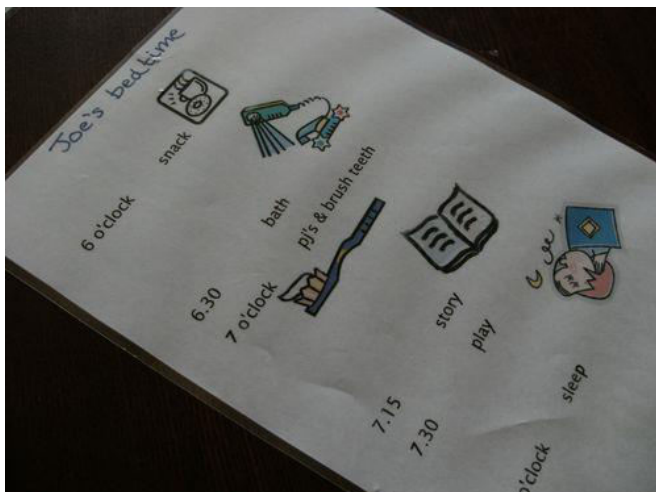
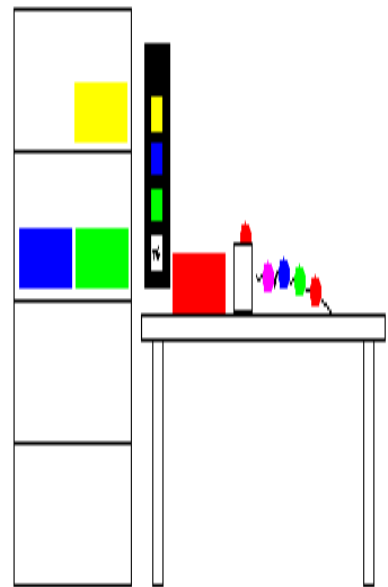


Compiled by The Nottingham City
CouncilAutistic Team

Structure & ASD

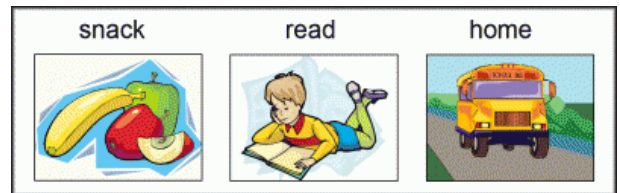
Research shows that most individuals with ASD often think in pictures and process visual information more easily than verbal information. The use of physical and visual structure promotes independence and uses individual strengths. This enables maximum access to the curriculum, increases understanding and reduces anxiety and stress.

Many children with ASD find visual structure useful regardless of their ability or the level of their communication skills.



Structure

Like all of us, individuals with ASD need structure in their lives. Structure enables them to understand what is happening and what is being demanded of them. This is essential in order to create order and security in what is often a very confusing world. This can be achieved through visual timetables, physical structure of the environment and structure of activities. **The amount of structure required depends on the child.**



Distraction

Individuals with ASD often find it difficult to access essential information. They tend to be poor at filtering out distractions or irrelevant information e.g. buzzing lights, busy displays,. Trying to work at a table full of stuff with no way of knowing what's relevant to them can cause anxiety. By providing activities which give visual and structural clarity about what is required and limiting distraction, we are able to increase success and independence.

Physical structure

Children with autism do not always automatically segment their environments like typically developing children. When they are in large areas children with autism can find it extremely difficult to understand:

What is to occur in each area;

Where each area begins and ends, and

How to get to a specific area by the most direct route.

Physical structure refers to the way we set up and organise each area of the room. Boundaries help the child to understand where each area begins and ends.

By strategically placing furniture to clearly visually define specific areas, it will decrease the child's tendency to randomly wander/run from area to area. Visual physical boundaries can also be further defined within a specific area.

These visual cues will help children with autism better understand their environment, as well as increase their ability to become more independent in their environment and less reliant on an adult for direction.



Work Stations

A child with Autism may become anxious in a classroom designed to be stimulating to average children. Children with autism often have some differences/difficulties with sensory processing. For some people with autism this can mean that colours, patterns, words, noises, textures etc. can be so distracting for them that they are completely unable to focus on anything else.

Being asked to listen, focus and attend when they are so distracted can be very anxiety provoking. This anxiety only decreases the ability to work effectively and may result in challenging behaviour.

People with autism have found that having the opportunity to use a quiet workstation in a room can alleviate some of the difficulties described above and enable them to be more effective learners.

Workstations

What is a workstation?



A workstation is a small area where an individual child can work with as little distraction as possible.

Work Stations

Every child on the spectrum is unique and some will need more structure than others. Some children may not need a workstation at all; others will benefit from having one to which they can withdraw when group / class life becomes too distracting or overwhelming.

To set up an individual work station you will need a table that is in a distraction free environment. Ideally in a quieter area of the classroom away from busy displays, windows and doors where children can become distracted or easily leave the room. Any necessary equipment will be accessible but not on or under the desk.



Shelving is optional. It can offer the benefit of further reducing distraction as well as giving space for organisation of tasks.

Work System



All children in a classroom need to learn to work independently. It may be necessary to specifically teach these skills to children with autism.

A child can be taught how to use a work system and then be left alone at the workstation when working on independent tasks

Work system & Tray tasks

A work system will clearly show the pupil:

- How much work I have to do.
- How I know I've finished.
- What do I do next?
- Require little or no organisation of materials by pupil.
- Engage the child physically in selecting the next task and removing finished tasks to one side.
- Have limited distractions.
- Develop concept of working in a standard organised fashion e.g. top to bottom, left to right.

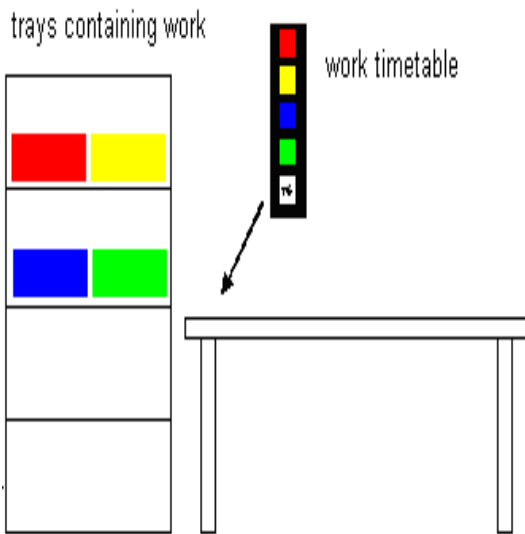
A good tray task will clearly show the pupil:

- What am I expected to do? (Using visual or structural cues appropriately e.g. a drawing or photo showing what to do or one piece of task already completed.)
- Use activities the pupil can do independently with a high chance of succeeding.
- Consolidate skills the pupil is developing.
- Use activities that are interesting to the pupil, building on strengths and interests.
- Require minimal support and limited verbal cues which may inhibit independence.
- Help pupils to generalise skills.

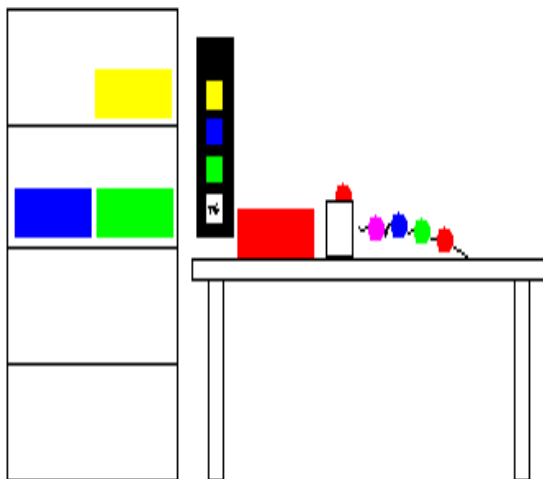


Three baskets are on the child's left. Finished work on child's right (off picture)

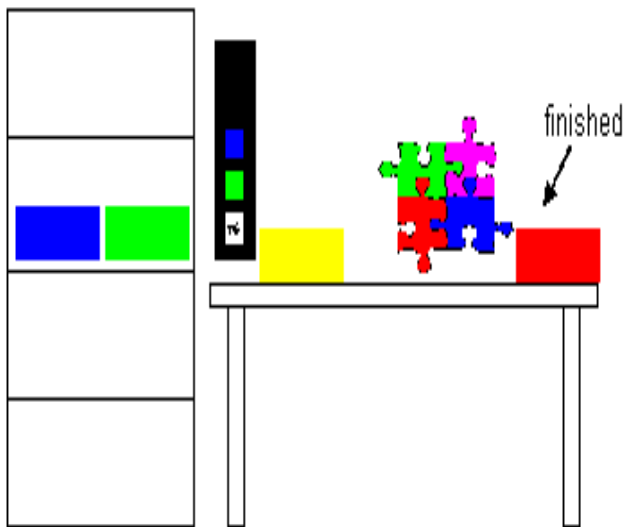
An example of a highly structured work system



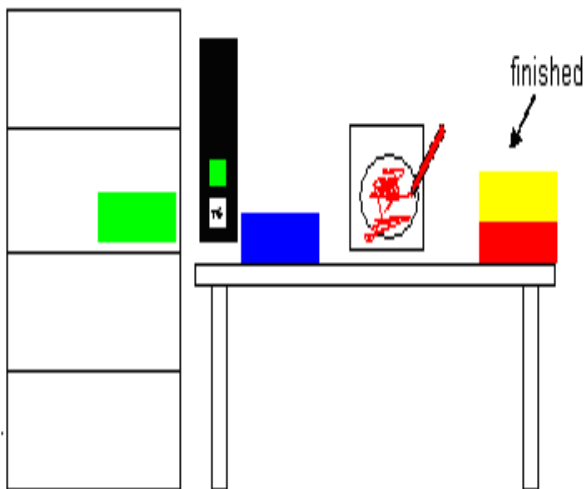
Trays containing activities are placed on pupil's left arranged top to bottom or left to right, usually on shelves. Strip stuck to table containing squares that match boxes e.g. colour/ number



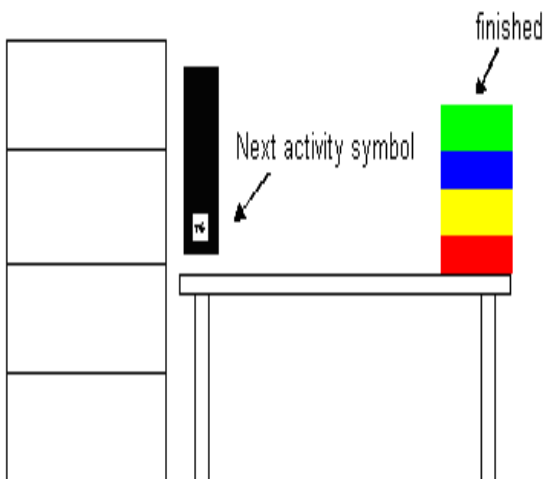
Pupil removes top square from strip, takes corresponding tray and matches square to Velcro spot on the front of the tray. The pupil then completes activity and discards it to right either on table, another shelf, floor or in box.



Repeat process 2.



Repeat process 2.



Process 2 is repeated until all squares have been removed.

When all trays are complete a symbol/ word/object of reference is provided to cue the next activity. This is either on the bottom of the strip or on the individual timetable.

Structuring work

It can be very helpful to provide visual structure in the work set. This can be done in a number of ways, for example:

- Highlight directions/instructions
- Number steps
- Define the spaces for answers or drawings
- Make a writing frame so the structure of an account is provided
- Highlight questions and where the answer is in the text in the same colour.
- Give an example of a completed task.



An example of a writing frame follows

Example of a writing frame

Our Science experiment

We got.....and.....
and.....and.....

First we.....

.....

Then we.....

We saw that.....

.....

This made us think that.....

.....

We have learnt that.....

.....

Visual Schedules

As children with ASD often have a poor concept of the passage of time, structuring the day can help.

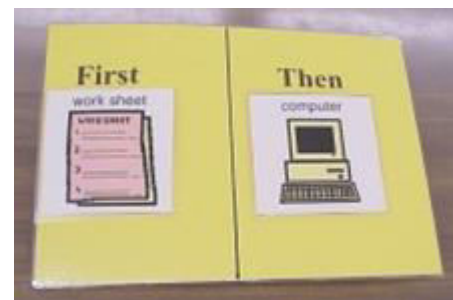
For some children lessons may appear pointless, uninteresting or endless. Structure can help add order, meaning and motivation to activities.

Children with ASD are usually poor at sequencing and a visual schedule provides order. It can make a confusing school day feel more predictable and safe.

Providing a visual schedule supplies the information children need to function with increased independence.

At the end of the schedule children can see home-time and this also helps promote feelings of safety and predictability.

The schedule must use pictures, symbols or objects that are **meaningful** to the individual child.



Different types of schedules

Discover what is meaningful to the child before deciding what type of schedule to make. It may help to think this through in descending order of skill level:

Words: can this child read well even when stressed?
If so a written schedule will be fine.



Words and symbols: are appropriate when a child can read but in times of stress needs picture symbols to promote easier processing.

Symbols without words: may suit a child who is barely reading if the child understands what these pictures represent.



Photographs: work if the child recognises areas of the classroom / activities / adults or work represented in recent photographs.

Objects of reference: if you show e.g. a pencil, does the child know this means writing or drawing? If so use objects to represent what the child will do.



Objects: for some children you need to use the actual objects they will use in each activity

Different types of schedules

Don't assume a fixed hierarchy, use what works for the child (not what looks nice) and use what s/he already understands. You may need to use a mixture of methods, e.g. Symbols for most events but photographs for some activities.

Use a length that's meaningful to the child:

- First...then (2 items)
- Firstthen....next (3 items)
- Chunks of the day, e.g. arrival to break
- Half day

Use a meaningful order:

- Top down or
- Left to right



Schedule routines

Develop a routine for using the schedule which suits the student

Think about

- Position
 - Close to the work station?
 - Central point?
 - Portable on a clip board or folder
- **Routine for checking the schedule** (“Name check your schedule”)
 - Schedule goes to task with child?
 - Symbol goes with child?
 - Child prompted to return to schedule at end of task ?
- **Showing ‘finished’**
 - Take off symbol, post away as task ends?
 - Crossing, ticking, rubbing off?
 - Moving a pointer or ‘frame’ attached to the schedule?

SUMMARY – THINK →

How are activities represented?

How much information is on display?

What is the routine for using the schedule:

Where is it displayed?

How does the child know when to check it?

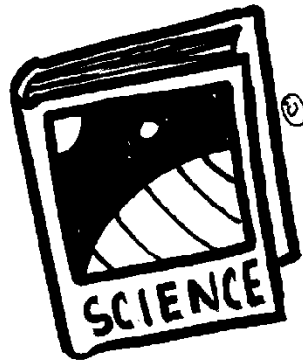
What does the child have to do with the schedule?

How is progress through the schedule displayed?

How are motivating events shown?

Task Lists

Task lists help to give extra visual guidance for more able children within lessons, removing the need for repeated verbal guidance. Task lists can take a number of forms including photographs of the child doing the activity, a drawing or a written list that can be ticked off by the child as each step is completed,



1

Write title, date and learning objective in your book.



2

Turn to page 6 in the text book and complete questions 1,2,3,4



3

When completed put text book on shelf and exercise book in tray



4

Read car magazine quietly until the end of the lesson.



Task Lists can be used both in school and at home for things like morning routine, how to brush your teeth or wash up etc.

1

Squeeze toothpaste onto your toothbrush.

☐

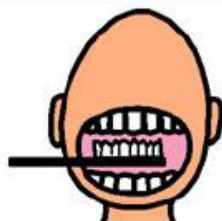
2

Hold toothbrush under the tap.

☐

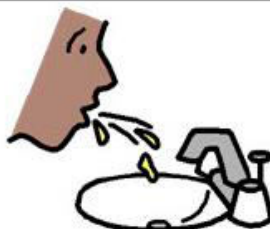
3

Brush your teeth.

☐

4

Spit the toothpaste into the sink.

☐

5

Rinse your mouth and smile.

☐

Summary

- **Structure the environment so that the child has minimal distractions and gains better understanding of the classroom areas.**
- **Present information visually as well as / instead of verbally.**
- **Fit the type of structure and the level of structure to the individual needs and capabilities of the child.**
- **Develop schedules using visually presented cues. Remember the visuals used must be meaningful to the child.**
- **A work system will enable a child to work through tasks independently.**
- **Try to help a child see what they have to do when creating and presenting activities.**
- **Task lists can enable a child to carry out a routine task such as changing for P.E. with vastly increased independence. Pictorial or written task lists can guide a child through a class lesson.**

If you require any more information about the strategies in this booklet please contact the Autistic Spectrum Team.