

WHAT IS AUTISM?

AIMS:

- ▶ To introduce World Autism Awareness Week at School.
- ▶ To provide an initial insight into autism.

TEACHER PREPARATION:

Preview *'A Teen's Guide To Autism'* and choose a few clips which are suitable for your students. Put these clips into the appropriate sections of the PowerPoint.

RESOURCES:

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO AUTISM
www.bit.ly/teens-guide-to-autism
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Explain that it is World Autism Awareness Week at School and that the students will be doing some activities to help them understand autism better.

Show the students 'What is Autism?' video.

RESOURCES:

'WHAT IS AUTISM?'
www.autism.org.uk/autism

MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Talk to the children about how difficult communication can be, and how we need to understand what it's like for autistic people.

Go through the PowerPoint, including the clips you have chosen from *'A Teen's Guide To Autism.'*

RESOURCES:

POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Challenge the students to think about what they have seen and learned during the assembly and how they can put it into practice when they are with autistic people.

LIVING WITH AUTISM

AIMS:

- ▶ To begin to understand what it is like to live with autism.
- ▶ To discuss what it is like to live with autism.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Watch *'My Autism and Me – a Newsround special'* video.

RESOURCES:

*'MY AUTISM AND ME' -
A NEWSROUND SPECIAL*
www.bit.ly/my-autism-and-me

MAIN ACTIVITIES:

In pairs or small groups, get the children to discuss what they have seen.

Use questions to prompt discussion. For example:

- ▶ What is it like to live with autism?
- ▶ What is different about the way autistic people think or organise things? Do you think it's easy to live with autism?
- ▶ How would life be different if someone in your family was autistic?
- ▶ How would you feel if you didn't know how to make friends?
- ▶ Do you know any autistic people?

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

Encourage the students to feedback the main points from their discussion. Do they feel they have a better understanding of autism? Will this affect the way they treat people in the future?

EXTRA ACTIVITIES:

- ▶ Social stories and comic strip conversations are ways to help autistic people grow their social understanding. They are short descriptions of a situation, event or activity, which tell you what to expect in that situation and why.

Give the students an example of a social story (resource 1), and a situation (such as going to the doctors, taking turns, or going on a ride at a theme park). Can students write and illustrate their own?

RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 1: EXAMPLE SOCIAL STORY
MORE INFORMATION ON
SOCIAL STORIES:
www.autism.org.uk/socialstories

WHAT ARE UNEXPECTED NOISES?

There are many noises.

**Sometimes noises surprise me.
They are unexpected.**

**Some unexpected noises are: telephones,
doorbells, barking dogs, breaking glass,
vacuum cleaners, slamming doors, honking
horns and thunder.**

**These sounds are okay. I will try to stay calm
when I hear unexpected noises.**

Adults can tell me when the noise will stop.

EXAMPLE SOCIAL STORY

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

AIMS:

- To research information about autism.
- To produce a leaflet or poster to raise autism awareness.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

Recap previous activity and what they learned from the video.

Share a variety of links and sources of information that students can use to research autism. For example:

- Newsround Guide 'What is Autism?' (www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/15541228)
- The National Autistic Society (www.autism.org.uk)
- Scottish Autism (www.scottishautism.org)
- Autism Northern Ireland (www.autismni.org)
- Child Autism UK (www.childautism.org.uk)
- NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/livewell/autism/pages/autismoverview.aspx)

RESOURCES:

RESOURCE 1:
WEB RESOURCES

MAIN ACTIVITIES:

Tell students to use the information gathered to create a leaflet or poster to promote autism awareness.

These could be displayed in the classroom or around the school.

WRAP-UP ACTIVITY:

- Do you think we need to promote more autism awareness in schools and the community in general?
- Is there a need for better understanding about the condition? How else can we promote awareness?
- Why do you think it is important to support organisations like The National Autistic Society?
- What might you like to do to raise money to help people with autism?

EXTRA ACTIVITIES:

Write a fact sheet about autism for students in other classes or years to help spread understanding in the school.

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.whatareyoudoingfilm.com

This short film looks at some of the questions you might have about autism, and helps to show you how to be a good friend to a classmate who is on the autism spectrum. It has some interviews with the brothers, sisters, cousins and friends of autistic children.

www.kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/brain/autism.html

This American website helps explain what autism is in an easy-to-understand way.

www.nhs.uk/conditions/autistic-spectrum-disorder/pages/Introduction.aspx

Information about autism from the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK. Autism is sometimes called 'Autism Spectrum Disorder'.

www.autismplus.org

This charity mainly supports people living with autism in the North of England. You can find information about autism on their website.

www.autismresearchcentre.com

The Autism Research Centre

Based at the University of Cambridge, the ARC is where lots of scientists are busy working on research into autism.

www.autism.org.uk/autism

This video will help you understand what autism is and how it affects people differently.

www.autism.org.uk

The National Autistic Society has loads of information about autism, like what it is, how it affects people and what you can do to help. The National Autistic Society is the main UK charity for helping autistic people and their families.

www.autisticuk.org

This organisation is run by autistic people. It does lots of campaigning and aims to improve the rights of autistic people, to raise awareness of autism and make the lives of autistic people better.

www.childautism.org.uk

This charity supports children with autism in the UK. You can find some more information about autism on their website.

<http://wrongplanet.net>

Wrong Planet is a web community designed for autistic people, their parents and others with an interest in autism. It includes forums, articles and how-to guides about autism, and might help you learn more about what life is like for autistic people.

<https://dinahtheaspiedinosaur.wordpress.com>

This blog has some cute cartoons featuring Dinah the Aspie Dinosaur to help explain what it's like to have Asperger syndrome.

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.