



Children's Therapy Team

Speech and Language Therapy Advice Sheet

Supporting young people with social communication and interaction differences/autism in secondary school

Every person is different. The following strategies are things to consider in consultation with the young person, the parent/carer and any relevant agencies involved.

Create a predictable routine: Support the young person to have a routine and aids to support the daily routines. This can be diaries (digital or paper) with an opportunity to communicate any changes through email or discussion.

Plan for changes: Prepare the person in advance about changes by informing and discussing them.

Allocate time for emotional regulation: Timetable times during the day with reduced demands when the young person has time to do what calms and relaxes them e.g. access a quiet room. This supports them to be ready for learning.

Identify support needed: Establish the young person's level of skills and abilities. Identify what support they need to access the lessons. For example they may need extra support outside the class for a specific subject. They may need support with transition to busy classes at busier times. They may be accessing the school from a different entrance.

Support the person to seek help when needed: Empower the young person to seek support when they need it. This may be for different things such as lesson related queries or about how they manage different situations that may make them anxious.

Named key worker: Identify who is the key worker with the young person. Ensure the key person is available most days and if not who the young person can go to. The key worker should be an advocate for the young person and a consistent support system to take their worries to.

Differentiate the lesson to fit the person's needs: Get to know the person's needs and strengths. Most young people benefit from visuals that support what is being said. This can be beneficial for most of his peers. This can be done in many ways e.g. by providing activities in writing, supporting any new subject with information on a power point presentation that they can access at a later point or modelling what they are expected to do.

Avoid non literal language or explain what it means: *Say what you mean.* If you are using metaphors, irony, idioms or sarcasm it will lead to confusion and misunderstandings, e.g. ‘What time do you call this?’

Provide instruction in chunks: When speaking to the person offer information in small amounts and allow the person time to process.

Allow time to process questions: When asking questions in the classroom allow everyone time to think of the answer.

Focus on new vocabulary: Support new vocabulary by linking it with their existing knowledge. Explore what the word means by asking the person what they know, fill in gaps. Talk about how the word looks and sounds. Create a definition for the word and link key vocabulary that relates to the word.

Check that the young person has understood: There are many ways to do this. Find out what is preferable to the young person. Maybe ask them to use their own words to repeat/rephrase what was said.

Encourage the young person to ask when they are unsure: It is helpful for the young person to know that when they have not understood something is not their fault. Work in supporting the young person to be aware of what was difficult or unclear and how to ask for repetition, clarification or help.

Discuss with the young person their preferred way of communication: This may be discussion, email, text or visuals. This could depend on the purpose of the communication e.g. informing of any changes, giving out homework, asking questions.

Set up access to one to one sessions and/or a social skills group: This needs to be available on an ongoing basis throughout their time in secondary school. It supports the young person to learn and receive support on daily changes during everyday interaction.

If you have tried using these strategies and you are still concerned about the impact of your child’s communication differences, you can:

- Look on our website for further information and advice:

<https://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/childrens-centre/your-childs-hospital-journey/therapy-services/speech-and-language-therapy/>

- Contact your Specialist Advisory Teacher if the child has a diagnosis of autism
- Contact the Parent Educational Psychologist telephone line <https://www.york.org.uk/families/Local%20Offer/Education/Specialist%20Teaching%20Team/Universal%20Offer%20Autumn%202023%20v1.pdf>
- Contact us via our ‘Request for Help’ line – see our website for further details

You can access further information from the following websites:

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