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**Supporting autistic and sensory-impaired students**  
**Strategies and tips**

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A version of this document, developed by the sensory impairment team at Cambridgeshire County Council, was circulated on the HoSS (Heads of Sensory Services) Forum in June 2022 as a contribution to the SI community of practice which the HoSS Forum represents. NatSIP is pleased to endorse this document and offer it a wider circulation.



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## **0. Introduction**

This document was developed by the Sensory Impairment Team at Cambridgeshire County Council<sup>1</sup>, and was circulated on the HoSS (Heads of Sensory Services) Forum in June 2022 as a contribution to the SI community of practice which the HoSS Forum represents. NatSIP is pleased to endorse this document and offer it a wider circulation.

This document is split into two sections: 1. Research and information, and 2. A handy guide to strategies.

## **1. Information and Research**

### **1.1 Emotional literacy**

Students with autism may have communication difficulties, and may misunderstand social cues. They may not be able to understand what they are feeling. This may make it challenging to find a strategy to help them be calm when they are in a state of distress. Students with sensory impairments may also have similar difficulties when in social situations.

Social and emotional literacy develop over time and need to be nurtured just like any other skill. Many children and young people with sensory impairment as well as a diagnosis of autism may take longer to develop this skill and may need more support to communicate their emotional responses effectively. They may require additional teaching and support to develop this.

Students who develop their emotional literacy will be able to communicate effectively, empathise, and problem-solve. Studies have shown that children and young people who develop these skills are more likely to be successful in adulthood and have lower rates of anxiety and depression. Studies also suggest that emotionally literate characteristics like self-restraint, persistence, and self-awareness are better predictors of life outcomes than common academic measures.<sup>2</sup> They are not only successful in adulthood. Children and young people who develop their emotional literacy tend to do well in school. Their ability to work well with others, control their impulses, and react to their emotional states improve.

In order to develop their emotional literacy, children and young people need to experience positive relationships with adults who are responsive, attentive, and attuned to the child. They also need opportunities to experience, explore and develop appropriate and meaningful communication and language around their emotions. The time to develop a meaningful, positive and stable relationship with a key adult is essential, as is access to resources that offer additional communication support around emotions.

Emotional literacy programmes are talk-based and use scenarios as a tool for development. Many rely on stories which assume that the individual has empathy and the ability to understand social perspectives. This may be difficult for many students with autism. Approaches will need to be tailored to the individual's needs and their sensory impairment. The student's understanding of the language that is used, concepts that are being discussed, and ability when signing in discussions must be considered when taking part in emotional literacy sessions. Theory of mind materials may be useful to develop emotional literacy. Students with autism may find communication aids that require visuals to assist them in this area. Particular consideration needs to be given to those students who have a vision impairment and how best to adapt these visuals.<sup>3</sup>

#### **1.1.1 Factors for practitioners to consider**

- Use positive relationships with key adults to develop emotional learning
- Use your awareness of the child/young person's needs and sensory impairment when designing activities

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/local-offer>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.autismspectrumnews.org/why-emotional-literacy-is-so-important/>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/emotional-literacy>

- Re-visit basic emotion vocabulary and reinforce it through regular learning experiences that are appropriate to the individual needs of the student
- Offer visuals to support communication (adapted,
- if necessary, for students with vision impairments) especially for emotional and social tasks

## 1.2 Organising and prioritising

Organisational skills and the ability to prioritise are essential to ensure that we are successful at tasks, planning our day and managing our time. Students with autism may find organising and prioritising difficult. Those with sensory impairment may also find this a challenge, due to the impact of their sensory impairment on their ability to access instructions and resources.

An autistic person may have difficulties with:

- processing information
- predicting the consequences of an action (if I do this, what will happen next?)
- understanding the concept of time
- 'Executive function' (coping with daily tasks like tidying up or cooking)

One or all of these can affect a person's ability to organise, prioritise and sequence. For example, if you struggle to understand the concept of time, how do you plan what you will do over the course of a week?<sup>4</sup>

As students move through the teenage years, there is an increased range of emotions and reduction in mental states accompanying puberty, in addition to adjusting to the changes involved in this stage of development. This is often shown in increased incidence of autistic behaviours and increased expectation on the students by those around them. This may result in higher levels of anxiety and the use of coping behaviours such as obsessional actions or ignoring things that are a challenge to access or complete, therefore having a negative impact on organisational and prioritising skills.

### 1.2.1 Helping to manage sensory overloads.

Students with autism and those with sensory impairments are often highly sensitive to their environment, and so the environment may have an impact on their ability to self-regulate. This sensitivity to the environment can be different for everyone and can include over- and under-stimulation. Any one of the student's senses can become sensitive or desensitised, including their sense of sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and proprioception. An autistic student and a student with a sensory impairment may not be able to ignore, filter out or be aware of the sensory input that they are receiving. They may need an adult around them, who has a good understanding of the student's behaviours, to help them to identify and understand the signs of sensory differences. Working with the student, staff, and parents to identify and use strategies to reduce the impact of the sensory environment on the student and to help them manage the input is essential.

## 1.3 Social narratives

Social narratives describe social situations in some detail by highlighting relevant cues and offering examples of appropriate responses. They are individualised based on the student's needs and are typically quite short, perhaps including pictures or other visual aids.<sup>5</sup>

Social narratives can help autistic students develop greater social understanding, stay safe and to enhance their social interaction skills.

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/organising-and-prioritising/all-audiences>.

<sup>5</sup> See: [https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/ebpbriefs/SocialNarratives\\_Overview\\_0.pdf](https://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/ebpbriefs/SocialNarratives_Overview_0.pdf)

In 1991, Carol Grey coined the term Social Stories™. These are social narratives written around a set of guidelines to ensure that the purpose and structure of the story is kept. The information needed is presented in basic language, in a factual, non-ambiguous way. When a Social Stories are developed using the specific criteria, they are evidence based, and research has shown that they can support the development of social interaction skills.<sup>6</sup>

Social stories include details and information about situations, events or activities, what happens in that situation, what to do, and why. Examples include:

- self-care skills
- saying thank-you
- how to cope with emotions
- what will happen on a visit to a new location
- understanding another's perspective
- managing changes in emotions

Carol Gray describes this technique as *a social learning tool that supports the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals, and autistic students of all ages.*<sup>7</sup>

The use of social stories can reduce anxiety for autistic students.

Social narratives are most effective when used when the student is feeling calm, in an environment that the student is familiar with, and when with a known adult. They should be reviewed regularly prior to the situation happening, and how the student receives them should be monitored.

#### **1.4 Comic strip conversations**

A similar approach can be used with Comic Strip Conversations™ (also by Carol Grey) that are a more visual way of representing a conversation, thinking about what has been said, what they are thinking, and the intentions of the people involved. Some autistic students may find this a more accessible way of understanding the abstract nature of conversations. Particular thought should be given to those students who have a vision impairment, and how they will access the comic strips.

#### **1.5 Visual supports**

Autistic students and those who have a sensory impairment may find that visual supports are helpful for them to understand routines, share emotions, as a prompt or reminder. They may be pictures, videos, photographs, tactile cards, line drawings, scales, or coloured cards, for example. These supports, whilst being helpful, will need to be differentiated for each student and when considering their use, the child/young person's access needs will to be considered.<sup>8</sup>

The *Incredible 5-Point Scale*<sup>9</sup> created by Karri Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis is an example of how scales can be used. The main point of the scale is to help the student identify a behaviour and how to respond to it.

#### **1.6 Modelling**

Modelling is a way of showing a behaviour by a parent, known adult, professional or peer and can lead to the student learning and using new skills. Modelling can often include and be supported with prompting and reinforcement. Modelling is the demonstration of a desired behaviour by either a parent, professional, or peer that can result in the imitation of that behaviour by the learner. This can lead to the development of

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<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/social-interaction/>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/visual-supports>

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.5pointscale.com/>

new skills. Modelling is often combined with other strategies such as prompting e.g., 'my turn' and reinforcement e.g., 'good talking-turns'.<sup>10</sup>

Modelling can be in real life situations or can be recorded so that the student can revisit and review the modelling, enabling them to develop fluency and confidence with the strategy that is being modelled. The video can be of others modelling the skill or the learner themselves, either showing the whole skill or a part of the skill that needs further focus.

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<sup>10</sup> See: <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/>

## 2. Strategies

### 2.1 Focus: Sensory Regulation

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p><b>Noise:</b></p> <p>Loud noises can be overwhelming, quiet noises can be distracting (hearing equipment amplifies <b>all</b> sound, not just the ones students want to hear).</p> <p>Trying to hear instructions in a large echoey PE hall or at a distance on a windy playing field can be extremely difficult. Swimming requires waterproof technology, swimming covers or swimming without hearing equipment.</p>	<p>Encourage quiet working as good practise for the whole class.</p> <p>Give children sensory breaks as needed – these can include ‘Golden Silences’ when children can turn their technology off, but not take it off, for an agreed amount of time.</p> <p>Use clear language, giving the student plenty of processing time. Depending on the child’s preferred method of communication, you may need to limit your use of hand gestures and facial expressions.</p> <p>Give class (staff and students) regular deaf awareness training.</p> <p>Use the child’s Personal Wireless System (PWS) effectively (if they have one).</p> <p>Have an agreed support system with the child so that they can communicate when/how their equipment is used.</p> <p>Make sure staff and students are aware of extra difficulties for swimming and that they have training in how to use swimming equipment safely (ask families for training?).</p> <p>Ensure students have a plan for communicating in the swimming pool and that they have a 1:1 TA with them at all times.</p>	<p>Have a suitable quiet space for child to work in.</p> <p>Sensory bag: this may include calming activities, colouring, small puzzles, fidget toys, playdough, bubbles, chew buddy, etc. What does the student find calming?</p> <p>Allow children to wear their hearing equipment on the quiet programme if they have one. Ensure adults working with them know how to switch programmes and how this will affect the child’s hearing.</p> <p>Contract for Student Support Preferences</p> <p>Contract for Student Support Preferences (separate one for swimming).</p>



Issue	Strategy	Resources
<b>Visual:</b>		
<p>Visually cluttered classrooms which can be overstimulating and/or distracting.</p> <p>Watching videos - there is a lot of information to process in a short time. Are the language levels appropriate? Are the captions helpful or distracting?</p>	<p>Think, calm, neutral colours. This can be beneficial for all pupils.</p> <p>Avoid 'washing lines' and keep displays simple and minimal.</p> <p>Give the child a chance to watch videos before lessons and pre-teach any key vocabulary. If the information in the video is useful for homework, can the video link be sent home and/or notes taken by a TA for the student to use?</p> <p>Ensure video has appropriate language levels.</p> <p>Consider if captions are appropriate.</p>	<p>Video links</p> <p>Differentiated video content.</p> <p>Books with a high visual content that link to child's areas of interest are useful ice breakers and good sources of learning.</p>
<p><b>Touch:</b></p> <p>Carpet time: being in close proximity to others, uncomfortable/scratchy carpet texture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PE lessons: being near to others, possibly having to hold hands with others, having to change clothes in front of others, PE kit being uncomfortable.</li> </ul>	<p>Offer the student the option of sitting in prearranged area. Make sure that they have a clear exit route so they can leave the carpet quickly and easily if necessary and that other children understand that they need their space.</p> <p>Be understanding that not all children are comfortable with touching others.</p> <p>Allow students to change in a separate, private area if possible, or allow them to come into school already in their PE kit.</p> <p>Consult with family about suitable adaptations to the PE kit that would make the child feel more comfortable (e.g. joggers and hoodie if they like baggy clothes or leggings and long sleeved tops if they prefer tighter clothing).</p>	<p>Named chair/space, wobble cushion, spot.</p> <p>Separate changing area</p>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p><b>General:</b></p> <p>Busy classrooms (particularly in EYFS) where there is a lot to process visually, lots of noise, children running around, bumping into each other, multiple activities to choose from.</p> <p>Lunch halls can be completely overwhelming: smells, visually cluttered, extremely noisy, close proximity to others.</p>	<p>Offer student limited choice of activities.</p> <p>If child is becoming overwhelmed, offer them time in a separate space that is calm and quiet</p> <p>If child does present challenging behaviours, use a 'stop and distract' technique.</p> <p>Due to differences in sensory processing, autistic children may perceive things in different ways and more artistically. This can be encouraged and nurtured.</p>	<p>Communication or now/next board (if appropriate).</p> <p>Quiet working area with activities such as reading or items that link to child's areas of interest.</p> <p>Have selection of appropriate tasks readily available, for example: tidying, running errands, finding pen lids, etc.</p> <p>Complete sensory profile to ascertain if child is hyper/hypo sensitive</p> <p>Anxiety mapping tool from Steps</p> <p>Encourage artistic activities (if they are enjoyed by the child) as an outlet and form of expression.</p> <p>Sensory circuits to either bring a child up or calm them down.</p>

## 2.2 Focus: Managing Change

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Transition between lessons can be busy and overwhelming for autistic children and those with sensory impairments and may trigger meltdowns.</p> <p>Lessons overrun which may cause frustration if the child expects to be finishing one activity and moving onto the next one.</p>	<p>Planning out the child's day using recognisable symbols, so they know what to expect and when.</p> <p>If the children have to physically move between lessons (for example in secondary school) the child may find it useful to leave 5 mins before the end of the lesson to avoid the crush in corridors.</p> <p>Similarly, arriving at and leaving school at slightly staggered times if possible.</p> <p>If a lesson is overrunning, perhaps the child and their TA could be allowed to move onto the next expected activity if it is not too disruptive to the rest of the class, or have a brief sensory break while they wait for the rest of the class to finish.</p>	<p>Class/individual visual timetable. Symbols can be removed once a task/lesson is completed so it helps the child see how they are moving through their day.</p> <p>Now/next board may be useful to focus on specific changes, rather than a full day.</p> <p>A pass that explains why this student may be leaving lessons/walking around the school when they would be expected to be in lessons so they can show it to new/unfamiliar staff and avoid confrontations.</p>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Visitors, school trips, special occasions</p> <p>Staff changes (especially last-minute changes due to illness, etc)</p>	<p>It is very important to prewarn students of changes such as trips, staff changes, visitors etc as early as possible.</p> <p>Describe the change, explain what is happening and why, emphasise aspects the child may find enjoyable, for example “You get to have a ride on a coach,” or “The lady is going to tell us all about dinosaurs.”</p> <p>Ensure families are also aware of planned events and have copies of resources at home so that they can answer questions and prepare the child too.</p> <p>Last minute staff changes are inevitable. Try to inform autistic children of these changes before they enter the classroom. Explain the reason for absence and give an idea of when the member of staff will return. Try not to be too specific as this could cause distress if things change (e.g. “Miss Smith is poorly today, but she will be back as soon as she feels better.”)</p> <p>If the absence is planned (e.g. due to job interview, appointments, etc), adult to explain that they will be away, when they plan to return and (if possible) who will be covering them. For example, “I won’t be teaching you tomorrow, Jack, but I will be back on Friday. Tomorrow you will have Mr Jones teaching you.”</p>	<p>Pictures of new places, people, activities to help with discussions.</p> <p>Calendar to record planned changes (for example school trips) and count down the days until they happen. Calendars can also be used to record personal occasions such as birthdays, family trips, dentist appointments, etc.</p> <p>Make a book of photos/images describing the change step-by-step (including the outcome) that the child can look at before and during the change.</p> <p>Use a visual timetable on the day of the change.</p> <p>Ensure cover staff are aware of any particular requirements the child may have and (if appropriate) introduce them to the child.</p>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Unstructured times in school day, for example, break times, choosing time.</p> <p>Children may find these times difficult due to socialising issues and/or not having clear tasks to complete.</p>	<p>Consider the use of programmes such as Circle of Friends (with trained practitioners) to help facilitate friendships.</p> <p>Consider a ‘friendship rota’ with children who are happy to play with the autistic child but may not chose to do so every day. This also means that the child knows who will be with them each day. Must be with children who understand the commitment.</p> <p>Offer a quiet space such as SEN room where the student knows they can go if they feel overwhelmed.</p> <p>Ensure staff on duty know about what makes the child anxious, what they need support with, how they choose to communicate, etc.</p> <p>At choosing time offer limited set of choices or specific tasks, for example, “You can choose x or y.”</p>	<p>Circle of Friends</p> <p>Friendship rota</p> <p>Now/next board</p> <p>Quiet space</p> <p>Individual Risk Management Plan (IRMP) shared with staff as necessary</p>
<p><b>Organisational skills:</b></p> <p>Autistic children and those with a sensory impairment sometimes find it difficult to organise their resources, belongings or time.</p>	<p>Gradually encourage child to become more independent with looking after their belongings so they are not overwhelmed, but do build up their independence.</p> <p>Children may need extra help organising themselves for PE, especially for swimming where deaf children will either need extra waterproof equipment to protect their CI or HA, or have no hearing technology and therefore will need extra help with communication.</p>	<p>Use a timer to indicate end of task so that the child knows how long they have to complete it.</p> <p>To do list for start/end of day or for times such as PE with pictures (for example, empty water bottle, put pencil case away, take off receivers, get bag and coat).</p>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Changes in friendships - friend is away, doesn't want to play, moves house. Children can form very close bonds with one or two specific children and then struggle if something changes.</p> <p>Changes in seating plan can cause upset if the child has to sit next to someone unfamiliar.</p>	<p>Try to encourage child to have a broader friendship circle if possible.</p> <p>Explain to classmates that autistic children sometimes find it difficult to understand social situations, may appear rude (e.g. not allowing other children to play their game) or may fixate on certain things (e.g. always want to play with cars or play 'dogs').</p> <p>If you know that a friend is leaving the school, talk to the autistic child about it, help them to name their feelings and perhaps facilitate families staying in touch out of school.</p> <p>Take child's preferences into consideration when deciding on seating plans if possible.</p> <p>Warn them before seating is changed.</p>	<p>Pictures of friend (if they are leaving).</p> <p>Calendar to mark when friend is leaving.</p> <p>Friendship rota</p> <p>Feelings resources e.g. NDCS What Are You Feeling?</p>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Moving to a new school/setting: This is a huge change and needs to be prepared for carefully.</p> <p>Moving up a year group involves lots of changes and challenges.</p> <p>Long term changes to support staff need to be handled sensitively.</p>	<p>When moving to a new school or care service, staff from both settings should be part of the preparations. The autistic person must be central in any decision making, and staff need to know about the things they need support with, what they get anxious about, and how they communicate. Visits to the new setting are strongly encouraged.</p> <p>Prepare the autistic person for transition to a new year group by talking about what will be different and what will remain the same. Encourage them to ask questions and try and answer as many as possible. Use any school opportunities for transitioning e.g. 'transition day' or 'meet the teacher day'. If necessary, offer the child a 1:1 meeting with their new teacher and a chance to see their new classroom during a quiet time.</p> <p>If support staff are changing it is important to prewarn the child and introduce them to the new member of staff. If possible, phase in their introduction over a period of time.</p>	<p>Create a transition book to help with the move. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• photos of the new school/setting</li> <li>• new staff</li> <li>• some ideas of things the child may look forward to e.g. play equipment or things they are going to learn about.</li> </ul> <p>Transition books for moving up a year group should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pictures of the new classroom</li> <li>• route to new classroom</li> <li>• who their new teacher will be</li> <li>• will there be a different playground or lunch area?</li> <li>• topics they will learn next year</li> <li>• answers to any questions the child has</li> <li>• pictures of new support staff</li> <li>• a visual timetable showing which support staff will be working with them on which days.</li> </ul>

### 2.3 Focus: Celebrating the strengths to manage the anxiety, build self esteem

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Some children who struggle with self-esteem may not react well to praise. They may not believe that they deserve approval and think that anyone who gives them direct praise is lying or making fun of them.</p> <p>Children may not like having attention draw to them - even if it is positive - and may find traditional reward systems too abstract to be meaningful.</p>	<p>Give indirect praise e.g. "This handwriting is very neat," or "These maths questions are all correct!"</p> <p>If the child gives an incorrect answer, consider how you frame your feedback and draw on the positives eg. "I like how you worked that out, have you thought about..." or "That's a great description of X, now can you tell me a little more about Y?"</p> <p>Rather than publicly praising a child, have a quiet conversation with them, write house points in their book or give positive feedback to families.</p> <p>Make rewards meaningful. Instead of house points give them stickers, time to indulge in their special interest or allow them to go to lunch early.</p>	<p>Meaningful reward strategies</p> <p>Regular communication with home.</p>
<p>Children who are progressing at a slower level than peers may feel that they are making no progress at all.</p>	<p>Use personalised or incremental progression charts. This could be something like a sticker chart for younger children or online learning journals such as Tapestry that include incremental assessment programmes (Cherry Garden). These can include visual representations of a child's progress that can be shown to them.</p> <p>Have a dialogue with children about their own personal targets and remind them that they are often working on different goals to their peers and are focussing on making progress in these areas.</p>	<p>Sticker charts</p> <p>Online Learning Journals (e.g. Tapestry)</p> <p>Assessment programmes e.g. Cherry Garden</p>



Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Autistic children and those with sensory impairment often suffer from anxiety. This can be exacerbated by sensory processing issues, lack of understanding in social skills and difficulties identifying their own emotions.</p>	<p>Use anxiety mapping tools to ascertain which situations are causing the most anxiety for the child and develop strategies accordingly.</p> <p>Reduce confusion and changeableness by making the child's day and environment predictable and giving the child opportunities for regular rest breaks.</p> <p>Increase a sense of calm to minimise sensory overload.</p> <p>When a child is anxious, reduce all input e.g. reduce questions and expectations but also sensory input – move to a calm, quiet space. Offer reassurance from a supporting adult. With older children, it is important to promote independence so that the CYP is aware of their triggers, can recognise when they are feeling anxious and implement their personal strategies themselves.</p> <p>If supporting adult recognises signs that the child is becoming anxious and could be building towards a meltdown, use preventative strategies such as: acknowledging the feelings the young person is experiencing, removing the child from the situation in a non-punishing way, take the child for a quiet walk or redirecting the child to a less upsetting task.</p> <p>Build times into the students daily/weekly timetable to work on emotional and mental wellbeing. E.g. PSHE, citizenship, life skills, social skills etc. These could be with the whole class, in a small group, 1:1 or a combination.</p>	<p>Anxiety mapping tools e.g. from the Steps programme</p> <p>Individual Risk Management Plans available to staff.</p> <p>One page profile for autistic children that includes information on anxiety triggers.</p> <p>Relaxation/distraction techniques e.g. yoga, weighted blankets, deep breathing, deep pressure exercises, etc</p> <p>Strategies to manage anger/anxiety e.g. mindfulness cards</p> <p>Strategies that increase social understanding and problem solving. E.g. cartooning, sensory awareness, self-awareness</p> <p>Personal tutorials for students to build on interaction and emotional wellbeing</p> <p>Adults working with the child to have a personalised 'tool kit' to help them prevent, manage, distract, or de-escalate challenging behaviour or situations</p>

## 2.4 Focus: Organisation

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Forgetting what to do in a task	<p>Visual supports:</p> <p>Pictures, written lists, calendars, and real objects can all be good ways of helping autistic people to understand what is going to happen and when. For example, a person might have a daily timetable with pictures of a shower, clothes, breakfast, their school, dinner, a toothbrush, pyjamas, and a bed to indicate what they will be doing, and in what order, that day.<sup>11</sup></p> <p>Lists:</p> <p>Lists can remind us of the tasks we need to do, and to help us prioritise. Lists can also be a good way of registering achievements (by crossing something off when you've done it), and of reassuring yourself that you're getting things done. Lists can be visual, written, or in the form of a task list app.</p>	

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<sup>11</sup> See: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/organising-and-prioritising/all-audiences>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Mixing resources up	<p>Colour coding:</p> <p>Colours can be used to indicate the importance or significance of tasks (and therefore help to prioritise tasks and work through them in a logical sequence).</p> <p>For example, work in a red tray or file could be urgent, work in a green tray or file could be pending, while work in a blue tray or file is not important or has no timescale attached to it. Colours can also help people to distinguish between paperwork, for example different household bills.</p> <p>Task boxes, envelopes, and files.</p> <p>Store work or belongings in set places, so they aren't misplaced or forgotten.</p>	
Forgetting verbal instructions	<p>Voice recording:</p> <p>Recorded messages, on a Dictaphone, smartphone, penfriend, talking tin lids, can be a useful auditory reminder of tasks, work, events, or deadlines</p>	
Being late	<p>Alarms and alerts:</p> <p>Computer calendars can have important dates stored on them, or reminders about when to pay bills. Instructions can be sent to the person's mobile phone by text - text messages lend themselves to this especially well as you are forced to keep instructions brief and simple. A text message is also an unobtrusive and discreet way of contacting or supporting an autistic person.</p>	

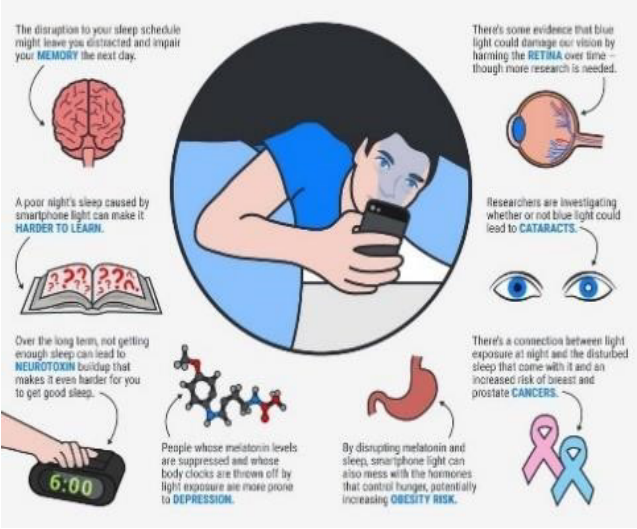
Issue	Strategy	Resources
Forgetting routines	<p>Times of day, days of the week:</p> <p>You can use times of day (morning, afternoon, or evening) or days of the week to help plan and organise tasks, social activities, and other events. For example, Saturday is shopping day, Wednesday is bills day, Thursday night is homework night.</p> <p>Teaching materials: time and sequence</p> <p>You may find that teaching materials such as sequence cards, games, timers, and clocks help some autistic people to understand the concept of time and sequences. Materials like this can be used at home and at work.</p>	
Spending too much money	<p>Budgeting is a key skill to learn. Many autistic and sensory impaired adults will manage their own bills and money. Many children will have pocket money to manage. Banks have apps that can help set sending amounts and help with managing money.</p> <p>There are many similar apps, such as GoHenry for children to learn these skills as well.</p> <p>Specific sessions may be needed with physical money at break or lunch times and trips in the community to learn to these skills before moving on to money management apps.</p>	
Not understanding the consequences of actions	<p>Social Stories</p> <p>Social comic strips</p>	

Issue	Strategy	Resources
At work	<p>Strategies to use in the work environment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using files and colour to identify and clarify the importance and deadlines for particular pieces of work</li> <li>• making a clear to do list at the beginning of the day - you can then cover up or mark off work which has been completed</li> <li>• arranging regular meetings with your line manager to ensure work is understood and is progressing</li> <li>• using the computer programs available to help organise work - for example colour coding emails relating to importance of response</li> <li>• using the calendar as a reminder for meetings or deadlines.</li> </ul>	

Issue	Strategy	Resources
In school	<p>Homework, assignments, and deadlines can cause great anxiety for some people. Whilst others may not realise the importance of deadlines.</p> <p>The following strategies can help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear monitoring</li> <li>• regular meetings with teaching staff</li> <li>• colour coding of files</li> </ul> <p>Some people may need help in understanding the end goal of what to them may seem continuous work and deadlines.</p> <p>Processing of instructions can be difficult. It may be useful to use communication books, online learning environments, and voice recordings to reduce the pressure on the student.</p>	

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Prioritising homework/ spending enough time on homework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write homework down in a planner as soon as it is set – with due date clearly written.</li> <li>• Understand homework content and expectations.</li> <li>• Ask the teacher or key adult for help or clarification if needed.</li> <li>• Use lesson notes.</li> <li>• Monthly planner as an overview.</li> <li>• Digital planners and calendars.</li> <li>• Organisation apps like Google Keep, Remember the Milk, Evernote<sup>12</sup></li> <li>• To-do lists.</li> </ul>	<p>Organisation Apps Video at <a href="https://www.understood.org/en/articles/video-apps-for-teens-with-organization-issues">https://www.understood.org/en/articles/video-apps-for-teens-with-organization-issues</a></p> <p>Google Keep</p> <p>Remember the Milk</p> <p>Evernote</p> <p>To-do lists</p>

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/video-apps-for-teens-with-organization-issues>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Feeling prepared for the day ahead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to get enough sleep the night before.</li> <li>• Avoid using electronic devices just before bed - – blue light blocks a hormone called melatonin that makes you sleepy<sup>13</sup></li> <li>• Try to pack school bag the night before.</li> <li>• Write a note to help remember anything for the following day.</li> </ul>	<p>Sleep Foundation web site: <a href="https://www.sleepfoundation.org/bedroomenvironment/blue-light">https://www.sleepfoundation.org/bedroomenvironment/blue-light</a></p>  <p>The infographic features a central illustration of a person in bed using a smartphone. Surrounding this are several text boxes and icons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Top Left:</b> A brain icon with text: "The disruption to your sleep schedule might leave you distracted and impair your <b>MEMORY</b> the next day."</li> <li><b>Top Right:</b> An eye icon with text: "There's some evidence that blue light could damage our vision by harming the <b>RETINA</b> over time—though more research is needed."</li> <li><b>Middle Left:</b> An open book with question marks and text: "A poor night's sleep caused by smartphone light can make it <b>HARDER TO LEARN</b>."</li> <li><b>Middle Right:</b> An eye icon with text: "Researchers are investigating whether or not blue light could lead to <b>CATARACTS</b>."</li> <li><b>Bottom Left:</b> A hand holding a digital clock showing 6:00 with text: "Over the long term, not getting enough sleep can lead to <b>NEUROTOXIN</b> buildup that makes it even harder for you to get good sleep."</li> <li><b>Bottom Center:</b> A chemical structure icon with text: "People whose melatonin levels are suppressed and whose body clocks are thrown off by light exposure are more prone to <b>DEPRESSION</b>."</li> <li><b>Bottom Right (Top):</b> A stomach icon with text: "By disrupting melatonin and sleep, smartphone light can also mess with the hormones that control hunger, potentially increasing <b>OBESITY RISK</b>."</li> <li><b>Bottom Right (Bottom):</b> A cancer awareness ribbon icon with text: "There's a connection between light exposure at night and the disturbed sleep that come with it and an increased risk of breast and prostate <b>CANCERS</b>."</li> </ul>
Revision for GCSE Exams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a timetable.</li> <li>• Make sure you know which subjects you find hardest. Focus first on these.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adapt</b> is good for this - you can flexibly create a timetable tailored to you. It allows you to track your progress and the topics you still have to cover.</p>

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/bedroom-environment/blue-light>



## 2.5 Focus: Verbalising with someone that something is a challenge

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Responding to constructive criticism/feedback from teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure expectations and feedback are clear and understood.</li> <li>• Ask a teacher or TA for help if needed.</li> <li>• Plan how the feedback will be done – you can try using a mind map/notes/additional research if needed.</li> </ul>	<p>Organisation Apps</p> <p>Mind of my own website:  <a href="https://mindofmyown.org.uk/">https://mindofmyown.org.uk/</a></p> <p>Brain in hand website:  <a href="https://braininhand.co.uk/">https://braininhand.co.uk/</a></p>
<p>Working with other students for class work/discussions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate with student in a sensitive and subtle manner, particularly if already in the classroom. Try to seat the child with a peer that they will feel comfortable with and vice versa. If that is not possible, be there for the student in case they would like to discuss with/work with you. And try to involve the teacher if that feels right - i.e., student can discuss their ideas with the teacher and build that relationship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use student’s profile for help/info on how best to support and approach student.</li> <li>• Important to communicate in a way that is specific and appropriate to the student.</li> </ul>
<p>Changes at school e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in classroom seating.</li> <li>• Changes to timetable.</li> <li>• Changes in staffing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out about the change.</li> <li>• Describe the change.</li> <li>• Explain why the change is happening.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brain In Hand (see above)</li> <li>• Can use visual supports if appropriate.</li> <li>• Involve the right people to minimise stress/anxiety.</li> <li>• Communicate with student’s caregivers if appropriate – allow them to prepare the child at home.</li> </ul>

## 2.6 Focus: Managing anxiety

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Becoming overwhelmed by 'what if' thoughts	<p>Breathing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blow bubbles.</li><li>• Blow into a pinwheel.</li><li>• Slowly blow out “candles” on your fingertips.</li><li>• ‘Five finger’ breathing:<sup>14</sup> Spread your hand and stretch your fingers out like a star. You can choose your left hand or your right hand. Pretend the pointer finger of your other hand is a pencil and imagine you are going to trace around the outline of your hand and fingers.</li></ul> <p>Place your pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb. Breathe in as you slide up. Breathe out as you slide down. Breathe in as you slide up your second finger. Breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fingers and you have taken five slow breaths.</p>	Hand Bubbles Pinwheel

<sup>14</sup> See: <https://www.educalme.com/5-finger-breathing/>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<p>Becoming overwhelmed by 'what if' thoughts</p>	<p>Cross the Midline:</p> <p>Crossing the midline, or moving one's hands, feet, and eyes across and to the other side of the body can help reset the brain.</p> <p>Research suggests that when you move your arms or legs across the centre of your body, the brain hemispheres are activated and work together so you can think with both logic and emotion.<sup>15</sup></p> <p>Try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross marches, child marches in place while touching their opposite knee (right arm touch left knee)</li> <li>• Windmills, have your child reach out to the side with their arms straight; then pretend that they are a windmill by moving their arms in a circle while crossing across the middle of their body.</li> </ul>	

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://www.scoilaonghusainr.com/anxiety-management.html>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Overwhelmed by the situation	<p>Allow some time for special interest e.g. look at pictures of favourite tv program while waiting in line etc.</p> <p>Stimulating your child’s vagus nerve (located on both sides of the voice box) can interrupt fight or flight mode and send a signal to his/her brain that “he/she is not under attack”.</p> <p>Ways to stimulate the vagus nerve include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sing or hum</li> <li>• breathe slowly—with roughly equal amounts of time breathing in and out.</li> </ul>	
<b>Transitions</b>	<p>Pre warn of a change in routine.</p> <p>Give time to adjust to change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give advance notice before a transition is going to occur.</li> <li>• Use visual supports.</li> <li>• Use structure and consistency.</li> <li>• Use reduced language.</li> </ul> <p>Provide light praise for good transitions.</p>	Visual supports

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<b>Forgetting instructions</b>	<p>Reduce spoken language.</p> <p>Repeat an instruction/comment rather than recast it.</p> <p>Use a non-verbal way as a reminder.</p> <p>Break down instructions so that they are not anxious about forgetting the instructions.</p> <p>If necessary, have these as steps.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• objects of reference</li> <li>• sounds of reference</li> <li>• tactile versions of pictorial symbols</li> <li>• tactile versions of abstract symbols</li> <li>• a tactile alternative to large print.</li> </ul>
<b>Changes in routines</b>	<p>Keep routines in place to allow for anticipation and preparation for what is coming next. Be consistent.</p> <p>If routines must change, talk through the change and why and make the change over a long period of time so that the change is gradual.</p>	
<b>New situations</b>	<p>Social stories (think about language or signs used for CYP who are deaf).</p>	
<b>Unexpected change in routine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide extra support.</li> <li>• Give alone/quiet time.</li> <li>• Access their sensory tools to help.</li> </ul> <p>Each student will have his or her own preferences, and what is used will also depend on the situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a weighted blanket</li> <li>• a bouncy seat</li> <li>• a fidget or other sensory toy to play with</li> <li>• turning the lights down</li> <li>• playing soft music</li> <li>• giving noise-cancelling headphones to wear</li> <li>• allowing the student to use a sensory room or go to a calm space in the classroom, practicing deep breathing and stretching</li> <li>• counting backward, tapping, etc.</li> </ul>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<b>Overwhelmed by what to do</b>	Explain to the child or young person what will happen, in the order it will happen. Consider how best to do this for the child, such as only two steps at time, adding in pictures, or giving a gesture to associate with the action.	Physical objects Timetable in pictures Braille timetable
<b>Unable to express anxieties</b>	Develop a strategy for the student to indicate that they are feeling anxious, or develop an understanding of the student's demonstrations of that anxiety.  Introduce alternative e.g., if the child flaps their hands when anxious, could they use blue tack to manipulate instead?	

## 2.7 Focus: Sensory overload

Issue	Strategy	Resources
<b>Self-regulation</b>	Teach/develop Self regulation when things are getting too much for the student. E.g yoyo mediation (or similar).	Calming yoyo meditation – see: <a href="https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/playing-words-yoga-stories-calming-yoyo-meditation/">https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/playing-words-yoga-stories-calming-yoyo-meditation/</a>
<b>Feeling overloaded</b>	<p>Develop a sign/signal for the student to use when they are aware that they are starting to feel overloaded.</p> <p>Break down complex instructions into smaller steps.</p> <p>Give one or two steps verbally, and when they have been completed, move on to the next one, or give visuals.</p> <p>Minimise verbal and visual clutter to reduce sensory overload and allow to focus.</p> <p>Reduce information on a page.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual timetable</li> <li>• To do list</li> <li>• Now/then list</li> </ul>
Sensory overloaded	Try to keep the environment as low-key as possible (e.g., visually clear, sound absorbing materials, no extraneous noise or conversation; balance lighting needs for children's visual impairment with those of arousal).	One page profile

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Not processing verbal instructions	<p>Reduce spoken language.</p> <p>Repeat an instruction/comment rather than recast it.</p> <p>When augmenting spoken language you will need to use non-visual means.</p> <p>Depending on the individual's skills and needs, one or more of the resources (right) might be appropriate:</p> <p>Be aware of possible multi-sensory input issues and adjust instruction accordingly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• objects of reference</li> <li>• sounds of reference</li> <li>• tactile versions of pictorial symbols</li> <li>• tactile versions of abstract symbols</li> <li>• a tactile alternative to large print.</li> </ul>



## 2.8 Focus: Emotional literacy

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Identifying their emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accept your child’s emotions and their emotional responses.</b> Don’t immediately judge, criticise, or negate how your child is feeling. Name the emotion for them and say things like: ‘Oh, that sounds really frustrating,’ or, ‘How lovely, I can tell how excited you are.’</li> <li>• <b>Label their emotions with them.</b> Doing so helps children feel understood. For example, say, ‘You sound upset,’ or, ‘You look worried.’</li> <li>• <b>Encourage your child to talk about their feelings.</b> Create an environment where it’s safe to talk openly about feelings and emotions free from judgement, criticism, or finger-pointing. Say things like: ‘You sound really fed up. Shall we have a chat?’ and, ‘How did that make you feel?’</li> <li>• <b>Help them to recognise the signs about how others may be feeling.</b> In stories, books, or TV programmes, ask open-ended questions to help your child step into the shoes of a character or person. Say, ‘How do you think that made him feel?’ or, ‘How would you feel if that happened to you?’</li> </ul>	

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Identifying positive achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recognise what motivates them to perform at their best.</b> Encourage your child rather than praise them: focus on celebrating the behaviour and effort, not just the result. Say things like, 'I've noticed that when things get difficult you just keep trying – that's fantastic'.</li> </ul>	
Emotional outburst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Teach children alternative ways of expressing their frustrations.</b> Ask your child an open-ended, empowering question to help them feel that they have choices. For example, say, 'How could you explain how you feel using your words rather than hitting?' or 'Can you think of a different way to let him know how angry you are?'</li> <li>• <b>Model how to remain calm and in control when you are tired, angry, or fed up.</b> Say, 'I've had a tough day at work – can we talk about this later when I've had a chance to relax?'</li> </ul>	
Not being able to calm down after an outburst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Teach them how to calm down and press their imaginary 'pause button'.</b> Encourage them to take three deep breaths and say a simple mantra of, 'I can feel calm inside.' After that, encourage them to go and do something they find calming and relaxing.</li> </ul>	

## 2.9 Focus: Communication Strategies

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Not playing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing Play skills, by playing games with teddies or dolls like tea parties, catching a bus or riding on a train, going shopping, Simon Says, card or table games like Connect Four or Uno, kicking a ball to each other or sharing a jigsaw puzzle.</li> </ul>	
To develop a child’s tolerance for being able to interact with another person, try the following strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Position yourself close to your child and attempt to draw their attention to you during play activities. This can include copying their actions or mimicking the sounds they are making. An example would be to push a train on a track and say “toot, toot”</li> <li>If your child is engaging in a task, attempt to join in e.g., if they are stacking blocks, try to add one.</li> <li>Play with one of your child’s preferred toys, engage with them when they approach.</li> <li>Encourage the idea of ‘play’ as something that you do by using the words “let’s play” and “good playing”.<sup>16</sup></li> </ul>	

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/social-interaction/>

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Having a friend over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a social narrative to provide information to your child before they have a friend over, so they know what to expect, have some ideas for things to do together or what to talk about.</li> <li>• Using visual supports to problem-solve social situations, like having one piece of cake left over, managing a disagreement, or responding to someone getting hurt, upset, or bored.</li> <li>• Role play or modelling so your child sees ways of managing all sorts of social situations in different ways.</li> </ul>	
Encouraging parallel play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directing your child’s attention to other children’s play “look what they are doing”</li> <li>• Providing opportunities to engage in structured turn-taking games and activities such as jigsaw puzzles, Potato Heads, Jack-in-the-box, with verbal prompts ‘my turn’, ‘your turn’ etc.</li> <li>• Provide prompts to request toys and items from other children, either verbally, or through non-verbal communication.</li> </ul> <p>Develop social play through joint attention, turn-taking, and different ways of playing with items to allow them to learn, and follow, simple demands and requests.</p>	

Issue	Strategy	Resources
Strategies for co-operative and social play include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break tasks down so that they have a clear start and finish point.</li> <li>• Provide structure such as visual supports.</li> <li>• Encourage choice making skills in 'free time'.</li> <li>• Parents and carers can model what to say to other children during play e.g. "Can I play?", "Will you play with me?", "Can I please have the turn next?".</li> <li>• Encouraging and modelling turn-taking skills "John's turn", "your turn".</li> <li>• Encouraging joint attention "what are they doing?".</li> <li>• Developing skills to cope with change and transition.</li> <li>• Providing structure to increase participation in group activities such as mat time, music time.</li> <li>• Increasing the size of social groups slowly.</li> <li>• Increasing the length of social interaction slowly.</li> </ul>	

### 3. Useful web resources

Emotional Literacy:

<https://thespectrum.org.au/autism-strategy/social-interaction/>

Revised and expanded VI and autism guidance material

<https://ianpbell.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/the-revised-and-expanded-visual-impairment-and-autism-guidance-material-july-2015.pdf>

VI and Autism References

<https://ianpbell.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/vi-autism-references-january-2016.pdf>

VI Multiple Disability

<http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/resources/vi&multi/boyce.html>

Tim Kehoe – VI and ASD assignment revised – the role of repetitive questioning

<https://ianpbell.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/article-116.pdf>

Minimal Speech Approach

<https://ianpbell.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/article-33.pdf>

Alyson Akers Alyson Akers - Augmenting the awareness of social communication in a congenitally blind child:  
A case study

<https://ianpbell.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/article-42.pdf>

Top 5 Autism Tips – Inclusion in education

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/school-inclusion>

Autism Spectrum Disorder – Communication Problems in children

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/autism-spectrum-disorder-communication-problems-children>

Social communication skills in the classroom

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/communication-skills-classroom>

Social skills and autism

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/social-skills-and-autism>

Emotional Literacy – Autism Toolbox

<https://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/social-and-emotional-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing/emotional-literacy/>

Social Narratives – ADHD

<https://adhdjourney.weebly.com/social-narratives.html>

## Comic Strip Conversations

<https://sparkingspeech.com/2020/06/27/understanding-the-unwritten-rules-comic-strip-conversations/#:~:text=Comic%20Strip%20Conversations%E2%84%A2%20were%20designed%20by%20Carol%20Gray,simple%20visual%20representations%20of%20conversations%20which%20can%20show%3A>

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