MAKING SENSE OF AUTISM

A THREE TIER TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PRACTITIONERS IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

This face-to-face training is designed for use across all types of early years settings and ability for children up to the age of 5 years. All these materials have been developed in consultation with staff, training providers, individuals on the autism spectrum, parents and carers. The training comprises three tiers.

www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk
The presentation materials are designed to give you a better understanding and awareness of autism and the way it affects children in early years settings.

Learning objectives

ALL PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

• Identify the four key areas of difference that need to be taken into account when working with children with autism.
• Know the importance of understanding the individual child with autism and their profile of strengths and weaknesses.
• Identify the key areas to help children with autism build positive relationships with staff and their peers.
• Know that many children with autism can be unusually sensitive to everyday sights, sounds, touch, tastes and smells which affects their learning and emotional state.

Contents

THERE ARE 4 THEMES:

- A unique child
- Positive relationships
- Enabling environments
- Learning & development

The content in this training is embedded within the EYFS and covers key messages that are relevant for all children with autism and to all types of settings.

Activities, case studies, films and key resources may also be used during this session. We have provided further information which include top tips for supporting children with autism you may have in your own settings.

EYFS Principle

All children should have the opportunity to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development. This can be done by observing, assessing and planning activities that meet each child’s individual care and learning requirements.

Principles

The materials will be used to promote the following principles:
1. Focus on difference and not deficit.
2. Promote positive attitudes to autism.
3. All staff can have an impact.

TERMINOLOGY

The term autism is used in all these materials. Some professionals may refer to autism by a different name. This may include autism spectrum condition (ASC), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), classic or Kanner autism, and high-functioning autism or Asperger’s Syndrome. The term ‘parent’ is used in the these materials to represent a parent or carer.
Four key areas of difference

Every child with autism will have a range of abilities within each of these areas. Many children with autism have high levels of anxiety as a result of these differences.

**Interacting**
Children with autism have differences in the way they interact, play and develop relationships.

**Processing Information**
Children with autism have differences in their attention, interests and how they learn.

**Sensory Processing**
Children with autism have differences in taking in and making sense of sensory information.

**Communication**
Children with autism have differences in the way they communicate, understand and use language.
EYFS Principle:
Every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

“The by understanding the hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses of autistic people, society can gain a deeper and rounder view of human nature.”

KEY INFORMATION
Autism is a lifelong condition which affects the way that a person communicates and relates to people and the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain features, their condition will affect them in different ways. The four key areas of difference that we need to be aware of to understand the educational needs of children with autism are:

- **Interacting**
- **Processing information**
- **Sensory processing**
- **Communicating**

There are approximately 134,000 children (or 1 in 100) with autism in the UK. Some children with autism are very able intellectually. Others have considerable learning disabilities in addition to their autism. Providing the right support at the right time can enable children with autism to build on their strengths.

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a child may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Share this information with all staff to try to avoid situations which may lead to distress.
2. Build self-esteem by listening and responding to the child.
3. Identify and use a child’s strengths and interests when planning activities.

**TOP TIPS**

Theme 2
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

EYFS Principle:
Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.

“In an ideal world the education authorities, health professionals and social services will all work together with parents in an attempt to provide support for our unique children and their families.”


KEY INFORMATION
See the child as a partner in the education process and build on their strengths. We cannot take for granted what a child can or cannot do.

It is important to find ways of supporting children with autism to interact, to build and maintain relationships with others, and to learn through play.

Encourage parents to be actively engaged with your setting to support their child’s progress and ensure information is shared effectively.

The child with autism can find it difficult to learn through play in the way that other children do. Support the child to learn through turn-taking games, help the child to engage in pretend play, and explore games that encourage sharing.

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a child may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Ensure parents and all staff are informed of support strategies and current issues.

2. Share information with parents and other professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Educational Psychologists and so on.

3. Educate parents, staff and peers positively about autism and difference through information and training.

Home school communication sheet – AET autism standards

Top Tips

Enabling environments
Learning & development
Theme 3
ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

EYFS Principle:
Children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.

“It was easy for me to move into a state of sensory overload, and when this happened, it was always difficult to stay among people.”


KEY INFORMATION
Sensory differences can cause children to experience stress and anxiety. Children with autism can find change difficult, but not impossible. Providing structure can be one way of reducing levels of anxiety.

The learning environment needs to be adapted to better meet the needs of the child with autism. We need to observe and listen to children with autism to understand the best way to achieve this.

Create safe spaces and use a low arousal (calm and quiet) approach to help children with autism to manage their anxiety at school.

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a child may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Check the environment for potential sensory distractions for individual children with autism (flickering lights, strong smells, noises, busy spaces).

2. Use visual cues such as objects, symbols, pictures or written words to support a child’s understanding of an activity. Use language that is clear, precise and concrete. Ensure a child has understood the information given to them.

3. Use visual prompts to help children predict what is happening next and to inform them of any changes to the usual routine.

EYFS Principle:
Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

“Although people on the autistic spectrum are very different, there are also many similarities in the way we think and perceive the world.”


KEY INFORMATION

It is important for us to understand the individual child and how their autism affects them.

If your setting works well for children with autism it is likely to work well for other children too.

The child with autism can find it difficult to learn through play in the way that other children do. Support the child to learn through turn-taking games, help the child to engage in pretend play, and explore games that encourage sharing.

A child with autism will have difficulties with understanding, developing and using communication and language. Ensure there are effective systems of communication with children, staff, parents and outside agencies. Staff should be flexible and willing to make adjustments to address the needs of children with autism.

TOP TIPS

Following these will help you to reduce the anxiety a child may be experiencing and will enable them to work more effectively in a welcoming and safe environment.

1. Use alternative communication techniques such as objects of reference, visual support and signing.

2. Teaching strategies and staff responses need to be differentiated to support the learning of children with autism.

3. Ensure expectations are realistic and individual to the child. Find out what motivates the child and build on their strengths.
early years programme

We help children and young people with autism to receive an education, enabling them to reach their potential.

There are 3 tiers of training:

1. MAKING SENSE OF AUTISM
   For raising awareness of staff who need to have an understanding of autism in their role, but who may not work directly with children with autism.

2. GOOD AUTISM PRACTICE
   For all staff who work regularly with children with autism.

3. LEADING GOOD AUTISM PRACTICE
   For all staff who may take a leadership role that includes responsibility for developing provision and training other staff.

AET EARLY YEARS AUTISM STANDARDS
A set of standards from the AET, to enable early years educational settings to evaluate their practice in addressing the needs of children on the autism spectrum.

AET EARLY YEARS AUTISM COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK
A competency framework for people working with children up to the age of 5 on the autism spectrum.

Mission
The purpose of the AET is to further raise awareness of the importance of autism education across the children’s workforce, to bring organisations involved in delivering autism education services together in order to promote effective practice and share information and to involve children and young people with autism and their families and carers in the planning and delivery of information and resources to enhance and improve autism education across the country.

Further information and resources can be found on the AET website at www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

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