

Managing Behaviour in The Resource Base

Autism Resource Base: Managing Behaviour

To be read in conjunction with the School Behaviour Policy and Physical Restraint Policy.

The Learning Environment

Autistic Spectrum Disorders cause difficulties in social interaction, communication and flexibility of thought. There are frequent sensory difficulties that cause children to either seek sensory stimulation or to avoid it. Autistic children, to a greater or lesser degree, have difficulty making sense of the world around them. All these difficulties may result in behaviour that adults find difficult to manage in some situations.

The difficulties experienced by children with autism can be minimised by setting up a learning environment that is structured, predictable and caring.

The day is structured so that each child knows what is going to happen next, reducing anxiety and frustration during transitions. Tasks and activities are readily accessible and children do not have to wait for things to be found. Interruptions are kept to the minimum and adults keep themselves focused on the children at all times.

As some negative behaviour becomes a means of communication for children with poor communication skills, we offer positive alternatives by using total communication. This includes clear speech, gesture, symbols, photographs, touch, movement and music.

The National Curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils. Tasks are set at a level that is neither too difficult nor too easy. Wherever possible, teaching involves practical examples so children learn through sensory experience which supports language and literacy.

If children regularly avoid certain tasks or become frustrated and distressed by certain tasks, the task should be broken down further and the child offered 'scaffolding' in order to make learning enjoyable and 'error free'.

It is sometimes easier to remove or substitute the cause of obsessive or disruptive behaviour than to try and change the behaviour in the short-term. For example a child who throws objects could be given a soft ball to throw instead and taught how to play with it.

Children must be prepared for change and new situations whenever possible. All children have a profile describing how autism affects their behaviour, perception and learning.

A Positive Environment

Children are praised for effort. A very high level of praise is given throughout the day.

Children are rewarded for completing tasks they least enjoy with activities they most enjoy. While children are generally discouraged from obsessive interests or repetitive behaviour they may be allowed to do them for a set length of time as a reward for completing other work.

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Rewards must be tangible and meaningful to the individual child. Food rewards may sometimes be used in very small quantities, for example, a single cheerio.

Opportunities for children to be involved in physical activities are offered frequently throughout the day. Physical activities are known to calm children with autism and help prevent tantrums.

Expectations of what children can do and how long they can attend in various circumstances are built up gradually, step by step. Children who are off-task are firmly but quietly directed back to their work. They may need reminding of what is on their timetable and what will happen when the task is complete.

Adults must be non-confrontational at all times. If one adult is having difficulty remaining calm or working with a particular child, it is acceptable and encouraged that they ask another adult to step in.

Children with Autism need to be taught how to interact with others. For younger children modelling skills and setting up opportunities to play together with adult support is important. Circle of Friends, social stories, and specific teaching about social understanding, social skills and emotions can help older children.

Some children with autism are vulnerable in the playground because they will copy others or do as they suggest without understanding the implications.

Respecting the needs of the whole class

When responding to challenging behaviour the needs of the whole class will be considered. Children with autism are easily upset by sudden loud noises or movements. Anybody who is causing a disruption may have to leave the classroom.

Removing a child from a situation where they are not coping should not be seen as a punishment and every attempt should be made to calm and distract the child beforehand.

Cards requesting 'breaks' and 'help' should be readily available and children taught to use them. However, care needs to be taken that 'break' cards are not used to avoid less favoured tasks.

One adult should never be left alone with a group of two or more young children if help is not within calling distance.

Never leave a child alone, but respect their need for privacy when they are distressed by giving the child some space.

Be supportive and caring towards a child who is having a tantrum but remain firm and consistent.

Structured Approach to Challenging Behaviour

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Challenging behaviour is stressful, dangerous or disruptive, and interferes with the learning of new skills.

When we want to change persistent challenging behaviour it is important to record all incidents of behaviour over a period of to 3 weeks taking note of:

- the setting in which the behaviour occurs, including the time and the people involved
- what triggers the behaviour
- a description of the behaviour
- the results of the behaviour .

The information gained in this way can be analysed to try and discover the reasons why the behaviour is occurring.

The child's strengths and needs should also be considered. With all the information and discussion amongst the adults who know the child, a strategy for changing the behaviour will be formulated.

Strategies should be discussed with parents and their ideas and suggestions valued

It is important that all staff follow behaviour management programmes exactly and that strategies are followed for 4 -6 weeks and then evaluated. Although detailed record keeping is no longer necessary at this stage, records should be kept giving a clear intention of how well the strategies are working.

Recording and Record Keeping

Pupils have a risk assessment sheet recording behaviour that might result in serious concern, injury or damage to property

Any incidents of behaviour that cause injury, damage to property or serious concern, must be recorded in the incident books that are kept in the Resource Base. Entries should be signed by the Manager of the Resource Base and serious incidents immediately reported to the Headteacher or Deputy and recorded on the Southwark Incident sheets.

For guidelines on physical restraint, refer to the policy on physical contact.

All adults must show the children respect and understanding. It is most important to have knowledge about autism and to know why unsociable behaviour may occur. It is also important to remember that an angry or frustrated child is a distressed child and to respond calmly.