

### SENSORY SENSITIVITY AND OVERLOAD

#### AIMS:

- ▶ To introduce Schools' Autism Awareness Week.
- ▶ To provide examples and experiences of sensory sensitivity and overload.

#### INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Explain that it is Schools' Autism Awareness Week and that the children will be doing some activities in class to learn more about autism.

Ask the children if they know anything about autism, or if they know someone who's autistic.

Show them the *'Autism and sensory sensitivity'* video.

Explain that autistic people can be affected greatly by their senses and that it affects their everyday lives.

Watch the animation *'Sensory Overload'* video.

#### RESOURCES:

*'AUTISM AND SENSORY SENSITIVITY'*

[www.bit.ly/sensory-sensitivity](http://www.bit.ly/sensory-sensitivity)

*'SENSORY OVERLOAD'*

[www.bit.ly/sensory-overload](http://www.bit.ly/sensory-overload)

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES:

As soon as the clip finishes, play some very loud music and start handing out small percussion instruments to various children and tell them to start playing them.

Choose four children and bring them to the front. Give them a clipboard with a maths worksheet attached and tell them to complete it before the music finishes.

After two minutes, turn the music off and tell the children with the instruments to stop playing.

Ask the children with the worksheets to explain to everyone how it felt to be in that situation.

#### RESOURCES:

PERCUSSION  
INSTRUMENTS  
CLIPBOARDS  
MATHS WORKSHEET

#### WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Explain to the children that we need to be aware that autistic people think differently and are affected by the world around them in a different way to how most people experience it.

Encourage the children to think about this and to try and be supportive and understanding if they ever see an autistic person go into a crisis/meltdown due to sensory overload.

A great way to support autistic people is to plan a fundraising activity.

Get ideas at  
[www.autism.org.uk/saaw](http://www.autism.org.uk/saaw)

### WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM?

#### AIMS:

- ▶ To understand how difficult a classroom can be for autistic people.
- ▶ To experience some of the feelings an autistic person might have in a classroom.

#### INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Before saying anything to the class, put some music on at a reasonably high volume.

Hand out worksheets to each of the children, making sure they are a higher level than normal.

Tell them they have five minutes to complete their work.

After five minutes turn off the music and ask them if they were able to complete the work.

Talk about how difficult it is to complete a task when our senses are overloaded.

Explain that lots of autistic people feel like this when they are in the classroom trying to do an activity.

#### RESOURCES:

WORKSHEETS ON ANY SUBJECT

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Explain that many autistic people find it very difficult to communicate.

Put the children in pairs and get them to choose who is A and who is B. Tell them that they will have a conversation about their journey to school.

Give all the As an instruction card (resource 1). This tells them what they have to do during the conversation. Give them five minutes to have the conversation.

When the time is up, give the Bs an instruction card. Tell the children to have another conversation, this time with Bs following their instructions.

#### RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 1: INSTRUCTION CARDS

#### EXTRA ACTIVITIES:

- ▶ Play the E and T game. Pupils have to find out a set number of facts about the other person in a limited time, but can only use words without an 'e' or a 't' in them. This game is to help pupils to think about the way they're communicating. It can also work if you are only allowed to answer 'yes' or 'no' to each other's questions.
- Discuss how much harder it is to communicate using these rules, and how that might be similar to being autistic.

**You are not allowed to use your voice to communicate.**

**Do not look at the person you are talking to.**

**Leave a five-second pause between each word you say.**

**Repeat some of the words your partner says during the conversation.**

**Completely ignore the person talking to you.**

**Cover your ears while your partner is talking.**

**Only use gestures and signs to communicate.**

**During the conversation, get up and walk away.**

**INSTRUCTION CARDS**

### HELPING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND AUTISM BETTER

#### AIMS:

- ▶ To understand what an autism alert card is for.
- ▶ To create an autism awareness 'wordle'.

#### INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Show the students the picture of the autism alert card (resource 1).

Have they seen this before? What's it for? Discuss how it might be used and why carrying it could be helpful for an autistic person. How might it be helpful for other people too?

Put the children into groups and get them to act out a scenario when the card might be useful.

Some examples:

- ▶ On a bus journey an autistic person gets anxious due to a group of young people making lots of noise, and needs to get off right away. The bus driver won't let her. She shows the card, the driver understands and lets her off as soon as it is safe to.
- ▶ At the supermarket, an autistic person wants to talk to an elderly lady in the queue. The lady thinks he's behaving oddly and doesn't want to speak to him. He shows her the card, she understands and feels happier to chat.

#### RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 1:  
AUTISM ALERT CARD

#### MAIN ACTIVITIES:

What's a wordle? Show the students examples of different wordles including those focusing on autism (resource 2).

Get the students to generate a list of words associated with autism and write them on the board.

Give each child a piece of A3 or A4 paper and get them to create their own wordle poster focused on autism using the words they have generated/examples given to them.

Get the children to use bright colours to write the words. Tell the children that they could use their wordles as a way of promoting autism awareness around the school.

#### RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 2:  
WORDLE EXAMPLES

#### WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Why is it important to be aware of what autism is? How else could we raise awareness in the school and wider community?

#### EXTRA ACTIVITIES:

- ▶ Get the children to put together a presentation about autism to raise awareness in the rest of the school in an assembly. They could also plan an awareness event where they fundraise too, such as a cake sale with cakes decorated with autism myths and facts (see resource 3).

If you're autistic, you might carry a card like this with you.  
This is so you can let other people know about  
your autism if you need to.

## Autism alert

This person has autism  
Please see over for information

Name:

### Emergency contact details

Name of contact:

Tel:

## This person has autism

- > Autism is a lifelong condition that affects social and communication skills.
- > Because people with autism understand language and social situations differently, they may behave in ways which others find unpredictable.
- > People with autism are likely to be extremely anxious in unfamiliar situations.
- > Please help by being understanding, patient and tolerant.

For further information, see the insert to this card,  
contact our **Autism Helpline on 0808 800 4104**  
or go to **[www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)**

The National Autistic Society is a registered charity



## AUTISM ALERT CARD



#### #AutismMyth

Autistic people don't feel emotions.

#### #AutismFact

Many Autistic people feel emotions intensely and can be overwhelmed by the emotions of others.

#### #AutismMyth

Every autistic person is good at maths, art and music.

#### #AutismFact

Fascinations and routines can be important for people on the spectrum.

#### #AutismFact

Autistic people may learn a lot about a topic they like, which could be anything!

#### #AutismMyth

All autistic children go to special educational needs schools.

#### #AutismFact

Most autistic children go to mainstream school while others require support at special schools.

#### #AutismMyth

Stimming (repetitive behaviour like flapping or rocking) is bad and should be stopped.

#### #AutismFact

Repetitive behaviour like flapping or rocking can help some autistic people deal with stress and feel better.

## AUTISM MYTHS AND FACTS

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When planning your autism awareness activities, make sure you follow these guidelines. Always consider the possible sensitivities of any students who are on the autism spectrum in the class.

#### 1. MAKE SURE NEEDS ARE BEING MET

A student who is on the autism spectrum may experience heightened feelings of anxiety and stress during the week. It's important that their needs are being met. It could be that you make sure they have an area to escape to, to help them cope with any sensory issues or stressful situations. Some students may need to use noise-cancelling headphones, or a 'stim toy' to help them cope with an environment. Talk to them, and their parents/carers, about their needs.

#### 2. BE SENSITIVE TO THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON

Autistic people of all ages are people first! Make sure you're thinking about the individual person's needs when preparing them for the week or any activities. Avoid making assumptions about how they will find something.

#### 3. DON'T SINGLE PEOPLE OUT

Talking about autism will draw a lot of focus to any student who other students know is autistic. Make sure the pupil does not feel singled out. The added focus could lead to bullying, so put measures in place to prevent this.

Some strategies include:

- have more staff near the student throughout the week (be subtle)
- have staff monitoring any hidden parts of the playground
- put a buddy system in place
- speak to the student throughout the week to find out how they are coping – if speech is an issue then using talking mats (mats to which pictures can be attached and re-arranged as required) are a good way to find out when a student is feeling happy or sad during the school day.

#### 4. ADVISE BEFOREHAND

We recommend you speak to the parents or carers of your autistic students about what will be covered before the activities begin. This will give them a chance to talk through any worries and concerns that the pupil may have. We also recommend the teacher has a conversation with any autistic students before the lessons begin to further prepare them.

#### 5. HELP YOUR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM FEEL IN CONTROL

It's important that autistic students feel in control of the situation as much as possible. This might mean working with you to create coping strategies for overwhelming situations, and taking an active role in planning the activities with you.

## TOP TIPS FOR HELPING AUTISTIC STUDENTS TO LEARN

- **Get the student's attention before you give out instructions.**

You could call their name or go closer to them, but also stay aware of any issues they may have with being in close proximity to others.

- **Use clear and consistent language.**

Try using visual clues or symbols along with words as this may make your instructions easier to follow. People on the autism spectrum often find visual information extremely helpful.

- **Give the child time to process information.**

Try using the six second rule: Count to six in your mind after giving an instruction.

- **Make sure that you say what you mean.**

Avoid non-literal language such as metaphor, sarcasm and idioms without also giving a clear explanation of your meaning. You could spend some time teaching a student some common idioms and metaphors, explaining them in literal terms. They may like to compile a list of common terms they struggle with.

- **Try to include demonstrations, activities and pictures in your lessons.**

People on the autism spectrum learn better when they see things. Use realistic pictures as they might not be able to relate to unrealistic ones. Visual supports are very helpful in preparing for changes and explaining information.

- **Make the lesson more explicit by relating to the child's experience.**

Or try to give the child such an experience – after all, it's easier to understand happiness when you're feeling it. The golden rule is to proceed from concrete (what the child knows) to abstract (what you are asking them to imagine).

- **Try to teach a new topic in as many situations as possible.**

Children on the autism spectrum might find it difficult to 'generalise' a learnt skill or to apply a skill in a new way when in differing contexts. For example, if you are teaching addition, teach the child to add up using objects, numbers and finger counting. Don't expect an autistic student to simply pick these things up, or to intuitively understand that horizontal and vertical additions are two ways of carrying out the same task.

- **Keep things calm and simple. Autistic students will benefit from a quiet, distraction-free learning area.**

Because of their perceptual differences, too much noise, movement, bright colours and pictures will be difficult for most autistic students to cope with. Similarly if you are using pictures to teach, try to avoid complicated pictures or pictures with too much information.

- **Have consistent classroom rules and routines. It's important your autistic students understand what you expect of them.** Make sure rules are explained explicitly using visual supports and that rules set are followed by staff (there is little more damaging to trust and rapport than staff not working by the rules that they set for others!).

- **Have clear consequences for rule-breaking.**

These should apply to the whole class (and staff – see above).

- **Use 'time-outs'.**

Having 'time-out' from a class can help a student recover from a stressful experience. Time-outs should be seen as meeting a need, not used as a reward for compliance or punishment.

- **Use visual timetables.**

These help to provide structure and therefore reduce uncertainty and anxiety, helping the student to focus on their learning.

To get more free teacher guidance about autism sent straight to your inbox, sign up to **MyWorld** at [www.autism.org.uk/myworld](http://www.autism.org.uk/myworld).