



Developing Peer Awareness

Autism Communication Team (ACT)
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Rotherham and the Autism Spectrum

- Around 1,100 school aged children with a diagnosis
- Around 850 of those children attend mainstream schools
- 102 Primary Schools
- 16 Secondary Schools

Why?

- We spent a lot of time developing and delivering training for a variety of adults:
 - Parents of children on the spectrum
 - Parents of children not on the spectrum
 - School staff
 - Other professionals
- Meetings with parents
- Discussions with SENCo's and other staff



On the Playground

Parents told us that they often felt extremely isolated when they were coming to school to collect their child. They felt that the other parents judged them and their child. They often felt very inferior.

This led us to developing awareness sessions, in partnership with individual schools, to try and increase the understanding of other parents and try to address this feeling of isolation.



Adults only?

Why did we only feel the need to train the adults?

Why was it only the adults understanding and awareness that we were trying to increase?

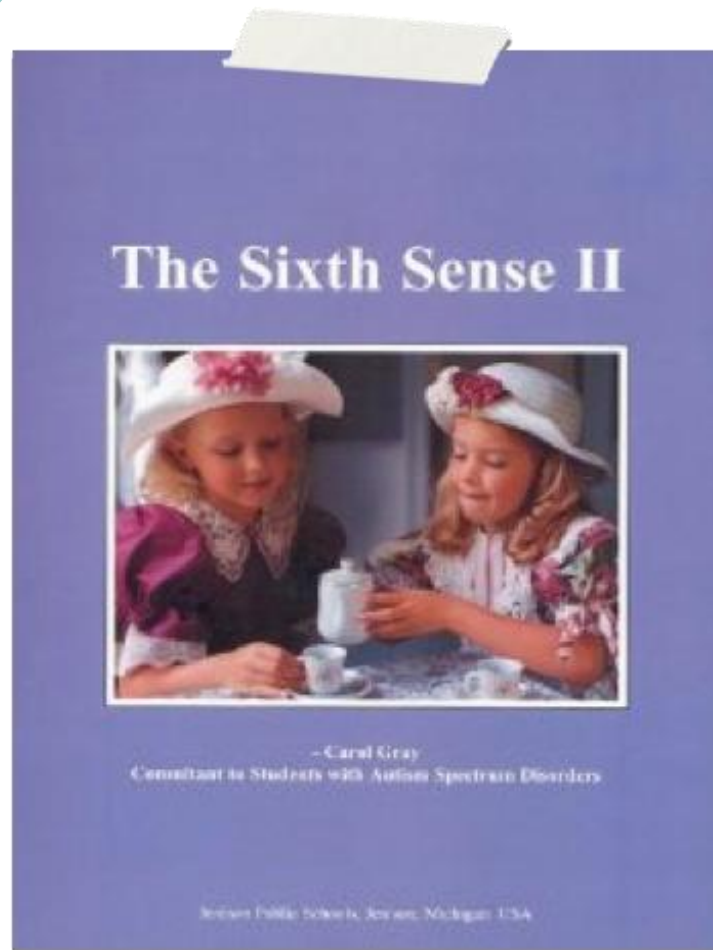
Developing the Peer Awareness Lesson

- What method should be used?
- Who should deliver the session?
- How do we involve school staff?
- Should the young person be included?
- Should the individual/s be named?

The Sixth Sense II

by Carol Gray

Carol Gray's book includes a lesson plan which gets children thinking about what they can do to help people who have a 'Sixth Sense' around feelings and emotions. The class teacher delivers this lesson no longer than a week before the ACT delivers the games session. This lesson does not mention Autism or Asperger Syndrome.



An Urgent Request

- Y6 Boy on a 3 day exclusion for aggressive behaviour.
- Concern about the relationship between him and his classmates.
- Felt that his class were fearful of him.
- School wanted to try and address this.

The Pilot

Due to the situation in the school some of our original considerations had been answered for us: the young people would know who the session was about and the young person himself would not be included.

Games: We decided to make the session as much fun as possible. So we developed four games which attempted to get the young people really thinking, whilst still having fun and without them having to sit and listen to us speak.

Four Games - Triad + 1

Wall Building - Social Relationships

The group have to work as a team to build a Lego wall around a garden. Each young person has a specific role which means they HAVE to work together to get their wall built.

Picture Game - Rigidity of Thought, Behaviour and Play

The young people are shown a cut out section of a picture and then asked to guess what the rest of the picture looks like.

Broken Squares - Social Communication

A game where the young people have to make four squares by exchanging pieces with their team mates but they are unable to use ANY form of communication to do so!

Snakes and Ladders - General Autism Knowledge

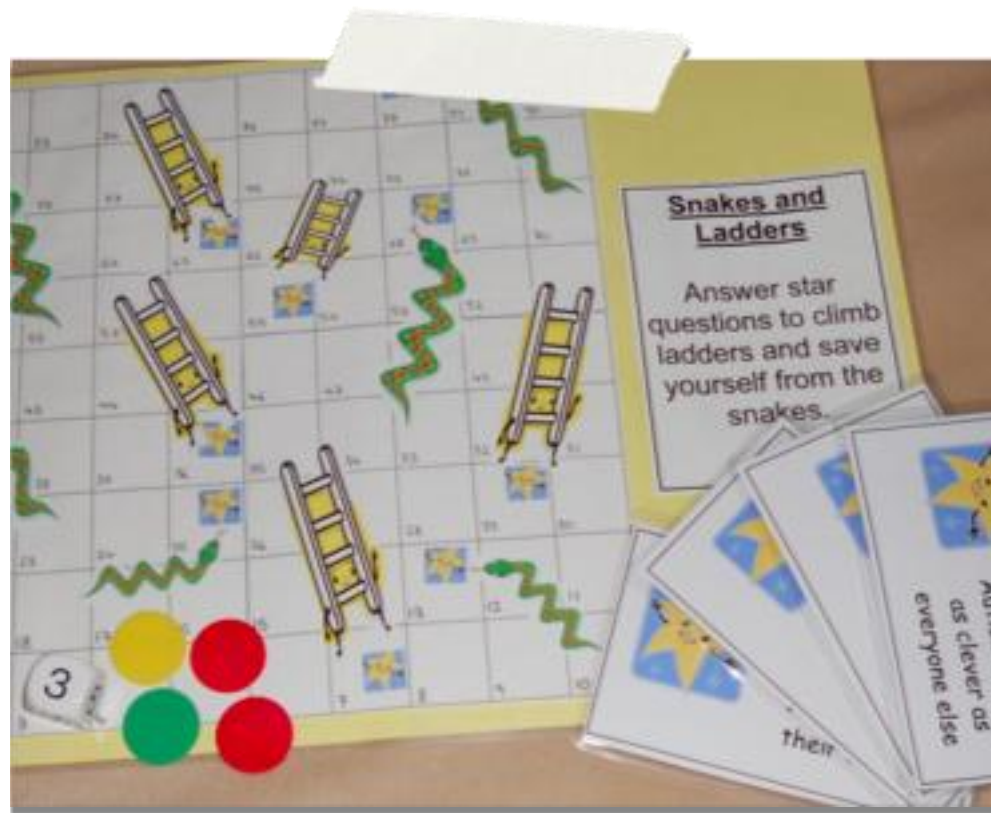
The concept works in the same way as normal snakes and ladders but to get up a ladder a question on ASD has to be answered correctly and if you land on a snake a correct answer on a question stops you having to slide down!

Outcome

- The children told us that they had learnt a lot about Autism and Asperger's and that they had fun at the same time.
- Feedback from the class teacher on the day was positive.
- We contacted the class teacher a few days after the young man had come back into school and the feedback was better than we could have hoped.

Outcome

"...The relationship between X and the other children in the class has changed more than I could have hoped. They no longer walk the long way round the classroom to avoid him. They are asking him to join in games and they are coming up to me and telling me if they think X is getting anxious or stressed out instead of just coming to me to tell me that he has done something wrong. He is now a member of the class instead of an outsider..."



Games



The Process

- ACT and class teacher meet to discuss the games so that school staff understand what they will need to do in the games lesson.
- The parents of any children in the class on the Autism Spectrum are informed that the lesson will be taking place and given the option to withdraw their child from the lesson - we do feel it best that all children are included as it is important for the children on the spectrum to consider how somebody else's autism may impact on them differently.

The Process

- Class teacher delivers the 'Sixth Sense II Lesson Plan.
- Two members from the ACT and two school staff members deliver the games lesson led by a member of the ACT.
- Young people fill in an evaluation immediately after the session.
- Class teacher fills in an evaluation around 3 months later to measure impact and outcomes.

Some Feedback Comments

- "The lesson was excellent. Students responded very well and were appreciative." Class Teacher
- "We learnt a lot about autism by answering questions [in snakes and ladders]" Student
- "It was fun" Student



Key Stage 3

After the success of the Peer Awareness lessons in Primary Schools, we began to think about how we could transfer this model into Secondary Schools.

5 Year Plan

- ACT delivered the lesson to all year 7 classes in pilot schools (member of school staff attended the lesson - cascade model).
- Initial pupil evaluation.
- Impact and outcome evaluation with staff after 3 months.
- Over 5 years all the young people in school would have an increased awareness of the Autism Spectrum.

The Lesson (KS3)

- Interactive!
- Positive!
- Unique!
- Thought provoking!

The Lesson Plan (KS3)

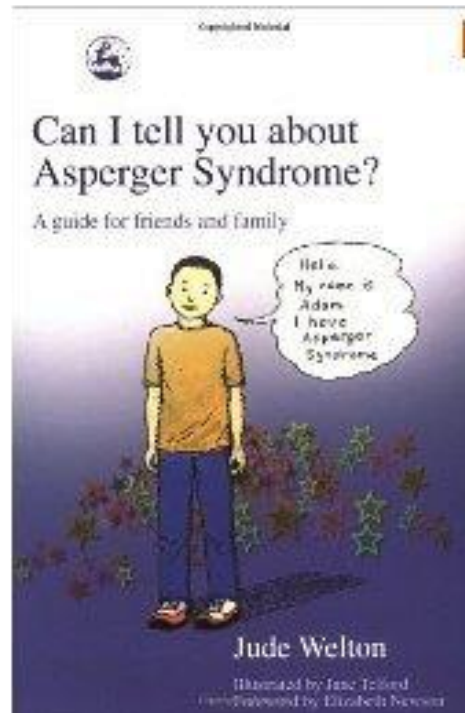
- Aims of the session and Quiz
- The Triad and Sensory Issues
- The Sally Anne Task - Theory of Mind
- Differences Task
- Strategies
- Evaluation



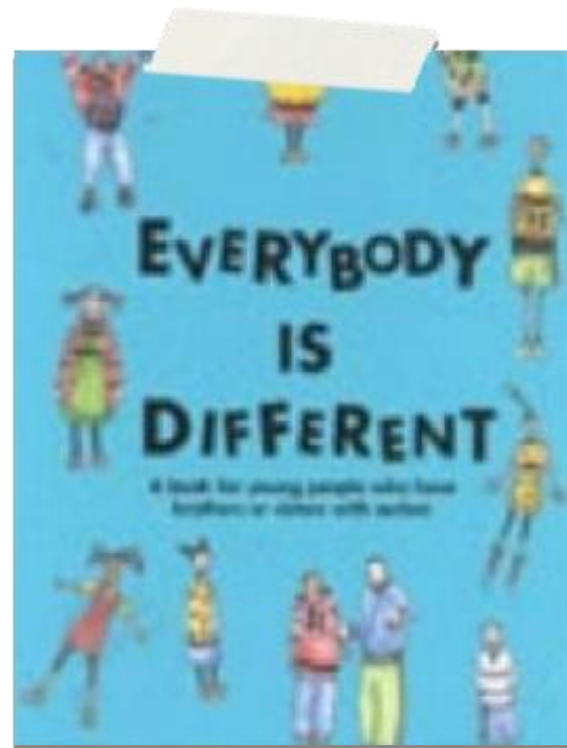
Feedback

"they respect and support each other more. They do not use abusive language when talking about children with ASD. They understand why some children have LSA support in lessons and why sometimes, they are allowed to do certain things such as leave the room."

Resources



Can I tell you about
Asperger Syndrome?
A guide for friends and family
by Jude Welton



Everybody is
Different
A book for young people
who have brothers or
sisters with Autism
by Fiona Bleach