# **TAKEAWAY FOR SESSION 6, MODULE 2**

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| **Learning Outcomes for Session 6, Module 2.** |
| ***Learning Outcomes for session 6, Module 2:***  Following completion of this session, students will:   * Have a clear overview of the nature and importance of Adaptive Living Skills as they apply to students with additional needs * Be sufficiently informed in order to support and promote independent living skills through the use of video-modelling, skills analysis/task analysis and graphic supports, within the role as a Special Needs Assistant and through incidental learning opportunities. |

**Supporting the Development of Adaptive Living Skills (ALS)**



This session is devoted to the important topic of Adaptive Living Skills, which are sometimes describes as Life-Skills. This is an area which is especially well-catered for in Irish Special Schools. The national curriculum does not include a lot of reference to this area, unfortunately, despite the fact that many students with additional needs experience very notable difficulties in this area of their lives. The fundamental skills which enable people to do the most basic things within their homes and communities, and are central to the students becoming independent adults, are not always autonomous. Skills necessary for commuting, making purchases, accessing information and personal care and safety issues are the skills necessary for life long after school is finished. If we fail to address this important area of education and development, then we have failed to provide a holistic and inclusive education.

John Moore is the presenter of this session. John comes from a wide background in education, both here and in his native Australia. He works in one of our top special schools – St Augustine’s in Blackrock. John has devoted much of his recent work to developing the whole area of Life-Skills and Adaptive Living Skills for his students, culminating in a Masters Degree thesis which focussed on this particular topic. We are delighted that John has agreed to share his expertise and more especially his school-based experiences through videos of some of his students (by kind permission). John advocates the use of video-modelling for effective teaching and this is a method which addresses a wider communication approach and takes the pressure off students to understand complex instructions. Video modelling is very effective and can be used to facilitate students improving their own skills or for the initial modelling of certain skills.

For Special Needs Assistants, this particular area fits neatly into contextual learning opportunities. Many of these skills cannot be taught in a classroom and must be modelled or taught through incidental learning opportunities. Many of these opportunities occur in the informal school-settings. An I-Pad or smartphone can be useful in scaffolding certain skills through the use of mini videos to show the skills involved on this. Note of caution here- be mindful of GDPR restrictions and the use of photography of students. All schools will have policies on this area and it is important to check with your supervising teacher or the principal before embarking on any such activity.

We hope that you find session 6 really useful and informative.

The NCSE has written specifically on this area and you will find useful information in the following link:

<https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/05221-NCSE-Resource-6-Life-skills-Proof-03.pdf>

Here are two more useful articles:

[Understanding 10 Essential Life Skills for a special needs student (alphaschool.com)](https://alphaschool.com/essential-life-skills-for-success-special-needs-children/)

The use of video-modelling for the teaching of Adaptive Living Skills is widely researched and advocated across the globe as an effective means of multi-sensory teaching of this very important area for our most vulnerable students. Here is an article which may be of interest:

<https://www.yourtherapysource.com/blog1/2020/06/17/teaching-daily-living-skills-to-special-needs-students-using-video-conferencing/>

**Here is the text for John’s First Learning Block, Session 6:**

Hi, my name is John Moore and I’ll be talking today about Adaptive Living Skills.

Just to briefly introduce myself, I originally grew up in Australia, where I studied Psychology before becoming a Primary School Teacher. Since then I’ve taught in mainstream schools in Australia, a small rural primary school in Wexford, A DEIS primary school in inner city Dublin.

I taught in a Special School in Kilbarrick, for students with Moderate GLD and ASD and I’ve then spent the last 10 years at St Augustine’s Special School in Dublin.

Saint Augustine’s is a special school with just over 160 students from 8-18 years old.

We cater for students with Mild to Moderate GLD from all over Dublin and Wicklow.

I would normally have 1 SNA in my class, and we’d work together with 9-10 students, aged 13-14 years old. Each year I would have 2-4 students who would be new to our school; normally moving from a mainstream setting.

A big focus on my class is building independence, both in the class and at home, really starting to address our students’ Adaptive Living Skills (or ALS).

What are Adaptive Living Skills or ALS

Adaptive Living Skills are the basic skills and behaviours needed to function independently as an adult. They include a huge range of skills and are used in a wide variety of environments.

In the literature, Adaptive Living Skills are also called Independent Living Skills, Adaptive Behaviour, Daily Living Skills, etc. but they all cover the same areas.

 “the skills needed for success in current and future environments, they consist of activities in domestic, employment and community settings that allow a person to be as independent as possible” (Bennet & Dukes, 2014, p.2).

So what skills are included?

That question might sound relatively simple but it’s actually quite complicated.

So, let’s just quickly imagine your day, just spend a few seconds now, just brainstorming the different living skills you’ve needed today to function as (hopefully) an independent adult. Getting up, getting dressed, showering, breakfast, cleaning, getting organised, shopping, logging onto this (okay, won’t go that far). But in a few seconds you should have quite a list of different living skills you’ve needed.

Now, Imagine 10% of that list you couldn’t do without help from someone else. Or 30%, Or even 80% of those tasks you’ve completed today, you needed someone to help you or even do them for you.

How would impact you? Your life, your independence, your confidence and your opportunities.

Now imagine a student you work with, but instead of being 8 or 12 of 16, they’re now 25 or 30. What skills do they need? What are they going to find difficult, which skills would have the biggest impact on their life? Are you and your setting preparing them for that?

Adaptive Living Skills include a huge range of skills that we just take for granted but many of our students struggle with.

From Basic Living skills; such as toileting, dressing,

Community participation skills; transport, money, using a phone,

Self-care, shopping, transport, cooking, laundry, even choosing and participating in leisure activities.

ALS also includes the skills needed for school or education; routines, social skills,

Or for employment; interviews, safety, job search, etc.

In recent years Inclusion has become the main focus in any conversation about students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) and there has been a dramatic increase in educational supports, access and opportunities for students during their schooling years.

We have earlier diagnosis, increased awareness in society, increased access to services, a wider range of interventions and an expectation that schools will cater for all students.

Many would argue that it is still not enough but over the last 20-30 years there has been a real and definite increase in supports and focus on inclusion.

However, this increase has not resulted in significant improvement in outcome in adulthood for many of our students.

We’re spending so much time, effort and money on trying to remove the barriers to inclusion that exist during their school years but little to no focus or research into how we can remove the barriers to inclusion that they will face in the wider community and throughout the rest of their lives.

There is very little research into adult outcome for individuals with AEN but the few studies point to some alarming trends. Across AEN, individuals have dramatically lower outcomes in adulthood when compared to peers. Extremely low levels of employment, further education, socialisation, independent living, and access to supports and health services. Each day and in every setting they face lifelong significant barriers to inclusion within the wider community. (Chen et al., 2015; Farley, 2018; Gray et al., 2014; Seaman & Cannella-Malone, 2016; Walsh et al., 2014).

Small example:

One study looked at young adults with ASD, and found that isolation and inactivity increased dramatically straight after school, with the average time spent sitting down increasing to around 13 hours a day. (Eaves & Ho; 2008).

There isn’t much research into inclusion after schooling in Ireland. But in 2017 the National Disability Authority and National Council for Special Education conducted a study into how young people with disabilities were prepared for life after school.

They found that the stress and anxiety for students and their families increased dramatically as they got closer to “aging out” of formal education. They were faced with a huge struggle to find and access adult services. And all groups interviewed; students, families, adult service providers, employers, teachers, SNAs, all of them reported that teaching the skills these students needed for adulthood was not a part of education; one SNA was actually quoted as saying the “curriculum does not prepare them” for adulthood (p.83).

Adaptive Living Skills are an issue across AEN . Many are struggling with the basic skills needed for independence throughout their lifetime and it’s actually viewed by both individuals with AEN and their families as one of the biggest barriers to positive outcomes and inclusion in adulthood.

The importance of ALS increases as students approach adulthood but so to does the gap between them and their peers. (Chen & Yakubova, 2019).

Let us just quickly look at just one area of ALS, Travel Skills. The skills involved can range from walking with a carer, being a passenger in a car, crossing the road, public transport, to even driving or airplane travel.

Lower travel skills are linked to increased burden on parents and family throughout life. They’re also linked to increased Isolation for adults with AEN but also of their families.

A study in Belfast found that 2/3 of young adults with ASD needed 1:1 assistance with travel skills and that up to 25% did not transition onto any meaningful activity after secondary school (Lynas, 2014).

Another study found that 75% of adults with ASD regularly had to miss activities because of transport issues but the startling find was that 75% of their parents regularly had to miss activities in order to meet their adult child’s travel needs (Feeley et al.; 2015).

Travel skills are just one area of ALS, but it shows how difficulties in this area impact not only the individual but also their families and cuts down so much of their choice and opportunity.

ALS is different to Intelligence.

An individual could have quite a low IQ but function quite independently and vice versa, someone with quite a high IQ could really struggle with simple daily tasks.

IQ refers to ability (what they could do) and is viewed as pretty stable (doesn’t change much) over a person’s lifetime.

ALS on the other hand.

Are Age related (expectations are very different for a 4yr old, a 12 yr old and a 30 year old).

It has a social context, these skills occur in their houses, in the wider community and often involve other people

Modifiable; ALS can change, with support it can be increased but can also decrease (due to environment, trauma, or even having too much support – someone doing everything for you can lower your ALS).

ALS is also based on typical (everyday) performance not ability (for example; someone might be able to independently brush their teeth and shower but choose not to).

Why? Lots of possible reasons why individuals might struggle with ALS. Issues around communication, imitation, memory, planning, gross/fine motor skills, challenging behaviour or rigidity (resistance to change) as well as motivation.

Our students are all so different and any of these issues/difficulties could be factors that make it harder for them to learn new living skills and use them in their daily lives.

There are many others factors that could be on that list, but one I think we should think about. Is “the people around them, including us”. (especially in your role as an SNA).

Our students need support, that’s why we’re here. That’s why we’re working with them. But we should be asking ourselves, what can they do themselves, what do they need a bit of help with and what do we really need to be working on.

Example: student I worked with when I first moved to Saint Augustines, she had just turned 15 and was a real character, extremely well spoken and very funny.

I was in the canteen with the class and wanted to see what they could do so we started with making toast. I got her to put the bread in the toaster, take it out, then handed her the butter and knife and she just looked at me with a shocked expression on her face, “you honestly expect me to butter my own toast”. Horrified that I’d ask her to do something for herself.

Another vivid memory of that same student, we caught a bus to the city centre and she was sitting down with a huge smile on her face, beaming, looking left and right, asked her if she was enjoying herself, “Actually, Mr Moore, this is the first time I’ve ever been on a bus!”

It just struck me that she was only a few years from graduating from us, couldn’t butter toast, had never been on a bus. Here I was working away at time, money, reading, friendship skills but really overlooking some of the everyday skills she would need for the rest of her life.

She would need support and practice to learn both of those skills but would be very capable. Highlighted to me the real need to look forward, look at what our students need now but also what skills they’ll need in 2 years, 5 years, 10 years and start laying the foundation for that now.

Assessing ALS is important as it gives both an understanding of the individual’s current performance but should also guide and shape planning for which specific skills to focus on and support.

Four main ways;

Formal Assessments

Checklists

Observation

Relationships

There are several formal assessments of ALS; such as the VABS and ABAS-II.

Formal assessments are mainly used for diagnosis and might show general areas of deficit compared to peers.

They might give an Adaptive Living Skills age, comparing to peers, and some broad areas they struggle with but not really useful for working out what specific areas we should target.

I find checklists much more useful. There are quite a few checklists for ALS. I’ll share some examples with you. These can be really useful for seeing where a student is at but also showing the range of skills that could be taught.

Some useful examples include:

Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS)

Independent Living Skills Checklist (ILSQ)

Life Skills Program Planner

Community-based Skills Assessment (CSA) (Autism Speaks)

Often these can be used to give a greater insight into a students level of ALS but also give ideas on what ALS can be targeted.

The Independent Living Skills Questionnaire was actually made by my school, Saint Augustine’s about 8 years ago. It’s the one I actually use the most.

We made it because more and more we were seeing students with huge gaps in their ALS.

It has 13 subsections and just over 200 items.

Our parents fill in out at enrolment but then again at 15/16. Even that process alone is a great help, as many parents of students with AEN or a developmental delay don’t really see that their child is growing up, that they’ll be an adult soon enough. It highlights that if we want them to have these skills then we really need to target them quite early on. If we’re serious about ALS then we really need to include the student and their parents in the process.

It’s a great insight in our students, often you find areas of need in ALS that you would have never expected. I’ve had students that seemed completely capable and independent at school but when looking at their ILSQ found that they couldn’t use a knife and fork, wash their hair, lock doors or even cross a road safely.

Observation shouldn’t be underrated when considering ALS.

Especially in your role as SNAs, you’re really in a central position for identifying areas of ALS that a student might need support or intervention. Whether you are in a special school, mainstream primary, mainstream secondary, special class or any other setting you will have insights and observations that teachers or others working with these students wouldn’t. You are central to supporting ALS.

Example:

I had a student several years ago with ASD. He was really bright, into his fitness, was starting to get into cross country, and came across as really independent. Patricia (the SNA in that class) and I were working on his IEP and she pointed out that he never went to the toilet and only ever ate crackers or toast with pate for lunch. We looked at the ILSQ and both were marked as “with reminders” but I called his parents and they said that he had actually never ever gone to the toilet outside of home, he had an hour bus trip home from school every day and would be racing in to use the toilet. When I asked about food they said he’d gotten much better, I asked what specific foods he would eat and it was only 5 very specific foods but had recently started eating pasta with a specific jar of pasta sauce. He also would barely drink at all.

We tried to work out toileting, was it sensory, was it other students being there (in other cubicles), what was it, then one day at swimming he gets out of the pool to go to the toilet. No problem, no hassle at all. It just clicked, it wasn’t the toilet, it was asking, at swimming he didn’t have to ask, just got out of the pool and went.

So we tackled both that year. For going to the toilet we made a visual breaking down the steps for asking for help/Asking for the toilet/ and asking for something? It broke the steps down and we used it for when he found work hard or tricky first and then for asking for the toilet.

For foods, we made a social story about different foods and water being important for our bodies (tied in with being strong and fit for cross country). We then gave him a long list of foods and at first he choose 5 that he would try, we broke down “trying foods” into steps, take a small bite, chew 5 times, spit into bin if you don’t like it, and taught him to rate them out of 10 for taste and out of 10 for being healthy. For drinking water we got him to mark on the edge of his bottle how much he’d try to drink that day. Started small, but each week he choose how much he’d try to drink each day.

 We really just wanted him to learn that trying new foods was good and that drinking water helped him feel better (would also help with using the toilet). Every time he tried a new food he got a HW pass (loved them), over the year he made so much progress, we actually stopped recording all of the different foods.

By the end of the year he was drinking loads of water, eating a much wider range of food but also proud of trying new things, would see his face and demeanor just brighten up when you praised him for being so mature and independent.

This is just one example of how without the observations and insight of an SNA that would have been missed. Also how tackling one or two areas of ALS could have a huge impact on a students’ life.

Relationship is also one way of working out which ALS to target. Your relationship other staff, their parents/family, bus escorts and even the student themselves can lead to insights into which Adaptive Living Skills to target.

I’ve had bus escorts and other staff bring areas to my attention that I would have missed. But we shouldn’t discount the views and opinion of the students themselves. I’ve had students tell me that they’d really like to work on public transport, seeing friends on the weekend, buying something in a shop and when they’re engaged and motivated it can make a huge difference.

One thing to think of though when we’re trying to assess ALS is processing time. It’s just something to consider, many of our students take a bit of extra time to listen, process that information, decide if they’re going to do it and then act.

One student really pops to mind, he was very bright, a bit inward looking and quite easily frustrated. Found myself having to ask him several times to do any task. He would get really annoyed and angry about being asked twice to do something, even though he wasn’t doing it.

Once, just decided I’d just ask once and just wait. Asked him to do something routine, get his tray out. Waited 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8… about to ask him again and he moved his chair and did it. I realised that I wasn’t giving him the time he needed before asking again, and again and maybe even again. Made a huge difference, he just needed 8,9, sometimes 10 very long seconds to work out what I asked, if he was going to do it, and then do it. Didn’t always work but at least by waiting I was giving him the chance to be independent.

So to finish off,

Many of us, trying to support our students in their current setting. We’re working on their academic, social, communication needs, etc.

But there is also a need to think, plan and bring the focus to their future and how we can support them and increase their inclusion, not just now but after they’ve left us.

Your role as an SNA is central to supporting students’ ALS. You are involved in many of the tasks that are needed throughout their day and really your observations, relationships and input relating to ALS are central.

**Here is the link to the Questionnaire that John mentioned. This was developed by and is in constant use by St. Augustine’s School. We have permission to use it here, but it is not for distribution without permission. We are grateful to St Augustine’s School for allowing us to use this document for training purposes:**

[ST AUGUSTINE'S - INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS - QUESTIONNAIRE - Final July 2013 (1) (1).pdf](file:///C:\Users\phyll\Downloads\ST%20AUGUSTINE'S%20-%20INDEPENDENT%20LIVING%20SKILLS%20-%20QUESTIONNAIRE%20-%20Final%20July%202013%20(1)%20(1).pdf)

**Here is the Text from John’s Second Learning Block, Session 6:**

Just to recap, we’ve discussed Adaptive Living Skills (ALS) and these basically cover all of “the skills needed for success in current and future environments, they consist of activities in domestic, employment and community settings that allow a person to be as independent as possible” (Bennet & Dukes, 2014, p.2).

ALS incorporate a huge range of everyday tasks and skills that we might take for granted.

However, for many of our students gaps in these areas can really impact upon their independence and choice. They are also real and significant barriers to their inclusion in the wider community throughout their entire lifetime.

So, at this stage we’re imagining that we’ve looked at a student’s levels of ALS, and have decided on addressing a few specific skills. So, what’s next.

The first steps involve gaining a better understanding of what the skill entails and how we can support the student.

So, we need to look at what exactly are we asking them to do.

Are there any safety considerations.

What supports they might need.

How are we going to do it and reinforce it.

One of the first steps is to look at related skills.

Often there are prerequisite skills or follow on skills that should be considered.

By prerequisite skills, I’m referring to any skills that they need to learn first. Example would be public transport, you can teach a student how to catch a bus to and from school but there are lots of prerequisite skills that they’d need to master first, safely crossing roads, awareness of strangers, what to do in a problem, how to call/text home, look after their belongings. These would all be skills that should be worked on before or at least alongside public transport.

By follow on skills, we’re referring to related skills.

Are there any changes that could help students with related skills; An example would be crossing the road. A lot of our students have difficulty with this and it’s essential for any sort of independence and safety.

In fact it’s the leading cause of accidental death for teenagers worldwide and children with AEN are five times more likely to be hit by a motor vehicle than children without (Xiang et al., 2006).

So crossing the road safely is a big concern for our students and their families. But most of the time it is taught by “look left and right” or “look both ways”. This way we’re really only preparing them for simple streets and maybe traffic lights. It actually doesn’t work for most crossings. Follow on skills would be crossing at t-junctions, intersections, roundabouts, etc. Just for my class to walk from school to the bus stop they have to make several crossings of 3, 4 and one crossing with 5 roads.

So, I’ve just added an extra step, a bit of pre-teaching of “where can the cars come from?”.

When we’re working on this skill I’d have the students show me the different ways cars can come from (in front, behind, left, right, etc.) and then change “look left and right” to “look each way”. By making a few changes you can prepare them for learning other ALS.

When we’ve selected a new skill or task, the next step is to work out what exactly is involved with both the task and the individual.

A trick I use is to almost act it out as if I learning it for the first time. Often simple tasks that we take for granted involve quite a few steps and one or two of them might be quite complicated or present a difficulty for some of our learners.

Just simply putting on a jumper involves steps that we wouldn’t even realise we were doing.

What are they? Are there any steps that could be difficult or tricky?

Do they need any pre-requisite skills to do this (inside out, which side is the front, pulling sleeves out?).

This might sound a bit excessive, but going through this first can really help give an insight into what you’re actually asking the student to do.

When we’re doing this we’re really doing a task analysis. A task analysis involves breaking down a skill or task into its steps or component parts.

A task analysis is different for each new skill but also might need to be different for each student.

A simple example might be washing hands. For one student it might just be 6 or 7 steps; turn on tap, wet hands, get soap, rub hands together, rinse hands, dry hands, but another student might need that broken down more, rub palms, rub between fingers, thumbs, fingertips, backs of hands.

Another student might find drying their hands or using a soap dispenser tricky and that might need to be taught or broken down.

Tasks analysis can take different forms. You can just simply write down the steps, make a checklist or even use your task analysis as a visual.

It’s also an important time to collaborate with others who are working with the learner (their teachers, other SNAs, etc.) but especially their parents/caregivers.

We need to agree on what the steps are;

Firstly, to make sure we’re not missing a step,

Also, to make sure each step is clear and concise

But also because each of us performs the same task in completely different ways. So by collaborating when making a task analysis you’re making sure everyone is using the same steps/language.

I’d always go through the task analysis with my SNA but I also the get the parents input, to make any changes they’d like.

The reality is that we might be working on ALS at school but it’s mostly in the home or outside school that they’ll be used. So by including parents we’re making sure the steps we’ve made will actually work in their setting, but also helps parents buy into the process and at the same time they’re learning how to support their child with future ALS.

There’s one step is actually often overlooked.

Ask the student to do it, this way, you’ll see what steps they can do, what’s tricky and it might just take one little change to teach the skill.

An example of this was a female student I worked with a few years ago. She was 13 and needed quite a bit of support with her period. She was quite reluctant to check if she needed to change her pads, she would need a lot of help in the bathroom and was getting quite annoyed and upset about it.

So we waited until she didn’t have her period and my SNA along with another female staff member asked her just to go through the steps, to show them what she’s meant to do when she changes her pad.

When she showed them what she was doing, it actually was just the packaging, she had some fine motor issues and couldn’t open the plastic packaging. Her mum in desperation, kept trying different pads to see if one would work but this just meant that every few weeks and only when she’s actually going through the stress of having her period, she’d have a completely different packaging that she couldn’t open. We spoke to her mum, asked her to pick one brand of pad and buy a few extra boxes and get her to practice opening them when she didn’t have her period. A few weeks later, she was almost completely independent, only needing reminders to check when she was going to the bathroom.

One student would never wear a jacket or coat, even in winter. We realised it was just the zip she struggled with. We went through all the task analysis of zipping up a coat, made visuals and then we actually asked her to have a try and show us. We realised it was actually just pushing the two parts of the zip together that she found tricky, but also that her jackets where quite snug so she actually had to pull quite hard to get the two parts of the zip together when made it much trickier. So we got her to practice just putting the two ends of the zip together with one of my old raincoats, it was huge on her. Just focusing on this one part of the process and using a much bigger jacket really helped her learn the steps.

Are there aspects of the task that would be hard/difficult for the learner?

Sometimes simple changes or supports could make a huge difference.

Supports for fine motor in cooking,

Lots of options for self-tying laces that can work on any type of shoe. You can still work on tying laces if it’s a priority but in the mean time you’re building their independence.

Toggles for strings on tracksuit or swim shorts (quite a few students struggle with tying knots). This means they would need help from an adult when changing or potentially after every toilet break, because of where you’re helping a student it means you potentially need a second adult nearby after every toilet break. Could be quite embarrassing for some students but also isn’t promoting independence. The simple toggles are put onto each string, they don’t have to tie them but can tighten them independently.

I’d be a big advocate of coloured dots. On Microwaves, washing machines, any task with lots of options. You can just place a 1,2,3 to really simply and visually show the steps.

These are just a few really simple and cheap solutions that can make quite difficult or complex tasks much easier for our students.

One of the main ways to teach ALS are visuals. They are a really useful tool for teaching living skills but also any new steps or process. Many of our students struggle with literacy, communication, social cues, working memory or even just joint attention. And a visual removes all that distraction and gives them a clear and consistent message.

But I would also argue that visuals also support independence. Even after they’ve learnt a skill they can use the visual themselves to check what step their up to or remind them of what’s next.

Visuals often would include pictures (to help students who find reading difficult) but if you’re working with a good reader they can simply be written or typed.

Teaching students to follow a list/checklist/or visual is a huge skill in itself.

If you can use lists/checklists or visual steps for teaching a few small tasks/skills at the beginning then what you’re actually doing is giving them a system that can be adapted or expanded to help teach any tasks in the future.

The simple process of doing the first step, checking what the step is and following the system can be difficult in itself but what you’re doing is giving them independence and a means of learning and progressing in the future.

Simply getting ready for class in the morning can be 6,7,8 steps. Many of our students rely on an adult to tell them what to do every morning, but if we can teach them to use a visual/list/checklist we’re giving them a means of being independent and if they learn to quickly and easily follow lists/checklists/visuals in a few different settings then this can be expanded in the future.

With some students this can progress onto using their smartphones for reminders/checklists/lists. Most of us use them all the time for reminders or lists. If students can learn to use visuals or lists on paper independently then there is a lot of potential for using their own smart phones/tablets to increase independence.

Sometimes a social narrative or social story might be needed. These are short simple stories that explain a situation and can help with students understand why something is needed or important. It could be “I shower to stay clean” or “We wash our hands after the toilet” or “we need to be safe on the road”. One little trick with social stories is that when students are in the middle of a situation (particularly if its stressful) it’s not the time to use them. I find they work best when they’re used beforehand to prepare students. For non-readers, it’s actually really quick and easy to make social story videos on software like powerpoint. Where they can watch and listen to a social story instead.

They can be tricky to write at first but after a few they get easy. There are lots of examples online so a quick google will give you some ideas.

https://my.visme.co/projects/rx1y9krn-g8nlq69vpq9r5m9d#s9

https://paautism.org/resource/hand-washing-social-story/

Often you’re going to have to use other tasks to support the same skill. If a student needs to learn to use a knife and fork, it’s often not practical to have sit down meals in a school setting, but you can use plasticine and placing coloured dots on where the student’s fingers should go on a knife and fork. Youtube and pinterest are great for getting ideas on how to support students ALS.

I used a sorting laundry task in the class on seesaw and then asked students to send in videos of them sorting laundry for HW. (You will see this in the interactive session content)

Here’s a shopping list visual and literacy/oral language task. Students would have to listen for what grocery items were needed, circle them and then write them down on a list. We’re using functional language in a listening task and also teaching students to write and use lists in the same activity.

Another technique for teaching ALS is Video Modelling. Video Modelling is a relatively new approach, it’s basically a learner watching a video of the desired skill or behaviour and then attempting it.

It’s been found to be very effective for teaching a wide variety of skills and behaviours (Hong et al., 2015; Wong et al.; 2015).

The research shows them to be highly effective for teaching ALS and although they look complicated, the technology has increased so much that with a smart phone or tablet, we have all the equipment we need to make them quite quickly.

There’s two main categories; priming where the learner watches the whole video beforehand and video prompting where the video is broken up into steps.

Video Modelling can also be broken down depending on who is the model.

Video Modelling Other would normally have an adult modelling a task. These are easy to use and make.

Video Self modelling – in Video Self modelling a video is edited to make it look like the student themselves is performing the task/behaviour appropriately.

We used Video Self Modelling in my last school with a student with Autism and quite challenging behaviour. Getting off the bus and walking into school was particularly bad. We took videos of him getting off the bus and little clips along the path he would take (a few we actually took at a different time) and put them together with narrated text of what he should be doing “I get off the bus” “I walk with my SNA”, “I have safe hands”, etc. He loved watching himself on the computer, loved it so much we actually used it as a re-enforcer for work.

Another example is of a really chatty student with Down Syndrome that would simply shut down when she thought she was getting work wrong. We tried everything but asked her to help us make a simple video of her acting out finding something tricky, asking for help, getting praise. She loved it, showed her parents and family. She still finds it tricky but has definitely improved.

Video Point of View modelling. This is taken from a first person perspective, so you don’t see a model just from the viewpoint of the person completing it.

Video Point of View Modelling is easy to make, cheap and with VPOV there isn’t any data protection or GDPR issues, meaning they can be used and shared with other students.

Here’s one I made and am using at the moment to teach tying shoelaces. I’ve set the shoe up with a white and black lace – to help students see what they are doing, but taking it from a point of view perspective means they’re not distracted by the model and can focus on the task. It actually only took a few minutes to make, it took much longer to do the task analysis and break down tying shoe laces to manageable chunks for the students to learn.

Video Modelling has been used and found to be very effective for teaching a wide range of ALS, road safety, cooking, self care, etc. And with the increase in technology they can actually be quicker and cheaper to make than visuals or other interventions.

Forward Chaining, Backward Chaining.

* Another tool/technique
* Break it down and teach a segment at a time.
* I.e. Shoe tying – backward chaining.

Another technique that can be really useful is forward or backward chaining. This involves teaching only a few steps at a time and once mastered expanding it to include a few more steps. For forward chaining you start with the first steps and for backward chaining you’d start with the last steps.

This is really useful for complicated or long processes and I actually use backward chaining for teaching shoelace tying. So students first learn how to pinch both loops and pull before adding a few extra steps and so on.

Two things that really need to be considered when teaching new skills are maintenance and generalisation. Maintenance is the ability to demonstrate a previously learned skill months or years after learning it. Generalisation means being able to complete a learnt task or skill in different settings or under different conditions. Both Generalisation and Maintenance are very difficult for many learners with AEN, particularly many with ASD. We’ve all probably seen this, spending so much time helping a student learn something and they look like they’ve got it but a week later or especially after a break from school they’ve completely forgotten it. Or they can complete a task in class but if it’s presented slightly different or in a different setting can’t.

If we’re serious about teaching ALS and promoting independence and inclusion then we have to be conscious of building maintenance and generalisation into our program. So once a student has mastered a skill, get them to do it in different locations, under slightly different conditions. A few weeks or months later go back over previous skills, or better yet, have them use a visual or checklist so that they can look back at it themselves.

Prompt Hierarchy

A prompt refers to how we make a request or help a student to do something.

We tend use verbal prompts the most, it’s natural for us to ask students to do something but sometimes a physical prompt might be best; for a new or complex skill (whisking, cracking an egg, inserting a key), maybe modelling: washing hands, gestural prompt; pointing at a chair to sit down, or a visual prompt; a visual with the steps to follow.

Each of these prompts are useful and are appropriate under different circumstances and with different students but we should always be mindful of fading prompts as they become more independent and verbal prompts are the most difficult to fade.

If you find that a student is waiting for a you to tell them what to do (a verbal prompt) before starting or taking the next step then really consider using gestural prompts (pointing), modelling prompts (showing what to do) or introducing a visual prompt (a visual or even a checklist) as you can fade these.

Also take your time, sometimes we jump in so quickly to help or prompt when a bit of extra processing might give the student the chance to take the next step themselves.

Before we finish. ALS can be modified, meaning with support they can be increased but we can also reduce an individuals’ independence and ALS by providing too much support.

Prompt Dependence is really something we need to be conscious of.

Prompt dependence is were an individual is so used to other people doing everything for them or being told what to do and when to do it that they’ll wait and wait for the prompt and just won’t attempt it themselves.

In my last school I remember walking past the boys’ toilet and seeing a 17 year old student with Autism getting really agitated at the sink, he was just standing there stimming and rocking back and forth. I knew he was about to really get upset and was trying to work out what was wrong. It ended up no one had said wash your hands. Every other time he’d gone to the toilet someone had said wash your hands and he was getting really upset because no one had said it.

Each year one or two students come to my class from a mainstream setting where they’ve had a 1:1 SNA. I would often see students who are 13/14 but just so used to someone doing everything for them. One student comes to mind he was actually quite bright but was so used to an adult sitting beside him he wouldn’t complete any work by himself, wouldn’t even get his pencil out of his pencil case. Even crossing the road, he would wait and wait for one of us to tell him to cross. It took us about half a school year to work on him just completing any work by himself, to get his own belongings ready and follow visuals for class routines and cross the road when it’s safe.

If we’re always doing everything for our students or constantly telling them what to do then we’re not giving them a chance to be independent, to grow and we could really be building a dependency that will cause difficulties when they move on from your setting.

Have higher expectations, look a bit longer into the future.

* What do they need now?
* Think of a few years from now and start building towards that.
* Maybe a change in what inclusion means?

There is a movement within the literature that the focus of inclusion and our curriculum needs to change for our learners with AEL.

The language is about removing barriers to inclusion but Hume et al. (2014) argue for a change in curriculum, that schools should adapt to meet the needs of students and prepare them for life after school. Is the goal of education to “prepare students for adult life? Or just to help them function in school so they can graduate” (Hume et al, 2014, p. 103).

Ayres et al. (2011) go even further and argue that education should reduce the focus on accreditation and academic skills, instead focus on functional skills, through a meaningful and adapted curriculum; “At what point does working toward fragmented, watered down academic standards become less important than working toward meaningful individualized curricula directly tied to increasing independence” (p. 12).

When you look at the research, changing the curriculum to meet the Adaptive Living Skills of our students is actually what they both want and need, it would increase their independence but also assist in the removing barriers to inclusion within the wider community not just now but also for the rest of their lives.

Your role as an SNA is really central to supporting our students’ Adaptive Living Skills. Any improvement you can make now in their functioning and independence can really have quite positive ramifications not just now but potentially for the rest of their lives

**In summary, you can see from these presentations that John advocates using a mixture of Video Modelling, Task/Skills Analysis and Verbal and Visual Prompts.**



John has also emphasised the importance of avoiding student’s over-dependence of prompts. The adult should ‘fade’ the support as independence is achieved. This is known as a GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY MODEL.

