

Primary classroom ideas for children with autism

NAS Education Support Service

The Autism spectrum



Autism

Lower IQ

Limited or no spoken
language

Often also a diagnosis of a
learning disability

(Sometimes called autistic
disorder, classic or Kanner's
autism)

High Functioning Autism

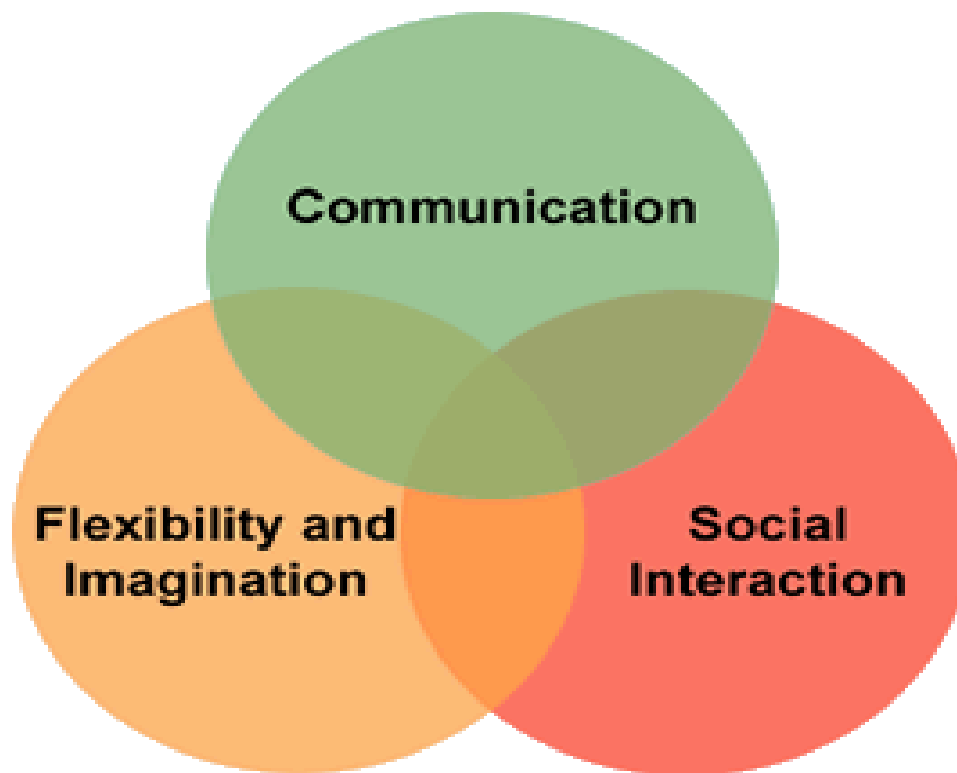
Asperger syndrome

Average or above average
IQ

More spoken language

The triad of impairments

core areas affected



+

Sensory differences

Psychological theories associated with ASD

Theory of mind

Central Coherence

Executive Function

Social Communication

Pupils may:

- Be slow to develop speech
- Have formal and pedantic language
- Interpret language literally
- Difficulty with non verbal gestures / facial expressions / eye contact

Social Communication cont.....

Pupils may:

- One-sided conversation – difficulties with turn-taking
- May take longer to process words
- May have ‘special interests’ – only talk about what they are interested in

Social Interaction

Pupils may :

- Be socially isolated
- Be unaware of the unwritten rules of behaviour
- Not knowing how to approach people – may appear ‘odd’, ‘eccentric’ or ‘socially awkward’
- Become tense and anxious in social settings
- Have difficulties picking up social cues

Social Imagination

Pupils may:

- Changes in routines
- Predicting future events and others' behaviour
- Difficulty separating fantasy and reality
- Sequencing events
- Transferring skills

How do 'neurotypicals' understand meaning?

- 55% from body language
- 38% from tone of voice and intonation
- 7% from the words used

Emotional Attribution

- ‘Neurotypical’ or typical developing children get a ‘reward’ seeing a human face
- Children with autism view humans and human faces as objects ‘no reward’
- ASD children have difficulty to attribute emotion to a facial expression
- Children with autism can learn that humans are nice, worth knowing objects

Sensory differences



Vision

Hearing

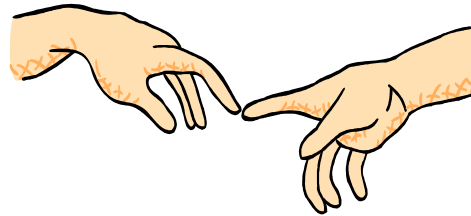
Smell

Taste

Touch

Body awareness (Proprioception)

Balance (Vestibular)



How might the autistic child appear in the classroom?

avoiding others

Anxious

Seeking own space/
withdrawn

no organisational
skills

Interrupting

Over dependent
on adult/child

Appearing
rude/abrupt

Asking repetitive
questions

Little motivation

Ignoring instructions

obsessional

talking too loudly



Strategies-What are they designed for:

- Decrease anxiety
- Focus attention
- Motivate
- Help children to relate to other people
- Facilitate increasing independence

Early Years phase: low arousal learning environment



Structure work so that the following is explicit:



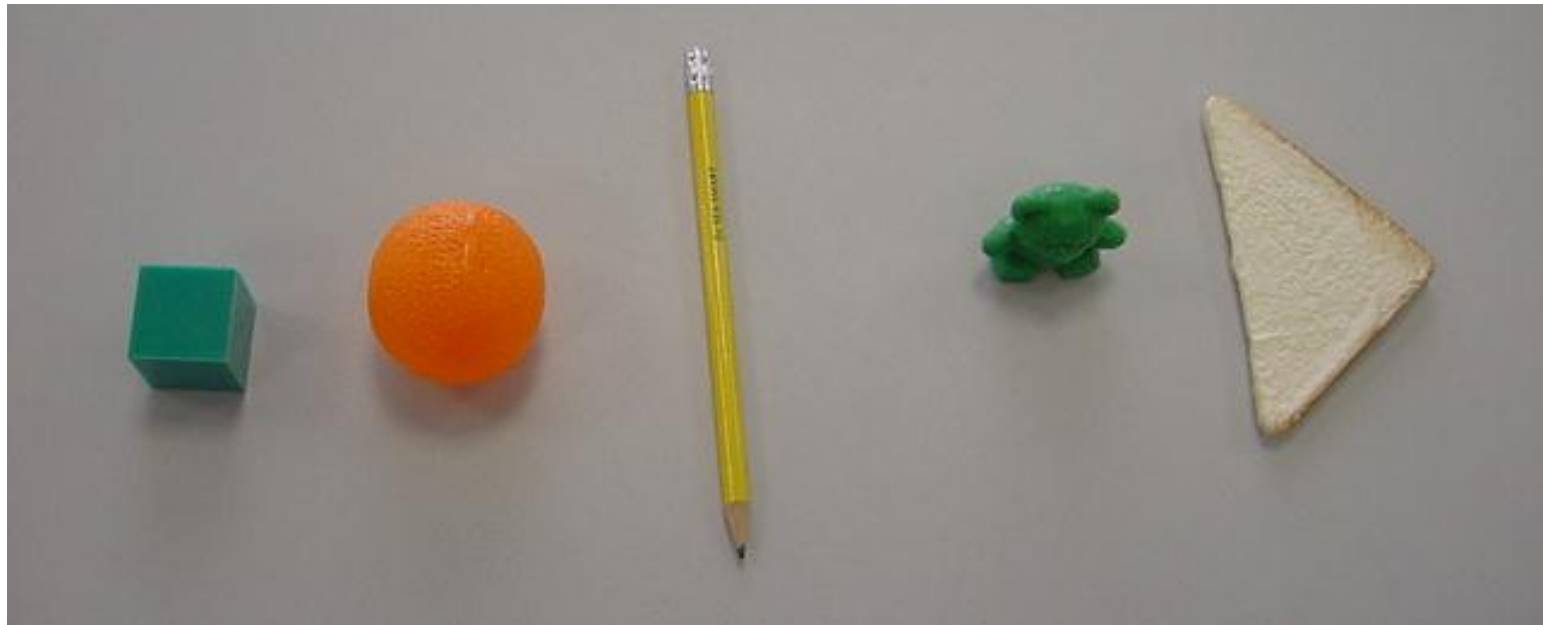


Physical Structure

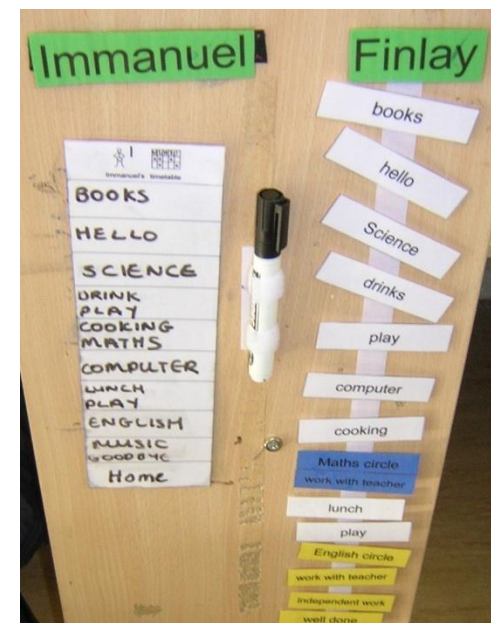
Enabling Independence



Visual Timetable - Objects



Timetables/ schedules provide predictability



Visual warning for turn - taking or the end of an activity



Practical Tips:

- Use name first to get attention
- Allow time to process information
- Repeat if needed using the same words
- One instruction at a time
- Give available choices – limit where appropriate

Setting work:

- Modify tasks as necessary
- Build in supports for short breaks, time out and high/low interest
- Provide alternative means of recording e.g. keyboard
- Ensure key concepts of lesson are visual
- Think how your comment or instructions could be interpreted

Practical strategies cont...

- Provide *structured* breaks within tasks
- Avoid confrontations /control
- It is 'okay' to be wrong
- Use physical exercise to de-stress
- Use positive accurate comments/rewards

Practical ways to help emotional attribution

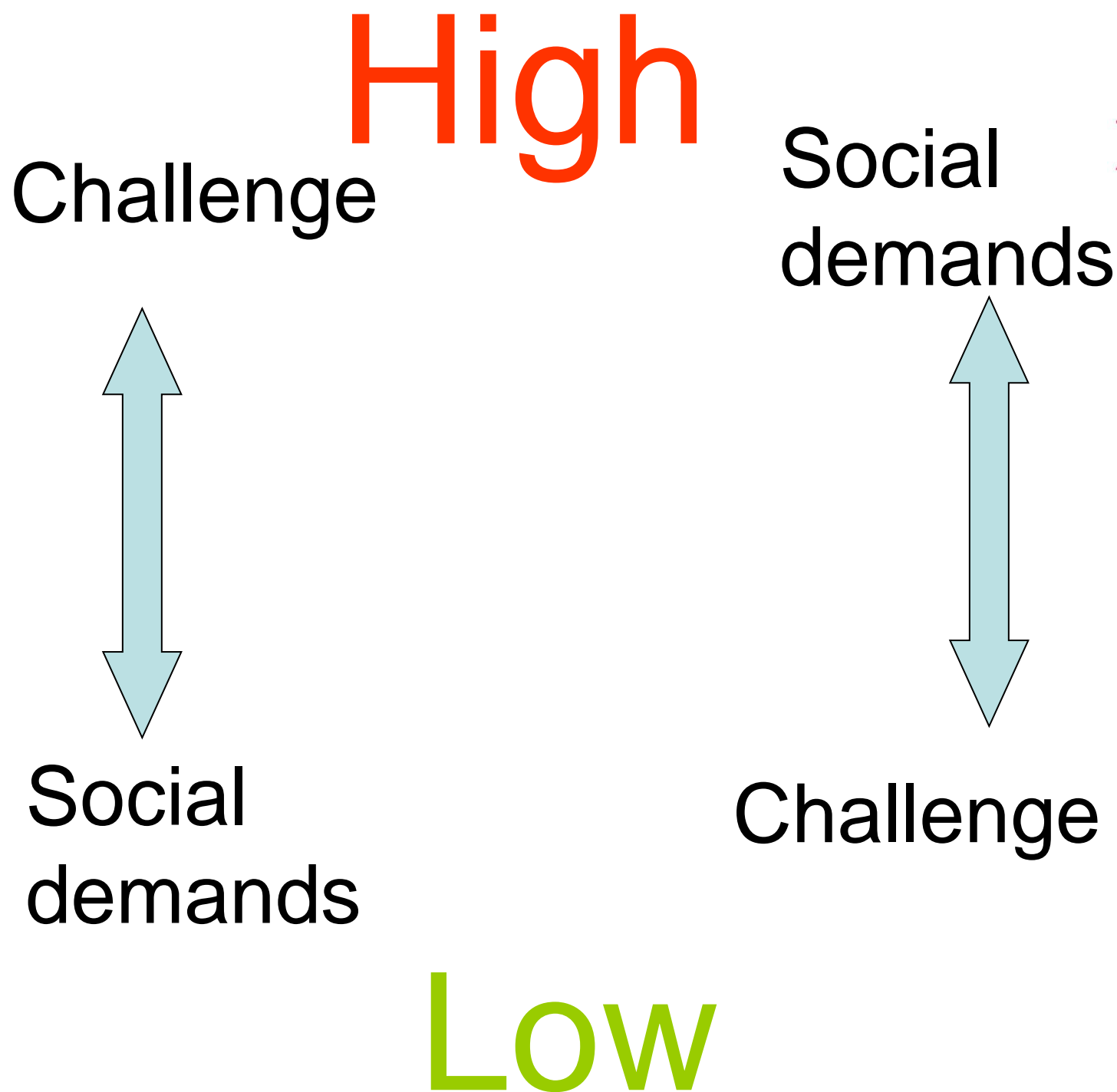
- Ensure pupil understands his/her basic emotions
- Explicitly teach facial expressions
- Teach social skills interventions to attribute emotion to a facial expression/s
- Transferring skills- help pupils rehearse more appropriate options
- Use role play with other peers

Supportive Physical Structure

- Utilises good visual skills
- Supports difficulties with theory of mind – make it visually obvious where to be
- Supports difficulties with central coherence – ‘seeing the bigger picture’, holding new information
- Supports difficulties with Executive function – focus, planning, sequencing, distraction

Positive outcomes-Aim high:

- Trust, confidence, spontaneous interaction with others/tasks
- If possible let the pupil discuss strategies and supports
- Use turn taking games and mutual help activity to encourage interdependency. Use a task which is an area of strength and interest for the pupil.
- Partnership with parents/carers
- Foster independence-no human velcro



Jane Green

Senior Education Support Service Consultant

www.autism.org/educationservices

educationalsupport@nas.org.uk

jane.green@nas.org.uk