A guide to supporting students with autism.
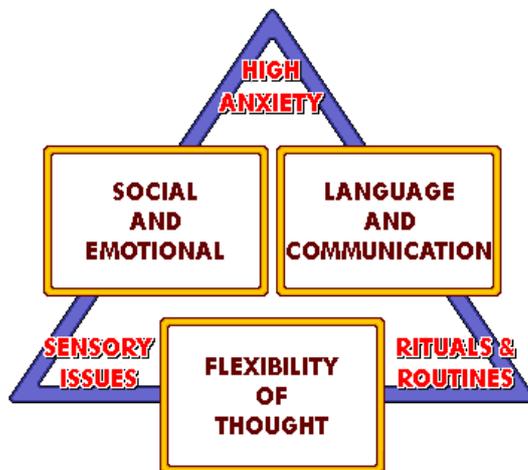
Some of which are in **Blue Zone**

AUTISM SPEAKS™
It's time to listen.

The aim of this document is to provide an overview of what autism is, how it can affect people, the inherent challenges in teaching and supporting people, and some positive strategies to provide the best support.

Part 1: What is Autism?

The National Autistic Society (NAS) say,

> "[it is] a **lifelong** developmental disability which affects 1 in 100 people in the UK".
>
> "It affects the way a person communicates and the way they experience the world around them".

Autism is not defined by how a child chooses to behave or react to different events, environments, and people. It is a neuro-developmental disorder that directly affects the way in which the brain functions.

It is this fundamental difference that makes the life for people with autism immediately more difficult, and thus requiring significant support in life.

The Triad of Impairment

The **Triad of Impairment** is a common reference to help explain the difficulties for people with autism. The difficulties are Social Communication, Social Interaction & Social Imagination.

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Social Communication	- Difficulty in using and understanding verbal & non-verbal language.
Flexibility of Thought	- Difficulties with planning ahead, being able to problem solve or predict if faced with a challenge. - Usually have extremely narrow interests, rituals that they will follow at certain parts of the day, and be adverse to change.
Social Interaction	- Difficulty in recognizing people's feelings. - Difficulty in being able to manage their own feelings. - They may stand too close to you, talk at you, prefer to be alone, and behave inappropriately as they don't understand appropriate social rules.
Social Imagination	- Difficulty in understanding & predicting other people's intentions & behaviour. - Difficulty in imagining situations outside their routine. - Difficulty in knowing what to do without structured instructions.

Part 2: What are the difficulties?

1. Students can take things incredibly literally so it is imperative that we use concrete, simple language to communicate.

Example

ASD Un-friendly	ASD Friendly (literal)
"It's break time. Go outside and play".	"Walk outside onto the playground and try to score a goal for 5 minutes. When this timer goes off the 5 minutes has finished".

2. Students may have difficulties sequencing & remembering verbal information that is given; therefore it is important to break information down into small, manageable pieces and for it to be visual.
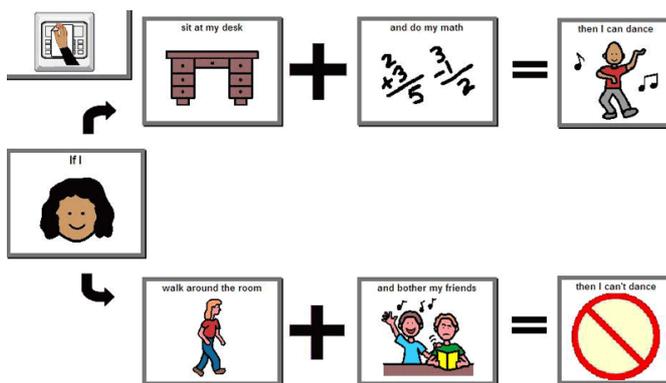
3. They can become overwhelmed by the sensory environment (i.e. noise, light, people), which may mean they need to remove themselves from the experience.

"Many people with autism have problems with sensory integration; some are **sensory avoiders**, where loud sounds, light touches and bright lights can cause discomfort; others are **sensory seekers** & crave deep pressure and other types of sensory input".

4. They have difficulties with transitions (activity to activity / place to place / starting and ending activities).
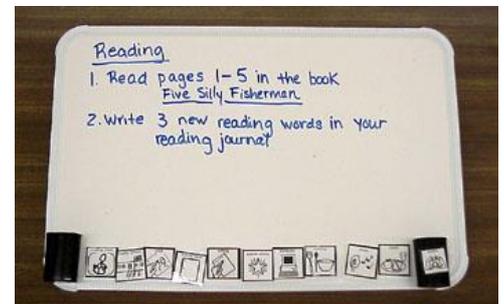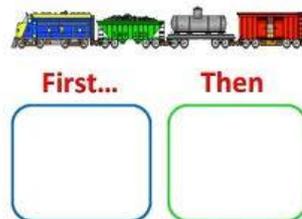
Using a timer lets the student know how long they have until something needs to change.

This can reduce anxiety around transition times.

Breaking the task down even further may be necessary.

Making simple, concrete language visual structures the activity.

This can reduce anxiety and develop independence.

Part 3: What support can we give?

The SPELL Framework (National Autistic Society)

The support given needs to be personalized and build on the strengths of the individual.

Structure	- This makes the world a more predictable, accessible & safe place. - It can aid independence, as students feel confident in their environment. - The student knows what is going to happen and what is expected of them.
Positive	- Builds on self-confidence and self-esteem by focusing on <u>strengths</u>, <u>interests</u> and <u>abilities</u>. - Realistic but high expectations. - <u>Positive</u> approaches to behaviour.
Empathy	- It is essential to be able to see the world through the students' perspective. - Understand what interests & motivates them, but also was distresses them. - To have a <u>calm</u>, <u>predictable</u>, <u>good humored</u>, & <u>empathetic</u> disposition. - Quality of relationship with the student in important – <u>respect</u>.
Low Arousal	- The environment and approach need to be <u>calm</u> and <u>well structured</u> to reduce anxiety. - Minimise the distractions to encourage engagement. - Understanding individual sensory needs will help create a calm environment; noise levels, colour scheme, odours, lighting & clutter.
Links	- Create open links between people and agencies (parents, school, medical, therapy, sensory).

SPELL: Examples

Structure	1. Use of visual forms of communication. 2. Visually structured activities (sequence the task in writing or images). 3. Try to keep the lesson or interaction format similar so the student knows what to expect each time it happens.
Positive	1. Find out why the behaviour might be happening & provide positive support. 2. Use personal interests of student's in order to motivate their engagement. 3. Set challenges to learn new skills but take your lead from the student.
Empathy	1. Get to know them and what makes them tick; share what you like/don't like (verbal, written, images). 2. Listen and support them through their anxieties, & offer solutions. 3. Don't take things personally.
Low Arousal	1. Visually structure the activities → reduce anxiety → engaged in task. 2. To know that student's may need 'their own time' to fulfill a sensory need.
Links	1. Speak to Form Tutors, Blue Zone Pastoral Manager and AHT. 2. Make use of therapy team for therapeutic advice.

We need to approach a challenging behaviour as a **detective** because our overall aim is to investigate what is causing it & how we can help:

This needs to be personalised to each individual

Why has the behaviour happened?

What positive support can we offer to find an alternative behaviour?

We must keep this
in mind if we are going to
provide positive support
for our students with ASD:

**All Behaviour
happens
for a reason ...**

- To meet individual's needs
- As an expression of how they
  are feeling
- To reflect any physical or
  mental health issue.