one day, then won't respond the next. This can be really frustrating for teachers but can be caused by certain environmental cues. For example, you hold up a young person's assignment and ask the class to start work on the assignment. The young person with SCD/ASD responds to the visual cue. If you are not holding the assignment the next time you give the instruction, the young person may not respond.

## **Tools**

- Get the young person's attention. Address the young person by name even when addressing the entire class. This should gain his attention and help him understand that the instruction is intended for him as well as others in the group. If there is a classroom aide, ask them to repeat the instruction to the young person individually.
- Assess whether the young person does respond to group instructions. If he is non-compliant when given an individual request, it might be better, for example, to ask everyone to be quiet rather than singling out the young person with SCD/ASD.
- Give the young person sufficient time to respond to an instruction, perhaps ten seconds, before repeating it.
- Use precise, clear instructions. Avoid vague instructions like, "Put this away." Give only one instruction at a time and don't continue to talk to the young person after you have given the instruction.

- Slow down your speech and emphasise important words.
- Make the instruction constructive and state what you want rather than what you don't want. Auditory processing difficulties may result in the young person missing parts of an instruction. For example, instead of hearing, "Don't slam the door!" he may hear "Slam the door!" Try saying, "<Young person's name>, shut the door quietly please."
- Approach the young person and try to gain his attention and eye contact before giving an instruction.
- Use visual cues to maximise the young person's ability to fully understand instructions.
- Sign language can be helpful to reinforce verbal instructions. You might sign 'sit down' or 'finish what you are doing', this is particularly useful across a noisy room.
- Keep classroom noise to a tolerable level. This will reduce stress levels and maximise the young person's ability to concentrate and listen to instructions. The young person's ability to process language will diminish or fluctuate when he is stressed.
- Make sure the instruction is a directive, not a question. Instead of saying, 'Can you get the text books?' say 'Get the text books please.' This does not mean that you have to use an overly firm voice or that you cannot give the young person choice.

# Obsessions & Inflexibility

## Coping with change and transition

### **Points to note**

- Young people with SCD/ASD are rigid in their way of thinking so they thrive on routine. They like to know what is going to happen next.
- When his routine is disrupted or something unexpected occurs, the young person may experience great anxiety, even outbursts of challenging behaviour. It doesn't even have to be a major change. In fact, some young persons seem to cope well with something like moving house, but a minor change can cause an unusual response. Any of the following can cause an emotional reaction; timetable changes, supply teacher, new class rules, losing his favourite pen, or a friend or TA absent from school.
- Transitions between classes, particularly in secondary school, can be problematic and unsettling. The young person may become distressed when moving through noisy, crowded hallways. The young person may be tactile defensive; he might have an intense dislike of the inadvertent bumping and jostling that naturally occurs in a crowded hallway. The young person might have proprioceptive difficulties; he can have difficulty judging where other young people are heading and in co-ordinating his own movements, so he might bump into others unintentionally.
- A young person with poor spatial ability will easily become lost moving through hallways, leading to great distress and frustration.
- Fire drills could potentially upset the young person for the rest of the day.
- Change should not be avoided entirely as it is a part of life. The young person needs to learn how to cope with change in a supportive environment.

### **Tools**

- Write the daily routine on the whiteboard or provide the young person with a hard copy and stick it in his diary. Give a copy to the young person's parents so they can discuss daily activities with their child and help him learn the timetable. This simple strategy can decrease anxiety about 'what happens next' and reduce interruptions with questions that may have been relevant to a previous activity.
- Classes need to have a clearly defined structure. Chaos and disruptions can be unbearable to the young person with SCD/ASD.
- On a map of the school, use highlighters to colour code areas and routes between classrooms.
- Give the young person a 5 minute warning prior to the end of class so that he can prepare for the transition. This might be a verbal signal, a visual signal or both.
- Where possible, give as much warning as possible of any change in routine. This advance warning can help the young person cope with the change.
- Arrange for a quick telephone call to the young person's home if a teacher will be absent.
- If an unexpected event occurs, tell the young person what will happen in clear, precise language. Many children are reassured by hearing what will happen after the unexpected event, e.g. "After the fire drill, we will return to the classroom."

- Have a place for the young person to go to if he is lost. Make sure it is a place that is quick and easy to get to and where an adult can readily provide assistance before the young person becomes too upset.

It would be useful to have a copy of the young person's timetable here, along with information and strategies that help calm the child.

- The young person should have a consistent and stable person at school that he can rely on and talk to, such as a counselor, tutor or pastoral staff. Prepare the young person well in advance if this person will no longer be available.
- If you think the young person can cope, allow for some spontaneity to prevent him becoming too dependent on routine. A 'surprise' card with an exclamation mark can be used to alert him to unexpected events. Reassure him that there is nothing to fear and that possibly it will be lots of fun! (Avoid promising that it will always be fun or he will come to expect this.)
- Give the young person positive self-talk phrases to help him cope, such as "It's different today" or "It's a new way today". Social stories can be a good way to introduce this concept.
- To limit stress while moving between classes, consider whether a TA or buddy could accompany the young person to his next classroom a few minutes before the other young people. An older young person, or one who does not have a TA could go to his next class a few minutes early, accompanied by a peer.

# Obsessions & Inflexibility

## Difficulty with rules

### *Points to note*

- A young person with SCD/ASD will rely on rules to give his life structure and make it predictable. This can be an advantage, as rules can be used in a positive way to promote good behaviour. However, when rules change or if they are flexible the young person can become anxious.
- Changes in routine can raise the young person's level of anxiety and affect his ability to concentrate. Too many changes in one day can be so overwhelming the young person may have a complete 'meltdown'.
- The young person might be extremely rigid in the way he learns and applies rules. He might see rules as either 'black or white'. He may not understand that some rules can be bent or broken in exceptional circumstances, such as an emergency.
- Sometimes the young person develops his own set of rules or firmly-held beliefs that help him cope with a confusing world. He might become very upset if others do not play or act according to his rules.
- The young person might insist on enforcing rules or 'buy' into grievances that don't really concern him. He might enforce rules and scold other young persons as if he were an adult. This can happen when the young person with SCD/ASD lacks social awareness. It can have a serious impact on his social acceptance from his peers.
- There is often no understanding of subtle social rules. For example, social convention dictates that young persons make friends with others of a similar age, values etc. The young person may prefer the company of someone a lot older or younger.

### *Tools*

- Be careful when teaching rules. They need to be taught in a way that allows for some flexibility; the young person needs to understand that some rules must be adhered to at all times, some rules can be flexible and some can be broken in exceptional circumstances. For example, rules such as respecting peers and school property should be observed without exception. 'No interrupting when the teacher is talking' can be a flexible rule, i.e. it is OK for a young person to put his hand up if he needs to go to the toilet or is feeling unwell.
- Young persons with SCD/ASD are strong visual learners so use visual supports to reinforce rules. Make a poster with classroom rules printed on it. List these in positive terms, e.g. "Keep your desk tidy."
- If the young person is constantly 'telling on' others, he needs to be taught when it is appropriate to seek adult help. For example, he should tell a teacher if someone is hurt or in physical danger, but not for trivial problems.
- Carefully explain to the young person that other children do not appreciate him taking on an adult role and constantly 'telling on' his peers.
- A social story can help the young person understand why it is sometimes OK to bend or break rules. Social stories are also helpful in teaching subtle rules of social interaction. See Social Stories p124-5

# Obsessions & Inflexibility

## Rigid routines

### *Points to note*

- A young person with SCD/ASD can build up rigid routines for himself because he gets stressed when he doesn't know what will happen next. These routines help to relieve his anxiety. When things happen in a set order, he gets a sense of comfort and security. The young person might become hooked into a routine that is very hard for him to break. Attempts to stop or modify these routines are likely to be met with great resistance.

### *Tools*

- While these rituals may seem odd or bizarre, the behaviour does serve a purpose. Only try to change routines that interfere with learning or that of others, or behaviour that is offensive.
- It will be necessary to conduct a review of the young person's stress level and look at ways of reducing his stress before trying to change any behaviour.
- One way to reduce stress about daily routines is to use schedules.
- Allow for some spontaneity and flexibility within the structure and routine of classroom activities. It is good for children to learn to cope with minor changes in a supportive environment, however not all children with SCD/ASD will be able to cope easily with this at first. Use an exclamation mark on a visual schedule or on the blackboard. Tell the young person that this means an unexpected or unforeseen change of activity or personnel.

# Obsessions and Passions: how to broaden horizons

Young people with communication and social interaction difficulties sometimes have unusual interests about which they can be obsessive. The subject can be a source of comfort and pleasure. They can be passionate about their interests and find it difficult to concentrate on other topics. The classroom focus should be on 'appropriating' the special interest and making its expression more socially acceptable, rather than extinguishing it completely, which would probably prove impossible!

## Tools

- Use the interest to help teach skills in the curriculum

*If the young person is interested in windmills for example, motivate him in Maths by providing a worksheet with problems relevant to mills. If the Learning Objective is about persuasive writing, allow the young person with a passion for trains to write a letter to the local railway company, arguing for a better service. In this way, the objective is achieved and the young person is better motivated. This is not always possible to achieve, as Pokemon Cards will not easily fit into a study of the Ancient Greeks – although systemic societal comparisons perhaps could be made!*

- Provide an acceptable outlet.

*Allow the young person a time to shine by sharing his knowledge e.g. by giving a presentation on his special interest to the class or sharing a special object during tutor time or PSHE'.*

- Establish clear rules to limit time spent on obsessive activities.

*If the young person is obsessed with a computer programme or wants to repeatedly discuss Aliens, give clear limits in terms of time, place and context. For example, allow 2 minutes for talk about Aliens just before lunch, once other tasks have been completed. If the young person forgets the rule, remind him by saying e.g. "Maths first, then Aliens ". Provide a language jig or social story (see separate sections) to explain the rules via visual support. A prompt card may also be useful to remind the young person that it is time to work e.g. it could show a picture of a young person writing, with the words 'Lesson Time'. Reward time spent on desired activities.*

- Use permission to talk about or work on a specialist subject as a reward

*This can motivate the young person to complete a task as he is aware that he can indulge his passion as a result.*

- Help the young person to be aware that others may not be as interested in his subject

*Explain, using a **Social Story** (p124-5), that other young people may not feel like playing a particular game or hearing about a particular subject all the time. Teach a script e.g. "Would you like to play/hear about...?" and prepare the young person with alternative games/topics to use when the answer is no. For example, the young person who always wants to play a particular game could be taught other games and a script to offer them to other young people when they say no to the favourite e.g. "Okay, shall we play.... instead?".*



- Give other young people a social script (See **Social Story** ) to use

*This can help to avoid frustration and encourage friendship. For example, the other young person might say “James, Warhammer at break time. Its time to draw a map now” or “James, we are talking about the Romans now”.*

### **Case Study**

Michael was fascinated by lights and light switches. He asked repeatedly about the light fittings in other peoples’ houses and was unable to resist pressing the light switches several times on entering a room. This was distracting for Michael and others.

**Action:** Michael was given a time & context limit for talking about lights and a set time to press the light switches. This was explained in a social story and he was rewarded for keeping to the rules. Other young people were taught a script to support him. In time, Michael was able to reduce obsessional behaviour until he ceased to talk about lights in school and no longer needed to press switches. However, he commented at the end of Year 8 that he was just as interested in lights as he had ever been but had learnt that others were not, so had stopped talking about them.

# Self Esteem and Depression

## ***Why does this happen?***

- Young persons with SCD/ASD are particularly vulnerable to teasing and bullying because their unusual behaviour and poor social skills make them stand out. Bullies may see them as a soft target. This can lead to poor self-esteem.
- The young person may find it hard to make and keep friends due to poor social interaction and communication skills. Attempts to form friendships can lead to ridicule and failure.
- Other young peoples may ridicule a child with SCD/ASD if he is not skilled in team sports and ball games. The young person with SCD/ASD may not enjoy these activities, favoured by his normally developing peers. Young peoples with SCD/ASD may not like participating in sporting activities due to sensory processing difficulties, i.e. noise, tactile defensiveness.
- Young people with SCD/ASD have reduced coping skills – they have trouble managing stress and anxiety. They often feel like they are out of control.
- While younger children with SCD/ASD are less likely to be aware of their differences, older children may develop an acute awareness that they are different from their peers. Depression in adolescence is high. It is important for the child to develop positive self-esteem ideally from an early age.

## ***Tools***

- Foster the young person's interests and obsessions. Creatively work the young person's interest into lesson plans. Allow him to share his expertise with the rest of the class. This will encourage and motivate him in his learning.
- Many young people with high functioning autism have skills beyond their developmental age, such as memorising formulas. Encourage them to help 'tutor' other young people.
- Encourage young people who have an interest in computers as they suit the learning style of children with SCD/ASD. The young person might become the class 'computer expert'. Computers are a great learning tool and an excellent career choice for those with SCD/ASD.
- Reward even minor improvements in behaviour.
- Young people with SCD/ASD are visual learners. Build on this strength. Reward good work or behaviour with a note of appreciation with accompanying pictures. This can be extremely rewarding for a young person who is constantly being reprimanded for inappropriate behaviour.
- Encourage the young person to keep a journal or portfolio of his best work. This should be reviewed whenever he is feeling down.
- Help the young person to monitor his moods – help him identify good feelings. For example, you might say, "I bet you feel proud that you did that!"
- It is essential that the school policy on bullying and harassment is enforced to ensure that young peoples with SCD/ASD are not discriminated against. These young people must have access to a safe environment free from harassment.
- Watch for signs that the young person is experiencing serious difficulties and alert his parents if you feel he needs medical attention. Depression may not present in the 'classic' way. Signs may be a reduction in personal hygiene, risk taking or bizarre behaviour (climbing on roofs, playing 'chicken') or tiredness and irritability due to poor sleep. Medical assistance should be sought without delay. Anti-depressants can make a huge difference to behaviour.

# Sensory Difference: Adapting to a young person's sensory profile

Young people with social communication difficulties often have problems in understanding how to deal with sensory information. It is hard for them to pay attention to some sensory messages, yet ignore others. They can have hyper (high) sensitivity or hypo (low) sensitive to sensory information. This can vary in different situations. The impact on learning and daily functioning can be significant but awareness of a young person's sensory profile means that interventions can be put in place to help.

Examples of the difficulties differences in dealing with sensory messages may bring are shown on the table below:

Sensory system	Hyper-sensitivity (high)	Hypo-sensitivity (low)
Tactile (touch)	Refusal to do PE in the hall as the sensation of bare feet on the wooden floor is over-whelming.	Stabs any object with a sharp end repeatedly into own arm but appears to feel no pain.
Visual (sight)	Unable to take part in an art lesson as the bright colours are "hurting my eyes".	Looks sideways at objects with peripheral vision and complains that central vision "makes it blurred".
Auditory (hearing)	Concentration is affected because the ticking of the clock is distracting.	Not responding to the whistle to signal the end of the game as he doesn't acknowledge certain sounds despite normal hearing
Gustatory (taste)	Severely limited diet as many foods have an overpowering flavour or texture and are rigorously avoided.	Eats anything – jumper sleeves, paper, his pencil etc.
Olfactory (smell)	Being unable to sit next to a particular young person because the smell of their shampoo is distracting.	Licks things that are new to him.
Vestibular (balance)	Finds it difficult to make some movements in PE and sports.	Needs to rock, spin or swing his body frequently
Proprioception (body awareness)	Difficulty with some fine motor skills e.g. buttons	Often bumps into people and furniture.

## Tools

- Be aware of the situations that might cause sensory overload.  
*If a young person 'over-reacts', think carefully about what the problem might be. The young person can often provide the answer if asked e.g. "Sam, you threw the paints in the sink because...?". This information is vital in devising creative solutions for next time.*
- Watch out for the signs of impending sensory overload so you can intervene at an early stage.

*Some young people begin to show signs of anxiety that you can pick up on. Those with autism & Asperger Syndrome may start self-stimulating behaviour e.g. hand flapping, humming, rhythmic movements, as a way of over-riding other sensory messages with ones within their control.*

- Never belittle the reaction.

*We all have different reactions to sensory messages, as illustrated by food likes and dislikes. If a young person refuses to wash his hands before cookery because “the water running from the tap feels like needles”, accept that this is his experience. Trying to force the young person will only result in more distress and telling him not to be “silly” may affect self-esteem. Focus instead on finding an acceptable solution e.g. putting water in a basin.*

- Be creative

*Any solution that works for both young person and teacher is worth trying. The answer may be very simple e.g. putting his hands over his ears when the music is playing in assembly. Other situations will require more complex solutions e.g. a programme of desensitisation to different foods to promote a healthier diet. Some problems lessen over time as the young person becomes better able to deal with the sensory messages.*

- Talk to parents

*They will probably have already encountered a similar difficulty at home and may have an idea that will help in school.*

- Allow time for the young person to deal with sensory overload

*If an experience has caused sensory overload, the young person may need some time out in a quiet, non-stimulating environment to calm. Overload causes stress levels to rise, with the accompanying raised heart-rate and production of adrenalin.*

- Prepare the young person for unusual sensory experiences

*Make sure the young person is given warning of e.g. the visit of group to assembly who will be playing brass instruments. Have a plan ready to deal with sensory overload or offer a choice to attend.*

- Develop the young person's skills

*If, for example, fine motor skills are difficult for a young person or he stands too close to others, consider setting a target on the IEP to tackle the issue and allow time to teach skills & practise.*

#### **Case Study**

Ryan refused to use the toilets at school as the noise of the flush was too much for him.

**Action:** Ryan was allowed to wear his I-POD in the toilet so he could replace a difficult sensory input (the flush) with one that didn't cause problems for him (music).

# Sensory Issues

Children with SCD/ASD often have sensory problems. They may seek or avoid sensory stimulation. They may be overly sensitive or very slow to register sensory input. This can be in the areas of tactile, visual, auditory, taste, smell, body movements and positions.

Sensory processing in children with SCD/ASD varies greatly from one individual to another. The functional implication of each young person's sensory issues should be taken into account. It is strongly recommended that you consult an occupational therapist for further advice and to conduct an assessment of the individual needs of the young person if you suspect he has sensory processing difficulties.

## Auditory sensitivity

### Why does this happen?

- Noise overload in schools is a huge issue for young peoples with SCD/ASD.
- The young person can have an under- or over-reaction to sound. This might be too much noise or just some noises in particular. He might find certain noises distracting or irritating. He might become highly anxious or appear to be in physical pain when exposed to certain sounds.
- Unpredictable sounds, such as a phone ringing or dog barking can cause unusual or fearful reactions.
- The young person might make humming noises or other sounds to mask out a noise that is disturbing him.
- Background noise can be so intrusive and distressing that the young person cannot concentrate. He may be unable to filter out this background noise and pay attention to what is being said. Low level noise can also be a problem, e.g. air conditioner or computer humming, clock ticking.
- The acoustics in a gymnasium or large hall can be unbearable to a young person with SCD/ASD.

### Tools

- There is a huge pay-off for teachers who are prepared to familiarise themselves with and understand each young person's particular sensory issues. Remember every young person has his/her own set of behaviours. Do not over generalise – SCD/ASD creates very individual profiles.
- Try to keep background noise to a minimum. Some problem noises can be easily fixed, i.e. replace rubber tips on chair legs to avoid them scraping on the floor. However other problem noises can be things that most people filter out, such as the hum of fluorescent lights, electric hand dryers, aeroplanes passing overhead, lawnmowers etc. It will be necessary to gradually desensitise the young people to these sounds, increasing their ability to cope and act appropriately when they occur. Consult an occupational therapist for advice.
- Have a quiet area for the young person to retreat to when feeling overloaded. See p105 for more information.
- If appropriate, play music in the classroom to mask out background noise or allow the young people to listen to music through headphones during individual work.
- In physical education classes, the young people may not cope well with the sound of a whistle. It may be helpful for the teacher to clap as warning prior to blowing the whistle, if one must be used.
- Some young people might like to use ear plugs to filter out excessive noise. This may be an option if the young person is unable to cope in situations like assembly or physical education

classes. Industrial-type ear protectors may be appropriate in some classes, such as woodwork.

## **Difficulty with physical contact**

*Riley hits out at his peers as they walk past him. He is tactile defensive and wants others to get out of his space.*

### **Why does this happen?**

- Some young people with SCD/ASD have a heightened sense of touch. He may overreact to physical contact or have an intense dislike of particular kinds of contact, i.e. he may not tolerate someone lightly brushing up against him. Adults with SCD/ASD have described how a light touch or brush from another person can cause discomfort or pain.
- The young person may prefer physical contact and affection to be on his terms. He may find it difficult to cope when another person initiates the contact.
- If the young person has a negative reaction to physical contact, remember that he may actually like the person who initiated the contact; it's just the contact that he dislikes. The young person may be unable to tolerate his peers accidentally bumping into him. He might react with anger because of his difficulty interpreting the actions of others.
- The young person may have trouble understanding what is communicated by physical contact. This is due to his difficulty interpreting the meaning of gesture and body language.
- Some young people might have a strong reaction to the perfume or deodorant of other people, leading to avoidance of physical contact. This could even prompt a young person to walk out of class.

### **Tools**

- There is a huge pay-off for teachers who are prepared to familiarise themselves with and understand the young persons particular sensory issues. Remember each young person has his/her own set of behaviours. – SCD/ASD has different manifestations within each individual.
- Allow the young person to sit at a table where there is little or no through traffic. Some young people will need this personal space in order to reduce anxiety and cope with group situations.
- If the young person and parents agree, talk to peers about the difficulties experienced by people with SCD/ASD. Ask them to be tolerant of his difficulties and to respect his personal space.
- The young person may resist lining up with his peers because he dislikes the tactile stimulation. Get him to stand at the back or front of the line. Another strategy would be to reduce the time you require the young person to stand in line and slowly increase it.
- Role play situations can help the young person develop more appropriate responses to physical contact.
- Consider that strong perfume or aftershave worn by teaching staff, parent helpers or TA's may be very overwhelming to the young person. This may prevent him from interacting in class and he may not verbalise his strong dislike of the offending 'smell'.

## Physical setup of the classroom

*Josh loves to draw but suddenly refused to go to Art. The tall stools in the Art room were wobbly and he felt very unsafe when he sat on them.*

### Points to note

- The young person may be particularly vulnerable to distractions and have difficulty filtering out irrelevant information, such as background sounds and visual information.
- The young person may be distracted and disturbed by the free movement of others in the classroom, i.e. other young people may bump into him, his chair or table when they move about the classroom. The young person may be unable to understand this contact is accidental. He needs his personal space.
- Some young people are very sensitive to light and will have difficulty concentrating if seated in a position where bright sunlight or reflections hurt his eyes.
- Some young people have difficulty with activities requiring balancing skills; he might have a poor sense of equilibrium and lack awareness of his position in space.

### Tools

- There is a huge pay-off for teachers who are prepared to familiarise themselves with and understand the young peoples' particular sensory issues. Remember each young person has his/her own set of behaviours. Do not over generalise – SCD/ASD is not like other disabilities.
- If it is practical, establish a work area in the classroom that is uncluttered, free from distractions and not subject to 'traffic flow' by other young people. It is *important not to exclude* or separate the young people from the rest of the class but to establish a work area that takes his special needs into account. Make sure the child has a clear and easy path to the teacher for help.
- Organise all work materials that the young people will need for an activity before commencing the work. Label tubs or trays to help him organise his work and supplies.
- Position the young person in a quiet corner of the room where there is little chance of him being distracted by light, reflections, the door opening and closing etc. Ensure there is good ventilation. The young person might perform better when facing a wall or window providing the view is not too distracting if he is distracted by other children.
- The young person might find it easier to focus and work at his desk if his work surface is raised to a 15 degree angle.
- Check for sensory issues concerning chair type, i.e. soft or hard. If the young people have to sit on the floor, consider the texture of the carpet. A mat, cushion or fabric square may be useful if the young person finds the texture of the carpet particularly unpleasant.
- It can be helpful to have the young person's schedule in front of his work space or stuck inside his folders or school diary. Colour coding for different subjects is very helpful, particularly if this is combined with colour coded books and folders.

## ***Visual stimuli in the classroom***

*Josh is a voracious reader who loves books, but he suddenly refused to go to the library. He is hypersensitive to a florescent light in the corner that constantly flickers.*

### **Points to note**

- Some young people are unable to tolerate bright sunlight or flickering fluorescent lighting. A classroom filled with bright colourful objects can be highly distracting or even disturbing. The young person might have difficulty giving attention to the relevant information when he is in a room full of distracting visual stimuli.
- The young person may become anxious by minor changes in the classroom, such as relocating a picture. He might ask questions repeatedly about this because he feels anxious about his sense of order being disturbed.
- Some young people see words on a whiteboard as a meaningless jumble.
- Some young people squint at objects; he might use his peripheral vision or look at things very closely. He may be doing this because he enjoys the sensation he gets from this different perspective.

### **Tools**

- There is a huge pay-off for teachers who are prepared to familiarise themselves with and understand the young person's particular sensory issues. Remember each young person has his/her own set of behaviours.
- Examine the young person's physical environment. Check that he is not affected by sunlight streaming through a window or reflections that might cause a distraction. If the young person seems overloaded by visual stimuli, tell him exactly what he needs to focus on. Give short, explicit reminders – you may need to repeat these frequently.
- Check whether the young person has difficulty reading the white board. Some young people find it hard to distinguish particular colours.
- Worksheets can be enlarged to A3 size; use a highlighter to indicate the space where the answers must go. It might seem like a small thing, but this can be a real problem for young people with SCD/ASD.
- Encourage the young person to use a blank sheet of paper to cover up the other questions on a worksheet. This will help him focus on one task at a time.
- Stress the importance of having an uncluttered work area. Alert a TA to the need to help the young person keep his desk tidy and ensure all his belongings are in order. When the young person is working on his own, it may help to have his desk facing a blank wall to limit distractions.
- Sit the young person away from eye contact of others if he finds this distracting.
- Always try to keep the environment tolerable. Ensure he has his 'own space'.



# SEXUALITY

## **Responding to people.**

A significant minority of individuals with SCD/ASD have smaller amygdalae than is typical; this is the part of the brain that registers an emotional response when looking at peoples' faces. This lack of emotional reaction can cause individuals to push people for a predictable reaction even if the reaction is negative. This may include behaviour that seems 'sexual' because sexual behaviour often causes a big reaction. The reaction enables the individual to feel secure about the person in the same way that people without this deficiency are reassured by the predictable emotional response that they feel when they see particular peoples' faces. It enables people to be categorized into groups of people who react in a particular way.

## **Tools.**

- If an individual with SCD/ASD is being provocative in a sexual way, it is important to understand why they are displaying this behaviour. If it seems to be because they wish to provoke set reactions this need can be directed into a more socially acceptable way. Often individuals with SCD/ASD can adapt independently, but some strategies that could be suggested include shaking hands with people or asking a specific question.
- Individuals may need a social story to explain why their current behaviour is unacceptable and how it makes people feel. While individuals with SCD/ASD may find empathy difficult, when the feelings of other people are explained most are more than capable of sympathy.
- Use a social story that makes the individual's current behaviour against the rules.

## ***Reading other peoples' intentions and feelings.***

Individuals with SCD/ASD are often unable to judge the mood or intentions of others. This can cause significant difficulties regarding sexuality and relationships. It may put individuals at risk as they may be unable to recognise the signs that someone is interested in them in a sexual way. In contrast, if they themselves are interested in someone, they may not realise the need for the feelings to be reciprocated or they may misread the emotions and wants of the other person.

## **Tools.**

- Ensure that pupils with SCD/ASD are taught to read facial expressions and body language and frequently remind them to pay attention to this when interacting with others. Unlike individuals without SCD/ASD they are rarely equipped to do this automatically.
- Teach the importance of consent from all involved regarding all types of sexual touching.
- Teach individuals how to say no and that it is okay to say no to somebody, even if that person is an adult or someone associated with authority.
- Teach individuals that it is okay for people to say no even if they are in a relationship.
- Teach pupils to talk about things to a trusted adult.
- Teach pupils that their private parts belong to them and it is not okay for people to touch them without their consent.

## **Understanding verbal communication.**

Individuals with SCD/ASD frequently experience developmental delays that cause the link between visual and auditory memory to be less developed. Understanding of language can therefore be weaker in individuals with SCD/ASD; this has an impact on all learning, including that about sexuality.

Individuals with SCD/ASD may also struggle to interpret words correctly. For example 'serious girlfriend' could be mistakenly interpreted as a miserable girl who is a friend! Individuals may also find it difficult to understand that words change their meaning according to context. This makes learning about relationships and sexuality more difficult, particularly in a culture that uses euphemism and a range of words that mean the same thing.

### **Tools.**

- Audit each pupil's receptive vocabulary. If vocabulary is not known but pupils are familiar with alternatives, these must be used until words are secure.
- Use visual and kinaesthetic learning aids when teaching about sexuality and relationships.
- Use straightforward language that is clear and unambiguous.

## **Abstract thought and theory of mind.**

85% of children with SCD/ASD do not develop theory of mind. This means they are unable to imagine a situation from someone else's point of view.

Furthermore, the development of abstract thought processes that usually occurs during adolescence is frequently impaired in individuals with SCD/ASD. They are subsequently unable to understand ideas and experiences that they have not actually experienced. This means that imagining relationships or sexual experiences and subsequently preparing for them may be difficult. It also means that a disproportionate number of individuals with SCD/ASD are not able to orgasm during masturbation because of their difficulty with imagination and fantasising. This can lead to frustration and negative behaviour. An additional problem is that the desire, yet inability, to orgasm may cause individuals to masturbate in a way that is harmful to themselves.

### **Tools.**

- Teach how their actions make other people feel and encourage pupils to empathize.
- Ensure that there is someone available that an individual can talk to and if there are problems regarding masturbation. Deal with any issues in liaison with home. It may be necessary to teach safe masturbation.

## **Privacy and safety.**

Individuals with SCD/ASD often find it difficult to recognise what behaviour is socially acceptable. This may cause individuals to be unaware of which parts of their bodies are private and what behaviour is private. This can cause issues when pupils are changing for sports and may cause individuals to touch themselves inappropriately when they are in public places. This can upset others or put individuals at risk of ridicule and even abuse.

## **Tools.**

- Individuals must be taught which part of their bodies are private and that they must be concealed from other people. However, ensure that individuals also understand that they may sometimes need to show their private parts to doctors.
- Teach modesty (for example during hot weather) and ways to change discretely.
- Teach boys that while it is normal to have erections, it is important that these are concealed if they happen in a public place. It may also be necessary to teach safe ways to make unwanted erections go away, for example by thinking of something boring.
- Teach what the differences between public and private places are. Check that they understand that this is not the same as a room that has a 'private' sign on the door.
- Ensure that there is a safe and private place for pupils to masturbate at home, but stress that public toilets are not an acceptable places to masturbate. (Men's public toilets are high risk places for abuse and it is also common for individuals with SCD/ASD to develop unhelpful associations between toilets and masturbation if this is allowed.)
- Teach that masturbation is normal and pleasurable and will not cause harm if done correctly.
- Ensure that individuals have someone that they can talk to and ask questions.

## **Coping with change.**

Individuals with SCD/ASD find change difficult and stressful. The physical and emotional changes that happen during puberty are thus particularly challenging. Furthermore individuals with SCD/ASD do not automatically change their behaviour as they grow up. Behaviour that is acceptable when children are young, such as hugging and wearing no clothes in hot weather, becomes unacceptable as the individual reaches puberty but individuals with SCD/ASD may not recognise this. It may also take individuals longer than normal to learn new behaviour.

## **Tools.**

- Young people should be prepared for change prior to it happening. If possible, teach about puberty before an individual begins to change.
- Use social stories to prepare individuals for stressful changes such as periods and unwanted erections.
- Show young people how to deal with some of the changes, for example using deodorant.
- If possible, teach appropriate behaviour when the individual is young, because it may take them years to change.
  
- If an individual is upset do not give comfort hugs that would be inappropriate for an older pupil. A comforting arm around the shoulder is acceptable and individuals may need to be taught this.
- Ensure individuals are aware of the places that it is not okay to touch other people even if the young person is not yet sexually mature or aware.
- Make rules clear and simple even if individuals find it difficult to understand the reasons behind these rules.

# Stress and Anxiety

## ***Why does this happen?***

- The young person with SCD/ASD responds to stress in the same way as anybody else; he finds it very unpleasant and will seek to reduce or avoid it. However, stress is a greater problem for the young person with SCD/ASD because he is likely to experience severe stress far more frequently than most people do and he is less able to deal with it effectively. He may have fewer resources to deal with his stress because he does not recognise it in its early stages or he lacks the knowledge of what to do about it when he does recognise it. He may not recognise these signs until the stress is overwhelming, he then has fewer resources to deal with it because of his communication and social deficits. So while he experiences the same feelings as everyone else, he has difficulty locating them, is unaware of them or does not understand what they mean.
- The young person may have poor self-awareness. He may find it difficult to know where parts of his body are in space without looking at them. He might also find it difficult to attend to, label and interpret the signals of his body and may not recognise particular messages as feelings indicating his mental state (anger, fear) or sensations indicating the physical states of his body (headache, thirst).
- When experiencing stress, the young person's ability in most areas will be affected.
  - His understanding of language decreases.
  - His ability to adequately express himself decreases.
  - His awareness of others and the cues they give is reduced.
  - He is not able to concentrate as well.
  - He may have difficulty focusing on relevant information.
  - His sensory systems can become overstimulated, so he does not cope as well with noise, visual stimuli and other sensations.
  - His ability to control inappropriate / anxiety-reducing behaviour decreases.
  - It becomes harder for him to use constructive problem solving.
- Feelings of stress may be so overwhelming that the young person has to be physically removed from the situation. Difficult behaviours are often an attempt to reduce stress levels. These responses may be effective (for the young person) but inappropriate; i.e. running away, obsessive or self-stimulatory behaviour, withdrawal etc.
- His fear may be based on a connection made from a single frightening experience. A situation that has previously caused anxiety can trigger a fearful reaction, even an extreme over-reaction.
- Avoidance can allow fear to grow out of all proportion. The young person is therefore unable to learn that his fears may actually be without foundation.
- The young person might have an extreme avoidance to certain sensory stimuli, such as sudden noises like applause.
- The young person can experience stress from the everyday challenges of coping with change and sensory input during the school day. Walking out of class can be a sign that the young person is suffering from unbearable stress.
- The young person might have no close friends that he can talk to and confide in about his fears.
- The young person may have learnt ways of dealing with stress that are inappropriate but work for him, therefore he might see no reason for change. You will need to be supportive, reassuring and emphasise the use of relaxation techniques.

- A small number of young persons with SCD/ASD develop anxiety disorders, e.g. panic attacks or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. This can be a sign that the young person is having major difficulties with the social demands of school or experiencing sensory problems.

### **Tools**

- Try to identify the fear if at all possible. Choose a time when the young person is calm, perhaps in an activity that he enjoys. Progressively expose him to the source of the problem. Visualisation techniques can also be helpful.
- The young person will need help learning to pay attention to, and correctly interpret the messages from his own body. This can be achieved by assisting and encouraging the young person to label feelings and physical sensations. Use role play, find pictures, use music or scenes from TV programs to talk about why / what happened to produce different sensations and emotions in other people. Once he is able to label some feelings, help him identify situations when he might feel these emotions himself. This allows the young person to start matching feelings and sensations to situations. Hopefully he will learn to identify situations that he finds difficult and then start to think about and be prepared to use coping strategies.
- Talk to the young person's parents to find out if an occupational therapist has conducted an assessment and sensory profile. The information gained from this can be extremely helpful both at school and at home. It gives direction to the modifications that are necessary to reduce stress.
- It is important to develop awareness of the signs that the young person is stressed. He may not reveal his stress the way that other children do. The cues may be very subtle. Look for triggers such as body posture, change in tone of voice, more or less talkative, resisting eye contact, becoming teary or restless. Or the stress may trigger challenging or repetitive behaviour. You can prompt him by saying "You look worried, do you need help?" Talk through his feelings – "Do your shoulders feel tight? Do you have a funny feeling in your stomach? Is your face feeling hot?"
- Note signs of stress and communicate this through your school reporting system. This will help other staff and supply teachers understand the young person.
- Some young persons will appear quiet and compliant in class, but become aggressive the minute they get home. This indicates a high level of stress at school but is often misinterpreted as coping at school and poor behaviour at home. It is in fact a release of tension in a safe place. It is important to have open and regular lines of communication between parents and teachers to fully understand how the young person is coping.
- Physical exercise (running, bike riding, jumping on a trampoline) is a good way of letting go of accumulated stress. Stress balls or a 'mad bag' that the young person can take his frustration out on, may also be useful.
- Allow for a short de-briefing session with a counsellor, teacher or an understanding peer to talk through the day's events or after a stressful incident. Use this time to explain in more detail why certain things happened and rehearse what to do next time it occurs.
- Allowances may need to be made regarding homework. The school day can leave the young person with SCD/ASD so stressed that he needs his evenings to unwind and relax. You might want to set aside some school time for the young person to do his homework or reduce the tasks he is required to do at home. See homework, p79.

- Some young people with SCD/ASD need a clear distinction between home and school; i.e. that 'school is for learning, home is for relaxing'. Imposing homework on a young person already under stress can be more than he can bear. Homework clubs can be helpful so as to complete work in situ before leaving school, thus keeping a distinction between home and school expectations.

# Teaching Emotional Understanding: Learning to recognise & cope with your own feelings and those of others

Young people with communication and social understanding difficulties often find their own feelings hard to recognise which results in inappropriate reactions. They need to learn to identify emotions in themselves and others so they can learn to deal with them appropriately. This teaching may be delivered as part of a social & personal development programme, through targets on an Individual Education Plan and through 1:1 mentoring, incorporating 're-tracking' of incidents using visual prompts.

## Tools

- Learning about their own emotions.

*Young people with social communication difficulties often seem to move from calm to highly distressed very quickly. This may be because they fail to recognise their own feelings as anxiety grows and only show their emotions once they are out of control. Teach the young person about a range of **emotions** and how to recognise them in themselves, see appendices.*

- Scales of emotion.

*Once a young person can recognise what he is feeling, he can communicate this to others. For example, a young person who is worrying about his work can say or indicate when he starts to feel worried, rather than screw up his work & storm out of the classroom once he has reached the stage of total frustration. If he has visual support to indicate what he is feeling e.g. by pointing to an emotion on a scale, the teacher can then provide the necessary support to allow the young person to become calm again and able to carry on with a task. Examples of '**Feelings Scales**' can be found in the appendices.*

- **Feelings thermometers.**

***Feelings thermometers**, a variation of Feelings Scales, (an example is included in the appendices) can provide the young person with a way of indicating his own emotional state without using language. The young person moves his name up and down the scale. The teacher can then see what is happening for that young person and intervene appropriately e.g. if a young person who is sensitive to noise indicates he is feeling upset when loud grass cutting machines are operating outside the classroom, the teacher may decide it is appropriate for him to go to a quiet room temporarily.*

- Reacting to others.

*Young people with social communication difficulties often find it difficult to understand that others have different feelings from themselves and to empathise with others. He may laugh when another young person falls over, as he enjoys the 'slapstick' element of the fall and fails to appreciate that the young person is hurt & feels upset.*

*He needs to be taught to recognise basic facial expressions and body language others display so as to be able to name the emotion they might be feeling e.g. tears falling from another young person's eyes is likely to indicate s/he is unhappy. The young person can then be taught to react more appropriately e.g. gently pat the young person's shoulder or find an adult to help..*

*It is useful to explain the emotions of others by providing a bank of social stories that deal with the particular situations that the young person finds difficult to understand e.g. a social story about why others might cry. See **Social Stories** section.*

- Self awareness.

*Some young people, particularly those diagnosed with Autism, Autistic Spectrum Disorders or Asperger Syndrome, become aware of their differences to others as they grow older. They can benefit from learning about what it means to have such a diagnosis, so they can identify their own strengths and weaknesses and therefore learn strategies to cope. This should always be done with the permission of, and in partnership with, parents & carers. There are books that are helpful in explaining about Autism, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Asperger Syndrome (see background reading).*

#### **Case Study**

Gary, a Year 7 pupil, enjoyed the emotional reaction he observed in others when he pushed them. He laughed when they became angry.

**Action:** A social story was written for Gary, explaining that the young people he pushed were angry because they were getting hurt and that pushing was an unfriendly thing to do. This was linked to a reward system so that Gary earned a sticker for each break time he achieved without pushing. If he achieved a row of stickers, he was allowed a five minute session reading his construction magazines, in which he was very interested.



## **SECTION 2**

### **Curriculum**

This section needs to be read in conjunction with the document:  
Children with Autism: Strategies for Accessing the Curriculum, KS3/4,  
North West Regional SEN Partnership, DfES, 2003

## Accessing Learning

### - prioritising personal and social development

A young person with Social Communication Difficulties naturally wants to follow his own agenda, choosing when, what and how to learn.

For inclusion to be successful, he needs to be accessing the learning in the classroom, to the teacher's agenda and timescale. Initially, this may involve an emphasis on Personal and Social Development to enable access to other curricular areas at a later stage.

#### Tools

- TEACCH approach (see section on **Using Visual Support Materials**)

This approach involves a sharing of control. The adult wants the young person to do some work but the young person wants to choose what he does. By teaching 'work first then....(reward)' we avoid confronting him, both parties get what they want and we keep things sweet.

*The young person needs to be able to see what he has to do, when he has to do it, how much he has to do and what will happen next. If we get this right, we are more likely to gain his co-operation.*

#### **Teach 'work first then.....(reward)'**

The reward needs to be something which is easy to provide but highly motivating. The most successful rewards are often different to those in general classroom use. e.g. drawing technical diagrams, looking at supply catalogues. Visual prompts to accompany the spoken language can be very effective e.g. saying 'Work first, then use the computer' whilst pointing to symbols of 'work' followed by 'computer'. At this stage we are teaching 'work first then.....(reward )' - other learning objectives are not the priority. The 'work' needs to be visually presented, easily achievable and not necessarily similar to that provided for the rest of the class.

- Insist and persist with 'work first then.....(reward)'

Ensure you withhold the reward until the work is completed but assist if necessary e.g. Pointing to each stage of a process. Once the work is completed he gets the reward. Gradually, adult intervention can be faded until he can be expected to do the work unaided before getting his reward.

- An Individual worktable can be useful in early stages as a step towards working alongside others.

Carefully selected classmate can be invited to work alongside him occasionally. Gradually, with support, the young person will begin to work alongside others using his individual worktable less frequently. It may be possible to offer a choice 'Work here or next to .....?'

- Personal visual timetable – e.g. pictures/symbols with words underneath.

When in use, the timetable allays anxiety because the student may lack the imagination to know, for example, how long 'til lunch?, yet be unable to use social language to ask. Refer to the timetable and emphasise 'It is time to.....' This removes the personal element because it is the timetable that is seen to direct, not you. If changes are necessary e.g. supply teacher, involving the young person in noting this change may help gain acceptance. He may be motivated by removing/covering/ticking off activities as they finish.

- Use of traffic 'wait' symbols e.g. for lunch or to turn on the light.

Some SCD/ASD young people are distressed by the need to wait, seeing no reason for any delay. Laminated small red, amber and green circles with the word 'wait', 'soon' and 'go' on 3 Velcro pads can be used to teach the concept of waiting. Add a symbol of the desired activity.

At intervals change the 3 Velcro pads: first use the red 'wait'; then the amber 'soon'; until just in time the green 'go' can be used.

This demonstrates visually that we know what he wants and that he can have it when the green 'go' symbol is in place.

- Use a clock/stopwatch for transition to the next activity e.g. 5 minutes until lunch time

This is one of the most useful strategies of all, to which most young people quickly learn to respond. Particularly effective if the timer is placed on top of a photograph of the next activity.

- Use of written prompt to teach 'Can I have.....'
- Explain to tutor groups that we are supporting the student to 'do the right thing' and that they are doing a good job of showing by example what to do e.g. sitting appropriately, listening to the teacher, ignoring poor behaviour.
- More explanation may be needed as to why he needs flexible arrangements (e.g. he may not attend every assembly because he finds it much harder work than they do).

## ● Art and Design

Pupils with SCD/ASD often have the following

### Strengths

- Good eye for detail
- Adept at recognising different styles
- Visual and tactile modes of learning

### Challenges

- Preference for working solo, rather than in groups.
- When working with some new media, there is a possibility of hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli.
- Some young people may react adversely to unexpected tactile experiences: for example clay, glue and certain materials in textile work.
- Some young people react quite strongly to smells of different media.
- Using materials and tools in different ways, due to difficulties in generalising and adapting previous learning to different situations.
- Organising and collating equipment and ideas.
- Difficulties in writing and handwriting.
- Rather than seeing the “whole”, they may focus on one specific part.
- Lack of empathy and understanding of emotions can make evaluating and developing work difficult.
- Adapting, adapting or refining work. Once they think they have completed it, they will resist having to do this.
- Rigidity of thinking can lead to difficulties with imaginative skills and abstract thought.
- Making a choice in methods of representation or range of materials.
- Poor awareness of the meaning of symbolism within art.
- Lack of a sense of danger, when using certain tools.

### Strategies

- When introducing young people to group work, take into account their need for sameness and routine.
- Where possible, ensure that the young person can work with a sympathetic buddy or adult.
- Give them a specific task, so that they know what is expected of them
- Allow young people to work with different media away from the group.
- A sympathetic friend or adult can help to ensure they have all the appropriate equipment.
- Use of visual clues/written lists/photographs or pictures of equipment can aid memory.
- Instead of writing, allow them to draw their response or use the computer.
- Use visual cues, pictures or photographs to attempt to help young people begin to understand emotions
- To support adapting of work, show a finished piece of work at the beginning of a topic. Unpick and back track on a finished piece of work. Prior to the start of the topic, schedule each session with what they will be doing.
- Use real objects and concrete ideas: for example pictures and photographs will allow them to develop their imaginative thought processes. Allow them to work from what they can see, rather than demanding imaginative responses. Allow them to talk through ideas with a friend or adult.

- Use discussion to ensure they have seen the whole picture
- Allow time for reflection and offer support in looking at how something can be changed.
- Ensure where a choice has to be made, that it is a limited choice.
- Show the young person how to safely use each piece of equipment; ensure they know the rules surrounding each piece of equipment; provide list of written rules, so they do not have to remember: do not assume they know the obvious.

## Careers and Work Experience

Pupils with SCD/ASD sometimes have special interests or abilities, and these are likely to dictate what field they might be interested in working in. Some pupils may be interested in the concept of 'making money' without realising the social skills needed in order to do this. What may also be new to the SCD/ASD person is the concept of working for a living, being paid, conforming to accepted social standards in the workplace and getting along with work colleagues. Work Experience is useful in allowing the SCD/ASD pupil to become aware of, and practice these skills in a safe environment.

### Tools

- Use the special interest to engage the pupil in an area of work, moving on from this to other areas of work so that pupils can understand the concept of employment, and be aware of the wide range of jobs that may be available to them.
- Work on where to find jobs advertised in the local area, and how to go about applying, will be good practice. Using the telephone to make enquiries is a useful skill.
- Pupils will need help to understand the process of applying for jobs, and particularly the social aspects of interviewing. Visits to a variety of workplaces and bringing in employers to undertake mock interviews creates a 'real' situation for the young person with SCD/ASD. Pupils will be unfamiliar with form filling, so practising completing mock application forms is essential.
- The area of social skills in the workplace is likely to be where the most work will be done in Careers. Pupils may be unaware of accepted norms of behaviour, and this will need to be taught specifically. Making analogies with the way that pupils work together in the classroom, the way people speak to each other and codes of dress at school is a good starting point.
- It is worth considering offering work experience in the school environment in the first place, to enable pupils to gain confidence in working with others and learning about what might be expected of them before venturing outside into the workplace.
- Plenty of forward planning is likely to be necessary in locating a suitable work experience placement. Connexions advisors can be invaluable. Placements will need to be aware of individual SCD/ASD needs/foibles well in advance so adaptations can be considered. Employers will need information as much as the student.

# Citizenship

## Strengths

- Good factual memory
- Interest in how rules and laws operate.
- Logical thinking with literal understanding.
- Motivation to use ICT.
- Enjoyment of expressing opinions
- Participate well in structured situations, such as debates where there are clear rules.

## Challenges

- Decision making
- Social understanding beyond factual knowledge, opinion/fact, relationships, social hierarchies
- Resolving conflict
- Abstract concepts
- Topics beyond their own experience
- Reflection skills
- Wanting to follow their own agenda
- Limited depth and range of vocabulary.
- Understanding the views of others
- Group discussion, negotiating, turn-taking
- Motivation and interest in topics outside of their area of interest.

## Strategies

- Begin with their own knowledge base: e.g. look at school hierarchies before looking at country wide. Use their own interests.
- Use visual media and practical activities: e.g. video, visits etc.
- Be specific about learning outcomes
- Avoid open questions
- Use clear handouts with factual lists
- Use frameworks and scaffolds in worksheets.
- Explain vocabulary and provide meanings beforehand.
- Explore literal interpretation through role play or “thought bubbles”.
- Be explicit whether information is an opinion or fact
- Limit choices to aid decision making
- Explore difficult issues prior to the lesson. Involve parent/home.
- Prepare roles and practice discussion skills beforehand.
- Teach acceptable behaviour for exiting, if the pupil is stressed.

# Design Technology

## **Developing, planning and communicating ideas:**

Young people with SCD/ASD may be able to follow plans, diagrams, methods and recipes but they will need support in order to follow them through to a conclusion. They are unlikely to be spontaneously creative. They will have difficulty incorporating the ideas of others into their designs.

### **Tools**

- Links between old and new learning will need to be made explicitly
- Use detailed and structures questions for problem solving exercises
- Help pupils to learn that materials and tools can be used in more than one way
- Help pupils with organisation – planning in what order to do a task
- Develop systematic habits and work routines help.
- Use checklists and visual instructions to give concrete support to show what has been completed and what to do next and where to end
- Use a design collage to help generate ideas – young person cuts out pictures of bags, colours, materials, animals that he likes to use in his design of a child's bag.

## **Working with tools, equipment/ materials and components to produce quality products:**

Young people with SCD/ASD will find listening to long explanations difficult, their short-term auditory memory is weak and sequencing is poor so remembering the demonstration and explanation in the right order is very taxing. Some are unable to listen and watch at the same time. Young people may have poor fine motor skills and poor spatial awareness. Due to heightened sensory awareness young people may have difficulties with smelling, looking at, tasting and touching materials – these are real fears and should be treated with tolerance.

- Support may be needed to choose tools and materials – offer a limited choice a hammer or a saw first, then a screwdriver.
- Provide diagrams, lists of instructions - show them where to start.
- Close supervision is needed when using tools of handling hot or dangerous items. Explicit teaching on how to handle these safely needs to be given.

## **Evaluating processes and products:**

The inability to hypothesise and predict will mean that young people are likely to need a lot of information and to be given guidelines for the completion of tasks. There may be an unrealistic view taken of such things as time and cost. Evaluation will therefore be difficult. Young people will need help and support to work in teams and apply knowledge and understanding from other subjects. Young people with SCD/ASD often dislike investigation for fear of being wrong

### **Tools**

- Use detailed specific written guidelines showing the activities they are being asked to carry out and the information that they will be expected to discover.
- Use supportive peers to encourage their participation



- Remind of previous learning and how it applies to the present activities as the pattern of their learning is often disjointed.

### **Knowledge and understanding of materials and components:**

Young people with SCD/ASD are unlikely to develop as easily the breadth of knowledge and understanding of their peers but may remember facts and have an interest in certain areas of work

#### **Tools:**

- Young people may be able to copy a model rather than being creative
- Link activities to young peoples' life experiences when considering the needs and values of intended users
- Inability to hypothesise and predict means that young people will need a lot of information and guidelines on a task. They will unrealistic in estimating time and cost so evaluation will be difficult use specific yes/no questions which are counted up in order to achieve a score to facilitate this.
- Once a task has been completed in one way young people may not see a need to further develop the ideas by using alternative products or components and methods. Some are motivated to use computer-generated designs but may not link the designs made this way to real life objects.

### **Knowledge and understanding of systems and control:**

Young people with SCD/ASD acquire facts rather than knowledge and true understanding. Sometimes a young person may develop an obsession, for example, in bridges; it may then be possible to use this interest to develop related ideas.

#### **Tools:**

- Link activities to young peoples' interests or life experiences to motivate and make the learning meaningful.

### **Health and safety:**

- Young people, once taught the rules of safety and behaviour, are likely to adhere to these rigidly. Skills that would be expected to have been learnt in earlier key stages may not have been. The inability to predict or foresee the consequences of actions on themselves or others may lead to accidents.

#### **Tools:**

- Be very specific about safety rules at all times
- Young people may have fine motor and spatial awareness difficulties and will therefore need close supervision when handling potentially dangerous tools or substances.
- Help will need to be given in organisation of work.

# English

## Speaking

### Challenges

- Inability to empathise and therefore to understand the needs of the listener or other peoples' viewpoints.
- Understanding the complex rules of social interaction.
- Tendency to talk at, rather than to, their audience.
- Narrow range of interests in which to talk about.
- Lack of intonation.

### Strategies

- Use of any major verbal contribution will require pre-planning and it may be necessary to be highly prescriptive, when telling pupils how to prepare for oral work: e.g. tone and volume of voice, posture, facial expression, gesture and timing may be developed through additional teaching of speech and language therapy.
- Agree topics in advance to avoid social embarrassment.
- Use of drama to encourage them to observe others and provide an opportunity to practice skills.
- Use of a tape recorder to listen to their own tone and expression and work out how they can improve their tone and expression.
- Use video to model appropriate tone, expression, and volume of voice, posture, facial expression, gesture and timing and provide feedback.
- Use of visual aids, when talking more formally to groups. Use of concrete or pictorial aids to structure their thoughts: e.g. PowerPoint can be very useful.
- Base the content of a debate or discussion as close as possible upon real life situations, so that pupils can use their own life experiences to work from.

## Listening

### Challenges

- The understanding of speech and language is affected for pupils with SCD/ASD by all aspects of the Triad of Impairment including language impairment, fixed and rigid thought structures and impaired social empathy.
- Poor listening skills, when the topic has little interest for them.
- Details may be noted and remembered, but the central theme may be forgotten.
- Anxiety in large group situations.

### Strategies

- Prepare the pupil in advance, outlining the main points to listen for and use visual cues to aid understanding.
- Make viewpoints of the speaker explicit to develop understanding. Speakers often assume a shared understanding of the world, but pupils with SCD/ASD may not understand a different perspective particularly when they are linked to feelings and emotions.

- Teach common metaphors methodically. Metaphors of speech can be quite alarming, when a pupil can only interpret them literally.
- Careful explanation between fact and fiction, as inferences may not be drawn and abstract concepts may not be understood. Pupils may take meaning from what the words say and not from what the speaker means. A common question asked by those with SCD/ASD is “why can’t people just say what they mean?”
- Opportunities to work individually or in a small group and develop confidence to contribute to a larger group discussion.
- Teachers need to allocate and make explicit the different roles within a group to develop the ability to contribute appropriately to a small group discussion and accept opinions, which are different to their own. Be aware that generalisation will also have to be explicitly taught: i.e. in a different group situation, people may take on different roles.
- One to one support during whole class debates to help in understanding and responding appropriately. A pupil with SCD/ASD could become distressed if ideas different to their own are expressed. A social story, prior to the lesson, could help prepare them for this. They may have challenges in explaining their own point of view and support could assist them in analysing and explaining their views to others.

## Reading

### Challenges

- Many of the problems that pupils with SCD/ASD experience when using spoken language also apply when reading. They may interpret words literally, fail to understand differences between fact and fiction, misunderstand metaphors and symbolic meaning.
- Can read text well but have challenges gaining meaning from what they have read (hyperlexia)
- Reading “in their head”; like a younger child, they may need to read out loud.
- Dislike of fiction books and preference for non-fiction texts – set books can be an issue.
- Intuitively understanding things from different points of view.
- Wide gaps in general knowledge, due to restricted interests and an inability to learn implicitly.
- Concepts of time, changes over time and therefore understanding texts set in past, future or in other cultures.

### Strategies

- Comprehension can be improved, if text is read out loud by the teacher or other pupils.
- Give them a quiet place to read where they can read out loud, so they do not disturb others.
- Reading to a cassette recorder and listening to it afterwards.
- Support understanding of a book through use of video, as it can help pupils understand the characters and story better.
- Support understanding of a book through use of images and visual frameworks such as a ‘character map’, timeline, comic strip versions etc., as it can help pupils understand settings, characters and the story, play or poem better.
- Encourage student to interpret meaning through his or her own drawing or through the use of mind-maps. For example, when a character has been described, ask the student to draw the character. Produce a comic strip version of the story. Any misconceptions soon become apparent!
- Use of own interests to encourage reading of non-fiction texts.
- Approach character analysis through a “detective game” ...”writing down clues”.

- Use of ICT, as pupils with SCD/ASD tend to be motivated and process information better through this approach (Kar2ouche is a good one to support the understanding of Shakespeare)

## **Writing**

### **Challenges**

- Drawing on experience of previous work.
- Fiction and writing for imaginative purposes.
- Distinguishing between fact and opinion.
- Criticising their own and other peoples' work, as this involves knowing what is known by readers/teachers.
- Fine motor control, which can lead to poorly presented work and affect the speed with which they are able to take notes.
- Resistance to handwriting

### **Strategies**

- Story frames which organise work into introduction, main events and conclusion. Include guidance on length of each section and expectations of the type of content.
- Writing to a framework of questions to be answered.
- Clear guidance as to the amount and type of writing: e.g. Model a good example first.
- Writing from their own experiences and interests will be easier than writing for imaginative purposes.
- Description or explanation will be easier than writing for argument or persuasion.
- Support to decide level of formality for different situations.
- Links to previous work will need to be explicitly pointed out
- Drafting and redrafting work on a word processor to avoid conflict about re-writing work already done and general use of the computer as a tool to motivate and help with presentation/handwriting. (PowerPoint and/or mind-mapping to aid planning & structuring of writing.)
- Support in proof reading
- Use of assessment criteria, (simplified, if necessary), by the young people themselves for self-assessment.

## Mathematics (1)

### Strengths

- Computational skills including rapid mental calculations.
- Attention to detail.
- Conformity to 'the rules'.

### Challenges

- Difficulties transferring/generalising skills into practical and real life situations.
- Estimation, approximation and evaluation.
- Practical problem solving tasks to do with memory.
- Selective attention.
- Interpretation of feedback.
- Abstract predictions, mathematical comparison, understanding hypothetical situations and therefore problem-solving.
- Organising the work needed to carry out purposeful enquiry.
- Understanding the process of a calculation even when they can obtain the correct answer. May have difficulties using a calculator.
- Use of symbolism in algebra as it requires a degree of abstract thought to make another symbol stand for a number.
- Perceptual difficulties can make shape, space and measure challenging.
- Desire for 'perfection' – don't want to make mistakes so don't 'learn from mistakes'.

### Strategies

- Frameworks to follow to help young people identify the relevant parts of the task on which to focus.
- Teaching based on practical activities that make sense to them.
- Careful teaching of mathematical vocabulary.
- Work on understanding the process of a calculation when they have a correct answer as there will not be the stress associated with failure. Use of white boards.
- Very specific teaching for any algebraic activity undertaken.
- Computer programmes to develop a sense of shape and space. Particularly those where you can see the shape from different perspectives.
- Allow time for processing and provide the student with a verbal strategy for this – "Give me a minute to think."
- Encourage students to ask for clarification – have a system: 'If you need help put your orange card on your desk.'
- Support – use peer tutors; TA's to check understanding of task and assist in organizing a logical approach to the task. 'Tell me what you are going to do first.' Use concrete apparatus, practical activities and/or visual stimuli to aid understanding and support estimation/calculation.
- Provide structure – key words in one place on the board; homework set at the beginning of the lesson; big picture, starter activity, introduction, development, plenary, etc. Set time limits.

## Mathematics (2)

### Using and applying number and algebra

Within the triad of impairment, [social interaction, communication and flexibility of thought], problems with Maths and the associated skills are not discreetly highlighted. In fact young people are often perceived as having an excellent mathematical ability e.g. the character in the film 'Rain Man'. Some young people display excellent computational skills and the stereotype of a mathematical genius is well established. These skills are however often isolated skills, in that they are skills that the young people cannot use in any practical or real life situation. The difficulties experienced then in both learning and applying mathematical skills can be traced back to the triad of impairment. Maths is as much about communication and language, flexibility of thought and social skills as any other curriculum area.

#### Tools

- Young people may be competent with computational skills but they may have difficulties in the areas of estimation, approximation and evaluation, as well as practical problem solving tasks to do with memory, selective attention and the interpretation of feedback. The generalization of skills and ideas from one area to another may also cause difficulties.
- In any area of work where abstract predictions are required, young people with SCD/ASD will find difficulty in making mathematical comparison spontaneously, understanding hypothetical situations and in problem solving. Young people will understand and respond better if the teaching is firmly based on practical activities that make sense to them.
- Young people will require a clear framework, limiting if possible the range of possible answers. Help the pupil by prompting them to identify the relevant parts of the task upon which to focus.
- When introducing new mathematical vocabulary ensure each term is explicitly explained to the young people. The level of understanding needs to be constantly reassessed and assumptions should never be made upon a seemingly high level of mathematical skill.

### Number and the number system

#### Tools

- The use of algebra may cause some difficulties due to the symbolism involved. Because a number is already symbolic it requires a degree of abstract thought to make another symbol stand for a number. This degree of abstract thought is complex and requires a great deal of very specific teaching for each algebraic activity that is undertaken.
- Young people may be able to carry out rapid calculations mentally, but may be unable to perform the calculation on a calculator, simply because they do not understand the process.

### Space, Shape and Measures

#### Tools

- For work in this area to make sense there is a need for the learning to have some functional purpose.
- Young people may show perceptual difficulties and teachers need to be certain that the underlying assumptions in terms of mathematical knowledge are in place.

- Perceptual conservation activities can cause problems –computer programmes can assist in this especially ones that can move shapes around so that you can see them from different perspectives.

## Using and applying handling data

### Tools

- Young people have difficulty organising the work needed for purposeful enquiry. There will be a need to limit choice.
- In processing and interpreting data young people will need help in putting the data together so that they are able to process it.
- Practical activities such as using the school canteen, paying for a snack can present problems for young people. Although they may be able to calculate the amount on paper, they may find it difficult to recognise amounts of money when they are displayed in different ways or when confronted with a different situation.
- Estimating the time and amount of money may prove difficult for students who cannot understand why you would want to estimate when accuracy by calculation is important.

### General

- Desire for ‘perfection’ – don’t want to make mistakes so don’t ‘learn from their mistakes’.
- Allow time for processing and provide the student with a strategy for this – “Give me a minute to think.”
- Encourage students to ask for clarification – have a system: ‘If you need help put your orange card on your desk.’
- Support – use peer tutors; TA’s to check understanding of task and assist in organizing a logical approach to the task. ‘Tell me what you are going to do first.’ Use concrete apparatus, practical activities and/or visual stimuli to aid understanding and support estimation.
- Provide structure – key words in one place on the board; homework set at the beginning of the lesson; big picture, starter activity, introduction, development, plenary, etc. set time limits.

# Examination preparation

Exams are a time of high anxiety for all pupils but especially for young people with SCD/ASD because:

- Exams are an unknown quantity – exam halls, regulations and rules
- They mean a change in routine
- They cause difficulties with study leave and revision

## Tools

Planning for exams parents and teachers can help by:

- Drawing up a sensible revision timetable including breaks for exercise and food
- Practice with past papers
- Inform students of revision guides, revision clubs, school library and computer programmes etc.

## Special arrangements

- Schools are able to make their own arrangements for pupils with SCD/ASD in internal exams. However for public exams- SAT's, GCSE's, GNVQ's, A and AS levels help is also available.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CHECK WITH INDIVIDUAL EXAMINATION BOARDS WHAT ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE – THIS NEEDS TO BE DONE SEVERAL MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

- The examination room** There may be a request for the candidate to be invigilated separately because:
  - it would give the candidate a less stressful setting where s/he could concentrate without what for him/her are overwhelming distractions
  - the candidate would not distract others by his or her ritualistic behaviour or by extraneous movements and noises which are beyond his or her control
  - the candidate can move around if this is helpful in relieving undue stress

There may be a request that a 'comfort' object is allowed in the examination room.

- Extra time** It is noted that the information booklet issued by The National Autistic Society recommends to teachers and parents that a request for extra time should be made to examining boards because they (people with autism) find it hard working to a time limit.

Whilst working to a time limit may cause excessive stress to some candidates, it could be counterproductive to others who would feel that they had to keep writing even if they had completed their answers.

- Presentation of examination papers** There may be a request that the question paper is presented on plain paper and in one colour because the candidate finds a range of colours confusing.
- Use of language in question papers** There may be a request that carrier language of questions is modified to be as clear as possible. This would be similar to the request made for congenitally deaf candidates who also need clear, unambiguous instructions and an avoidance of abstract ideas, except when understanding such ideas is part of the assessment.



- v. **Prompting of the candidate when it is time to move on to the next question** This may be requested because of the candidate's obsessional behaviour which may cause him or her to keep writing on a particular topic, totally **unaware** of the passage of time. She/he may have been used to being 'moved on' in class and such prompting is allowed in examination conditions (see the individual boards GCSE Advisory Notes on the use of prompters).
- vi. **Word-processing and handwriting** If a pupil's writing is illegible or if motor control is so impaired that handwriting is difficult or excessively slow, word-processing may be the usual method of written communication in class and may be requested for examinations. Alternatively there may be a request that the candidate be exempt from the assessment for handwriting etc. The centre may require advice on this point as the candidate's grammar and spelling should not be affected.
- vii. **Request that the answer papers are scrutinised at some point by someone aware that the candidate has Asperger syndrome and who is familiar with the condition** There could be a number of reasons for this including:
  - the general appearance of the paper including diagrams and labeling etc
  - the language used and the obsessional content of the answer
  - the possible use of **bad language** or other expletives which may be triggered by a distraction or because excessive feelings have been aroused in response to the question. Using bad language in this way is beyond the control of the candidate and is not an attempt to shock or be rude to the examiner.
- viii. **Oral tests** It would be very difficult for anyone to conduct an oral test with a candidate with Asperger syndrome without being apprised of the situation and of the particular behaviour and difficulties of the candidate. Indeed, examiners might feel threatened by the candidate unless they were aware of the condition. Examiners should be made aware that the candidate may display some of the following behaviour:
  - not understanding body language
  - getting too close to the examiner
  - avoiding eye contact and possibly writhing, twisting, swaying and walking around during the interview
  - making inappropriate, over-familiar or over-formal remarks
  - echoing questions, even to the extent of copying the voice and accent - it is not rudeness but a lack of understanding and a variation of wording might assist the situation
  - stilted speech, unless the topic is the obsessional interest and in which case it will be hard to stop or divert the conversation to another subject
  - failing to understand abstract ideas and taking jokes, exaggerations and metaphors literally
  - the student will not have had the usual day to day experience of life. This particularly applies to relationships and doing things with the peer group: for example, he might not be able to respond to a question about what a candidate did with his friends at the weekend because he would not perceive himself as having any friends possibly relevant for Modern Foreign Language conversation.

## Motivating students

Some young people with SCD/ASD cannot see the point in sitting an exam. They know that they have the knowledge and cannot understand why they have to explain it on paper. This may need extensive discussion and exploration, including parents as necessary.

## Tools

- These young people will need explanation to understand the aim behind exams. See social stories for hints on how to explain exam related ideas [such as the reasons for doing well in exams and how to maintain concentration during an exam]

## Hyperlexia

Hyperlexia is the ability to read mechanically without necessarily attaching the appropriate meaning to the text. Many young people with SCD/ASD may have Hyperlexia. This will give an exaggerated impression of their abilities

### Case study

James was asked in an English exam “Can you describe the main characteristics of Macbeth’s personality?”

He answered simply “Yes” because he could.

## Tools

- Teach how these and other types of questions need to be answered.

## Anxiety

Exams are generally stressful for all young people. Young people with SCD/ASD may feel that school at this time becomes suddenly very different and indeed it does, exams take place in large halls with different lighting and sound which may prove distressing for those who have a high sensory awareness.

## Tools

- Role play test situations in the examination rooms
- Think about finding another place for these young people to take their exams
- Work closely with parents, to ensure their son/daughter is sleeping, eating and relaxing well, Send home a revision timetable.
- Young people don’t need to sit exams in all subjects, they can attend lessons and not sit the exams if it is too stressful

Remember that each young person with SCD/ASD is different. Some will need more help than others. Even those with predicted good grades can find difficulty coping with the practicalities and changed situations of exam time, anxiety about which can block their ability to show their strengths and their normal coping mechanisms.

# Fear of failure

## ***Points to Note***

- Many young people with SCD/ASD are very particular about certain aspects of their work. They may insist on getting things right; they will start an activity, make a mistake, then start over again. Such perfectionism means they may never see a task through to completion.
- Some young people become really frustrated by their mistakes leading to great distress.
- A young person with SCD/ASD can struggle for a long time over what seems to be a straightforward choice. He may be reluctant to make a decision because he then risks getting something wrong.
- Some young people are acutely aware of their inadequacies. For example, they may have very poor handwriting and are so embarrassed they will refuse to hand in written work.
- A pupil may be very reluctant to do any unfamiliar activity. This may be because he is unable to imagine how to do something unfamiliar and he cannot envisage the sense of achievement that comes with accomplishing something new.

## ***Tools***

- Don't comment on failure; just show the young person the correct way.
- Avoid negative comments, like saying 'no' or 'that's not right'.
- Show the young person that you make mistakes too, and show him how you deal with them, i.e. if you make a spelling mistake, you simply put a line through the word.
- The young person with SCD/ASD can be very insecure about appearing stupid so he may be reluctant to seek help. Have an agreed code or signal for when the young person requires assistance.
- Keep choices easy and provide the young person with support to work his way through them. It is important that the young person be given choices, but remember that too many can be overwhelming and stressful.
- Build success into activities - ensuring that tasks are not too difficult.
- Computer use alleviates a lot of stress and has the advantage of being self-correcting with features like a spell-checker. Encourage computer use as much as possible.
- The young person might receive a lot of negative comments about his behaviour, so counter this with praise at every opportunity. Young people with SCD/ASD need a lot of encouragement.

## **Geography**

### **Knowledge and understanding of places**

Much of the factual content of geographical work will appeal to those with SCD/ASD. Gathering facts and figures is an area of strength.

#### **Tools:**

- Young people will require direct assistance to identify patterns within the information gathered.
- Simple connections between areas of knowledge will have to be explicitly taught.

### **Knowledge and understanding of patterns and process**

A combination of the core deficits of social impairment and language impairment has a direct effect upon much of the key area of developing geographical skills. The level of social impairment makes it difficult for a young person to show a sense of empathy with others. This makes developing an understanding of how people in different regions function, a difficult concept. The impairment in language makes it even more problematic for these young people to formulate the questions that would focus their understanding of the human structure in different regions.

#### **Tools**

- Young people will need help to answer questions like 'What is it like?' Visual images and video clips watched with things to look for may be beneficial. Descriptions in terms of 'Look at the topography, vegetation, human features, urban development, road patterns' might be required to help structure the question.

### **Map Work**

The core deficit of flexible thought, characteristic of a young person with SCD/ASD will create perceptual difficulties for that young person when interpreting and understanding much of the geographical evidence and information. This will show in young people having difficulty coping with much of the symbolic nature of geography.

The diversity and variety of information may be confusing

#### **Tools:**

- Start from the young person's perspective – use maps, aerial photography and computer information.
- Base organisation of materials around clear and unambiguous rules.
- Check for generalization of information – don't take it for granted that information that is common to different geographical concepts is linked.

### **Knowledge and understanding of environmental change and sustainable development.**

Aspects of Geography that require reflection and interpretation can prove problematic. There may be difficulty in the comprehension of the language used. Interpretation of what is said or written may be very literal. Young people will often understand what the literal meaning of the word is. They do not understand connotation that is often applied by the speaker or writer. Some young people display verbal skills that appear to be as good, if not better than their peers – this does not mean that they are intellectually at this level so replies need to be clear, not too sophisticated for the young person to understand.

## **Tools**

- Provide a glossary of terms with clear meanings
- Provide visual cues and concrete examples wherever possible
- Watch spoken and written language for any ambiguity
- Link theory to practice – especially important when doing field work.

## **Fieldwork**

Young people generally find this difficult. Any changes in routine are problematic with young people often becoming anxious. If fieldwork involves contact with the general public, completing a questionnaire or visiting another establishment then detailed preparation will be necessary.

## **Tools**

- When planning a field work trip discuss plans and details carefully with a young person beforehand ( See Health & Safety, trips and visits, p22) Social stories may also be beneficial
- Role-play asking questions of members of the public including asking and thanking them for their help.
- Use a buddy to ask the questions and then get the partner to record the answers.

## **Maps, scale, representation**

Representations and symbols are areas that can cause problems for young people with an SCD/ASD. The symbolism involved requires a high degree of abstract thought that would be difficult and therefore any concepts involving symbols, such as map work, may need a greater degree of specific teaching.

- Start any new work by looking at areas that are familiar and then make connections between the new work and the familiar.
- Representation on maps needs a lot of work with aerial photos to ensure that they are able to make the connection between the symbol and what it represents. Making models may help.

## **Communication**

The young person with SCD/ASD may lack personal organisation and find it difficult to gather the items needed to get started on a task. Once started on a task they may find it hard to get the pace right.

Young people may find it difficult working as part of a group due to their communication difficulties.

## **Tools**

- Provide a checklist of items required of a task.
- Provide an outline of the task with an indication of how much is required and what steps are involved in the process.
- Use ICT to help set out work and present work to a high standard
- In group work start off working with a partner, it may help to allocate clearly defined roles. Initially this may be passive, but building up gradually so that they are able to make a bigger contribution to the group.

## Handwriting difficulties and note taking

*Brody is reluctant to take notes - he hates making mistakes that are permanent, but is more co-operative now that he uses a Dictaphone.*

### **Points to note**

- The young person with SCD/ASD may have fine motor difficulties that it makes it hard for him to write neatly. He may not have enough control in his hands to hold and use a pen efficiently.
- The young person may be a perfectionist who insists on always forming his letters perfectly. He may become so obsessed that he constantly starts over, never completing an activity. The young person may be an extremely slow writer, or he may write well at the beginning of an activity but tires quickly.
- Some young people with SCD/ASD insist on writing in capital letters.
- The young person's handwriting may suffer if he is anxious about writing well or stressed by some other issue.
- The young person may have difficulty taking notes from the blackboard, as this involves reading the words, keeping them in his memory momentarily, writing them down, often while listening to verbal instructions from a teacher or the chatter of his peers! It is very difficult for young people with SCD/ASD to attend to more than one stimulus at a time.
- Sometimes a student is so self-conscious about his poor handwriting that he is too embarrassed to hand in any written work.

### **Tools**

- Some young people may need to use paper with larger lines to keep letters even and uniform.
- Young people who insist on writing in capitals may have learnt to write this way prior to school entry and have become 'stuck'. There are many other ways of recording information.
- Show the young person how you handle mistakes when you are writing.
- Some young people write better if their writing surface is raised to a 15-degree angle.
- While handwriting difficulties need to be addressed, consider alternative methods of recording such as using a laptop or mini tape recorder. These can be useful when the young person needs to record a lot of information.
- Advise the young person of how much he will need to write at the *beginning* of the lesson so that he knows in advance what is expected of him.
- Assign a note taking buddy – have another young person photocopy his notes to ensure the young person with autism has a complete set. Summarise key points in a handout. Note also that some young people with autism have great difficulty reading the handwriting of others.
- A social story can help teach the young person that it is OK to make mistakes.
- Allow the young person to type written work. Ask the young person's parents if they can transcribe the work if the young person is not a competent typist.
- Consider providing opportunities to learn efficient word processing skills.

## History

Learning about significant individuals and events in history should present little difficulty at a factual level. However difficulties may be encountered where young people are expected to make connections, comparisons, evaluations and analyse data. Interpreting events in different ways will need to be taught explicitly and directly rather than relying on the young people intuitively grasping an abstract concept. The potential of ICT opportunities should be explored particularly when group work is required.

### Chronological understanding

The factual aspects of history can prove to be an area in which they may excel and find great enjoyment. Difficulties arise when trying to assimilate this information into a usable format. They will need explicit opportunities to reflect on events and be directed away from giving a list of unrelated detail.

- Although young people can memorize lists, when information is presented visually young people with SCD/ASD show better memory skills.
- If text is provided as a source, watch for the mismatch between reading level and comprehension level. Young people may not understand the meanings of words or the young person may focus on specific words and not grasp the overall meaning of the whole sentence/passage.

### Knowledge and Understanding of events, people and changes in the past

Young people may have a good memory for personal events that are stored in relation to the context of their occurrence, however their general world knowledge or memories of facts stored in terms of their meaning relationships may be limited.

Young people may have difficulty in the comprehension of language and understanding of what is said or written may be very literal. They may understand what the words mean, but not what the speaker or writer intends. This can lead to a number of difficulties ranging from misinterpreting instructions to problems of interpreting different viewpoints etc.

### Tools

- Check your language for any ambiguity and be aware of any areas that may lead to misinterpretation, as well as not being misled by the young person apparent verbal skills which may be superficial
- Use mind maps to help compile all sources of information in a visual way so links between disparate areas can be drawn.

### Historical Interpretation

Young people with SCD/ASD have particular difficulty in distinguishing fact from fiction. Young people have difficulty in understanding how others feel or think; this is a core difficulty.

### Tools

- Looking at history in relation to the local area or a particular young person's experience may be more meaningful to them.

- Set up discussions that a young person is able to relate to and use other young people to demonstrate different points of view using the phrases “I think this..” “I disagree, I think it is” Then help the young person to identify with the different views: – “What does John think? What does Judith think? What do you think?”
- Teach strategies to help them recognise which information is factual and supported by evidence and which is derived from an individual’s point of view.
- Help young people to discriminate between the relevant and the irrelevant by getting them to focus on the most important information, possibly by highlighting or providing a list of key word.
- Some young people will have difficulty with the concepts of time and understanding which events happened in the recent past and which longer ago. It may be helpful to have a visual time line encompassing the topic that is being covered.
- Extra time may need to be given for the young person to reflect as they are generally slow at processing information.

### **Historical Enquiry**

Young people have difficulty in generalizing information so that the connection between things in the past and actual artifacts or place may be lost.

#### **Tools**

Young people need more help to organize themselves. They will need to be shown what part of a particular artifact needs to be studied.

### **Organization and communication**

Young people lack personal organizational skills and find it difficult to gather the items needed to get started on a task

#### **Tools**

- Give a list of materials that can be ticked off as they are found.
- Give a framework and an indication of how much work is expected
- Guidelines should be given on how to set work out.
- Use ICT to help with the presentation of work
- When using group work give each person a specific role this may initially be passive but building up gradually so that they are able to make a bigger contribution to the group.



## Homework

Young people will often have difficulty starting and completing homework when they do not understand the instructions or the purpose of the work set. This may be interpreted as deliberate refusal. It is essential to explain visually why homework is important. The ability to transfer skills from school to home can also be a problem.

### Difficulty starting and completing homework

#### Tools

- A social story to explain why homework needs to be done.
- More detailed instructions may be necessary, particularly when it is an open-ended task.
- To establish the homework routine, consider reducing the amount of work expected, particularly in the first few weeks.

### Not getting information into the homework diary

#### Tools

- When possible, write up homework on the whiteboard at the beginning of the lesson rather than the end.
- TA or peer to check that the homework is entered correctly, including when, where and to whom it should be given when finished.
- Some schools enter homework details on their website.

### Not completing homework correctly

#### Tools

- Be aware of difficulties with literal interpretation. Some young people when asked to find out about' a topic will not naturally assume that they have to record the information.

### Organising their own time, e.g. spending too long on homework in order to get it finished or being unable to pace themselves for long-term projects/coursework

#### Tools

- As young people with SCD/ASD often have poor forward planning skills, long-term homework may need to be structured into smaller steps.
- Ensure that the young person understands that they only have to work for the given amount of time on homework. It is important to make it clear that it is not always necessary to finish the task, provided the required amount of time has been spent on it – ensure this is agreed by the recipient of the work.
- Problems with flexibility of thought mean that young people will find it hard to accept if homework is not given on the correct day.

## Improving organisational skills

### Points to note

- People with SCD/ASD tend to have poor executive functioning skills. This means the young person might have difficulty with organisation, task sequencing, planning, prioritising and getting started.
- A young person with SCD/ASD can easily become overloaded and confused coping with the social demands of school life. This added stress would affect his ability to organise himself and his belongings.
- The young person may not see the point of being well organised; he may have little motivation to please others or master new skills.

The young person can have particular difficulty remembering which items to bring from home, what he needs to take home each day and the materials required for certain classes. Stressors may be as varied as not knowing where to put answers on a work sheet and finding his way around the school.

### Tools

- The young person will benefit from having a map of the school. Use highlighters to colour code classrooms, home room, canteen, toilets etc.
- Use a homework assignment book or sheet. This should clearly state what is expected as well as listing the books and resources needed to fulfill the requirements. Have the young person's parents check and sign the book and copy important dates on to a calendar.
- Encourage the young person to use a calendar at home (preferably one related to his special interest) as a constant visual reminder of important dates, assignments due etc.
- Talk to the young person's parents about providing a suitable place at home for him to complete his homework. It is essential this space is free from distractions.
- It is important the young person has time to 'unwind' at the end of the day so you may need to lower your expectations regarding the amount of homework he is required to do. You might like to set aside some class time for the young person to complete a homework assignment. See also homework p79
- Use different coloured trays, files or folders to organise workspace.
- Suggest the young person use a colour coding system for notebooks, text books and folders for each subject.
- Use a visual or written timetable that shows the items that are required for each lesson.
- Allocate a time each week for 'housekeeping' and a general tidy up of the young person's work area, locker etc. The young person may also benefit from having a larger locker if this is possible. While the extra space may assist with organisation, remember his executive functioning difficulties could mean he is unable to determine what materials are essential, useful or unnecessary, so he may need assistance with this.
- Enlarge worksheets onto A3 size paper and using a highlighter, mark the spaces for each answer.

The young person may need some help getting started with an activity. A physical prompt may be necessary. Try providing a list, sequencing the tasks to reach the goal of the activity.

## **Information and Communication Technology**

Pupils with SCD/ASD often show an aptitude for completing work on computers. Computers are consistent and non-judgmental. The computer's response to the pupil's interaction will never vary.

### **Finding things out**

Pupils with SCD/ASD have fundamental difficulties when given problems to solve. They access the internet competently, but not are able to distinguish what is most relevant from the mass of information on offer.

### **Developing ideas and making things happen**

The discussion of the role of ICT in modern life will prove difficult for those with SCD/ASD. The triad of impairments can have the most effect on these aspects of the programme of study. Pupils may not have the verbal communication skills to discuss their experience, they find large groups situations threatening and will achieve more and at a higher level when working individually or in small groups.

### **Exchanging and sharing information**

Many pupils with SCD/ASD quickly adapt to the technology involved in using computers and become capable users. Computers are a powerful motivator. Software can allow students to present work with good layout, including pictures in the form of clip art; reviewing, modifying and evaluating work as it progresses

Used effectively, pupils with SCD/ASD can derive many benefits from using the computer. Carefully planned and supported use of the computer can provide:

- A safe non-threatening, non-judgmental learning environment in which there is emotional neutrality, infinite patience and immediate feedback without value judgments.
- A final presentation that can look as good as anyone else's with mistakes in spelling and grammar corrected via the spellchecker and re-drafting.
- Assisted problem solving without conveying the impression that their communication difficulties are holding the class back or preventing them sharing their own "innovatory" ideas
- Greater visual clarity
- Computer modelling to allow students to visualize abstract ideas
- A way of making changes to text that is relatively easy, thus allowing focus on the creative process, making writing more closely related to thinking
- Opportunities to use games on the computer. This can have a benefit if carefully used.
- When the pupils' ability and experience are carefully matched, paired and shared group work can reduce anxiety about learning and promote greater achievement. Shared responsibility for a wrong answer can lead to analyzing why and how for next time.
- Using the student with SCD/ASD as a peer tutor to help less ICT literate students can raise self-esteem and provide opportunities for social interaction within a structured situation.
- The teacher must give explicit directions as to what the task is, with visual support or demonstration.

A significant limitation of extensive use of the computer is that it can reduce the need for social interaction. Some individuals with SCD/ASD can develop a particular affinity and or expertise, preferring the computer dominated activity to the complexities of human interaction. Knowing when and how to intervene is therefore of paramount importance to the teacher. The relationship between pupils and teacher changes over time.

Initially the teacher is the manager of pupils' learning i.e. the teacher tells the pupil what to do. In the interim stage the teacher acts as advisor to help pupils' set own task and goal. As the students become more proficient the teacher is established as a facilitator.

Lunchtime computer clubs can be a sanctuary for pupils. This is a place where their knowledge and skills are valued and yet the pupils can relax during the recreation time.

When computers malfunction, as they sometimes do, a social story is helpful to alleviate the stress for individual pupils.

## Memory recall and reflecting on learning

### Points to note:

- The young person with SCD/ASD might easily recall established facts and general knowledge. Many have excellent rote memories.
- According to some theories, many learning difficulties experienced by people with SCD/ASD arise from a failure to develop an experience 'of self'. It is as if they have difficulty experiencing events as happening to themselves, rather it is like they are watching a video of life. This lack of experiencing self has a profound effect on the young person's ability to process information.
- When you ask the young person with SCD/ASD a question, he has to stop thinking his present thoughts, process the meaning of the question, come up with an answer and then respond. This may take some time.
- The young person might have difficulty accessing and retrieving memories without a specific cue. It is not that the information is not there, but the young person may not have a meaningful framework by which to link events and personal memories.
- The young person may have difficulty responding to an open question, such as "What did you do on the weekend?" but he may be able to answer questions when given alternatives, such as, "Did you go the park or the beach at the weekend?" This type of questioning gives him a prompt to retrieve the information from his memory.

### Tools:

- Be aware of the young person's difficulties with open questions; only use these if you feel the young person can give an appropriate response. Otherwise, ask questions that give him a cue as to the correct response.
- Be patient when asking questions. Try not to interrupt or finish sentences for the young person as this may interrupt his thought processes and cause him to start over again.
- There are several strategies to try that may help the young person to memorise specific information.  
These include:
  - when talking about experiences, discuss the young person's personal response, i.e. how he felt and what he was thinking. Young people may need assistance to identify these feelings,
  - working the information into a diagram or picture form,
  - helping the young person to establish links between new information and information he already knows. Use visuals wherever possible.
- When a new skill has been learnt it is helpful to reflect on this learning before moving on. This can be done by;
  - identifying key points,
  - asking the young person to clearly state what he thinks he has learnt,
  - making connections between what has been learnt and prior knowledge in the subject,
  - making judgements about how this new skill or information will be useful in the future.

## Modern Foreign Languages

### Strengths:

- Good memory for rote learning (unless they have a specific learning difficulty like dyslexia)
- Mechanical learning of a foreign language
- Learning of grammatical rules and vocabulary

### Challenges:

- Pupils with SCD/ASD experience many difficulties with their first language. They understand literal meanings of words and grammatical construction, but are likely to have difficulties with pragmatics. Such difficulties will also be apparent when using a second language.
- Conversation, role play and shared games could cause anxiety
- Listening skills in terms of selecting what is relevant
- Multi tasking making listening and translating difficult.
- Cassette recordings often used in language lessons often move too fast and can cause anxiety.
- Picking out relevant written information.
- Fine motor difficulties can make handwriting slow and untidy.
- Generalising their learning across contexts –the vocabulary for the café can be used in other social situations

### Strategies:

- Practice conversational skills and role play with an adult
- Support and explanation of role play
- Visual clues to cue them into a response
- To encourage an oral contribution or answer a question, write down a question and place it on their desk as an early warning. This gives them time to process and prepare the answer before it is asked verbally.
- High level of visual support such as written script, pictures, artifacts, video
- Teach set conversational routines that can be practiced with an adult or supportive peer.
- Word/sentence cards to aid recall and act as prompts until the routines are established.
- Watching a video recording of themselves speaking
- Support to scan notes. Highlight main points and important information.
- Pupils are likely to be more willing to redraft their work on a word processor.
- A lot of preparation for any residential trips abroad. A scrap book with photographs from previous school visits to the area, outlining what will happen, how pupils will travel, where they will stay, what will happen each day. Individual adult support is likely to be required. Communication with parents will be essential as many pupils with SCD/ASD have eating and sleeping routines which will be important to them when coping in unfamiliar surroundings.

## Music

### Strengths:

- Music has an inherent structure and predictability that is less complex than social communication. Young people with SCD/ASD often respond positively to the structures and musical elements of rhythm, pattern and pulse.
- Ability to attend accurately to detail.
- Good rote memory for patterns.
- Enjoy repetitive nature of practicing same songs.
- Opportunity for sense of achievement at the same level as their peers.
- Music can be powerful for calming, 'de stressing' and creating atmospheres.
- Useful for developing social and communication skills.
- Show lack of social embarrassment.
- Low academic demand (writing skills) so often respond positively.
- May respond positively to the structures rules of composing.
- Can be motivated by ICT and therefore music software.
- May enjoy the intellectual challenge of composing for a target audience.
- Have different and unique perspectives on tasks which may lead to an innovative result.

### Challenges:

- Co-operating with others when performing in a group.
- Communicating ideas or personally interpreting the music.
- Literal rigidity without creative interpretation when following musical intonation, pulse etc.
- Hypersensitivity to noise.
- Over stimulated by exciting, noisy environment.
- Poor concentration and attention skills.
- Organisational skills. Getting started and knowing how to finish.
- Over stimulated by the instrument so never really starts the composing.
- Accepting and understanding other peoples' perspectives
- Abstract concepts such as feeling and emotions.
- Expressive vocabulary.

### Strategies:

- Pre-warning before sudden or unexpected sounds.
- Give them a strategy to signal when they are not coping with the noise e.g. leaving the room, hands over ears.
- Practice performing in front of others and desensitising gradually increasing group size.
- Explain a performance situation and what will be involved e.g. using a social story.
- Position appropriately near an exit if the pupil is anxious.
- Use ICT resources e.g. software for composing.
- Have quiet times during a music session to allow young people to have a break from the noise and reduce over stimulation
- Use of headphones to block out noise and aid concentration.
- Tape record and video performance to compare and contrast and offer suggestions.
- Focus on areas they are good at and less so on those they find difficult.
- Break tasks down into manageable chunks.
- Model tasks give a visual/oral demonstration of how the complete task should look/sound.

- Provide clear explanations for musical terms.
- Allow for a longer time span to become familiar with a piece of music.
- Give clear written examples of how to analyse, evaluate and compare music. Keep such written notes as an aide memoir for when a pupil has to approach such a task.
- Avoid open-ended questions.
- Use their interests to motivate their interest in music.
- Use examples of real life context e.g. showing videos



## Organising the Physical Environment – arranging the classroom to maximise learning.

The young person with Social Communication Difficulties often finds the busy classroom environment overwhelming. He needs to be in an ordered and stable environment where he can be as independent as possible. In addition do you need to reduce or minimise the following:

### Tools

- Consider the young person's seating position in order to reduce distractions.

*Usually, the closer he is to the teacher, the fewer distractions he will encounter. The teacher can give reminders to keep him on task – verbal reminders or a touch on the shoulder.*

- Be aware of things he may find fascinating or worrying.

*A flickering computer screen in the corner of the classroom could increase his anxiety.*

- Consider an individual work table/desk.

*Again, this minimises distractions and enables the young person to keep on task. It provides consistency and can be used flexibly.*

- Keep the workspaces as uncluttered as possible.

*Although this applies to the classroom generally, be aware of items on his work table/desk. If necessary, it is better to remove them than to constantly remind him, not to fiddle with the ruler, for example.*

- Give prior notice of changes in the day.

*If the time of assembly changes that day or there will be a supply teacher the next day, let him know as soon as possible. Incorporate the change into his personal timetable to give **Visual Support** (p96-99).*

- If working collaboratively, other young people need to be supportive and non-threatening.

- Give the young person a personal timetable.

*It is a good idea for the young person to have his own timetable of the day's events. Routine is important to him and he will need to know what is going to happen. A visual timetable (see this **Visual Support** section) can help him anticipate and predict activities. This will make him more secure, reduce his anxiety level and prepare him for learning. It allows for flexibility within learned routines and enables the teacher to explain changes in a visual manner.*

- Use a Buddy system or circle of friends.

*A buddy system enables the young person's classmates to help him cope in situations which are unfamiliar. The buddy helps the young person with SCD/ASD by setting an example, prompting, encouraging etc. Circle of Friends is a specific technique that requires pre-planning and agreement of the pupil and peers. Ask your EP for further information.*

- Use of visual structure and techniques such as visual signs, colour coding and clear marking of teaching areas.

*A green sticker on his English book helps him identify the correct book more efficiently.*

#### **Case study**

Maths was Dominic's favourite subject but the teacher noticed that he was seldom on task and stared across the classroom. This happened every day, just in the maths lesson. The teacher realised he was watching the computer screen which had been used in the previous lesson.

**Action.** The teacher made sure the computer was always turned off when not in use, eliminating the distraction and enabling Dominic to concentrate more fully on his maths.

# Physical Education

## Strengths

- Benefits gained by successful inclusion in P.E. including improved social inclusion, group work skills, and reduction in stress.

## Challenges

- Social interaction
- Lack of empathy leading to failure to understand the rules of competition and win/lose situations.
- Language and non-verbal communication e.g. following and giving instructions.
- Thought and behaviour, rigidity of thinking and impaired imagination leading to difficulties problem-solving and predicting
- Gross and fine motor skills – spatial awareness, planning and sequencing movements. Lack of awareness of danger.
- Difficulties receiving auditory information and therefore instructions.
- Aversion to changing clothes, or clothes with different feelings and textures.
- Aversion to going into the gym hall due to changes in environment, acoustics, not understanding the activities or disliking physical activities (due to motor difficulties), not being able to cope with the space or the echoes.

## Strategies

- Exercise and relaxation can reduce stress and anxiety in pupils with SCD/ASD. Exercise prior to learning can lead to more successful learning.
- Increased knowledge of games can develop social inclusion in the playground, social exchanges, confidence in joining in groups, learning about rules and team playing.
- Limit the space available and explore the space alone with the pupil e.g. when the hall is empty.
- Use of visual cues such as video and modeling to make clear a series of movements.
- Give clear instructions one stage at a time.
- Break down the task into small individual steps.
- Teacher to partner to make steps explicit and gradually introduce a sympathetic peer partner, then increase the number of partners gradually.
- Make sure the student knows they are part of the group and the instructions are universal.
- Rehearse the routine for changing for P.E.
- Desire for 'perfection' – don't want to make mistakes so don't 'learn from their mistakes'
- Allow time for processing and provide the student with a strategy for this – "Give me a minute to think."
- Encourage young people to ask for clarification – have a system: 'If you need help show me your orange card, put up your hand' [or any other agreed system]
- Support – use peer tutors; TA's to check understanding of task and assist in organizing a logical approach to the task. 'Tell me what you are going to do first.' Use concrete apparatus, practical activities and/or visual stimuli to aid understanding and support estimation.
- Provide structure – key vocabulary in one place in the room [difficult in the sport's hall]; big picture, starter activity, introduction, development, plenary, etc. set time limits.

# PSHE

## Strengths

- Following instructions/rules accurately
- Routine tasks
- Specific knowledge around a topic
- Attention to detail

## Challenges

The aim of PHSE is for all young people to be able to take their place as a member of their community and society in general. Young people with SCD/ASD have more difficulties with abstract concepts than their peers. The very nature of the difficulties has the most profound affect upon the development of these skills.

- Following an agenda other than their own
- Extending their narrow range of interests
- Managing the social demands of work placements/communicating with unfamiliar people.
- Changes to routine/ dealing with unexpected situations.
- Generalisation
- Expressing fears/anxieties
- Understand and respond to feelings and emotion
- Understanding and using facial expression and body language
- Interpreting actions of others
- Forming relationships
- Literal interpretation
- Understanding how they appear to others
- Seeing the need for personal hygiene
- Wearing appropriate clothes for the situation

## Strategies

- Use special interests as a motivator. Identify times for the interest and adapt the curriculum to include it. Use interests to develop leisure activities.
- Be proactive in preparing for work placements- involve parents. As preparation for unfamiliar situations use rehearsal, photographs, information books.
- Teach through practical experience.
- Provide opportunities to reduce stress.
- Share information and develop understanding that while fears may seem strange to us they are very real for the person with SCD/ASD.
- Give specific tasks to ensure young people have a role to play.
- Systematic teaching of emotions, feelings, body language.
- Use of video and photographs to develop understanding of non-verbal communication.
- Use of Circle of Friends, Social Stories, Social Scripting, comic Strip Conversations and Social Communication Groups.
- Involve peers by raising their awareness of SCD/ASD as having positive qualities as well as sometimes presenting challenges and difficulties.

- Provide concrete experiences and examples.
- Support verbal instruction with written instructions.
- Build self-care into the routine where appropriate –e.g. plan comfort breaks.
- Specific step by step instructions, written checklist of what to do.
- Specific teaching and practice demonstrations of what to do. Do not assume prior knowledge.
- Teach acceptable behaviours and parameters explicitly. Teach what “private” means and provide rules that are safe for all concerned. Confidential may need some detailed exploration.
- Desire for ‘perfection’ – don’t want to make mistakes so don’t ‘learn from their mistakes’
- Allow time for processing and provide the student with a strategy for this – “Give me a minute to think.”
- Encourage young people to ask for clarification – have a system: ‘If you need help put your orange card on your desk.’
- Support – use peer tutors; TA’s to check understanding of task and assist in organizing a logical approach to the task. ‘Tell me what you are going to do first.’ Use concrete apparatus, practical activities and/or visual stimuli to aid understanding and support estimation.
- Provide structure – key words in one place on the board; homework set at the beginning of the lesson; big picture, starter activity, introduction, development, plenary, etc. set time limits.

# Religious Education

## Strengths

- Good memory for facts
- Interest in rules/structures/systems/laws
- Express opinions
- Attention to detail

## Challenges

- Understanding abstract concepts, hidden meanings and symbolism
- Real difficulties with the idea of faith and belief as opposed to fact.
- Difficulty realising what is important or relevant and therefore focusing on the detail
- Understanding other's perspectives and sometimes the strength of other's beliefs
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Topics outside experiences and perspective
- Historical aspects of religion and relevance for today's society
- Following agenda of others
- Recognising difference between fact and opinion
- Unrehearsed oral presentations
- Planning of written work
- Participation in and following class discussion
- Group work

## Strategies

- Begin with real life experiences and link abstract concepts to these.
- Introduce pupils to language and materials prior to a new whole class topic
- Group work should be kept to very small groups with sympathetic peers. Prepare and provide a structure for debates making expectations clear.
- Use of visual approaches including the interactive white board, photographs, books, posters, artifacts etc to communicate abstract concepts
- Use of pupils individual interests to draw links to the curriculum
- Similarities and differences between religions could be presented in a factual way.
- Visits to religious buildings for example should be prepared with the young person with ASD in advance through use of pictures, plans, maps and discussion.

# Science

## Scientific enquiry

Young people with SCD/ASD do not ask how and why questions spontaneously – they require specific teaching. Young people will have problems processing and understanding verbal instructions and working in a group.

## Tools

- Prompt questions giving examples: 'What do you think would happen if we added x to y...?'
- Work 1/1 to elicit descriptions and ideas and aid recording initially with an adult, then attempt paired turn taking to share descriptions and comparisons.
- Establish rules in pair work for listening to others ideas and reflecting them back –social stories may help with this.
- Provide instructions for practical work in written form. Ensure young people have understood what has to be done.
- Help with practical organisation of equipment or space.
- In experiments give one small task at a time.
- Ensure safety rules are clearly understood.
- Use mind maps diagrams and charts to present information – help to provide a framework to apply logical thought.

## Investigative skills

The four areas planning, obtaining and presenting evidence and evaluating are highly problematic to young people with SCD/ASD as they involve making predictions, observations, reflections and drawing conclusions. The inability to hypothesise and predict will mean that young people are likely to need a lot of information and to be given guidelines for the completion of investigations. Young people with SCD/ASD often dislike investigation for fear of being wrong and this also affects the quality of their evaluation. Concepts need to be related to everyday aspects of life

## Tools

- Give clear guidance on planning experiments; explain variables systematically.
- Watch out for phobias and hypersensitivities when exploring new materials. Young people may need to practice using safety glasses for example.
- Use ICT to help with organisation and presentation of work
- Use pre-constructed worksheets
- Use concrete models, diagrams and visual resources
- Make links to previous knowledge explicit
- Use a routine of 3 standard questions at each major stage of the experiment.
- Model good examples of coursework getting students to mark using the assessment criteria

## Health and Safety

**Young people once given instructions tend to follow them explicitly. They will use the equipment exactly as they have been taught to. The more explicit the instructions and the clearer the visual cues, the better. Draw attention to safety rules as displayed in appropriate areas.**

## Science Group work

Science often requires young people to work in groups this may cause difficulties; they miss social cues, they may be unwilling to accept the opinions of other young persons, may overreact and can appear rude.

### Tools

- Give specific roles and jobs within groups
- Allow opportunities for partner work –turn taking
- Appreciate that social interaction is stressful
- Allow opportunities for individual work
- Establish a circle of friends to support the pupil in lessons

### Literal use of language

Problems can occur with the literal interpretation of language. 'Heat the test tube' may require additional instruction such as 'for 1 minute', 'until the substance inside turns red' 'until the water is clear', 'until it reaches 80 degrees'.

### Tools

- Do not assume that the topic of conversation is obvious – make it explicit.
- Develop ways of rewarding young people for good social skills, used in context e.g. partner work.
- Many young people will have difficulty learning and retrieving new vocabulary. Make a list of new words. Use visual cues to support.
- Desire for 'perfection' – don't want to make mistakes so don't 'learn from their mistakes'
- Allow time for processing and provide the student with a strategy for this – 'Give me a minute to think.'
- Encourage young people to ask for clarification – have a system: 'If you need help put your orange card on your desk.'
- Support – use peer tutors; TA's to check understanding of task and assist in organizing a logical approach to the task. 'Tell me what you are going to do first.' Use concrete apparatus, practical activities and/or visual stimuli to aid understanding and support estimation.
- Provide structure – key words in one place on the board; homework set at the beginning of the lesson; big picture, starter activity, introduction, development, plenary, etc. set time limits.



## Transfer of learned skills

### ***Points to note***

- People with SCD/ASD can be very rigid in their way of thinking. They can have great difficulty transferring the skills learnt in one setting to another, similar setting or between subjects.
- Problems with memory recall lead to difficulty searching the memory for useful information. Unless they are specifically cued, the young person can lack the ability to spontaneously search his memory for knowledge that can be transferred to a new situation.
- Sometimes a young person can display certain skills at school but he cannot perform them independently at home, or vice versa.
- This inability to generalise skills can be a big problem if the young person's teacher is unaware of just how rigid the child can be.

### ***Tools***

- It is important to always generalise what is being taught with a range of examples and situations. The young person needs an opportunity to learn the same thing in different situations to encourage flexible thinking.
- Practice each new skill with a range of practical examples in different settings. Then move on to more complex ideas.
- There needs to be good communication between home and school. Keep a record of skill development in a Communication Book and send it home regularly with the young person each day. Newly acquired skills can then be practiced at home.
- When a new skill has been learnt, reflect on the learning experience by talking about what has been learnt and how this skill might be used in the future.
- The young person should also be given the opportunity to enjoy what he has learnt. Reflect on the achievement, pointing out to the young person that he is happy, proud etc.

## Using Visual Support Materials – making sure he knows what to do.

Most young people with Social Communication Difficulties have problems processing, what is for them, too much verbal information. However, they usually respond well to information when it is presented visually, either in written, diagrammatic or picture format. Such young people are often referred to as visual learners.

### Tools

- Use of a visual timetable.

*This could be the daily timetable displayed at the front of pupil diary. If referred to each day, changes in the daily routine could be illustrated in order to prepare all young people.*

- Personal timetable.

*Diaries can be used for older young people. Some young people respond to colour-coding to make the different subjects even clearer.*

- Use of symbol cards.

*Showing a symbol card to a young person at the appropriate time can reinforce the action or behaviour required, e.g. Symbols for 'work time', 'quiet' or 'waiting' can be used in a similar way. Older young people can be prompted to focus on a task without the need to use words.*

- Use of **Language/Picture Jigs**.

*Language jigs use pictures or symbols to give a visual representation of what is going to happen so that it can be more easily understood, e.g. for the less able this can be three symbols/pictures representing 'table', 'work' and 'playtime'. The jig both illustrates and reinforces the desired behaviour.*

*(Refer to **Language/Picture Jigs** )*

- Use of '**Social Stories**'.

*Social Stories are written and verbal explanations of situations young people are going to or have faced; they explain the semantics and pragmatics for young people.*

*(Refer to **Social Stories**)*

- Written instructions.

*Young people can find long verbal instructions confusing. A short written instruction outlining the main points gives visual support to help the young person gain clearer understanding of what is expected.*

*Such instructions can be presented as numbered points or bullet points and they help the young person work independently. Written instructions are particularly helpful when promoting independence and when giving homework.*

- Modelling.

*Young people can imitate ordinary young peoples' behaviour, who act as mentors or peer supporters as in Circle of Friends or Quality Circle Time*

- Use of TEACCH (The Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Young People) strategies.

*Such strategies emphasize the importance of the young person knowing:  
what he is required to do,  
when he is required to do it  
when he will have finished  
what will happen next.*

*TEACCH visual support strategies include personal schedules (timetables), cue cards and written instructions (see references).*

#### **Case study.**

At the end of assembly, Megan was eager to leave the hall and found it difficult and waiting for her class to lead out. Assembly had finished and she saw no reason to stay!

**Action** - At the end of the assembly, the Teaching Assistant prompted her with a non-verbal signal saying 'Wait' until it was time to leave the Hall. This provided her with a reminder of what was expected even though it was a social and organizational custom which made little sense to her.

# Visual supports

## Why use visual supports?

Visual supports enable young people to keep track of the day's events and activities, as well as develop an understanding of time frames and an appreciation of environmental sequences.

Visual supports are an important teaching tool as pupils with SCD/ASD have:

- Limited understanding of the concept of time, i.e. knowing what is happening or will happen and then sequencing, predicting and organising the order of events.
- Difficulty with communication. This includes difficulty understanding verbal explanations of what will happen at certain times during the day.
- Rigidity and need for sameness. Changes can create considerable stress for young persons with SCD/ASD. One way to reduce stress and increase opportunities for success is to use visual supports.

Visual supports can increase the young person's independence and ability to understand classroom routine. You may find the young person becomes less dependent on teaching staff and verbal instructions, along with a reduction in difficult behaviour and repetitive questions.

## Types of Visual Supports

- Yearly diaries
- Term diaries
- Monthly calendars
- Weekly calendars / timetables
- Schedules of one hour, 10 minutes or less
- General daily classroom schedule with activities and individual tasks
- Individual work skill schedule
- Sequence charts / schedule of daily routines

## Visuals Are Important!

Remember, most young persons with SCD/ASD are visual learners, so where appropriate use pictures and written words in conjunction with verbal communication.

You can use a computer program such as Boardmaker™ to make your visual supports, use photos, clipart or download and print the pictures from [www.dotolearn.com](http://www.dotolearn.com)

A range of formats can be used including posters, blackboard / whiteboard, diary, small photo albums, business card holders, cardboard strips, books or laminated cards.

## Behaviour

Schedules can be the cornerstone of management practices for young persons with challenging behaviours. Specific behavioural deficits can be managed using schedules. For example, to clarify expectations, set limits, reduce negative teacher attention for undesired behaviour. Schedules can indicate that a preferred activity will follow a non-preferred activity.

## Communication

Schedules can be used in a variety of ways to develop language and aid comprehension depending upon the individual young person's needs. For young people with limited verbal language, schedules can provide an opportunity to interact and communicate.

## **Social Skills**

Time spent outside the classroom can be extremely challenging for young people with SCD/ASD; many find this a temporarily overwhelming experience. Using a schedule of 'activities to do during breaks' can considerably reduce anxiety. Provide a range of appropriate activities following discussion of a young person's needs and preferences. At first you may need to support the pupil to decide what order to choose to do things. These ideas can be placed on business-size cards and carried in the young person's pocket.

Information about where these activities are available and between what times they may be accessed will be useful, e.g. Computer 1-1.30pm in Learning Skills Room; Tues., Weds. Thurs.

## **SECTION 3**

### **SOCIAL**

## Accessing Assembly.

Young people with Social Communication Difficulties often have difficulty maintaining focus in Assembly. They can find it difficult to focus on what is being said, be anxious about being with a large group of people and find religious concepts hard to understand (corresponding to the three impairments in autism).

### Tools

- A short and predominantly visual assembly will enable easier access.
- The use of power-point or overhead projector will help maintain interest, as will the use of live music/role play/celebration of good art work.
- Be flexible about attendance. If the pupil has difficulty in assembly, does he have to attend daily? If not he could spend some of the time working in the classroom

- Praise young people sitting next to him.

*Praise those sitting nearby for helping him and for showing him how to behave appropriately in assembly.*

- Use of something to fiddle with.

*Allow the young person to have something quiet to fiddle with. This may help lessen his anxiety and enable him to focus on what is being said. A very small piece of Blu-Tac can be used, as long as it does not prove to be disruptive.*

- Sit him on a chair

*A chair will prevent him from moving around on the floor will help define his sitting space.*

- Use a Language Jig.

*He could take this pictorial representation of the sequence of events with him so he knows what is happening and when it will finish. It can incorporate a reward activity after assembly.*

- Use a 'Social Story'.

*This will describe appropriate behaviour and may give an explanation of what is expected. It can be used to reinforce the answer to questions such as 'but why do I have to go?'*

- Place the young person carefully.

*Seat the young person at or near the end of the row, close to an adult, a specially selected 'Buddy' or a responsible young person.*

- Give him a special job or responsibility.

- Prepare for any changes in the usual assembly routine.

*This might include changes in vicars, assembly leaders or the playing of instruments. If he is to receive a certificate or to be singled out for praise, be sure he knows how to shake hands. Some young people find the sound of applause deafening and prefer not to be clapped. Prepare the other young people to use a 'silent clap' instead, i.e. raising hands above the head and waving.*

- Back-chaining.

*This can be used to introduce the young person to assembly and where the first step is joining in for the **last** 5 minutes, gradually increasing the length of time the young person is expected to be in assembly. This involves 'small positive steps' and can avoid a young person learning that if he makes a fuss at the beginning of an assembly he gets taken out.*

- Be patient.

*Don't expect the anxious young person to step up to full assembly by next week; next term is more realistic.*



## Coping with break and lunch breaks

*A young person with SCD/ASD was allowed to choose one friend to join him and play his Nintendo at break. He quickly went from being ostracised to being the most popular boy in school.*

### Points to note:

The school grounds can be a really threatening environment to a child with SCD/ASD during recess and lunch breaks. There is no structure or routine to recess and lunchtime. Children with SCD/ASD enjoy routine, so they are likely to feel stressed or anxious during this time. Normally-developing children use their breaks to release stress and unwind; the student with SCD/ASD may return to the classroom too stressed to concentrate and participate in any way.

- The young person with SCD/ASD may prefer to withdraw during this time, because he is tired from the social demands and sensory overload in the classroom. In the school grounds, there maybe a lot of free movement, noise and vast open spaces. There are unwritten rules that must be adhered to. There are many sights, sounds and smells to deal with. These are likely to cause stress and anxiety.
- The young person with SCD/ASD may lack imaginative and creative play skills; he may prefer solitary or repetitive pursuits, such as computer games. This puts him at a disadvantage socially. He may have no interest in his peers' conversations about clothes, the opposite sex, the latest fads etc.
- The young person with SCD/ASD will be vulnerable to teasing and bullying during this time. Unusual behaviour and poor social skills will make him stand out as an easy target. He may lack assertiveness and coping mechanisms to deal with this behaviour, which may result in angry outbursts in class sometime after the event. He may be unable to express his feelings of distress to an adult.
- Children with SCD/ASD can be naïve and trusting. He may be easily led into trouble by others who seek to manipulate him, i.e. suggesting he go 'out of bounds' or outside the school grounds.

In the school grounds, the poor motor skills of the child with SCD/ASD will be painfully obvious to all. While other young people enjoy playing ball games, the young person with SCD/ASD may avoid doing so due to his lack of co-ordination and poor motor skills.

- Attempts to join in ball and team games may lead to ridicule.

The young person with SCD/ASD may be a 'wanderer' with little sense of personal danger and no understanding of school boundaries.

### Tools:

- Accept that the young person may need to be on his own at times, but provide support should he wish to join social activities.
- Encourage the young person to learn by watching others play. Talk through the activities to explain the role of each person.
- Incorporate social skill training in class. Have the young people act out social situations, such as how to join in a conversation in various circumstances.

- Ensure the young person clearly understands the rules regarding school boundaries and 'out-of bounds' areas for his own safety. Use a colour coded map of the school grounds.
- Help the young person develop strategies to respond to teasing and unwanted social approaches from others.
- SCD/ASD is an invisible handicap – a young person with SCD/ASD looks like any other young person. This makes it difficult for the rest of the teaching community to understand the young person's problems and needs. All teaching staff should be aware of the social difficulties experienced by people with SCD/ASD to make allowances (but not excuses) for behaviour. Place a photo of the young person in the staffroom along with notes about his behaviour and difficulties. (Check that this is OK with the parents first.) Will MDSA's and canteen staff have access to this information?
- Have a pre-arranged place for the child to go to if it all gets too much. The young person should also be aware of who he can turn to for support when he is distressed, such as a school counselor. If necessary provide the student with photo cards/names of staff he can go to when he needs help.
- If possible allow the student access to a resource room, computer room or library at break times.
- Make a picture schedule of lunchtime activities. One hour can seem like a long period of unstructured activity for a young person with autism. Split the hour into segments: 20 minutes – eat lunch, 20 minutes – ball games, 20 minutes – other activities.
- Allow the young person 10 minutes of time out after returning from recess or lunch, or end lunch slightly earlier. Give him a favourite activity, time at his special interest or listening to music. Some young people may prefer a solo run or walk around the yard to de-stress.
- Choose a mature young person to keep an eye on the young person during break and lunch breaks. Rotate young people on a roster system. Some young people require close supervision by an adult at all times. Be clear in passing on this information to new or temporary staff.
- Use a business card holder the young person can keep in his pocket with ideas for conversation starters, activities to try, etc.

All young people in the school should be aware that bullying is unacceptable through a school policy of positive behaviour management.

A social story can help the young person with SCD/ASD cope with breaks, giving him ideas for activities and helping him understand school boundaries. See social stories.

## Creating a home base

### Points to note:

Young people with SCD/ASD benefit from having a home base room for a number of reasons:

- Young people with SCD/ASD may become stressed and disturbed in a classroom due to the amount of noise, movement and/or visual stimuli. If the young person needs time out of the classroom, or his teacher requests he leave due to disruptive behaviour, he needs a safe environment to go to.
- Young people with SCD/ASD are vulnerable to being bullied and teased due to their unusual behaviour and lack of assertiveness. They are an easy target because they stand out.
- If the young person has no friends, he may have no-one to talk to about his troubles or anxieties. A young person with SCD/ASD may not know whom to turn to when he needs help or is feeling anxious.
- The social environment at school is demanding and stressful for young people with SCD/ASD.
- The young person may feel threatened by the close proximity of others. He might feel stressed in a large group. This is a sensory processing issue due to tactile defensiveness.

When the young person is stressed, his ability to communicate may be significantly reduced; he may have trouble finding the words to say he needs some time away from the classroom.

### Tools:

- A little forethought at the beginning of the year can have enormous benefits and will increase the young person's ability to cope throughout the year. Be proactive rather than reactive in planning.
- Where space permits, allocate a resource room as a home base for all young people with SCD/ASD and/or learning disorders, e.g. a small room or part of a larger base with seating, work space, computer access. This can be a place where TA's or other professionals can work with young people on a 1:1 basis, and a place for the young person to go if they are required or permitted to leave their class. This room can be a retreat for students before school and during breaks.

### If it is not possible to set aside a home base:

- Consider whether it is possible to adapt part of a classroom to a less formal space where the young person can listen to his favourite music through headphones, sit quietly or use a computer at appropriate times.
- Teach the young person how to signal or verbally communicate his distress. For example, an agreed signal that means 'I need a break' or a laminated pass card that can be handed to the teacher when the young person is feeling overloaded and needs to leave the classroom.
- If possible, arrange access to the library or computer room at recess and lunchtime. This can be a safe place for the young person if he is being bullied or teased, or feeling anxious.
- Consider also the physical setup of the classroom and sit the student in a position that will maximise his ability to learn. See physical set-up of the classroom pp87-88.

### If the young person is away from school due to stress or behavioural issues:

- Consider sending work home via email.
- Work with parents, pupil, EWO and relevant professionals to plan a return to school

The break should not be treated as a punishment.

# Difficulty with Social Language

## Why does this happen?

- A young person with high functioning SCD/ASD and Asperger's Syndrome may be articulate and have an extensive vocabulary but these skills can mask his severe language difficulties. A particular area of difficulty is in the social use of language, known as *pragmatics*. For example, he may have difficulty initiating and maintaining a conversation or using correct modulation in his voice. His language may sound very rigid or formal. He may talk at people rather than with them. He may constantly interrupt the conversation at inappropriate times.
- The young person may also have limited ability to convey and understand the meaning of words, known as *semantics*. He might interpret language in a very literal and concrete way. He might have difficulty understanding metaphors, sarcasm or jokes because he doesn't grasp the underlying meaning (inference) or intention in someone's speech.
- The young person might use words or phrases that seem inappropriate. He can make comments that are very blunt or even rude because he lacks social awareness of when and to whom these comments are appropriate. Swearing can be a problem. The young person can pick up these words from peers, then use these inappropriately, such as in the classroom. His lack of social awareness makes it hard for him to understand that this is not appropriate.

Repeating words, phrases or questions is known as *echolalia*. It is frequently seen in early childhood but can persist in some cases. It often indicates poor receptive language skills and misunderstanding speech. Echolalia can be immediate or delayed. It is considered positive as it shows the child is 'tuned in' to language. Older children may be able to repeat a phrase or instruction, without grasping the meaning. The young person may repeat your instructions word for word, but is not actually doing it what you asked because he hasn't grasped the meaning of the instructions.

## Tools:

- Use the young person's interests to practice starting and maintaining a conversation, and turn-taking.
- Be aware that an extensive vocabulary can mask serious comprehension deficits. You may need to repeat and simplify instructions. Keep your language as precise as possible and avoid abstract concepts. Allow the young person time to respond to instructions, then check he has understood. Use visual schedules or cards to reinforce your message. For older young people, print simple instructions or tasks onto cards. Spoken words 'disappear' quickly so use visuals or written instructions wherever possible.
- Teach the young person a standard phrase to use when he has not understood an instruction.
- Be specific. "In a minute" is an abstract concept to a young person with SCD/ASD and it may be interpreted literally. The phrase "It's getting a bit too noisy in here" carries an implied meaning that you want the class to quieten down. A young person with SCD/ASD may completely miss the point of this inference.
- Be constantly aware of the language that you use. Ask yourself whether instructions could be interpreted in a way other than intended, such as giving an instruction that may be interpreted as a question. Sarcasm and irony should be avoided unless you know the young person understands these.
- Use role play to develop the young person's social language skills. These scenarios can be used to help the young person understand when someone is joking or teasing, how to initiate a conversation and how to respond to the emotions of other people.

- Discuss common metaphors and idioms. Explain what they mean.

*Pull your socks up!*  
*Raining cats and dogs.*  
*Feeling under the weather.*  
*Stop 'monkeying' around.*  
*Butterflies in my stomach.*  
*In one ear and out the other.*  
*On cloud 9.*  
*Knock it off!*  
*Spill the beans.*  
*You're in hot water.*  
*Hit the road.*  
*You're pulling my leg.*  
*Time flies when you're having fun.*  
*As tough as nails.*  
*Shake a leg.*  
*We don't see eye to eye.*  
*Cut it out!*  
*Don't bug me.*  
*Skating on thin ice.*  
*Give me a break!*  
*Hit the books.*  
*You hit the nail on the head.*  
*I lost my head.*  
*Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.*

- Sign language may assist some young people; even if their language skills seem quite good. For example, in a noisy classroom, you notice the young person across the room in difficulty and becoming frustrated. You could say, "Do you need help?" while signing 'help' to reinforce your question. Speech therapists can provide you with examples of useful signs.
- If swearing is an issue, remember that the student is probably copying the language of his peers to compensate for his own language difficulties. Clearly tell the young person which words are considered inappropriate in the classroom. A written list might also be appropriate. Remember that while the young person may follow the rule, he may never really understand why some words may be used in one situation and not in another.

## Effective Communication – making your words count

The young person with Social Communication Difficulties finds it difficult to give attention and listen to the spoken word. First get his attention and speak clearly, giving lots of time to make sense of what you have said. The words you use and how you use them can make a huge difference.

### Tools

- Be concise, e.g. 'Lunch box on the table' rather than 'Would you like to come over here with me and sit next to Ben for lunch?'

*A pupil's processing speed can be slower in social situations – missing out unnecessary words in your speech can help. This can feel quite instructional and 'rude' but can be much more helpful than more elaborate speech.*

- Use the young person's name at the beginning of the instruction e.g. 'Joseph, (pause)..... Open your book ready to start  
*He is likely to be alerted by his name and attend to the rest of the sentence.*

- Allow a significantly longer processing time than is usual for most mainstream young people. Be patient and wait for a response!

*He may respond in a highly original way, given time. His response can reveal his intelligence and give opportunities to boost his self-esteem and standing in the class.*

- Use positive rather than negative instructions, e.g. "Joshua, feet on the floor" (when he hanging from the wall bars)
- Use visual cues such as Language Jigs, photographs, written words, symbols etc. Visual support speeds up the processing time; requiring less effort on his behalf
- Use of cueing (sentences for the young person to complete) "Todd, you want.....", "Anna is angry because.....", "James, for swimming, you need to take....."

Answering questions can be difficult. Verbal cueing like this enables him to respond more easily, by finishing off your sentence.

- Repeat the instruction, as necessary, using precisely the same words and intonation – like a broken record!

*Re-phrasing often confuses the young person with SCD/ASD.*

- Use concrete rather than abstract language, e.g. “Write the next word here” rather than “Start a new line.”

*He may be confused by abstract language or he may interpret it literally and start drawing an extra line in his exercise book!*

- Never use sarcasm, e.g. saying “Great!” when he has spilt paint.

*As above, he may be confused or think you are pleased and do it again!*

- Ask specific rather than open-ended questions, e.g. “What did Roman soldiers wear?” rather than “What do you think a young Roman Soldier felt about going to Hadrian’s Wall?”

*He may have considerable general knowledge, giving interesting factual answers but be unable to give an opinion about feelings.*

# Eye contact

## Points to note

- Eye contact is a non-verbal communication skill that people with SCD/ASD do not develop naturally.
- The young person may feel very uncomfortable looking directly at someone when speaking or being spoken to. He may be unsure how long he should hold his gaze before looking away and cannot maintain eye contact in a manner that is natural and comfortable.
- Many young people report that it is very difficult to concentrate and listen to someone speaking while maintaining eye contact. Some young people will be able to make eye contact when they speak but not when they are listening. For some young people, senses switch in and out so that conversations become fragmented.

## Tools

- Praise the young person's attempt to make eye contact even if it is only momentary.
- It is often more important for the young person to learn how to orient his body and give non-verbal signs that he is interested in communicating and listening. For example, body facing toward the other person, nodding, saying 'uh-huh' etc.
- To encourage eye contact, hold an item near your face (such as a work sheet) when explaining an activity.
- The young person may become so stressed at having to look at a speaker that he cannot take in what is being said. In this case it will be necessary to judge whether or not it is beneficial for the young person to look at the speaker. If the young person is able to remain calm and attend to the speaker without making eye contact, it may not be worthwhile pushing this issue. However the young person needs to know it is better to look *near* the speaker's face than to be staring out a window!



# Facial expression and body language

## Points to note

- When we communicate, we use a range of non-verbal cues in addition to our words, e.g. eye contact, gesture, and facial expression. The young person with SCD/ASD can have difficulty reading the meaning of these cues and might misinterpret them. He can also have difficulty using non-verbal communication in a manner that is spontaneous and natural.
- The young person with SCD/ASD may have difficulty with personal space; standing too close or too far away when speaking. The young person may not turn his body toward someone when communicating, preferring to stand side on or head facing down at his desk. Some children lean on other young people like they were a piece of furniture.

## Tools

- It may be useful to teach the meaning of gesture in common scenarios. For example, if a teacher walked into the classroom, put her hands on her hips and frowned, it would mean she is unhappy about something.
- Young people need help learning to pay attention to and correctly interpret facial expression and body language. This can be achieved by helping the young person to understand non-verbal communication. Use role play, find pictures or watch scenes from TV programs to talk about facial expression and body language. Be expressive in your own emotions, facial cues and voice so there are more cues for the young person to pick up on.
- The young person may always lack a natural ability to read facial expressions and use body language. He can, however, be taught how to act in various situations, such as teaching him the appropriate personal space to give people when conversing. This would need to be done in a way that illustrated the rule for various social interactions, or the young person may apply one rule rigidly to all situations.
- If the young person is anxious or upset, be particularly aware of your facial expressions, tone of voice and use of gesture as this extra information may get in the way of his understanding your words.

# Improving social understanding

## Points to note

- Social skill deficits are a core characteristic of SCD/ASD and should not be overlooked when assessing reasons for inappropriate behaviour. Social skill deficits impact on the young person's social acceptance.
- The young person is likely to have difficulty understanding the thoughts and feelings of other people. He may have difficulty understanding and monitoring his own emotions. He may also have difficulty adapting to the needs and personalities of other young people.
- Impairments in social behaviour include limited ability to use gesture, limited or inappropriate facial expression, awkward body language and a peculiar gaze. The young person may also be unable to or have limited ability to interpret gesture, facial expression and body language. The young person may misinterpret what is implied by an affectionate touch, such as a touch on the arm or pat on the back.
- The young person might find it hard to understand the intentions and motivation of other people – that is, why people behave the way they do.
- Impairments in social interaction lead to difficulty with conversational turn-taking, maintaining a topic of conversation and maintaining eye contact.
- As a teacher, you may need to teach the young person social awareness skills that you didn't have to learn yourself – i.e. social skills that you acquired naturally, like listening without interrupting, and pausing to allow others a turn in conversation.
- The young person might have limited ability to understand the consequences of his behaviour.

## Tools

- Young people with SCD/ASD need to be specifically taught social skills; they do not acquire these naturally by being in a social environment.
- Draw the young person's attention to the use of facial expressions, gesture, voice inflection and proximity in social interaction and explain the attitudes and meaning they convey. This can be done through drama and role play.
- Improving social understanding will help all young people become more aware of direct and indirect means of communication, improving relationships with peers and teaching staff.
- Some suggested topics to improve social understanding:
  - developing self-awareness,
  - developing social interaction skills such as turn taking and waiting,
  - recognising that other people have feelings, thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that may be different to their own,
  - using and interpreting body language, facial expression, gestures,
  - understanding metaphors and idioms,
  - understanding inference and implied meaning,
  - understanding words and phrases that have more than one meaning.Most young people with SCD/ASD have difficulty putting themselves in 'another person's shoes'.
- A pupil may also have a limited ability to take an introspective view of his own behaviour.
- The above topics are a good starting point for young people with SCD/ASD to develop better social understanding.

- The young person needs to be made aware that he is being addressed when the teacher speaks to 'everyone' to enable him to respond to group instructions.
- Encourage the young person to join in any groups or clubs at the school that relate to an area of interest. This will provide him with an opportunity to interact with his peers and be included.
- Point out young people in the class who are good role models so that the young person with SCD/ASD can see how he *should* be behaving. This is important as children with SCD/ASD can be easily led astray.

# Lack of tact

## Points to note:

- People with SCD/ASD can have great difficulty appreciating the thoughts and feelings of other people due to impaired 'theory of mind'. This means they have great difficulty conceiving of or understanding that others may see the world from a different perspective and hold different opinions, values, beliefs and world views to their own. This impacts on their ability to understand how their comments affect others.
- The young person might comment on a person's physical appearance, perhaps pointing out in a matter of fact way that they are overweight, bald or have bad skin! This is not done to hurt or embarrass the person; people with autism just tend to 'tell it like it is'. However, others in the class are likely to find these comments hysterical so it can cause disruption.
- Occasionally pupils with SCD/ASD can appear bombastic and judgemental, reminding you of their rights and entitlements, e.g. 'If you make me do that I can take you to the European Court of Human Rights'. Whilst this may seem overblown, it may be factually correct, and it is hard not to act defensively. A factual answer may be more use than a prolonged discussion. [You would have to be 16 to be able to do that in your own right!]

Teaching staff may also face criticism of their teaching style and ability to keep the class under control. For example, this may occur if the young person becomes stressed in a noisy environment; he may criticise the teacher for not controlling the noise level.

## Tools:

- It would certainly help to have a thick skin and keen sense of humour. Remember the young person is not being malicious.
- Choose a quiet moment after class to talk to the student, explaining that the comments are disrupting the lesson.
- Talk to the rest of the class when the young person with autism is absent. Encourage them to imagine what it must be like to have an impaired 'theory of mind'. Seek permission from the young person and parents first.

Social skills training using role play can assist all young people to develop better interpersonal skills and increase awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others. See improving social understanding.

# Learning to ask for help

## Points to note:

- The young person may have difficulty asking for help; he might continue with a problem until his frustration runs out. He might not appreciate that other people may be able to help him. This is because many people with SCD/ASD have an impaired 'theory of mind'. He might have difficulty understanding the thoughts and intentions of other people so he doesn't comprehend that someone else might be able to offer a solution to his problem.
- Even a young person with good language skills may not recognise the need to tell someone that he is frustrated, that he wants something, or that something is troubling him. He might think that others already know what he thinks or feels without having to verbalise his thoughts.
- A young person who is being harassed or bullied may not complain about or report incidents because he is unaware that teaching staff actually need this information in order to take action (he may just think they already know).
- A young person who appears lazy or avoids his work may in fact be unable to get on with the task because he is stuck. The young person may have difficulty asking for help; he might continue with a problem until his frustration runs out. He might not appreciate that other people may be able to help him. This is because many people with SCD/ASD have an impaired 'theory of mind'. He might have difficulty understanding the thoughts and intentions of other people so he doesn't comprehend that someone else might be able to offer a solution to his problem.

## Tools:

- The young person with SCD/ASD needs help to understand his own emotions and how to convey them.
- If you ask an open question, the young person may say 'no' when he means 'yes'. For example, instead of saying "Are you too hot?" you might say, "If you are feeling too hot then you need to take off your jumper." Instead of saying "Do you need help?" say "If it's hard then you need to say 'I need help'".
- The child with SCD/ASD might be very insecure about appearing stupid so have an agreed code or signal to encourage the student to ask for help.
- Be aware of the tasks that cause the most difficulty. Work alongside the young person and help him to recognise when he is having difficulty. Teach a standard phrase to use, such as "I'm stuck" or "I can't do this." Older children, who don't want to draw attention to themselves, could use an agreed signal to alert their teacher that they need assistance.
- Appoint an understanding peer or staff member to counsel and debrief the young person following an incident. Make sure they have private 1:1 time to discuss the situation in detail.
- There may be a tendency for the young person to have one problem solving strategy and apply this rigidly. He will need encouragement and assistance to think 'outside the square'.
- When the young person has completed a task, talk through the sequence of steps and reflect on what has been learnt from the exercise.

# Literal interpretation of language

## Why does this happen?

- Young people with SCD/ASD have language difficulties that cause them to interpret what others say in a very literal way.
- Confusion can arise where indirect and polite forms of speech are used. Instructions may be treated as questions when they are rephrased.
- Rephrased in certain ways, for example, “Can you tidy your desk?” The student may answer the question but does not realise that you are actually expecting him to do something.
- This confusion can be attributed to difficulty interpreting the motivations and intentions of the speaker. The young person might have trouble understanding what others think and feel.
- A teacher who does not understand the young person’s difficulties may think he is being disrespectful or rude, for example if the student were asked “Can you read this paragraph to the class” and the young person replies, “Yes.”

Figures of speech, humour and sarcasm may also cause problems. The young person may be ridiculed by his peers when figures of speech are interpreted literally.

## Tools:

- Monitor your language; try to be aware of phrases you are using that could be interpreted in more than one way. A young person with SCD/ASD may miss the intended meaning, even if it seems obvious to the neuro-typical mind.
- Be specific and state what you want the young person to do, rather than what you don’t want.
- Phrase your questions as a directive. Instead of saying “Can you tidy your desk?” say “Tidy your desk please.” This does not mean you have to use an overly firm voice or that you cannot give the young person choices.
- Teach the meanings of some commonly-used phrases and figures of speech. This can be done as a whole class activity to be enjoyed by all. You could ask the young people to illustrate the literal interpretation, then translate the true meaning. Listen to the young person’s peers to hear the types of phrases that may cause difficulty.

*Pull your socks up!*

*Stretch your legs.*

*Get a wriggle on.*

*Cat’s got your tongue.*

*Drop everything.*

*Catch you soon.*

*Jump on the computer.*

*Raining cats and dogs.*

*Feeling under the weather.*

*Stop ‘monkeying’ around.*

*Butterflies in my stomach.*

*In one ear and out the other.*

*On cloud 9.*

*Knock it off!*

*Spill the beans.*

*You’re in hot water.*

*Hit the road.  
You're pulling my leg.  
Time flies when you're having fun.  
As tough as nails.  
Shake a leg.  
We don't see eye to eye.  
Cut it out!  
Don't bug me.  
Skating on thin ice.  
Give me a break!  
Hit the books.  
You hit the nail on the head.  
I lost my head.  
Your eyes are bigger than your stomach.*

# Obsessions & Inflexibility

## Obsessive topics

### Points to note

- People with SCD/ASD tend to have a narrow range of interests. Sometimes this will be one obsessive interest that excludes all other topics. The young person may have an encyclopaedic knowledge of this obsession.
- Obsessions can take a number of forms. They can be;
  - self-stimulatory behaviours (auditory, visual, tactile, motor),
  - attachment to objects (trains, cars),
  - interest in one topic to the exclusion of all others,
  - verbal obsessions (facts, dates, statistics, car number plates),
  - insistence on sameness and resistance to change (lining up objects, positioning materials before starting work).

Obsessions change or alter over time but are likely to be a part of the young person's life forever. They provide the child with pleasure and satisfaction. The young person feels safe talking about his obsession because he knows what to say and how to answer questions on the subject.

- The young person might talk about his preferred interest without any regard to the listener's interest in the conversation.
- Sometimes a young person will be keen to engage in conversation, but the only way he knows how is by talking about his obsession. He lacks the pragmatic language skills to just have 'a chat'.
- Talking about a favourite topic can be a way of reducing anxiety as this helps to control the young person's environment and increases predictability.
- Obsessive interests can intrude on the young person's thoughts, leading to distractibility and poor concentration.
- The young person may have little motivation to work on topics that fall outside his preferred area of interest.

### Tools

- Try to understand the young person's reasons for continually going on about his obsessive topic - then try to limit the extent to which it intrudes on his thoughts and conversations.
- Identify certain times that the young person may talk about his obsessive topic, (for example only in the morning.) Gradually reduce the length and frequency of these times. Use visual sequencing to help with this (i.e. timetable).
- Help the young person recognise the non-verbal signs that a listener is growing tired of the conversation, i.e. yawning, looking away, lack of positive verbal response. Suggest a change of topic when these signs are observed.
- Try not to get caught up in obsessive talk or questioning. If the obsessive talk is a way for the young person to reduce his anxiety, look at ways of reducing stress and help him to find other ways of coping with that stress.
- Show interest and give lots of praise when the young person talks about something other than his obsessive interest.



- If the young person's interest is limited to one particular topic, such as diesel engines, try to expand his interest into other areas such as different types of transport and machines. Incorporate the interest into other areas. If the obsession is with animals, the young person can learn about the countries in which they would be found.
- One of the most effective ways of managing the obsessive interest is to use it as a reward. It is very motivating for young persons to be allowed to engage in his obsession without interruption for a certain amount of time each day. You could reward the young person for completing his work with free time in the library to read about his obsession.
- Utilise the young person's expertise in his preferred topic (provided the interest is socially appropriate) by asking him to share his knowledge with the rest of the class. Common obsessions include trains, maps, capital cities, weather patterns and statistics. These topics can be incorporated into many areas of the curriculum.

# Peer relationships

## Points to note

- The young person may appear withdrawn and to prefer his own company but he may really want to have friends – he just doesn't know how to go about it. Sometimes he may need to withdraw because the social environment of school can be stressful and demanding; just socialising with peers can be exhausting.
- Some young people prefer adult company over their peers. The young person may seek friendship for what he can *learn* from another person, not for social enjoyment. Also, adults are likely to be more understanding of the young person's peculiarities. The young person may think his peers have little knowledge on the topics that he finds interesting.
- The young person may have a controlling, dictatorial style of interaction with his peers. He may be very resistant to the suggestions of others. He may become aggressive toward his peers if he has to incorporate the ideas of others. Peers may see the young person as bossy and authoritative, acting more like a teacher than a friend.
- The young person may have difficulty with concepts such as sharing, waiting and taking turns. He can become over-emotional if he loses a game, he may always want to win or be first. This is because people with SCD/ASD don't like change and uncertainty. They also tend to be perfectionists and can't stand to lose.
- The young person may actively seek friendship but lacks the ability to interact with others. He can become quite distressed by his failed attempts to make friends. His response to this failure can range from arrogance and denial, to poor self-esteem or complete withdrawal.
- The young person may lack the ability to make character judgements. While others can judge a troublesome child that is best avoided, the young person with SCD/ASD may be attracted to peers that are poor role models. Similarly, the young person may be unable to judge whether a comment or action has malicious intent or is a friendly overture.
- Some young people will tolerate being teased and tormented at school just to have company. Some will steadfastly believe that others are their friends when it is obvious their peers are exploiting their naiveté.
- The young person may 'burn-out' his friends by being too demanding and possessive. The intensity of an exclusive friendship may become intolerable to his peers. The young person might not understand that his friends sometimes want to spend time with others. Sometimes young people with SCD/ASD react quite rudely and refuse to interact with their friend ever again if they can't have an exclusive friendship.
- For some young people with SCD/ASD, the only social interaction they have with their peers is at school because they don't seek out their friends out of school hours unless this is prompted or arranged by their parents.
- The young person may have limited conversational topics. Some will want to talk exclusively about their preferred interest, not recognising the signs of boredom from their friends. While their friends may prefer to talk about make-up, the opposite sex, TV shows and social gossip, these topics hold little interest for the young person with SCD/ASD.
- When teenagers reach an age where they want to wear the 'right' clothes, the young person with SCD/ASD will struggle to fit in. Fashion is not usually a high priority for them; they tend to dress for comfort and practicality. In adolescence, there may be little motivation to maintain a socially acceptable standard of personal hygiene.
- It is often hard to gauge peer group norms [how low to wear your rucksack so as to be 'cool']

- The young person may appear to lack empathy, an important factor in any relationship. Friends expect compliments, compassion and kind gestures. The young person might be unintentionally rude or unkind due to his inability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others. For example, if a friend falls over and hurts himself, the young person with SCD/ASD might respond by clowning around to make his friend laugh, rather than offer compassion and a helping hand. The friend may see this behaviour as uncaring.
- Adolescents with SCD/ASD can develop real social phobias. They can become acutely aware of their social errors and the fact that they are 'different'.
- As you can see there are a number of reasons why it is difficult for people with SCD/ASD to make and keep friends. However it is not impossible. Remember that if the young person fails to make friends, he is denied access to the very situation he needs to practice his social and communication skills – a very unfortunate 'catch 22' situation.
- *Inappropriate sexual behaviours.* Teenagers with SCD/ASD experience puberty just like other adolescents. The delays in development associated with SCD/ASD do not delay the onset of puberty or sexual feelings. Adolescents with SCD/ASD experience the same sexual needs and other physical sensations that accompany physical growth. However, ignorance of social cues combined with an impaired ability to communicate can cause positive sensual feelings to be expressed in unusual behaviours. The young person will respond to new emotions and body developments in a unique way depending on his diagnosis, intellectual ability and personality type. During puberty, behaviours that have always formed part of the young person's repertoire of obsessive or repetitive behaviour are increasingly likely to be interpreted as sexual, for example, touching a peer's long hair or rubbing his own genital area.
- People with SCD/ASD sometimes lack self control. Problems can arise when the male young person with SCD/ASD becomes aroused by his female peers as they begin to wear make up and dress in a manner that is designed to be appealing to the opposite sex. In no way does this excuse a lack of self control or inappropriate touching, but highlights the need for all young people to have ongoing social skills training throughout their secondary schooling.

## Preparing for 6<sup>th</sup> Form and College

Most young people with SCD/ASD find any idea of change immensely threatening, whether eating a different brand of yoghurt or moving house, the same extremely high levels of anxiety can be produced. They may be unable to concentrate on anything else if the change is not handled well by the adults around them. The transition from school to 6<sup>th</sup> form or college needs to be dealt with in stages and with as many opportunities as possible for the young person to get used to the idea.

### Tools

- Talk about moving on and how things do not stay the same in life. Arrange a number of visits for the young people with SCD/ASD person to the new place, which gives them enough opportunities to meet the people they will be working with. Visiting over several consecutive days/weeks may be necessary, to allow the young person to adjust and become familiar with the new surroundings. Some young people with SCD/ASD like to explore rooms or buildings in their own way, which may be different to the way other people might do it. They may also use different senses, such as smell or touch to familiarise themselves. They may wish to explore the perimeter of a room, and may notice things about the furniture that other people would not regard as important. The person with SCD/ASD needs to be allowed to do whatever they need to do, with someone who knows them well, and without an audience or other people around.
- Depending on the person's ability, they may be able to take photos by themselves, and create a record of where they will be going and with whom they will be working with. If they are not able to do it themselves, a parent or carer will need to do this for them. Many young people with SCD/ASD find it helpful to have this record in the form of a scrapbook containing information, pictures, a plan of the new rooms they will be using, a timetable, what to do at breaks and mealtimes etc, so that they can refer to it when they need reassurance and to give them time to learn things like peoples' names, room numbers, building names. This could be built up over time or made all at once, depending on individual preference. It can act like a security blanket, and help the person to gain confidence about what is going to happen in the new surroundings.
- Apart from the practical side of moving schools, it is important not to neglect the emotional side of change. Whilst many young people with SCD/ASD find change hard to cope with, they have probably undergone much change during their lives. Some of this may have been negative and some positive, so it would be important to focus on the positive, such as changing from being a small baby to a toddler, from a toddler to a young child, and all the things they have successfully learned on the way. The young person may be able to come up with their own ideas about what changes in their lives have been positive. This will help them to associate change with something positive. If the person is particularly anxious about the change that is to take place, it may be necessary to focus on this more than for another person.
- Another aspect that will need to be discussed is the difference in the way they will be treated by adults in college or 6<sup>th</sup> form than school. For example, being expected to be in the right place at the right time, asking for help at an appropriate time, and who to talk to and what to do if something is not going right. Young people with SCD/ASD may need specific advice about what to wear in order to 'fit in' with the other young people at college, as being trendy does not always come easy to them. Even explaining *why* blending in is important will need to be talked about.

- Young people with SCD/ASD pupils will continue to need schedules in college, as they may have had in school, both for the timings of the day, and for what is going to happen in individual lessons. It is important that staff are made aware of this and how important it is to the young people with SCD/ASD. The problem young people with SCD/ASD have with certain lessons is that they are timeless, in their minds never ending! Whenever a task is set they need a schedule.

# Social Stories:

## How to write and use

Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray. As the name suggests, they are simple stories that explain a **social situation**. The social etiquette or rules of a situation may not be obvious to a young person with Social and Communication Difficulties and can be made explicit in this visual format.

The **aim** of a Social Story is to provide the young person with very specific facts and information which he may not be aware of in order to help him understand a social situation. You may be anticipating a problem and writing a social story to prevent it occurring. This involves thinking from the point of view of the young person. You may be writing about an event after it has happened, to explain more about the social context, or you may wish to praise a young person for appropriate behaviour.

Accuracy is important as you are aiming to help the young person understand a new or potentially difficult situation. Follow these steps to write your social story:

1. Be clear about what you want to achieve. What is the desired end result?
2. Gather information so you have the correct facts. For example, what time a coach will leave for a trip and which adults will be going. Sometimes, you will need to gather information by observation, from the young person's point of view e.g. what happens and why? How does a situation begin and end?
3. Condense the information in simple sentences. There are three types of social story sentences you can use:
  - **Descriptive:** Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These are the indisputable facts about a situation or setting or people.
  - **Perspective:** Describing *other peoples'* thoughts, beliefs, feelings, opinions, physical condition and motivations. This is often an area of mystery for young person with SCD/ASD, as they have difficulty seeing things from another's point of view. For example, a perspective sentence could be 'Small children believe that Santa Claus makes Christmas presents' (belief) or 'Mum will be happy to get a surprise birthday present' (feelings).
  - **Directive:** Describing the *expected response* to a situation and gently directing the young person towards this. The use of 'I will....' To start a directive sentence is best avoided as it could set a young person up to fail. Use instead 'I will try.....' or 'I might try....' e.g. 'I will aim to be sitting quietly at 9 o'clock, ready to start work'.

Carol Gray recommends a ratio of **descriptive & perspective** sentences to **directive** sentences of 2-5 to 0-1. A social story does not necessarily have to include a directive sentence – it all depends on the purpose of the story. Too many directive sentences and too few descriptive & perspective sentences make for a less successful social story.

Be positive. The title of the social story can set the tone. For example, use 'How to talk to adults at lunchtime' rather than 'why I must not be rude at lunchtime'.

### Handy Hints

- Use the first person for younger people
- Use the present or future tense
- Words like 'usually', 'often' and 'sometimes' avoid making a situation that can change appear 'black & white' to the young person with SCD/ASD
- Make positive statements. Don't talk about being 'naughty' e.g. 'When I make a mistake, I will have time out'.
- Keep your sentences short.
- Try to be clear, accurate and concrete. Abstract concepts can be difficult.

### Examples of Sentence Types

**Descriptive:**

I am in Year 8 at school.  
The end of term is Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> October.

**Perspective:**

Mum and Dad are proud of my singing in the choir.  
Greeting people is a friendly thing to do.  
Young people don't usually like tidying their rooms.  
My teacher thinks I am good at maths.

**Directive:**

I will try to remember to say 'Hello' when other young people say hello to me.  
I will try to put up my hand and wait to be asked before answering a question.

# Teaching Social Understanding: what should I include and what techniques should I use?

Young people with social communication difficulties often need to be specifically taught about the meaning of social situations and how to behave within social contexts. They may not learn appropriate social responses instinctively or through observation. This teaching may be delivered as part of a personal & social development programme or targeted in an Individual Education Plan.

## Tools

- Provide simplified rules and teach what these mean.

*Rules that are applicable throughout society are the most important e.g. no hurting, no stealing. Rules for the classroom can also be simplified e.g. look & listen, no breaking. The young person will need an explanation of what each rule means in different contexts.*

- Teach the young person how to behave in social situations.

*These will include the corridor, in assembly, on the playground, when changing for PE and at lunch time. The young person may respond to a Language Jig or Social Story. You can use prompt cards, which show a picture of the desirable behaviour and a written instruction. Practice skills, such as lining up safely, as part of a Social & Personal Development programme.*

- Teach the young person appropriate social approaches.

*This will include phrases and actions e.g. using a name to attract attention and a script, such as "Would you like to go to the computer room with me?" Some young people use inappropriate touch e.g. attempting to hug a visitor and will need to be taught who he can touch and how he may touch e.g. who can be hugged and whose hand you may shake. Think about the language and choices required for the canteen.*

- Give the young person opportunity to reflect on social situations.

*When things have gone 'wrong', the young person needs time and help to analyse the situation and reflect on how his behaviour has affected others. The young person needs to know what he can do next time to get it 'right'. Keeping a book or file of these reflections and plans can be helpful for future reference.*

- Use a **Befriender** scheme.

*Young people can learn something from their peers about socially acceptable behaviour and friendship. A specially chosen group of young people, sometimes the same age and sometimes older, take it turns to partner the young person with communication and social interaction difficulties. They act as formal 'guides' through social situations and prompt the young person to behave & respond appropriately. Befrienders need to be clearly briefed and rewarded for their efforts.*



- **Circle of Friends.**

*This is a more intensive version of the Befriender scheme. A 'Circle of Friends' support the young person and come together on a regular basis to discuss progress and plan ways forward. Your Educational Psychologist can explain in greater detail if you want to set this up.*

- **Language/Picture Jigs and Social Stories.**

*These are visual and written explanations of a social situation. They give specific facts and information. They can be effective in explaining a situation a young person finds difficult, preparing a young person for change e.g. a supply teacher, teaching a routine or sequence e.g. how to change for PE, and praising a young person by detailing exactly what he has done well (see separate sections on **Language/Picture Jigs** and **Social Stories** for examples and instructions on how to write these)*

#### **Case study**

Sam, in year 8, wanted to play football at lunchtime but became distressed when the other young people 'broke the rules'. He would tell them off and try to pick up the ball, which resulted in scuffles. As a result, the other young people were reluctant to let him join their game.

**Action:** A social story was provided for Sam, explaining that the rules of playground football were different to the games of football he watched on TV. In particular, the number of young people on each team could be more or less than 11, there was no referee (decisions were made jointly and negotiated) and the ball didn't go out of play.

A group of young people who regularly played football agreed to take turns to be Sam's befriender during games. As part of Sam's personal and social development programme, a Teaching Assistant supervised football games and debriefed Sam after each to further his understanding.

Sam was then able to play football at lunch times more successfully. He was still concerned that rules were broken but was taught to deal with this by recording his feelings in a private book. Sam found it helpful to give red and yellow cards to individuals in his book but wasn't allowed to 'tell them off' during the game or to tell them later that he had given them a card.

Most playtime football games were then free from incident and happier for both Sam & his friends.

# Teasing and Bullying

## Points to note

- The young person with SCD/ASD may tolerate teasing from his peers just to have company. He may have difficulty understanding whether the comments or actions of other young persons have malicious intent; he may be naïve and doesn't know when he is being manipulated. He might be so eager for acceptance that he is tricked into breaking school rules, stealing, etc.
- The young person might be a soft target for bullies. He may be a 'loner', have unusual behaviour, poor social interaction skills and lack assertiveness; this can really make him stand out from the crowd.
- Young people with SCD/ASD are frequently subjected to bullying when others learn that they can tell the child with SCD/ASD to do or say almost anything and they will then go off and do it. This type of bullying is particularly hard to spot.
- The young person may have no desire to conform to his peers; this is especially noticeable as he reaches adolescence. He may not be interested in wearing the latest clothes, preferring comfort and practicality over fashion; females with autism may not wear make-up or perfume because the smell is aversive. These differences single the young person out from the 'in crowd'.
- Teasing and bullying can trigger an angry or emotional outburst without warning, some time after the event. When challenging behaviour occurs in the classroom, always consider whether it is the result of bullying. The young person might have great difficulty communicating the distress caused by these problems.

## Tools

- Appoint a mature peer to watch over the young person with SCD/ASD, a kind of 'guardian angel, or be part of a mentoring system. This can be done without the young person's knowledge to save embarrassment.
- All young people in the school should be aware that bullying is unacceptable through a school policy of positive behaviour management.
- Bullying can be drastically reduced if the child is not isolated in the school grounds. Have someone keeping a watchful eye on the young person with SCD/ASD, such as a buddy, TA's or MDSA's or playground duty teacher. A watchful eye however is no substitute for a real friend, so it is important to encourage friendships.
- Ensure that all staff have an understanding of the social difficulties experienced by young persons with SCD/ASD. Staff also need to be trained to look beyond the behaviour of the child with SCD/ASD to ascertain what or who caused them to act that way with regard to the child naively following the suggestions of others.
- Set up a home base or resource room for the young person to retreat to when he feels threatened or anxious.
- Talk to the young person's peers, explaining the characteristics of SCD/ASD and the difficulties he experiences. Seek permission from the young person and parents first.
- Help the young person to develop appropriate responses to unwanted or hostile approaches. 'Business cards' with suggested responses can be carried in the young person's pocket. This is important as a young person that is being regularly tormented may have outbursts of rage and aggression.
- Make sure the young person has someone to talk to when he is upset, either a school counsellor, a compassionate peer or another adult who is readily available. It may help to give the young person a map with directions, so he can easily find help when necessary. Remember that a distressed young person is likely to have added difficulty finding his way around the school grounds. Walk the route a few times to familiarise him or write a list of directions if the young person has difficulty reading maps.

# Transition from primary to secondary school

## Points to note

The move from primary to secondary can be a stressful time for young people with SCD/ASD this is can be for many reasons. For students who dislike change there are an awful lot of changes in this transition:

- Change in place of schooling, especially size and complexity of site
- Change in staff, numbers, familiarity, maybe gender
- Change in time of leaving and arriving at home
- Change in way of travel to school
- Change in number of other students
- Change in rules and expectations in each different classroom
- Change in school routine

All of the above can cause the young person significant stress. Potential difficulties should be highlighted at the Phase transfer review, and plans for transition developed early in yr6. As soon as the student knows which school they will attend, transition planning should start.

## Tools

### Primary school

#### Year 5

- Incorporate into the Individual Education Plan targets to address potential difficulties with transition.
- Consider staffing issues. Has the student had the same Teaching Assistant for some time? If so, planning should start now for increased independence and experience of relating to different adults.

#### Year 6

- A transition discussion should ideally be scheduled once school placement has been decided to share information and plan strategies to address areas of concern. Parents, outside agencies and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) of the primary and secondary school need to be invited.
- Arrangements should be made for information provided by all present at the transition meeting to be communicated to all staff within the secondary school. Arrange extra visits in addition to those provided as standard induction. A Teaching Assistant could accompany the pupil, providing the secondary school agree. For some students, visiting the building after school hours may be helpful. Suggested prompts are contained on p151-152, to support full information gathering.

### Secondary school

- Provide a visual guide of the school in booklet form to include photographs of key staff (eg form tutor, SENCo, head teacher, head of year, office staff) and areas in the secondary school, eg dining hall, toilets, office, tutor room.
- Provide a map of the school with key places highlighted.

- Plan how the young person will be supported during unstructured times. Some young people may need adult support to transfer from lesson to lesson for the first few weeks. Write down these arrangements so that the young person will have a copy for reference.
- When there is to be a designated Teaching Assistant (TA), provide opportunities for them to observe or work with the pupil in the primary setting during the summer term.
- A video guide of the school for the student's reference over the summer holiday would be very helpful. If not already available media students or 6<sup>th</sup> form students might embrace this as a project.

## **Year 7**

- Provide additional information about how to read the timetable, including a written explanation of abbreviations. Some young people will benefit from colour coding subject areas for easy reference.
- Ensure all adults working with the young person are aware of their specific difficulties, and the strategies implemented to date. It is important that school policy is to make all staff aware exactly where such student profiles (including all SEN and other needs details) are kept.
- A class seating plan will help reduce the young peoples' anxiety and address their need for routine.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to inform the peer group about SCD/ASD. This will depend on the young person's awareness of their diagnosis. Parental and the young person's consent must be sought in advance.
- Additional adult support may be necessary during the first few weeks for key times, such as moving between lessons, using the canteen, break times etc. This will enable the young person to become familiar with the new environment and will reduce their anxiety.
- Be aware that using the school toilets can be a cause of anxiety, eg assuming an alternative toilet cannot be used when the designated one is out of action, or going to the toilet when others are present. The young person will not necessarily communicate this to an adult and therefore go all day without using the toilet.

# Working in Partnership with Parents/Carers

## – moving forwards together.

Parents/Carers know their children. A consistent approach, particularly in the home and school environment, is crucial to any education plan. Teachers and parents/carers must communicate and work together as far as possible, in order to create order, security and consistency in the young persons life.

### Tools

- Use a contact book

*This is a book that is used by parents and school staff and is kept in the young person's bag and transferred from school to home each day. It is not necessary for both parties to write everyday (although some do) but information such as 'Joseph has been awake since 4am this morning so he may be tired' or 'Ellen had a difficult lunchtime. She had an argument with her friend and although they worked together this afternoon, she may react when she gets home. Perhaps you could get her to talk about it?' would be helpful.*

- Regular informal contact

*This may need careful thought, especially if pupils travel by taxi. A regular phone call between school and parents at a mutually convenient time may provide the best opportunity for useful communication. Positive comments help ease the transition from school to home for both the young person and parents/carers. It is best to avoid the 'catalogue of misdemeanours' call. E-mail also might be an option.*

*Difficulties during the day can be referred to if necessary and can also be written in the contact book, plus the solutions found. However, if negative comments are written it is advisable to discuss these verbally with the parent/carer to avoid misunderstanding. Time taken explaining the context of an action is usually well spent. If difficulties increase, a meeting can be arranged in order to discuss the matter.*

*When young people are independent in travelling to and from school this may be done over the phone.*

- Regular formal meetings.

*There will be regular contact to discuss the young person's Individual Education Plan (IEP) and school reports, but both parents and teachers must feel able to ask for additional meetings when necessary.*

*The recommendation in the SEN Code of Practice is that IEPs should be formally reviewed at least twice a year but Wiltshire recommends at least three times a year. Obviously there should be monitoring meetings for the IEPs on a very regular basis.*

- Home visits

*A home visit by the teacher (and/or teaching assistant where appropriate) before the child starts school is invaluable in both understanding the child and establishing a working relationship with the parents/carers. It gives the teacher insight in how to adapt the classroom to help the young person settle as quickly as possible during his first visit.*

- Teacher and parent/carer sometimes work on issues that are predominantly 'home-based'.

*Sometimes young people can show dramatically different behaviour out of school, e.g. a placid, happy child at school can be aggressive and show signs of extreme anxiety at home. Teachers need to know if this is the situation in order for them to work with parents to address the issue. The reasons for such behaviour are not always apparent and it could be that something at school is having a detrimental effect. Coping with the social aspect of the school day can be very stressful and it is not unusual for young people to respond badly once they leave the school gates.*

- Agree actions and record them in writing.

*People's memories of meetings and their understanding of situations are open to interpretation. At every meeting agree what the outcomes are and keep a detailed written record. Give a copy to the parents/carers.*

- Be sensitive to issues raised by parents. Respect confidentiality and discuss with the parents when information could or must be shared with others.

*Teachers often see parents at their most vulnerable and can be seen as a confidant. Occasionally one parent/carer will say something about their partner in confidence. Accept the confidence but do not agree with the comment as it may come back to haunt you.*

- Honour agreements – it is the key to a trusting relationship

*If you say you will phone on Wednesday, do so even if it only to say that you won't have the information before Friday.*

- Listen, listen, listen. It's worth it.

## **Section 4**

### **References**

## Background Reading References

The following publications are recommended for providing practical, accessible and up-to-date information that will enhance inclusion and support both parents and professionals working with people with SCD/ASD. (There are many excellent publications that describe the core features of SCD/ASD, however the purpose of this section is to suggest publications that offer the reader practical assistance.)

### General Reference

#### **Asperger Syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals**

Author: *Tony Attwood*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

### Resources for Teachers and Parents

#### **Access and Inclusion for Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, 'Let Me In'**

Authors: *Matthew Hesmondhalgh and Christine Breakey*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

#### **Addressing the Challenging Behaviour of Children with High-Functioning Autism/Asperger Syndrome in the Classroom – A Guide for Teachers and Parents**

Author: *Rebecca A. Moyes*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

#### **Asperger Syndrome and Adolescence: Practical Solutions for School Success**

Authors: *Brenda Smith Myles & Diane Adreon*

Publisher: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

#### **Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers**

Authors: *Val Cumine, Julia Leach & Gill Stevenson*

Publisher: David Fulton Publishers Ltd

#### **Asperger Syndrome and Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage and Meltdowns**

Authors: *Brenda Smith Myles & and Jack Southwick*

Publisher: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

#### **Asperger Syndrome – practical strategies for the classroom: A teacher's guide.**

Author: *Leicester City Council & Leicestershire County Council*

Publisher: The National Autistic Society, London

#### **Autism in the Early Years: A Practical Guide**

Authors: *Val Cumine, Julia Leach and Gill Stevenson*

Publisher: David Fulton Publishers, London

#### **Autism Spectrum Disorder and Young Children**

Author: *Diana Roe*

Publisher: Early Childhood Australia



**How Rude! The Teenager's Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behaviour and Not Grossing People Out**

Author: *Alex J. Packer*

Publisher: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

**Incorporating Social Goals in the Classroom**

Author: *Rebecca A. Moyes*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**It Can Get Better...Dealing with Common Behaviour Problems in Young Autistic Children**

Authors: *Paul Dickinson & Liz Hannah*

Publisher: The National Autistic Society, London

**Making It A Success: Practical Strategies and Worksheets for Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Author: *Sue Larkey*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Teaching Young Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders to Learn: A practical guide for parents and staff in general education classrooms and preschools.**

Author: *Liz Hannah*

Publisher: The National Autistic Society, London

**Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism & Related Disorders: A Comprehensive Guide for Parents & Teachers**

Author: *Maria Wheeler*

Publisher: Future Horizons

**Understanding and Teaching Children with Autism**

Authors: *R. Jordan & S. Powell*

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, UK

**Autobiographical Accounts**

**Asperger Syndrome, the Universe and Everything**

Author: *Kenneth Hall*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome: A User Guide to Adolescence**

Author: *Luke Jackson*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Hitchhiking through Asperger Syndrome**

Author: *Lise Pyles*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Eating an Artichoke, A Mother's Perspective on Asperger Syndrome**

Author: *Echo R. Fling*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Life Behind Glass**

Author: *Wendy Lawson*

Publisher: Southern Cross Press, Australia

**Understanding and Working with the Spectrum of Autism, An Insider's View**

Author: *Wendy Lawson*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Smiling At Shadows**

Author: *Junee Waites & Helen Swinbourne*

Publisher: Harper Collins

**Pretending to be Normal, Living with Asperger's Syndrome**

Author: *Liane Holliday Willey*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

**Fiction**

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time**

Author: *Mark Haddon*

Publisher: Random House Children's Books

**Blue Bottle Mystery - An Asperger Adventure**

Author: *Kathy Hoopman*

Publisher: Jessica Kingsley

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*Search web for TEACCH sites and references*

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**Survival Strategies for Parenting Children with Bipolar Disorder:** George T Lynn 2000

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**What is Asperger Syndrome and how will it affect me?** National Autistic Society – Autism helpline

**Why does Chris do that?** Tony Attwood (1993): London: National Autistic Society

## Websites and Addresses -for further help

The National Autistic Society  
[www.nas.org.uk](http://www.nas.org.uk)

Information on Social Stories  
[www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org)

Teaching information  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/sen](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sen)

Autism Support (Charity)  
Organiser: Alice West  
3 Oak View, South Street, Great Wishford, Salisbury, SP2 0NR  
01722-790571  
[oakview3@wishford73.freemove.co.uk](mailto:oakview3@wishford73.freemove.co.uk)  
[www.support4autism.co.uk](http://www.support4autism.co.uk)  
Helpline 01722-792823

ask  
Wiltshire Children's Information Service  
08457-585072  
[www.askforkids.com](http://www.askforkids.com)  
Free advice to parents and carers  
Mon-Fri 9.30 – 5.00

Wiltshire National Autistic Society  
0870 0203 569 (ansaphone)  
[autismtogether@hotmail.com](mailto:autismtogether@hotmail.com)  
[www.autism-together.org.uk](http://www.autism-together.org.uk)

Behaviour Observation Forms  
[www.polyxo.com](http://www.polyxo.com)

**North West Regional SEN Partnership**  
[www.sen-northwest.org.uk](http://www.sen-northwest.org.uk)

## **Publishers and Distributors**

**Jessica Kingsley Publishers**

[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com)

**Astam Books Pty Ltd**

[www.astambooks.com.au](http://www.astambooks.com.au)

**Book In Hand**

[www.bookinhand.com.au](http://www.bookinhand.com.au)

**Amazon** [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Future Horizons**

[www.futurehorizons-autism.com/](http://www.futurehorizons-autism.com/)

**AAPC – Autism Asperger Publishing Company**

[www.asperger.net](http://www.asperger.net)

**Section 5**  
**APPENDICES**

# Rewards Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

My target \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_


**When I complete a row, my reward will be**

\_\_\_\_\_

**When I complete the chart, my reward will be**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Suggested prompts for gathering Transition Information**

### **SENSORY PROFILE**

Visual, olfactory, tactile, hearing sensitivities?  
Any other identified sensitivities/disability?

Epilepsy

Is the person aware of the onset?  
How would this be communicated?  
What is the reaction afterwards?

Known allergies or reactions to medication?  
When was medication last reviewed?

### **GENERAL FITNESS**

Any gross motor skill or co-ordination problems?  
Do they like physical exercise?  
Any particular likes?  
Any particular dislikes?  
Are they knowledgeable about own body.  
Can they describe being unwell?

Received sex education?  
Can estimate the understanding of this?

### **NUTRITION**

Any intolerances?  
Any allergies?  
Specific diet?  
Any difficulty with chewing or digestion?  
Any cultural dietary requirements?

### **LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION:**

#### **EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION**

What system is used?  
How are needs indicated?  
How much is speech used?  
Not at all?  
Echolalia only?  
To communicate own immediate needs?  
To communicate experiences?  
To talk about issues beyond own experience  
How easy is it to understand?  
Is there a lot of repetitive speech?  
Is there control over tone and volume?



## **RECEPTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Can they follow simple instructions?  
Spoken?/Verbal/written/diagrammatic?

Is communication interpreted in a literal way?  
Is there interpretation of body language?  
Is there understanding of humour?  
Simple slapstick  
Subtle humour?  
Is there a need for time to process communication?  
Is the expressive speech markedly better  
than their understanding of language?

## **SOCIAL INTERACTION**

Is there enjoyment in social interaction?  
Is there shared interest or points things out  
to others?  
Do they like having others around or are they  
solitary?  
What is the interaction like with family, staff, peers?  
Is there any difference?  
Is there differentiation between known and unknown people?  
Is there initiation of contact or conversation?  
Are conversations 2 way or related to needs or  
special interests?  
Will they join in actively or passively?  
Does he/she seek out company?  
How does s/he demonstrate pleasure?  
How does s/he demonstrate displeasure/anger?  
What helps in these situations?  
What makes it worse?  
What are their special interests?

How do they cope with unexpected change?  
What do you do to help? Curriculum strengths

Curriculum weaknesses

**Successful strategies to date?**

# **Appendix:**

# **Social Stories**

# Sports Day

On Friday afternoon, (date), there will be Sports Day at (name) school.

The students will change into their P.E. kits after lunch. Then they will go to the field and sit with their house team.

There will be competitions. Everyone competing will wait for their turn to take part. They will stay in their house area. An adult will read out the names of people in each event. If I hear my name I need to go where I am directed. The race will start when the starting pistol goes off.

You can take your water bottle into the house area and wear a hat while waiting to compete. You can bring sun cream to school to rub onto your skin.

There will be NO ICT and Assembly on Friday afternoon because it will be Sports Day instead.

If it is raining, there will be NO Sports Day. It will be a normal Friday afternoon instead and there will be ICT and Assembly.

Sports Day is a fun time but it is okay to feel worried about the races. If you feel worried, an adult or a teammate will help you. Everyone should try his or her best. It is okay if you don't win a race. Everyone who finishes a race will get points for their team.

When the races are finished, teachers will tell students when to return to the Sports Hall to change . Then it will be time to go home.



## Time for School

[Name] School works a fortnightly timetable, called Week A and Week B

School begins with Registration at 8.45am

I need to be in my tutor room for registration at 8.45am whether it is week A or Week B

After registration my tutor will give out notices or important information or announce changes.

It is important to listen and write changes in my planner

Sometimes I may not feel like listening. This information will make my day easier because there may be some changes to what I expected.

I need to listen carefully.

At the end of registration [9.00am] we go to our first class of the day

## **Social story**

Doing well in exams

Sometimes teachers give tests and exams to see what pupils have learnt in lessons.

You can be given a test or exam in any subject

When a teacher tells the class they have a test or exam they often tell the pupils what information will be covered.

It is helpful to listen to the teacher's advice and do some revision.

Sometimes pupils feel nervous before and during an exam.

It is OK to feel nervous







# **Appendix:**

# **Language/ Picture Jigs**

# Language/Picture Jigs

Language/Picture Jigs are in some ways similar to social stories. They are used particularly with young people who find reading difficult.

Language/Picture Jigs show a child in pictures what they are supposed to do in a given situation in pictorial form; line drawings, photos of clip art can be used. They can be used to explain usual routines of things out of the ordinary like trips or special visits.

<p>Walk into assembly</p>  <input data-bbox="435 890 500 963" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Sit on a chair</p>  <input data-bbox="841 875 906 949" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Listen to assembly</p>  <input data-bbox="1338 875 1403 949" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Stack the chairs</p>  → <input data-bbox="435 1299 500 1373" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Sit on the floor. No talking.</p>  <input data-bbox="836 1253 901 1327" type="checkbox"/>	<p>Taxi home</p>  <input data-bbox="1317 1289 1382 1362" type="checkbox"/>

Young people can use the boxes in the corner to show when that part has finished.

# Language/Picture Jigs:

## How to make and use

A Language/Picture Jig is a visual schedule that guides a young person through an activity or describes a change in routine.

It is a series of small boxes, generally four or five, including a simple drawing and sentence in each box.

A 'tick box' can be included at the bottom of each section, so that the young person can tick off each part as it is completed.

At the end, it is often necessary to include something the young person wants to do, or is familiar with, to give motivation to progress through the activity.

When telling the young person about the activity, use the same words as are written on the Language Jig to avoid confusion.

The activity or change in routine is broken down into small steps and each box is one step.

They are usually prepared in advance but it can be useful to have a blank with you all the time so you can quickly produce a Language/Picture Jig to cope with the unexpected.

Language/Picture Jigs are a powerful tool for both adult and young person. They allow the adult to describe an activity or change in routine visually and the young person is presented with information in a format that suits his learning style.

Examples are included in the appendices, together with a blank for you to copy and use.

### Case Study





Sarah was always last to change for PE. She couldn't organise the sequence of events to take off and put on her clothes successfully.

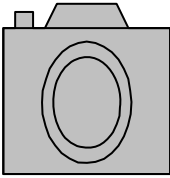

#### Action:

Sarah was given a Language/Picture Jig, showing the order she should remove her clothes and put on her PE kit. The teacher talked her through it, using the same words, the first couple of times she changed but Sarah was then able to be independent, using the jig step by step.



## Language/Picture Jigs

<p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Wednesday</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">21<sup>st</sup> March</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Thomas and the young people in year 8 go on the</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>bus to 10 o'clock.</p>	<p>Thomas and the young people will look at all the exhibits</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Thomas will eat his packed lunch sitting on the grass.</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>At 2 o'clock, Thomas and the young people will go on the coach back to school. Then it will be time to go home.</p>
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<p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Photographs</p>	<p>Walk to the Hall.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 100px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	<p>Sit on the chair. Smile!</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 100px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Back to the classroom.</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 100px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>
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# **Appendix:**

# **Emotions**

# **Curriculum**

# Feelings

What is \_\_\_\_\_?

Today, we are talking about the feeling called \_\_\_\_\_.

## Description

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Name..... Date.....

# My Feelings

Today, I am learning about \_\_\_\_\_

These things make me feel \_\_\_\_\_

- 

- 

- 

- 

-

# Feelings Scale

## Positive emotions



**Fantastic**

**Excited**

**Happy**

**Pleased**

**Calm**

# Feelings Scale

## Negative emotions



**Sad**

**Bad**

**Grumpy**

**Glum**

**Calm**

# Feelings Scale

## Negative emotions



**Furious**

**Angry**

**Cross**

**Anxious**

**Calm**

# Feelings Scale

## Negative emotions



**Awful**

**Stupid**

**Frustrated**

**Worried**

**Calm**



# Feelings Thermometer

## Feelings Scale

**I feel .....**  
*(move your name  
up and down the  
scale to show how  
you are feeling)*

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