

Supporting Autistic Young People for Foster Carers

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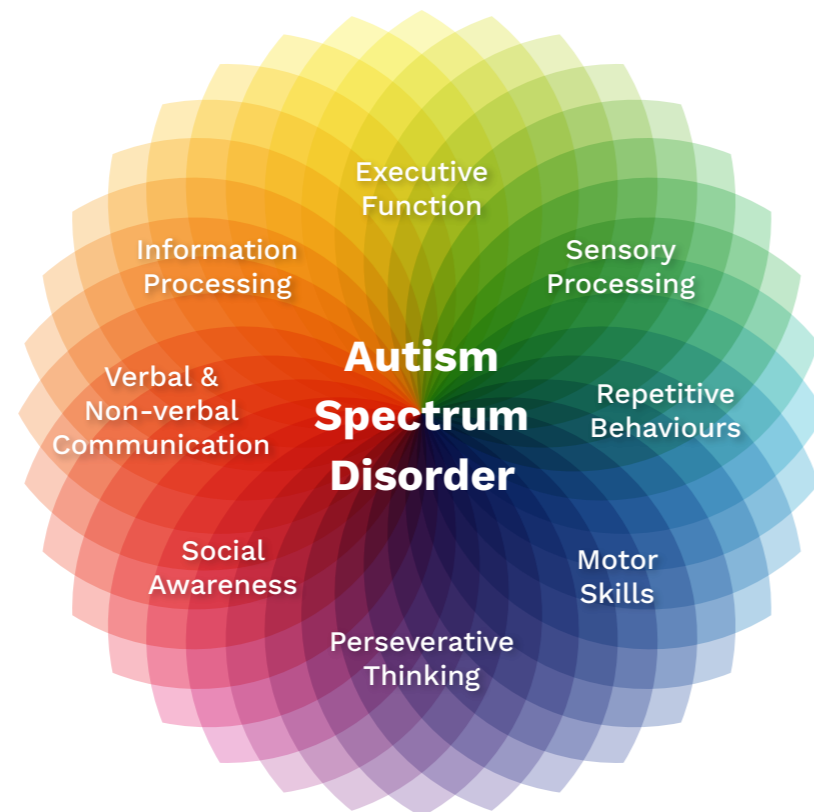
What is autism?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that can be characterised by a person's differences. This can be their social interactions, communication skills, sensory needs, and restrictive and repetitive behaviours.

No two people with autism are the same, as each individual will have different traits. Generally, autistic people see and experience the world differently, often having heightened sensory stimulation and a different perspective on situations.

The autism spectrum is being recognised through a wheel as opposed to a line, this way it identifies some individuals may have strengths in some traits, and needs in others, but it does not categorise them as a functioning level.

Autistic individuals have an array of positive characteristics, these can be displayed through attention to detail, deep focus, observational skills, absorbing and retaining facts, visual skills, expertise, methodical approaches, novel approaches, creativity, tenacity, and resilience, accepting of difference, and integrity.



Generally, autistic people see and experience the world differently.

Some general, helpful principles

Getting to know your child and their individual characteristics is likely to be more helpful than trying to apply general parenting strategies.

- Make use of the support that is available via your agency. Caring for a child / young person with autism can be challenging at times and some advice and support will always help you think through strategies you may not have thought of.
- Your child may find it difficult to understand or label how they are feeling so it is important to try to understand their behaviour in the context of what it may be saying about their feelings, e.g. going into a corner, hiding their face and covering their ears may be a sign of being over whelmed or of anxiety.
- It is important to understand your child and their world, rather than trying to get them to “fit” into the world around them.
- As you learn things may go wrong but do not be disheartened or view things going wrong as a failure. Remember you are both learning about each other and in any learning we all make mistakes from time to time.
- Play does not mean you need always join in with your child. Whilst it is good to engage with your child it is also necessary to let them explore their world through play as all children do when learning. Their play may also look different from that of neurotypical children so be mindful of not trying to promote “normal” play e.g. a child being happier playing alone or stacking/lining up and arranging toys.
- Try to generally keep things calm for the child / young person. Neurodiverse individuals may be more prone to extreme arousal in some, more chaotic environments.

- Try to be consistent and predictable so your child learns they can rely on your responses in everyday interactions or situations.
- Where possible, as you get to know your child well, try to predict likely difficult situations and try to prepare your child and plan how to manage if your child starts to become distressed.
- Sometimes small transitions may be a significant stressor for a child who is neurodiverse so always make sure your child is prepared for transitions (see page 6).
- Work closely with the agency around preparing for the placement. A placement of a child / young person who is neurodiverse is likely to require even more careful planning and preparation.
- It is important to recognise that an autistic child may still experience attachment issues and recognising these issues and working through them may need additional support to work through these issues. Similarly, there may be a degree of trauma and, due to the difficulties a neurodiverse individual may experience, they may find it hard to process or understand these emotions and some additional support may be needed to support the child / young person.

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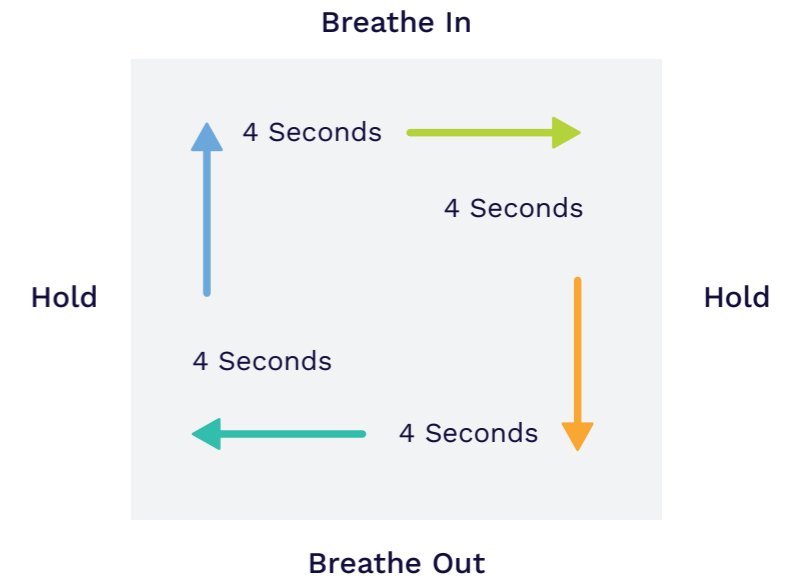
Top Tips for Supporting Autistic Young People

- 1** Establish a daily schedule to provide your young person structure and predictability.
- 2** Give your young person 'downtime' at times. To help them process the events of the day and lessen overstimulation, encourage them to spend time alone engaging in a favourite activity.
- 3** Your young person may occasionally feel extremely anxious, which can result in a crisis or shutdown. To know how to react, it may be beneficial to research the distinction.
- 4** Try to refrain from impulsive actions or remarks when under stress. For now, let go. Talk to your young person about what happened and what would be beneficial going forward when you both feel calm.
- 5** Together with your young person, create a toolbox full of techniques you can use when they are feeling down.
- 6** Help your young person get ready for change by writing out and planning the specifics or having them make a visual memo to help them understand and retain the knowledge. You can also create Social Stories... see pages 10, 11 and 12.
- 7** When possible, use visual tools like now and next cards or a visual timeline.
- 8** Things can go wrong, and that is okay. Debrief with your young person and learn from experience.

Creating a toolbox

Square breathing

Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breathe out for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds and repeat. Continue breathing in this way until you feel calmer, or time yourself for 2 minutes.



The Five Senses Grounding Technique

List 5 things you can see, list 4 things you can feel, list 3 things you can hear, list 2 things you can smell, list 1 thing you can taste.

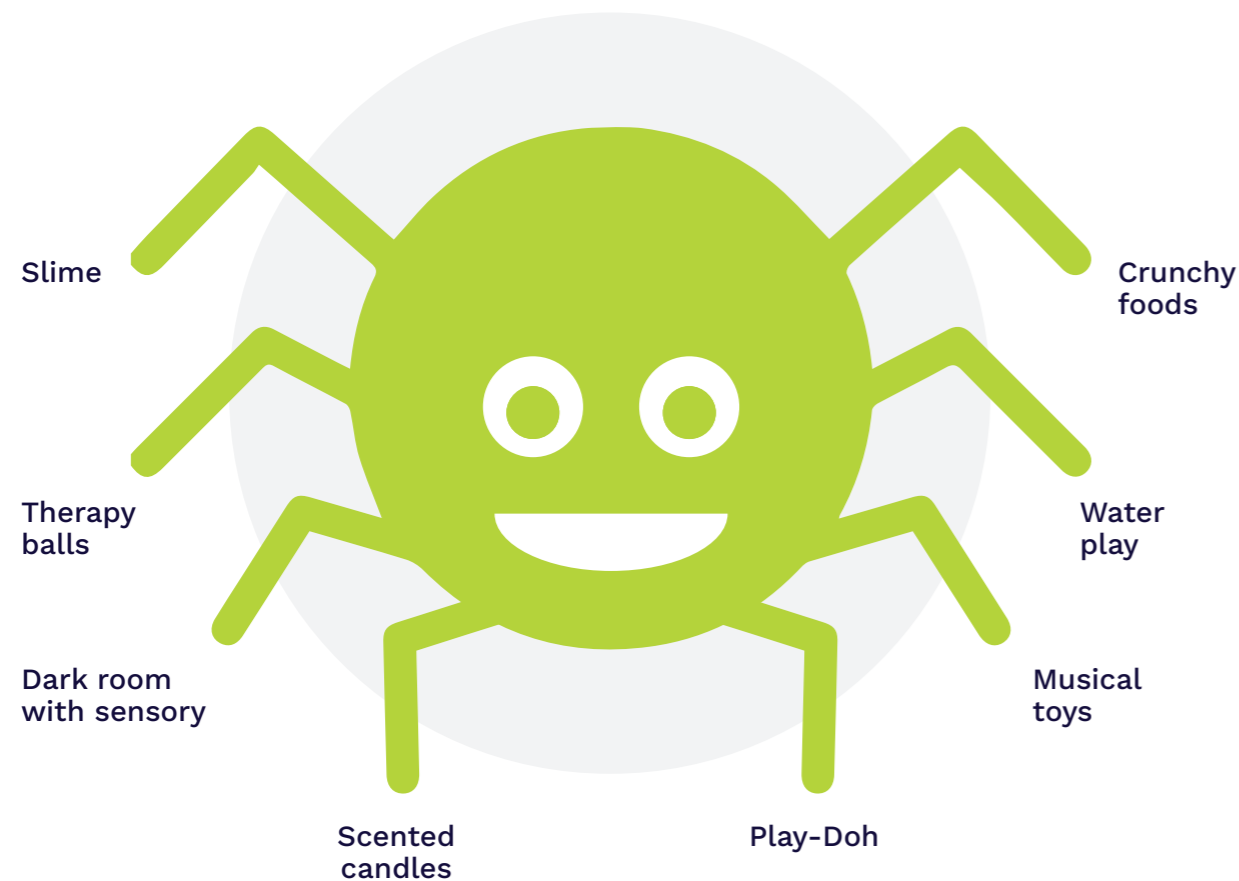
- 5**
- 4**
- 3**
- 2**
- 1**

Sensory spider

Work with your young person to develop a sensory spider which will support them during a crisis.

Think about developing a green sensory spider (what helps to keep them calm) and a red sensory spider (things to avoid).

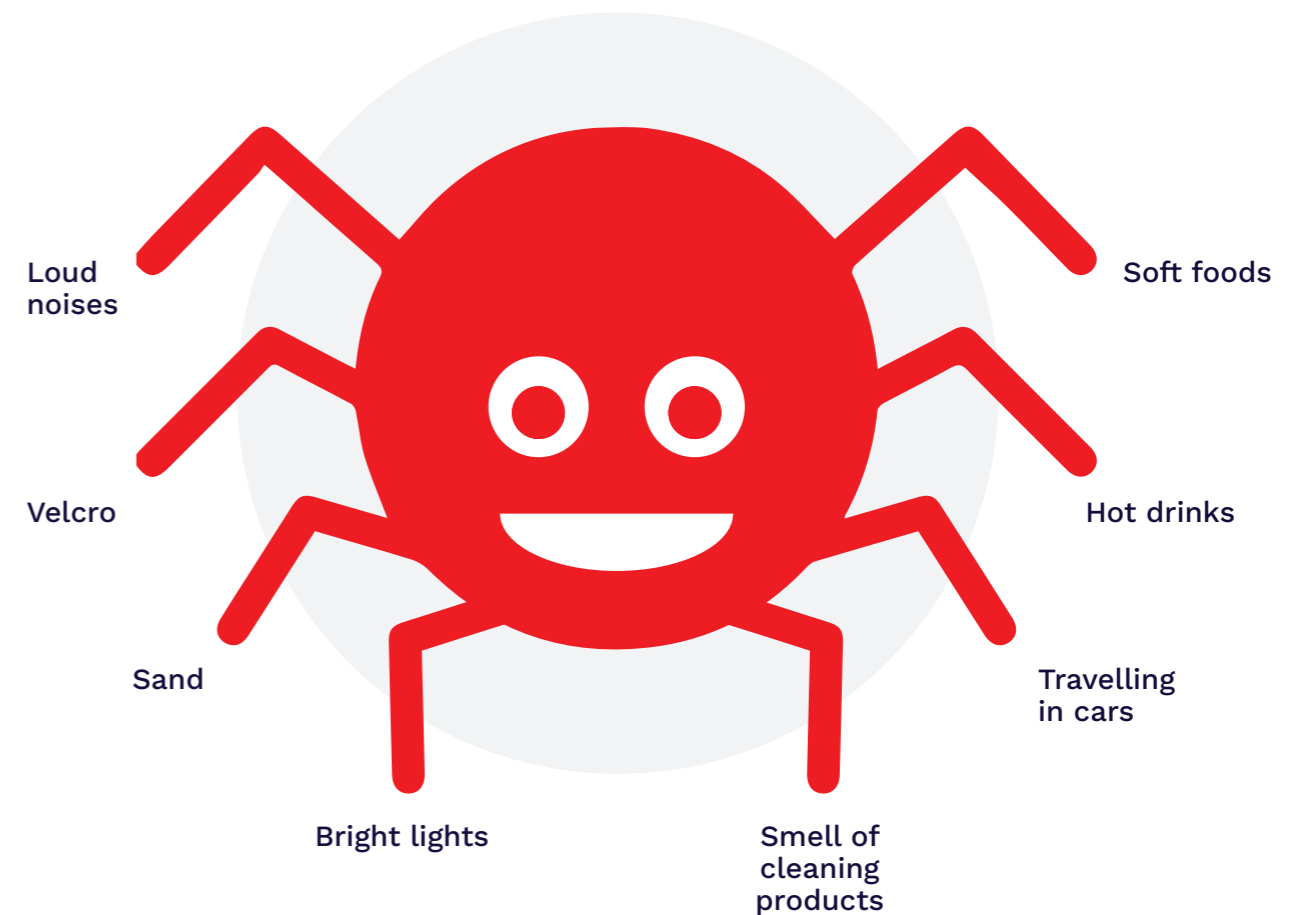
What helps to keep them calm



Support during a crisis.



Things to avoid



Social Story

What is a social story?

“A social story describes a situation, skill, or concept according to 10 criteria”

Carole Gray

The goal:

To share accurate information that is descriptive, and that will be meaningful to the individual. Providing information with the aim of keeping the individual physically, emotionally, and socially safe.

Story in 3 Parts with a Title:

Introduction

‘The Body’ (explanation)

Summary

Do's

- Discuss with key people around the person
- Carry out observations
- Agree the topic and title
- Tailor to the persons functional ability, experiences, and level of understanding
- Use first and third pronouns
- Use names in the story to personalise
- Positive vocabulary
- Clear, accurate and empathetic information
- Ask “why + how” questions
- Factual
- Objective
- Explain and guide
- Person Centred/Focused



Don'ts

- Start with ‘you’
- Negative vocabulary
- Assumptions/opinions
- Accusative
- Subjective
- Abstractive or figurative
- Set rules or sanctioning's
- Disorganised
- Too long or contain too much information



Social Story Example 1

Topic

Moving into the next year group.

Purpose

Child is feeling anxious about the transition.

Content

There are lots of classes in our school.

When children get older, they move into a new class.

Ella will be moving into a new class.

Ella's new teacher will be Mrs Smith.

Ella has met Mrs Smith.

Mrs Smith will help Ella.

Ella will be in a class with Sophie and Rosie and other children who attend the school.

In her new class Ella will do reading and writing.

Ella likes these activities.

Mrs Smith will look after Ella in her new class.

Social Story

Example 2

Topic

Loud music in the car.

Purpose

Peter does not like loud music.

Content

Sometimes we go in the car with Gary and Sally and Megan.



Gary, Sally and Megan like listening to loud music in the car.



Peter does not like loud music.



Ear defenders stop loud sound.



Peter has ear defenders.

Peter can use his ear defenders in the car.



If Peter wears ear defenders in the car he will not hear loud music.



Creating or using a social story can help you to understand how the autistic person perceives different situations.

www.autism.org.uk

Supporting Non-Verbal Autistic Young People

Getting and keeping their attention:

Use their name at the beginning of a conversation so they know you are talking to them.

Make sure they are paying attention before asking a question or giving an instruction.

Use their hobbies and interests to engage them.

Processing information

Say less and say it clearly.

Pause between words and phrases to give the person time to process what you have said.

Don't use too many questions.

Use visual supports – symbols, Makaton, timetables, Social Stories, now and next, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), picture of reference.

Be aware of the environment as it could impact their senses and how much they can process.

Avoid open-ended questions

Keep questions short.

Ask only the most necessary questions.

Structure your questions.

Be specific.

Use of language tips

Some autistic young people can be literal in their understanding of language so it is important to be clear:

Instead of asking “were you born in a barn” ask the young person to “please close the door.”

If giving an instruction phrase it as an instruction E.G. “time for homework now” rather than “would you like to do your homework” which invites a “yes” or “no” response – unless they can choose whether to or not of course.

Use non-committal phrases to allow for uncontrollable changes, e.g. instead of saying “swimming is on every Wednesday”, say “swimming is usually on Wednesday” as otherwise the young person may expect to go even on Christmas day.

Supporting and managing behaviours that may be challenging

Although our strategy is to accept individuals' unique neurodiverse features there may be some behaviours that present a major obstacle to the individual. Behaviours that potentially do significant harm to the individual or present significant risk to others may need addressing for increasing the individuals' opportunities.

Generally, any behaviours that challenge serves a valid purpose for the child / young person. By problem solving through simple reflection on occasions where difficulties may have arisen, possible reasons for the behaviour may be apparent. Structuring your reflections to trying to answer a few simple questions may support this process. Firstly, try to consider the situation from the child / young person's perspective and try to answer the following:

- Where was the child / young person?
- What was happening at the time? Were they engaged in an activity or task? Were they sat down or active?
- What was the environment like? Was it quiet? Noisy? Busy? Hot / Cold etc?
- What had happened leading up to the incident and immediately before?
- What changed for them as a result of the incident?

Whilst it can be very difficult to step outside of our emotional responses

to behaviours that may challenge, it is important that we try and avoid our own “mental traps” that can undermine our confidence and ability to rationalise situations. It can be easy to fall into traps such as thinking “they don't like me”, “I just can't meet their needs” etc. that will undermine the ability to think rationally.

By thinking situations through in a structured way, it may allow you to find patterns that may indicate the purpose of the behaviour. It may require thinking through several situations before you are able to reach an understanding of what may be going on so it can be very helpful to maintain a written record of your structured reflections to help consider together.

Once this understanding is established (or an informed guess can be made) think about how the child / young person can be helped to utilise a more acceptable means of achieving the goal or for ways you can plan to intervene before an incident occurs. For example, if you found that a young person started to become distressed or angry in a noisy, busy environment after 10 – 15 minutes, try keeping stops initially to 5 minutes, leaving before the young person becomes distressed and praising them for excellent coping skills. Coping strategies and increased tolerance can then be developed over time to enable the young person to engage for longer.

Ultimately, if we can teach a young person a skill or method to achieve what they seek in a more effective (and acceptable) way, the need to use behaviours that challenge becomes redundant. Support in using this approach can be accessed by talking to your Supervising Social Worker. This additional level of support can complement training you may have had in undertaking your role as foster carers and the range of techniques covered in this booklet.

Coping with unusual or “bizarre” behaviour

Some children / young people may engage in some behaviours that others may view as strange, unusual, or even “bizarre”. Some individuals may have developed sensory behaviours that involve unusual, complex, whole-body movements. Some behaviours may involve forms of echolalia where certain phrases or words may be repeated (these may sometimes be a little embarrassing).

Whilst it can be difficult to be in a public area with a lot of people around when a young person is displaying unusual behaviour the key thing to ask yourself is, is the young person putting themselves or others at risk? For example, if a young person gets excited and flaps their hands whilst making unusual noises when buses drive past, this will not pose any risk to anyone. In cases like this, it is best just to recognise that the child is neurodiverse and accept the behaviour as

being one of their personal quirks. There is no need to intervene or try and stop the young person acting in this way even if it is drawing attention from members of the public. Sometimes it is necessary to be prepared to wear virtual armour against social embarrassment in the sound knowledge that you are taking the right approach.

Some behaviour may develop however, that can pose a risk. For example, some young people who are neurodiverse find it difficult wearing clothing and will remove clothing at the first opportunity. In this case it would not be appropriate to allow, for example a 14-year old young person to be removing their clothes in the middle of town. In cases such as this an approach using social stories, supported by clear stimulus control and reinforcement for appropriately wearing clothing would be required. For example, a rule about only being undressed in the bathroom, changing cubical at the pool or their own bedroom could be supported by reminders through social stories when going out, about keeping clothes on with praise and / or reward for keeping clothes on.

This may be an area that some additional support can be accessed from your Supervising Social Worker.

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Helpful Resources

Websites

National Autistic Society:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Options Autism:

<https://www.optionsautism.co.uk/blog/2018/07/30/autism-helpsheets/>

Autism community and forum:

<https://wrongplanet.net/>

YouTubers/Youtube videos

Dan Jones: Aspie World

Purple Ella

Rosie King

Carly Fleischmann

Books

For primary-aged children

All Cats are on the Autism Spectrum:

Kathy Hoopman

Dragon and His Friend:

Steve Herman

Different Like Me:

Jennifer Elder

For secondary-aged children

Freaks, Geeks and Asperger Syndrome:

Luke Jackson

The Social Survival Guide for Teens on the Autism Spectrum:

Lindsey Sterling

The Awesome Autistic Guide for Trans Teens:

Yenn Purkis and Sam Rose

The Young Autistic Adult's Independence Handbook:

Haley Moss

For foster carers

The reason I jump:

Naoki Higashida

The New Social Story Book:

Carol Grey

Successful Social Stories For Young Children with Autism:

Dr Siobhan Timmins

Successful Social Stories For School and College Students with Autism:

Dr Siobhan Timmins

The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome:

Tony Attwood

Women and Girls with Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Sarah Hendrickx

The Explosive Child:

Ross Greene



www.nfa.co.uk