

ASD Strategies to use in the Classroom

This paper summarises information that may be helpful to school staff working with children and adolescents in the classroom.

Rules

Students with ASD like structure and to follow rules. The use of rules and boundaries let them know what behaviours they can and cannot partake in, and can help to minimise behavioural outbursts. Rules can also be used by teachers as a scapegoat. Individual rules may be used for students who have particular behaviours and need a visual reminder taped to their desk, for example, 'I will stay in my seat'.

Rules for children with ASD must be clear, operational and objective. This means that they should describe specific behaviours and their meaning should be obvious to whomever is reading them. For example, instead of, 'wait for your turn to speak', the rule should be something like, 'raise your hand when you want to speak and wait for the teacher to give you permission'.

Behavioural Contracts

A behavioural contract is a written document that specifies:

- Expected behaviour(s)
- Clear, operational and objective expectations that are realistic
- Consequences for performing or not performing the expected behaviour
- A time frame of how long the behaviour should occur for

A behavioural contract should:

- Have a fair work-reward ratio
- Be negotiated by all parties involved
- Be honest, with the reward being delivered as specified
- Have layers of rewards (daily, weekly, monthly)

- Have a negative consequence for not sticking to the contract
- Be visible to the student as a reminder of how they are to behave

The Picture Exchange Communication System, PECS (Frost & Bondy, 1985)

PECS uses pictures to aid the communication of children who are nonverbal, with a focus on getting the children to initiate communication. The children will choose a picture of a desired object and give the picture to their communication partner. The communication partner will honour the exchange as a request.

There are six main stages in PECS. The first is simply exchanging a picture for an item or activity. In the second, the child learns to exchange pictures with different people, in different places, and to travel a larger distance to do so (for example, across the room, rather than reaching to the person sitting next to them). In the third stage, the child learns to choose the picture of an item that they want from several pictures. The child will learn to create simple sentences such as, 'I want...' in the fourth stage. The fifth and sixth stages are very advanced, and the child is taught to use PECS to answer questions and to comment.

Social Stories (Gray, 1991)

Social stories are used to give information about situations, skills or concepts that a child with ASD may find confusing. The stories explain social cues, the perspectives of others and responses that may be expected from others. The aim is to give the reader information that is accurate, reassuring and easily understood. It is likely that if a student understands a situation better, then they will behave in a more acceptable manner in such a situation.



Cartoon Conversations (Gray, 1994)

Cartoon Conversations are like comic strips that are used to promote social understanding in children with ASD. Simple figures are used to portray characters, and other symbols such as speech and thought bubbles, colour and shapes are used to represent messages that are often hidden in conversations. For example, what the characters are saying may be depicted using rounded bubbles, their thoughts by cloud-like bubbles, and anger by the colour red and sharp edges. Cartoon Conversations will show people with ASD why people have acted or may act in a certain way by explaining underlying thoughts and emotions. They may be used to explain past events that did not go well, or to prepare for situations that may occur in the future.

Sensory Difficulties and the Classroom

There are ways that the classroom can be adapted visually and auditorily to address the sensory sensitivities that are common in children with ASD. The lighting should be indirect and not too bright. The classroom should not be too bright and colourful as this may upset or distract students with ASD. The classroom should also be relatively quiet, and there should be no sudden noises. Low level noises not noticed by others, such as the buzzing of fluorescent lights may be irritating to students with ASD.

Classroom Lessons

Students with ASD like structure and routine, and therefore days and lessons should be structured. Visual schedules are a good way in which to do this as the students will have a visual reminder of what they can expect. A visual timer may also be useful, as many students with ASD find the concept of working time difficult to understand. The Countdown Clock (see links below) is a visual timer that shows time of up to an hour disappearing using a red disc.

Students with ASD follow visual presentation easier than verbal presentation, so instructions are better written down than verbalised. Technology such as computers may help to

overcome poor motor skills and slow and messy handwriting.

Individual or Group Work?

For students with ASD, poor social skills might hinder academic performance if group work is required. Students with ASD are likely to work better individually. Pairing a student with ASD with another student may also be beneficial in helping to develop communication and social skills.

Special Interest

The special interests and talents of students with ASD should be encouraged as they will increase motivation for learning and are skills that can be used in the future for employment. If possible, subjects should be set up so they can incorporate the special interest of the student. For example, if the special interest is planes, the student could read a book about planes, learn about planes have been used in historical events such as wars, and calculate how long it would take to fly from Hamilton to Wellington.

The Rage Cycle (Myles & Southwick, 1999)

Individuals with ASD may seem to be unpredictable with behavioural outbursts occurring with no warning. Their lack of emotion and nonverbal signals mean that it is difficult to tell when they are becoming upset, however, early intervention can prevent such behavioural outbursts. The Rage Cycle has three main stages; the Rumbling Stage, the Rage Stage, and the Recovery Stage.

The *Rumbling Stage* may be identified by subtle changes in behaviour that may not appear to be related to a behavioural outburst. For example, they may bite their lip, lower their voice, tap their foot, withdraw from or lash out at others, or complain of feeling unwell. Interventions are likely to be individual to the student, but can involve removing the student from the situation by giving them a task to do, moving near the student, signaling your awareness of the situation with a 'secret' signal, the use of humour, directing the individual to a visual schedule, referring to the



classroom rules, redirecting the student to another task, allowing them to go to a quiet place to complete their work, or taking a walk with the student.

If the Rumbling Stage is not recognised and managed, the student may react impulsively, loudly and violently in the *Rage Stage*. The safety of the student, their peers, the teacher and property must be ensured. A safety plan is necessary in the case of such an event, and it should be practiced. A 'safe' room should be available for the student to use at all times and in all weather.

In the *Recovery Stage*, the student may have an impaired memory of the Rage Stage and may deny it even happened. The teacher should work with the student so that they can become part of the classroom routine only when they are calm enough to accept the intervention. The behavioural outburst should not be discussed with the student straight away as they may relive the event and regress to the Rage Stage again.

References and Links

Cooper, J. O., Heron, T. E. & Heward, W. L. (2007). *Applied Behaviour Analysis*, Second Edition. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Ministries of Health & Education. (2008). *New Zealand Autism Spectrum Disorder Guideline*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Smith Myles, B. & Southwick, J. (1999). *Asperger Syndrome & Difficult Moments: Practical Solutions for Tantrums, Rage & Meltdowns*. USA: Autism Asperger Publishing.

Behavioural Contracts

<http://joeschedule.com/>

[JoeSchedules Visual Toolkit/](#)

[What is a behavioral contract.html](#)

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/sample-behavior-contract.html>

<http://www.freebehaviorcontracts.com/behavior-contract.php>

Countdown Clock

<http://www.spectronics.co.nz/catalogue/time-timer-resources>

PECS

www.pecs.com

Social Stories and Cartoon Conversations

www.thegraycenter.org

Visual Schedules

<http://www.specialed.us/autism/structure/str11.htm>

<http://www.do2learn.com/picturecards/howtouse/schedule.htm>

