



General Strategies to Support Students with an Autism Spectrum Condition at Home

These are general strategies which may or may not apply to your child. By definition Autism Spectrum Conditions can present differently in different individuals. These strategies aim to describe a range of difficulties and possible strategies to support children. These ideas are by no means finite, but may offer a useful starting point.

Children with an *Autism Spectrum Condition* generally like predictability and routine. Hence often they want to be in control of events. You can aim to provide predictability which can help reduce the child's search for control and level of anxiety.

You can provide predictability by:

- Establishing clear routines e.g. morning and bedtime. (*We understand that getting your child ready for school can be an issue.*)
- Your child may find it difficult to get organised, may be difficult to direct or may lose track or "drift" from what they are meant to be doing. Think about how you can show your child the sequence of tasks. A sequence of objects, pictures, symbols or words can help you establish a positive routine. The choice of visual method will depend on what makes the most sense to your child.
- It can also be useful to establish a regular after school routine E.g. get changed, "chill time" tea, reading / homework followed by a favoured activity. It is helpful to have a calm activity before bedtime

Going to School

Some children will need a specific routine to prepare them for the transition into school. If you are having difficulties try the following;

- Give your child a schedule
 - Have breakfast
 - Wash
 - Get dressed,
 - TV (for ten mins if you are quick enough)
 - Walk to school

- Try to encourage speed by using a visual timer (sand timer, the clock, buzzer)
- Some children may need a motivator to encourage them to keep going i.e. *if you finish by this time you get 10 min of TV, but you lose one minute for every minute you go over. It may be beneficial to present this visually to help them to understand time passing.*
- Use alarm settings on smartphone with calendars for older children to organise and prioritise.

Coming home

Try not to discuss school unless your child initiates the conversation. Aim to keep any interaction to the minimum on the journey home.

Once home allow your child to have some time alone, perhaps doing a favoured activity for a short while before trying to engage with them.

After some time out, give your child an indication of who the evening is going to run; (some children may need to know this on the journey home.)

- Homework
- TV for ten mins (if home work is all finished)
- Dinner
- Electronic game
- Bath
- Story
- Bed

If something different is going to happen, tell your child at the earliest opportunity. Explain when it will happen, how long for and if possible what it is going to look like. For example they may need a picture of the venue even if they have been there before.

However, in some situations where a child has a fear, such as going to the dentist, minimal prior warning may be preferable with a favoured activity following the event.

Some children will need the same type of structure in place for the weekends and holidays.

Recording events on a calendar can help some children understand how many days there are to an anticipated event. E.g. visit to grandparents, dentist etc.

It may also help to distinguish visually between days at school and days at home. This will help to prepare for school holidays.

Knowledge of your child will colour your decision on how much warning to give for particular events.

Going to Bed

It can be helpful to ensure that the bedroom is a calm place. Reducing clutter and distractions will be beneficial.

From an early age aim to establish a calm bedtime routine, e.g., drink, bath, story. Listening to calm music with subdued lighting can also have a soothing effect.

Avoid boisterous activities, lively music or computer games before bedtime.

It is common for many children to have difficulties getting to sleep. Problems which occur during the day may “play on a child’s mind”. These problems may appear bigger when trying to get to sleep. (see strategy on page 7).

Visual Timetable

Children with autism usually respond well to visual timetables at school.


They will need to know what to expect. An itinerary or visual order of events may help steer the child through the activity. All events need to be made predictable.

A visual timetable can also be useful in the home environment. It can be particularly helpful to outline an event for the child e.g. a trip out with the family.

A visual sequence of expected events or itinerary can help the child understand what to expect or anticipate.

A visual timetable needs to be in a form that the child can understand. Eg it may take the form of pictures, symbols or words. A visual timetable gives predictability. It outlines what activity comes next.

E.g. A visit to a wildlife park schedule;
(Can be written pictorial or both)

| | |
|---|--|
| ➤ Get in the car & play on iPad |  |
| ➤ when we arrive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use the toilets ▪ Look at the map |  |
| ➤ Complete the foot safari |  |
| ➤ Lunch & toilets |  |
| ➤ Watch the Seal Show |  |
| ➤ Gift Shop & toilets |  |
| ➤ Get in the car & play on iPad |  |
| ➤ Home |  |

Coping with change

- It can be helpful to forewarn your child of any changes to planned events, preferably in a visual format
- Changing from one activity to another may present difficulties. A visual timer may provide processing time for the child to adjust to the change. e.g. moving away from the computer

Homework

Often children with autism view home as separate to school hence may see homework as impinging on their time.

- Have a set routine at home- when and where to do homework
- It can be helpful if equipment is on the table ready to use
- Aim to minimise distractions as much as possible
- Allocate an agreed amount of time to focus on the homework task
- Ensure your child knows how to get started
- He / she may benefit from positive prompts to stay on task.
- Your child will need to know when he / she is finished
- Ensure your child has time to clear away
- Plan a pleasurable activity for your child to do following homework

If a number of tasks need to be completed on the same evening plan a brief movement break / snack before starting the task.

Making choices and problem solving

- Making choices can be difficult. It can be helpful to limit choices to make the process easier e.g. initially use either / or alternatives
- Children may need to be led step by step through the problem solving process. Preferably reinforce this in a visual format

Sensory issues

- Your child may have heightened senses e.g. so may react to noises, smells, tactile stimuli, etc.
- Some children may be particular about the *taste and/or texture* of particular foods. This can lead to a limited diet.
 - It can be helpful to provide opportunities to try different foods. Agree a taste using the tip of the tongue. If this goes well the next time they can try a bite.
 - It can be helpful to keep a regular routine at meal times.
 - Try to keep mealtimes positive - praise or reward for trying different foods. *Aim not to make an issue out of refusals.*
 - It can sometimes be helpful to involve your child in the preparation of new foods.
- Movement and noise may be a problem. Busy places like markets or supermarkets can over stimulate your child. It can be helpful to choose a less busy time.
- Queuing can be an issue for some children since being first is more predictable. Some children also have difficulties in tolerating others within their personal space, or have difficulties in judging personal space.

Teaching how to queue can be possible, leaving a space in front and behind. Initially if the child is near the front of a short queue with children or adults modelling the behaviour can be helpful. With other children providing an alternative e.g. stand alongside the person at the front can prove helpful, though this will need to be negotiated with the person concerned.

In some situations difficulties with queuing can be minimised through special arrangement. E.g. Stores may make special arrangement for queuing for Santa

- Some children find particular or sudden noises alarming e.g. if a child reacts to the Hoover and the child is old enough, consider giving your child the chance to use it! It could have the bonus of some help with the housework!
- Your child may be particular about the feel of clothing. Some children seek out particular textures. You may need to teach your child what it is o.k. to feel and touch

Social skills need to be taught

- Children with an Autism Spectrum Condition will not generally understand non-verbal communication e.g. glare, meaning to stop. Messages need to be made explicit.
- Your child will need to be taught appropriate ways to communicate with less familiar people. This is best taught in real life situations.
- Be aware that after social times, your child may then need time alone, since social demands can be stressful and tiring.

Understanding spoken language and saying what they mean

It can be helpful to provide practice opportunities for the child so they can see the purpose of communication e.g. put a favoured toy or snack out of reach so that they need to communicate with you to get it. (Make sure you move handy stools or chairs out of the way!)

Reward / acknowledge the child's attempts at communication

Some children benefit from being provided with pictures / symbols of things they want

Understanding consequences and the impact of their behaviour on others

It is important to be consistent with your child. Inconsistency causes confusion. Confusion can lead to negative behaviours.

Your child may interpret what you say literally. So it is important to say what you mean. E.g. if you say "in a minute" your child may expect just that.

You may need to show your child how his/her behaviour can affect others. You do not need to be a wonderful artist. Stick drawings will suffice.

You could draw an incident then show the child the effect on his/ her sibling for example;



makes your sister



makes her



- A smile is usually returned.
- Friendly words or actions will usually be greeted by friendly words.
- Unkind words may cause the other person to be cross or upset.

When correcting your child always say what you want the child to do instead.

Understanding and dealing with feelings and emotions

Children with autism often have difficulties expressing their feelings. It can be helpful to provide simple pictures e.g. smiley face, sad face, "I need help" card etc.

Expressing feeling through numbers or on a thermometer gauge has proved helpful with some children.

Listening to your child is important since often they have difficulties with perspective. All problems feel like huge problems and they find it difficult to understand that others may see the situation very differently. It can be helpful to try to record problems and help them sort them into big box or little box?



They can play on the child's mind. This may be a particular problem at night. Helping your child feel that his problems have been aired and put away is time well spent.

Older children find it useful to write their problems down with discussed solutions ticked.

Useful Resources and Reading

- **Asperger's Syndrome**; A guide for Parents and Professionals – *Tony Attwood*
- **Aspergirls**; Empowering Females with Asperger's Syndrome – *Rudy Simone*
- **Dealing with Feeling**: An Emotional Literacy Curriculum for Children Aged 7-13 – *Tina Rae*
- **Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome**: A User Guide to Adolescence – *Luke Jackson*
- **I am an Aspie Girl**: A book for young girls with autism spectrum conditions – *Danuta Bulhak-Paterson*
- **Inclusion Development Program** – Supporting children with an Autism Spectrum www.idponline.org.uk
- **What's Happening to Ellie?** : A book about puberty for girls and young women with autism and related conditions – *Kate E. Reynolds*
- **What's Happening to Tom?**: A book about puberty for boys and young men with autism and related conditions – *Kate E. Reynolds*

Support & Information Groups

- **Ambitious About Autism** – www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
ambition to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism.
- **Autism Bedfordshire** – www.autismbedfordshire.net
an independent charity providing information, advice, emotional and practical support to individuals with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, their parents/carers, families and associated professionals throughout Bedfordshire.

- **National Autism Society** – www.autism.org.uk
are the leading UK charity for autistic people (including those with Asperger syndrome) and their families, providing information, support and pioneering services, and campaign for a better world for autistic people.

- **Outside In** – www.outsidein-solutions.org.uk
a community interest company dedicated to supporting and educating families, adults and professionals living with or working with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) and associated conditions.

- **SEND Advice** - Bedford Borough SEND Advice Service
Tel: 01234 276 267; Email: sendadvice@bedford.gov.uk