

Additional Assessment Questions **Autism spectrum Disorder**

Child's medical/social history

1. Any concerns about hearing/vision/speech?
2. Were all development checks attended?
3. Did the child attend Nursery/Playgroup?
Any concerns about behaviour there?
Did the child play with/make friends with other children?
4. How is the child getting on at school?
Progress in learning?
Friendships?
What does teacher say about the child?
How did the child cope with new school, changing schools/classes?
What happens if routine changes?
What does child say about school?
Any bullying?
Happy?
5. What are family relationships like?
How does child get on with/play with siblings?
6. Does the child have any obsessions or rituals?
What happens if these are thwarted?
7. Dressing/undressing?
Feeding/eating?
Sleeping?
Does the child have difficulties with physical activities, e.g., catching a ball, riding a bike?
8. Any health concerns in other family members?

Handout for Parents and Practitioners

Helping children diagnosed in the autistic spectrum

Teamwork

It is important to ensure that everyone who may be involved with a child (e.g., teachers, dinner ladies, caretakers, etc.) is aware of the nature of the child's difficulties. This helps to foster understanding and avoids negative labelling of the child as 'naughty' or 'difficult'.

Dealing with challenging behaviour

The behaviour of children with autism spectrum disorders can be very challenging at times. If the child engages in 'difficult' behaviour, it is important for adults around him or her to try to keep their cool. Shouting, noise and rapid movement can escalate the child's own stress levels and lead to loss of control. It is important to become aware of the trigger signals (such as hand flapping, the need to hold on to a particular toy) that may indicate that the child is becoming stressed.

There is little point in trying to stop harmless ritualistic behaviour (such as flapping hands, rocking). This usually serves the purpose of helping the child to calm him/herself down. However, potentially harmful behaviour such as hitting themselves or others, scratching or biting should be discouraged. Distracting the child with something less potentially damaging can often be useful.

Parents should also try to teach the child a socially acceptable way of saying 'Please leave me alone' or 'This is too hard for me.'

Providing a quiet area where the child knows he/she can retreat to can often be quite helpful. If no quiet area is available, headphones can also be quite effective.

Dealing with change

Try to keep daily routines simple and predictable. If the daily routine has to change for any reason, try to ensure that the change is discussed well in advance. If a major change (such as a house move or change of classroom) is inevitable, it can be helpful to make up a scrapbook about the change. This can include pictures (or photographs) and other detail about what is likely to happen. The child can then use this book as a reference point every time the proposed change is discussed.

If possible, introduce change gradually. For example, visit a different room with familiar people, introduce new teachers and members of staff involved with the child gradually and well before any change is due to take place.

Make sure that instructions are kept simple and only given one at a time.

NOTE: This leaflet is designed to be used as part of a wider conversation with your practitioner. If you want to take an online course for parents, visit www.inourplace.co.uk.

Visual timetables

Children who may be on the autistic spectrum often find visual instructions and organisational aids more helpful than verbal ones. If a child has particular difficulties in organising him/herself or has concerns about when certain events should happen, parents might like to consider using a visual representation (such as a drawing of a clock) and pictures to illustrate what is expected of the child.

Visual timetables can also be used to teach children the sequence of days and time concepts such as 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'.

They can also be used to facilitate interaction by providing a visual prompt to help the child discuss what he/she has done during the day/week.

Star charts and rewards

Some children with social communication difficulties respond well to star charts and other reward systems for good or appropriate behaviour. If parents are reporting problems with temper tantrums or bed-wetting, it may be helpful if they try giving the child a star every time he/she behaves well or does not wet the bed. An appropriate reward at the end of an agreed period of time may be effective in modifying the child's behaviour, particularly if parents are able to link any reward to the child's particular interests or preoccupations.

See an example of a star chart in the handouts at the end of Part 4.

Social stories

Social stories are used to explain social situations to children on the autistic spectrum in terms of relevant social cues and often to provide information about appropriate responses. They provide answers to the 'who, what, when, where and why?' questions of everyday life.

They are written in response to individual children's needs. These needs are usually identified by:

1. Direct observation of situations the child finds difficult
2. The child's response to a particular social situation that might suggest that they have 'misread' the cues
3. A social skills assessment.

After needs have been assessed, social stories can then be used to:

1. Describe situations in terms of relevant social cues and/or appropriate responses in a non-threatening way
2. Translate goals into easily understandable steps
3. Help children to cope with changes in routine or understand concepts such as 'forgetting' or someone 'changing their mind'
4. Address a wide range of behaviour such as aggression, fear, obsessions and compulsions.

Key points when using social stories

1. Introduce the story when the child is not anxious – i.e., before the event.
2. Ask carers/teachers to read the story in different settings – to help with generalisation.
3. Social stories are used to teach social understanding over rote compliance (The only information we generalise goes to long-term memory – to store in LTM we have to have meaning and understand the information).
4. Stories should be used to describe more than direct.
5. The goal is NOT to change behaviour but may be the reason you think about doing the story. The goal is to share any information that the child may be missing that may then make the situation more comfortable for them.
6. Each social story describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses.
7. It is important to try to observe or experience in order to understand what the student's perspective might be.
8. The child's needs determine the topic of the story.
9. The child's perspective determines the focus of the story.
10. 50% of social stories should be written to praise what the child does well.
11. Each story should have an introduction, body and conclusion.
12. Stories should be written in the first and third person.
13. Stories should use positive language and state desired responses – if there is a need to refer to negative behaviour this should be done carefully in general terms: 'Sometimes people make mistakes'.
14. Each social story should be literal and avoid ambiguous language.
15. Wherever possible, introduce changes in routine by using 'insurance policy' words like *usually* and *sometimes*.
16. You can use alternative vocabulary to avoid words that may elicit anxiety.
 - different = another
 - change = replace
 - new = better or anothere.g., 'I may have a different teacher' could be, 'I may have another teacher'.
17. Use concrete, easy-to-understand text with pictures.
18. One simple illustration may be more effective than using an icon over every word.
19. You can use photos, but watch out for extraneous information.

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Solihull Approach Resource: The School Years

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20. Each story follows the social story ratio (sentences can be partial or complete):

- directive and/or control sentences
- 2–5 descriptive, perspective, affirmative and/or co-operative sentences
- each story should contain descriptive sentences. These are accurate, assumption-free statements of facts
- a social story MAY contain perspective sentences. Most of the time, perspective sentences describe the thoughts and feelings of other people
- a social story MAY contain affirmative sentences. These enhance the meaning of surrounding statements, and may express a commonly shared opinion within a given culture, e.g., 'This is OK', 'This is a good thing to do'.
- each social story MAY contain directive sentences. A directive sentence identifies a possible response, and/or gently guides behaviour, e.g., 'I will try to', 'I will work on', 'I could do x or I could do y'. Some children can come up with their own responses.

21. Social stories can be written down. The child can then be asked to read the story to him/herself every day initially and then gradually fade as the message is understood, or, if the child has trouble reading, the story can either be read to the child or recorded for them to use. Websites and books are available on social stories.