

A WINDOW INTO OUR WORLD

AIMS:

- ♥ To understand that autism is a spectrum condition which affects each person differently.
- ♥ To understand the barriers that people can face in achieving their ambitions.
- ♥ To understand how these barriers can be overcome with the right adjustments and support.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Show the video 'A Window Into Our World.' Think about how anxiety and stress affects autistic people.

Put the class into discussion groups to think about the following questions:

1. How do you think autism affects people differently?
2. To cope with anxiety, autistic people will use different strategies such as playing music or talking.
 - ♥ How do you cope with anxiety?
 - ♥ Do you cope differently to autistic people?
3. Can you see why an autistic person may become more anxious due to the sensory environment than someone else?
4. How do you think people learn different coping strategies?

Have a class discussion based around the questions. Introduce further questions to develop the discussion:

5. There are different goals and aspirations expressed in the film. Choose one goal and think about these questions:
 - ♥ Are there any particular barriers an autistic person may face?
 - ♥ What support could be offered to help them overcome these barriers?
6. Autism is a hidden disability, meaning that you cannot tell if a person is autistic by looking at them. This can make it harder to understand an individual's behaviour.
 - ♥ Do you think autistic people should have to declare their disability?

Encourage the students to feed back their answers – support can be found in the *Full Spectrum Awareness* toolkit.

RESOURCES:

'A WINDOW INTO OUR WORLD' VIDEO
www.bit.ly/window-into-our-world

FULL SPECTRUM AWARENESS TOOLKIT
www.autism.org.uk/full-spectrum-awareness

MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Challenge the students with the following question: What do you think is the best way of raising awareness about a disability?

Ask the students to come up with a way of raising awareness of autism in the school. Once they've developed their ideas, get them to present them to the rest of the class.

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Have a class discussion: why is it important to raise awareness of autism and other disabilities? You could talk about how fundraising or volunteering for organisations like The National Autistic Society, which help people living with autism, is one way of helping.

EXTRA ACTIVITIES:

- ♥ Some autistic people use alternative communication methods, such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and Makaton. Challenge students to research one of these methods. If they choose PECS, ask them to come with their own set of pictures to describe their day to another student. If they choose Makaton, ask them to rehearse and learn by heart something which they can then share with the class.

SENSORY EXPERIENCE

AIMS:

- ♥ To identify the sensory challenges faced by autistic people.
- ♥ To understand the strategies used by individuals to cope with these challenges.
- ♥ To learn how adjustments to the environment can help autistic people.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Use the video clip *'Exercise in Sensory Experiences: An instructional video'* to introduce the students to the type of activities they will be doing during the lesson.

You can choose to do all or some of the activities demonstrated in the clip.

RESOURCES:

*'EXERCISE IN SENSORY EXPERIENCES:
AN INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO'*

www.bit.ly/exercises-in-sensory-experience

FULL SPECTRUM AWARENESS TOOLKIT

www.autism.org.uk/full-spectrum-awareness

MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Explain the activity that you want the group to do. Encourage the students to feed back after each activity they experience.

Use the question sheet (resource 1) to encourage the students to discuss how they found each activity.

RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 1:
QUESTION SHEET
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
TORCHES

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Autism is a spectrum condition, so autistic people will each react differently to different sensory stimuli. Ask the students to choose one of the exercises and record how two autistic people could be affected differently.

QUESTION SHEET

Sound

1. How did you try to concentrate?
2. How did you react to the noise?
3. How would noises at school cause you difficulties when trying to concentrate on different tasks?
4. Fifty-eight seconds into the instruction video, one of the young campaigners is shown covering his ears. What do you think would have helped him to deal with a noisy environment better?

Spatial awareness

1. Where in school could you find a similar situation like the one in this exercise?
2. Can you think of places around town where this could also be a challenge and why?

Sight

1. How did you try to concentrate?
2. Did you find any of the light painful and if so, why?
3. Can you think of a situation where lights flicker or turn on and off quickly?
4. Autistic people can find bright lights such as fluorescent lights irritating and even harmful. What adaptations could be made to those lights to make them more bearable?

Social situations

1. What would have helped you to understand the social rules relating to the situation?
2. Autistic people have trouble picking up and applying rules in different social situations. How do you think that this affects them?
3. Speech therapy is used to train autistic people in how to navigate social situations, in addition to teaching them how to talk. Have you ever had any type of training in social skills?

Depth perception

1. How hard was it to follow the spotlight?
2. What parts of your body did you have to move while following the spotlight?
3. What other problems could follow from a lack of depth perception for autistic people in their daily lives?

Body awareness

1. How did you feel about having to move between the two people?
2. How did you feel when the other people grabbed you?
3. What problems can a lack of body awareness cause for people with autism?

Balance and sound

1. How did you feel when you were struggling to focus?
2. What problems do autistic people have with balance?
3. Autistic people can do 'occupational therapy', which helps with balance. How might this help?
4. Autistic people may rock back and forth as a way of relaxing (known as 'stimming'). How do you think this helps?
5. Autistic people can be extremely sensitive to quiet or loud noises. What problems do you think this can cause them in a classroom or assembly hall?
6. What adjustments can be made for autistic people?
7. What could an autistic person do to adapt to a loud environment?

Additional questions

1. How do you think the reaction to different sensory stimuli affects an autistic person's ability to do everyday tasks?
2. What can be done to help autistic people to cope better with the difficulties caused by different sensory stimuli?

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.