

A photograph of several children standing at a water fountain. They are wearing white t-shirts that have been splattered with various colors of paint (red, blue, yellow, orange, purple). One child in the foreground is wearing a white baseball cap. They are holding hands and looking towards the fountain. The background shows green trees and a clear blue sky.

2008

“Just because 29 other children are doing something, how am I supposed to know I should be doing it too?”

If it works for children with autism it will work for many others.

This calendar was inspired by children and young people with autism and their families.

TreeHouse is the national charity for autism education. The TreeHouse vision is to 'transform through education the lives of children with autism and the lives of their families.' The TreeHouse Constructive Campaigning Parent Support Project is an innovative and exciting project which puts parents and carers at the centre of improving the provision of autism education. It is supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and other funders until 2009.

The project is working with parent and carer autism support groups in ten local authority areas – Birmingham, Ealing, Havering, Lambeth, Lincolnshire, Medway, Oldham, Poole, Redcar and Cleveland, and Staffordshire.

Parents and carers in the project recognise that schools try to do their best for all children. However, school staff may not always have had the opportunity to learn about special educational needs such as autism, which is an extremely complex condition.

A recent survey carried out by the National Union of Teachers concluded: less than a third of teachers (30%) felt confident in teaching children with autistic spectrum disorders. Over two thirds wanted training in this area and over three quarters identified lack of professional development as the main barrier to teaching children with autism.

Several parents and carers involved in the project have contributed to autism awareness training for teachers and other professionals. They are highlighting the issues and needs of children and young people with autism from a parents' perspective, drawing on their individual experiences about what works for their child and may work with other children with autism.

This calendar can be used as a flexible resource – for example as the basis for a school or class assembly or professional development day to highlight the ways school staff can make reasonable adjustments. Local parents or carers can use it to deliver a presentation or introduce a discussion about autism.

For more information about involving parents and carers in improving the provision of education for children and young people in your area please contact the TreeHouse Constructive Campaigning Parent Support Project on 020 8815 5443 or visit www.treehouse.org.uk



*The national charity for autism education
Constructive Campaigning Parent Support Project
www.treehouse.org.uk*



“It will take you a while to get to know me – my autism is different to everyone else’s.”

January 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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“It will take you a while to get to know me – my autism is different to everyone else’s.”

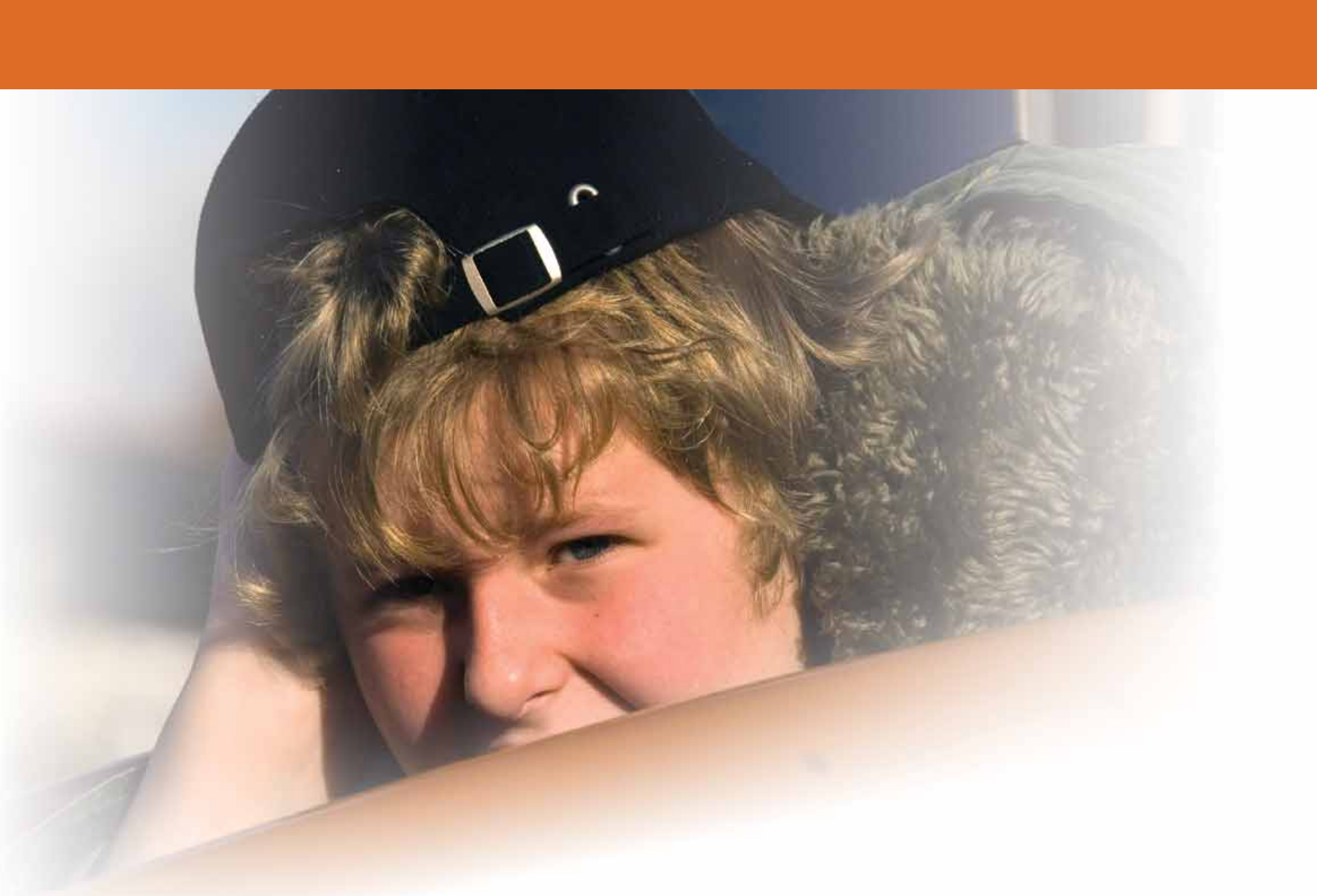


- autism is a general label for a complex disorder.
- autism is a spectrum disorder, so every child is affected in a different way – treat each child as an individual.
- getting to know a child with autism can be tricky – finding out what they do and don’t like is usually a good place to start.
- ask as many people as possible for information – ask the child, ask parents/ carers, ask previous teachers, and take the time to observe the child. Then draw up a pupil profile with their photograph and an explanation of their autism. This may include information on sensory issues, social skills, likes and dislikes and rewards which may be appropriate and effective. Make several copies to share with other teachers and learning support staff.

Example

Many children with autism have difficulty understanding and responding appropriately in social situations. A child may start to become disruptive or difficult to manage in a classroom setting; this is a sign that he or she is struggling and needs some assistance or a break from the situation. Another child may become withdrawn and compliant – equally in need of help and desperate to conform.

And it may be different tomorrow.



“If you use my name when you speak I am more likely to focus and know you want me to listen.”

February 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“If you use my name when you speak I am more likely to focus and know you want me to listen.”



- children with autism find social cues and expectations difficult. Most children know that when the teacher speaks they should listen to find out if they need to respond. A child with autism may not know this.
- if giving individual instructions, use the child's name first, so that he knows he needs to listen and respond.
- if giving group instructions, the child with autism may need to know this includes him. Simple additions in the instruction can help as in the example below, although it may be useful to explain to the rest of the class that this is to help the child and is not sarcasm or picking on any one child.

Example

“Can yellow group, Adam that includes you, please put their books away and collect their coats.”



“Give me precise instructions and use simple language so that I understand exactly what you want me to do.”

March 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
31					1	2
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“Give me precise instructions and use simple language so that I understand exactly what you want me to do.”



- understanding language and the social cues that go with it can be very difficult for a child with autism – so if there is a lot of language this can be even more confusing.
- keeping language clear and precise is harder than it sounds. Think about which words carry important information (key words) – these are the words that the child needs to hear in order to understand.
- repetition of key words, stressing key words with volume, using pictorial aids or pointing to key words on a board when speaking can all help.

Example

“Go and wash your hands in the toilets” is an instruction which is open to interpretation. A child without autism may predictably go to the cloakroom, wash their hands in the basin using soap and hot water and then return to class. A child with autism may interpret this differently and wash their hands in the toilet itself.



“I enjoy routine and can find unstructured time and play difficult. I may need your help to use this time effectively.”

April 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“I enjoy routine and can find unstructured time and play difficult. I may need your help to use this time effectively.”



- providing choices is a good place to start in supporting children with autism during less structured times of the day. This can be achieved with verbal instruction and with visual aids.
- peers can help the child with autism by modelling activities that could be completed. Buddying systems work well during unstructured times. Buddies also need regular support to ensure they are comfortable about their role and responsibilities.
- play times are really tricky as they can be unstructured and busy. Spend some time observing the child from a distance. Be sure that they feel safe, know what their options are, and who to go to if they need help. Buddies and/or support from an adult may be necessary for parts or all of playtime.

Example

Make sure buddies are informed about the unique needs of the child with autism. Provide them with information on the child and strategies which can be used with them. Strategies could include, keeping language simple, giving the child with autism longer to respond, and using visual aids.



“Tell me what’s going to happen today – it helps me if I have clear structure with some detail.”

May 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“Tell me what’s going to happen today – it helps me if I have clear structure with some detail.”



Everyone likes structure, it helps us plan our day and know what to expect. Children with autism are much more comfortable when they have a clear plan to their day. Conversely unexpected changes to the day’s plan or weekly routine can be highly stressful experiences for a child with autism.

The following approaches may help with this:

- decide what and how much information to provide. The language needs to be precise, but quick to deliver, so keep things simple (key words, written cues, photos, pictures/symbols). There should also be a clear, repetitive format when delivering information – first, then, next, last.
- it is important to decide when to give this information. Some children benefit from small block planning (before morning break, before lunch, after lunch, end of day), others from whole day planning. Short blocks can be a good starting point.
- these approaches are very individual and can be described in a child’s profile (or ‘passport’ as it is sometimes called).

Example

Unusual events, such as sports day can be highly stressful for children with autism. Reasonable adjustments schools can consider are:

- *a programme of the day – making a visual timetable of the day’s activities if necessary.*
- *explaining what clothes the child might need to wear, if these differ from the typical daily uniform.*
- *informing the child of changes in their home time, and different locations e.g. fields, obstacle course.*
- *highlighting and discussing any changes in the child’s usual routine.*



“Sometimes I may take you literally. If you say you will be back in a second, that’s what I expect you to do.”

June 2008

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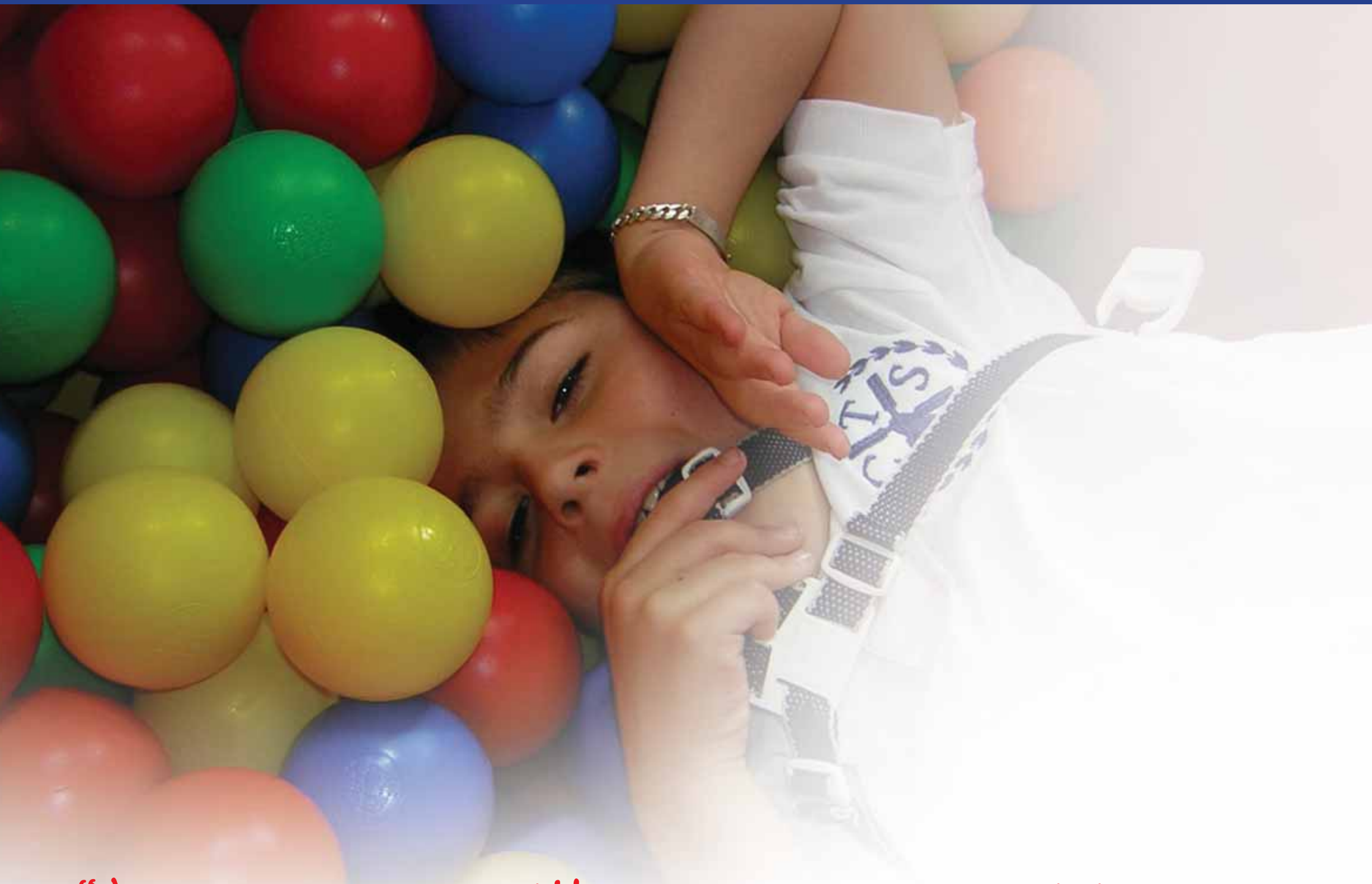
“Sometimes I may take you literally. If you say you will be back in a second, that’s what I expect you to do.”



- think about your language – keep it clear and precise, sticking to key words where possible.
- metaphors, jokes and sarcasm don’t work. If they are used they will need to be explained.
- if the child does take you literally, and this results in disruption in the classroom, it is important to review the language you have used – and it is important to acknowledge the mistake was yours “I’m sorry Peter, I should have said...”

Example

Painting faces on paper plates is an activity that many enjoy. If instructed to “paint your face” when presented with a paper plate neurotypical children may immediately understand the task. A child with autism however, may interpret this instruction differently and apply paint to their own face.



“Are you cross with me or are you raising your voice to be heard? It’s so hard for me to tell the difference.”

July 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“Are you cross with me or are you raising your voice to be heard? It’s so hard for me to tell the difference.”



- when we listen to others speaking, we take account of not just what they say, but how they say it too. This means processing lots of social cues at the same time (tone of voice, volume, facial expression, gesture etc). This can be very difficult for a child with autism.
- it is important to think about the number of social cues in the classroom. It can help if the teacher includes commentary on the day’s events – how a person is reacting/feeling, what has happened/is going to happen, why a person was given a certain consequence, etc. It’s all about filling in the gaps.
- it also helps if the teacher gives regular feedback throughout the day, so that the child with autism feels more secure and confident.

Example

“I am much happier now that everyone is working quietly; I am pleased that you have done some great listening so far today.”



“If I don’t look at you when we’re talking – I am not being rude, I just find eye contact very tricky.”

August 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“If I don’t look at you when we’re talking – I am not being rude, I just find eye contact very tricky.”



- if a situation is difficult and the child is anxious, you are less likely to be offered eye contact. Rather than make an issue of this, focus on the positive of the child coping in a difficult situation.
- eye contact can be increased – to start this off stick to activities the child enjoys and let the child know when they have given appropriate eye contact, and that you (or the child’s peers) like it.
- when the child communicates with you, always stop what you are doing and give them eye contact, this will model appropriate social behaviour.

Comment

Eye contact is a part of communication that we often take for granted. If a child with autism isn’t making eye contact when you are communicating with them, it may be part of their disability and not them being disobedient.



“Keep your language simple and positive. Tell me what to do, instead of what not to do.”

September 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“Keep your language simple and positive. Tell me what to do, instead of what not to do.”



- this is easier than it sounds, we often use phrases like “do this worksheet and don’t take too long about it... did I ask you to talk and read as well?... I didn’t ask you to do that”. For a child with autism, this makes things negative, and confusing.
- the more words you use, the longer it will take for the child to process the information, and the less likely she is to understand.
- focus on action words provided in a sequence when telling the child what to do.

Example

*“Read this passage quietly. When you have finished read questions 1-10.”
Then check the child understands, perhaps by having her repeat the instructions back to you, “so tell me what you are going to do?”*



“Sometimes I find busy situations overwhelming – it helps if there is a quiet place I can go to, even if just for a short time.”

October 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“Sometimes I find busy situations overwhelming – it helps if there is a quiet place I can go to, even if just for a short time.”



- what children with autism find overwhelming may vary. Some children may find noise overwhelming and may prefer to complete activities in a quieter area. Some children may find new activities difficult, and may benefit from a quieter period following completion of a new activity.
- when planning for the day ahead with the child, it is important to identify and discuss potential difficulties and possible solutions. This proactive approach allows the child to be prepared, have some control over their own behaviour and is less likely to result in confrontation.
- when providing solutions and alternatives, it is important to agree with the child how he or she will signal they need to access the quiet area. They may put their hand up, or they might have an agreed phrase such as “can I be excused”. Also, agree how they will exit the quiet area, and re-enter the group for example “sorry about that I just needed a minute”.

Example

A child may have a coloured card they hold up in class when feeling overwhelmed, to be excused to a designated and agreed quiet area.



“If you show me what to do, instead of just telling me, it can really help me to learn.”

November 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“If you show me what to do, instead of just telling me, it can really help me to learn.”



- keeping things as clear and precise as possible can be extended to the prompts and teaching strategies we employ with children with autism. Initially this may mean putting more thought into lesson planning and presentation. However it will pay off in the long term.
- showing a child what to do using pictures can be helpful in all sorts of ways, such as in improving independence. If a child needs constant verbal reminders to collect belongings at the end of the day, why not put pictures of all the items onto a card which they can use independently to remind themselves. If there is no language for the child to decipher, it may mean the job will be completed more quickly.

Example

Activities such as PE can be much more effective when the teacher shows the movements required as well as describing them in words.



“It can take me several seconds to process what you have just said – please be patient with me.”

December 2008

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
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“It can take me several seconds to process what you have just said – please be patient with me.”



- it can take children with autism longer to figure out all those key words, and whether the words mean they need to do or say anything. Wait a few seconds before giving them the answer or asking someone else.
- the clearer the language – the less time it will take to process. So be precise, and if pictures or written words help to convey information more quickly, use them.
- sometimes the child may not have heard you. He may be engrossed in another activity, or be concentrating on blocking out noise. After a few seconds, check you have the child’s attention by using his name – you may need to repeat what you have said.

Comment

There are particular times – such as class registration – when a child with autism may take longer to respond when his name is called out. He is not being silly or cheeky, he just needs more time to respond.

Facts about autism

- it affects one in 100 school age children in the UK.
- the cause is unknown.
- education is the only agreed effective intervention.
- there are 7,500 autism specific places in schools for 90,000 children with autism in the UK.
- only a fifth of teachers working with children with autism have had any autism-specific training.

What are the consequences?

- 27% of children with autism have been excluded from school.
- only 11% of carers of children with autism are able to work full time.
- 90% of adults with autism don't have the basic skills to live independently.

“Just because 29 other children are doing something how am I supposed to know I should be doing it too?”

“It will take you a while to get to know me – my autism is different to everyone else’s.”

“If you use my name when you talk I am more likely to focus and know you want me to listen.”

“Give me precise instructions and use simple language so that I understand exactly what you want me to do.”

“I enjoy routine and find unstructured time and play difficult. I may need your help to use this time effectively.”

“Tell me what’s going to happen today – it helps me if I have a clear structure with some detail.”

“Sometimes I may take you literally. If you say you will be back in a second, that’s what I will expect you to do.”

“Are you cross with me or are you raising your voice to be heard? It’s so hard for me to tell the difference.”

“If I don’t look at you when we’re talking – I am not being rude. I just find eye contact very tricky.”

“Keep your language simple and positive. Tell me what you want me to do, instead of what not to do.”

“Sometimes I find busy situations overwhelming – it helps if there is a quiet place I can go to, even if just for a short time.”

“If you show me what to do instead of just telling me it can really help me to learn.”

“It can take me several seconds to process what you have just said – please be patient with me.”

With sincere thanks to all the children, young people, and families from TreeHouse and the following parent and carer autism support groups who have contributed to the production of this calendar:
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