

Hand in Hand Navigating Autism Together



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CHAPTER 01

Seeing Through Their Eyes

Difficulties in Social Communication & Interaction

- Socio-emotional reciprocity
 - Difficulty approaching or responding to others as expected
 - Challenges sustaining back-and-forth conversation
 - Limited sharing of feelings and difficulty recognising others' emotions
- Non-verbal communication
 - Brief, inconsistent, or uncomfortable eye contact
 - Limited or awkward use of gestures
- Relationships
 - Difficulty making friends or understanding unspoken social rules
 - Struggles to adjust behaviour across contexts and people

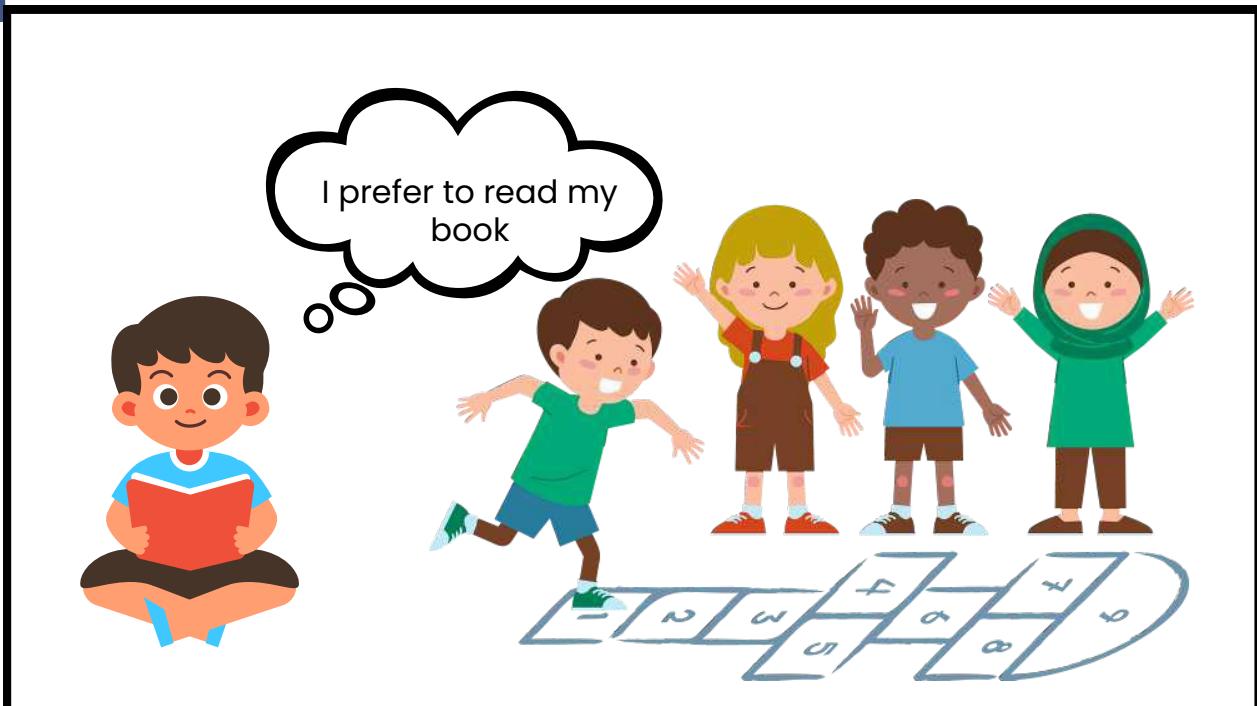


Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour or interests

- Repetitive behaviours
 - Repeated movements, actions, or speech (e.g., hand-flapping, repeating phrases, lining objects up)
- Preference for sameness
 - Distress with routine changes; may follow patterns or rituals closely
- Focused interests
 - Intense, narrow interests beyond typical age expectations
- Sensory differences
 - Over-, under-, or fluctuating responsiveness to sounds, lights, textures, smells, etc.
 - Unusual interest in how things look, feel, sound, or move



Here's a peek at how it might look like in real life



Every child on the autism spectrum is wonderfully unique, with strengths, challenges, and behaviors that may look very different from one child to another.

HOW TO HELP MY CHILD COMMUNICATE?

USE OF VISUALS

Tools that use pictures, written words, or objects to share information.

1. SCRIPTS

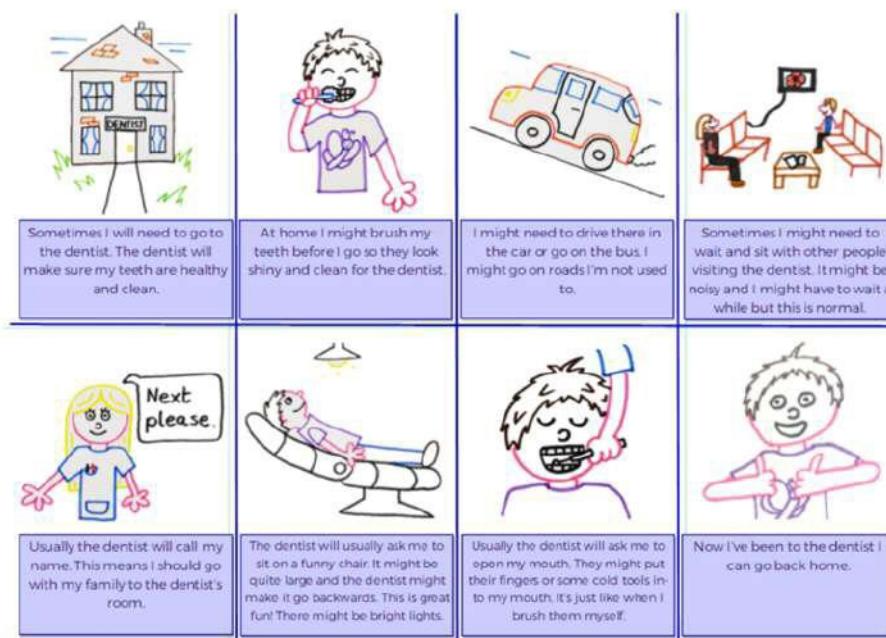
- Provide short, simple descriptions of what to expect in social situations.
- Supports learning routines, understanding behaviours, adapting to changes, and recognising others' feelings.
- Practice role-play scripts across people and situations.
- As your child gets more independent in approaching social situations , scripts can be gradually faded in use.



Tami Boyd, 2009

2. SOCIAL STORIES

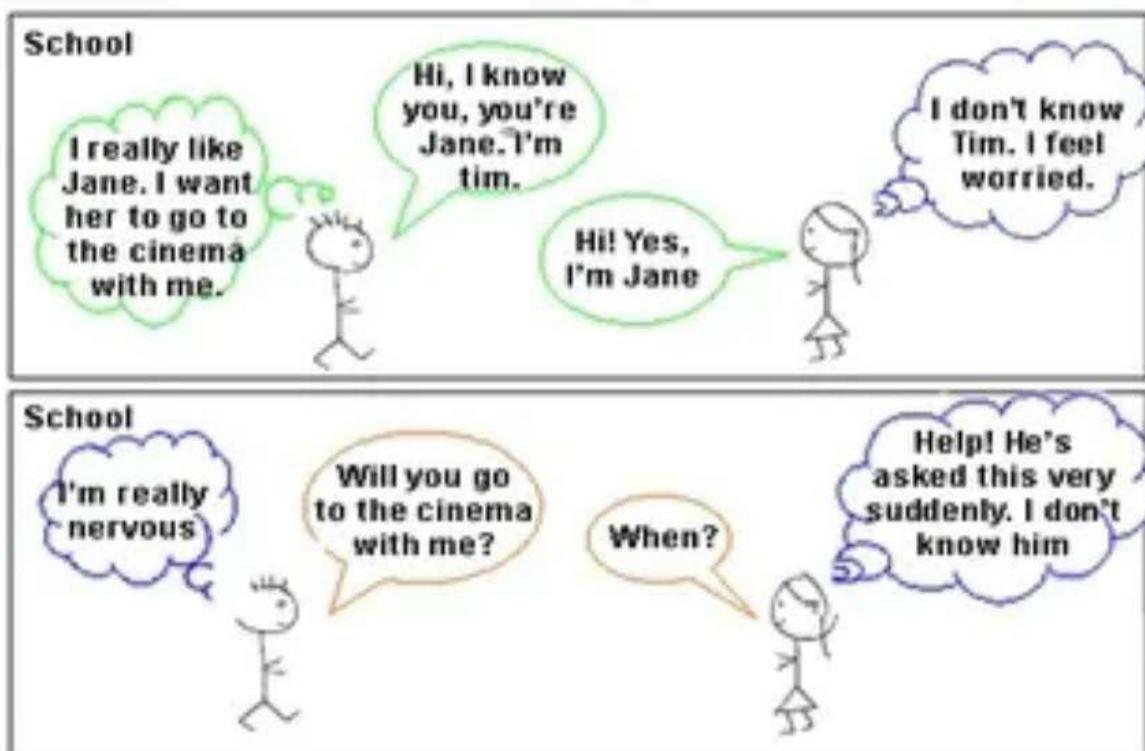
- Describe specific social situations and help children with autism learn how to handle them.
- Read the story just before the event it describes to help your child prepare.



HOW TO HELP MY CHILD COMMUNICATE?

3. COMIC STRIP

- Conversations between people, shown with speech and thought bubbles, to represent what others may say or think, and understand other peoples' perspectives.
- Teach socially acceptable manners, problem-solving skills, and ways to resolve conflicts.



Because every child has their own age, way of thinking, and learning style, different types of visual supports—such as short scripts, social stories, or comic strips—can help make things clearer and more meaningful for your child.

HOW TO HELP MY CHILD COMMUNICATE?

4. AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

These are various methods, techniques, and devices designed to help individuals with speech and language difficulties communicate. They can be used in a variety of settings—including at home, in school, and in the community—to support skill development and promote generalization. You can discuss with your child's teacher, doctor or therapists if you would like your child to get started on these.

Picture exchange

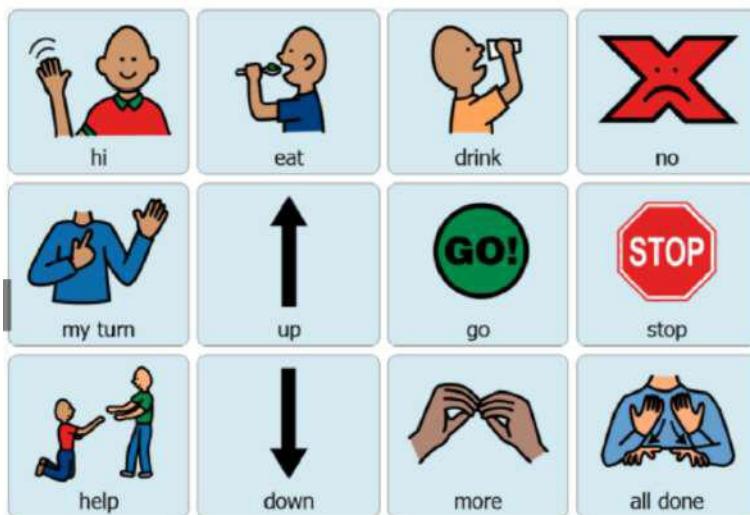
Individuals learn to exchange pictures for desired objects. For example, they may present to a caregiver a picture of a specific food that they want to eat.

Speech generating devices

These are electronic devices, often tablets like iPads, that enable users to communicate. Options include typing words that are converted to speech, selecting pictures, or pressing buttons to generate spoken output, such as pre-recorded phrases. For example, 'I want to go to the toilet'.

Eye gaze system

These devices allow individuals who cannot use a mouse or keyboard to control a computer using only their eyes. A small camera tracks their eye movements, enabling them to select buttons, type words, and communicate through a speech-generating device.



UNDERSTANDING ROUTINES

Supporting Your Child Through Change

Children with autism often find comfort in predictable routines.

Changes—like cancelled activities due to weather, a different teacher, or holidays—can sometimes be stressful.

Ways to help your child prepare for changes:

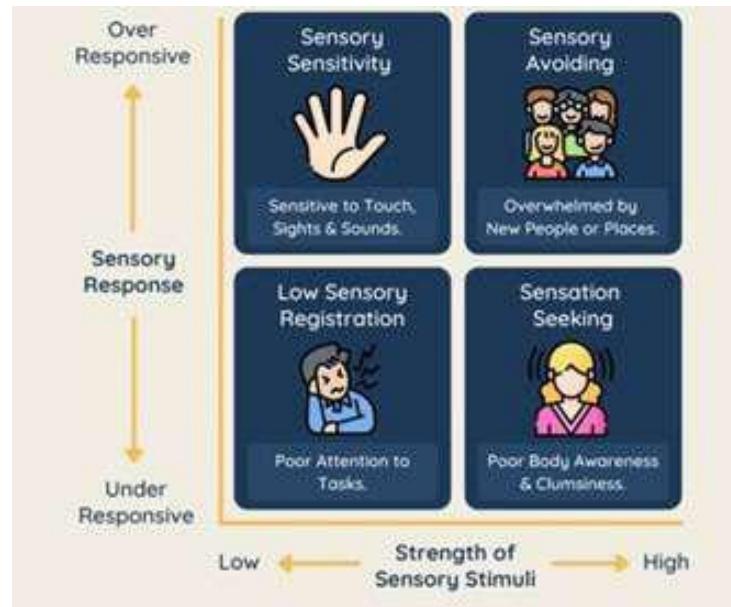
- Use visual supports such as short scripts or social stories.
- Create timetables or schedules that show what will happen, what to expect, and what they can look forward to.
- Give extra time to prepare for the change before it happens.



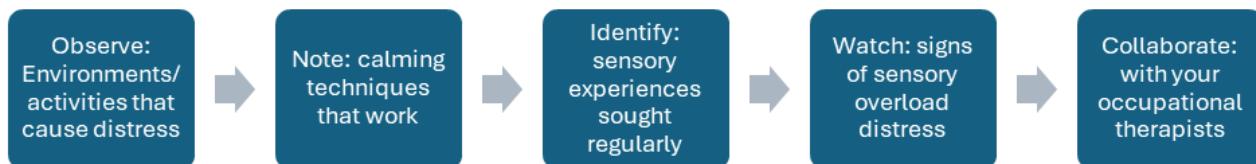
SENSORY PROCESSING

Common Sensory Experiences:

- Over-responsiveness
 - Sensations feel more intense or overwhelming
- Under-responsiveness
 - Reduced awareness of sensory input
- Sensory Seeking
 - Craving certain sensory experiences
- Sensory Fluctuations
 - Sensitivity level changes across different setting



How to identify sensory needs:



Children with ASD may process sensory stimuli differently

- Public spaces
 - May dislike crowded, noisy, or visually busy spaces.
- Social Interactions:
 - Difficulty tolerating proximity or touch, which can make social situations challenging.
- Communication:
 - May need extra time to process verbal instructions.
 - Background noise can make it harder to focus or respond.
- Learning and Education:
 - Lighting and sounds in the environment may be distracting or overwhelming.
 - Handwriting and transitions between activities can be difficult.
- Regulating Emotions:
 - Sensory overload can trigger stress, anxiety, or meltdowns.
 - Anticipation of unpleasant sensory experiences can increase worry.
- Managing Behaviour:
 - Sensory challenges can trigger fight, flight, or freeze responses.

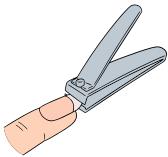
SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES IN DAILY LIVING

and how we can manage them

Area	Strategies
Eating (e.g. picky eating) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer small portions of new or less-preferred foods together with favourite foods Encourage your child to touch and explore the food before eating
Personal care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage independence in everyday tasks whenever possible Practise activities in front of a mirror to build awareness. Provide firm, steady pressure for comfort and reassurance
Brushing Teeth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gently massage teeth with a soft cloth Brush teeth with your child looking in the mirror Offer a clean towel to chew on if gagging occurs
Brushing hair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a brush with soft, rounded ends
Face washing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a predictable number of strokes Try cloths with different textures to see which is preferred
Showering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use gentle "no-tears" shampoo Massage scalp before washing Keep face dry with goggles Protect ears with earplugs Warm water can be calming, cold water can be alerting

SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES IN DAILY LIVING

and how we can manage them

Area	Strategies
Hair cutting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ear plugs or listen to music • Use a heavy blanket for comfort • Block water sprays from the face
Nail cutting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soak hands in warm water before cutting to soften skin and nails
Toileting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close toilet lid before flushing. • Use noise blockers for flushing/hand dryer sounds • Use disposable wipes • Provide a soft, cushioned toilet seat
Dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash new clothes before wearing to soften them • Remove tags • Choose seamless clothing where possible and how we can manage them
Sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a predictable bedtime routine. • Create a calming environment eg. soft music, dim lighting • Encourage physical activity 4–6 hours before bed • Avoid screen time 2 hours before sleep

CREATING SENSORY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

Creating a Calm Space at Home

Set up a quiet, comforting area—like a corner or small tent—for your child. Include:

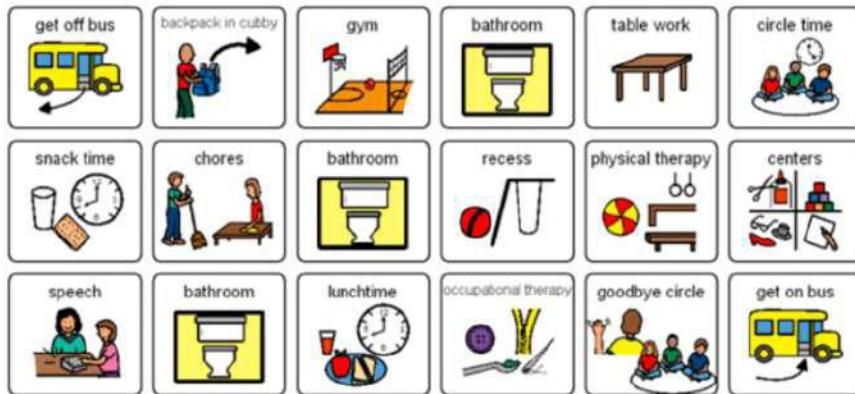
- Comfortable seating
- Adjustable lighting (dim, warm, or cool)
- Calming music
- Sensory objects (e.g., heavy blankets, fidget toys)



Supporting Sensory Needs at School

- Quiet workspace: Offer a calm corner or quiet area
- Sensory breaks: Schedule movement or quiet-time breaks
- Heavy work: Include tasks like carrying books, moving chairs, or handling PE equipment
- Seating: Anxious children may prefer sitting at the back or in a corner. Children with attention difficulties may benefit from sitting near the front.
- Visual supports: Use schedules and organisers to clarify routines and expectations.

My Daily Schedule



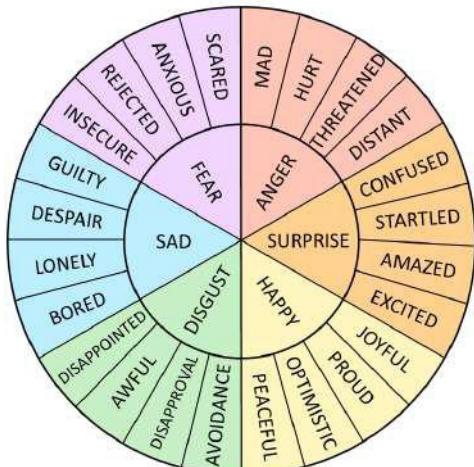
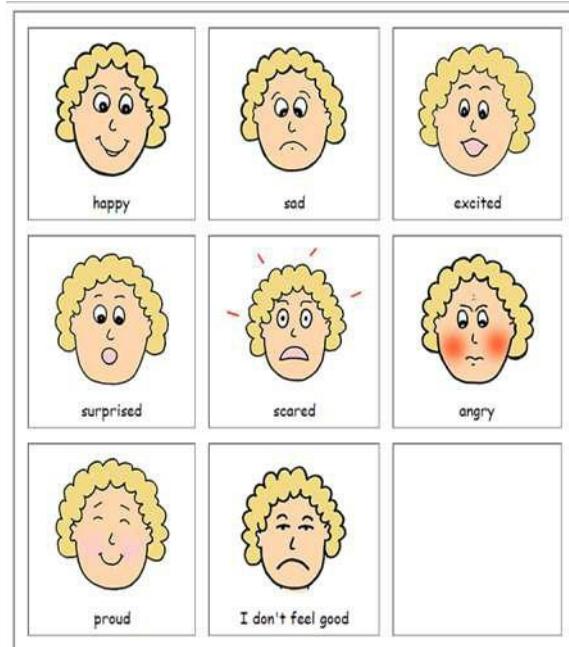
CHAPTER 02

Big Feelings, Little Cues

Children need support to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions, as well as to understand the feelings of others.

Recognizing Emotions

- Start with the basics: Begin by teaching your child about emotions.
- Recognizing emotions: Help them identify basic emotions in themselves and in others.
- Understanding intensity: Teach them that emotions can vary in strength and intensity.



! Children learn to understand emotions in different ways. Visual tools can help, such as:

- *Real-life photos*: Most relatable for children
- *Emojis*: Simple, clear symbols of emotions
- *Feeling words*: More advanced, linking language to emotions



All emotions are valid—there's no right or wrong way to feel. What matters is how they are expressed and managed, as some coping strategies are more helpful than others.

Understanding Emotional Intensity

You can also use tools such as a feelings thermometer or an emotion ladder to help your child understand and communicate different levels of emotional intensity.

Feelings thermometer



Encouraging Emotional Development

Teaching Emotions in Daily Life

- **Use daily moments:** Help your child learn about emotions and how to express or respond to them.
- **Label emotions:** Point out feelings in books, videos, or real-life (e.g., "Look, Sally's smiling—she's happy").
- **Be responsive:** Acknowledge your child's emotions (e.g., "You're smiling, you must be happy") and model your own (e.g., "I'm SO excited—let's high five!").
- **Validate feelings:** Show understanding (e.g., "You look sad" or "It seems you might be angry").
- **Encourage expression:** Support your child to use words or pictures to share how they feel.

CHAPTER 03

Helping Calm the Storm

Encouraging positive behavior

- Give instructions one at a time.
- Break instructions into small, manageable steps.
- Use pictures to illustrate instructions when possible.
- Give your child opportunities to make choices.
- Praise your child for following instructions or showing good behavior.



Understanding challenging behavior

Children with autism may sometimes have meltdowns, tantrums, or hurt themselves or others. Keeping a log of triggers can help you understand and manage these behaviours.

Common triggers include:

- Changes in routine: e.g., taking a different route to school
- Sensory overload: e.g., loud noises on the train
- Social situations: e.g., parties or gatherings
- Stress build-up: several small stressful events across the day

Managing challenging behavior

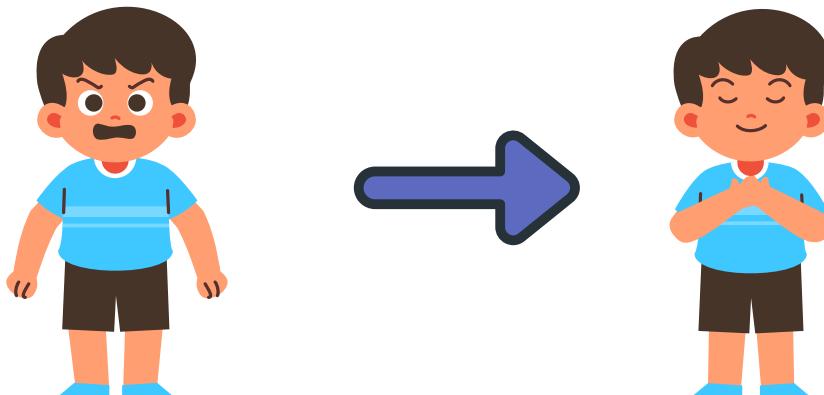
When your child is distressed, you can help by:

- Staying calm yourself
- Using short, simple phrases (e.g., "Sit down")
- Pausing stressful activities until they are calmer
- Encouraging coping strategies that work for them



Emotion Regulation

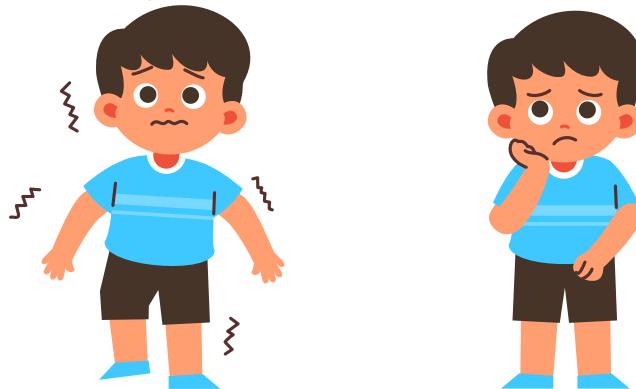
- Emotional regulation is the ability to identify and recognize feelings, including their intensity. It also involves choosing appropriate coping strategies or behaviors. examples include:
 - *changing the emotion*



- *reduce the intensity of the negative emotion*



- *enduring or "riding out" the difficult emotions*



Coping Strategies

- Reading books
- Watching videos
- Playing games
- Watching scenery

VISUAL

- Exercise
- Go for walks
- Trampoline

PHYSICAL

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Deep Breathing (breathe in through nose and breathe out through mouth)
- Listening to music
- Essential oils

RELAXATION

- Personal Mantra: Help your child create a short, encouraging phrase they can repeat to themselves, such as "I am brave," or "I can handle this."

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

This list is not exhaustive; you may discover other strategies that work well for you and your child.



The effectiveness of coping strategies differs for each child—there's no single perfect approach. What matters most is finding the strategies that work best for your child and practicing them regularly.

Practicing what we've learnt

Case Example: Helping Ben Cope with Change

Ben is 8 years old, has learning difficulties and does not speak many words.

His parents usually guess what he wants through his actions and facial expressions.

He enjoys playing at the playground after school. On a rainy day when he couldn't go, he became upset and hit his mother.

His parents helped him calm down by playing relaxing music, guiding him to a quiet corner, and giving him a stuffed toy. Later, they introduced a visual guide with alternative rainy-day activities, encouraging Ben to choose a few he liked. Ben uses his Alternative and Augmentative Communication device, his iPad, and presses pictures to show what he wants to do.

By consistently redirecting him to these chosen strategies when he shows early signs of anger, Ben is learning to feel more in control and apply coping skills in different situations. He can also better learn to communicate his wants and needs.



Practicing what we've learnt

Case Example: Supporting Tina with Exam Stress

Tina is 15 years old and attends a mainstream secondary school. As her oral exams approach, she feels anxious and scratches her arms.

Her parents support her in various ways.

They help her identify her emotions by using a feelings wheel. She looks through the different emotions and identifies that she is feeling anxious.

They run through coping strategies, including deep breathing, to help her practise calming down before the exam.

They prepare social stories about the exam, including preparing going to school, sitting in the exam hall, doing the exam paper, and going home after.

They also role-play the process together.

This helps her better prepare herself for the process of the exam.

During the actual exam, Tina manages her anxiety by practising deep breathing and using a stress ball to stay calm.



Practicing what we've learnt

Case Example: Helping Jay Build Body Awareness and Social Skills

Jay is 12 years old and attends a mainstream school. He enjoys spending time with friends but struggles to make and maintain friendships. He can sometimes appear clumsy, such as standing too close or tapping friends too hard when greeting them.

To help Jay develop better body awareness and participate more comfortably in social situations, he can engage in heavy work activities both at school and at home. Examples include:

- **Before and during school:** Walking to school instead of taking the bus, climbing stairs instead of using the lift, doing static exercises like chair push-ups, or helping teachers carry books or PE equipment.
- **Social activities:** Participating in team-based sports to increase social interaction and promote a sense of belonging with peers.
- **At home:** Regularly helping with household chores and including physical exercises of his choice in his daily routine.

These activities help Jay organise his body in relation to others and prepare him to engage more successfully in social situations.



CHAPTER 04

Co occurring conditions

Children with autism may also have other conditions that present differently from the core features of autism. These can include:

Neurodevelopmental conditions

Examples: Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), intellectual disability, language disorders, learning difficulties, and developmental coordination disorder.



Mental health conditions

Examples: Anxiety disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, psychotic disorders, gender variance and related conditions, and tics.

Physical health conditions

Examples: Seizures, sleep disorders, obesity, feeding challenges, gastrointestinal issues, dental problems, hearing difficulties, puberty-related concerns, and visual challenges.



If you are concerned about these, speak with your psychiatrist and/or paediatrician. Doctors, psychologists, and occupational therapists can support management.

Medication use

Medication for ASD

Currently, there is no medication proven to improve the core features of autism (social-communication difficulties and restricted, repetitive behaviours).

These are best supported through tailored learning and behavioural strategies.

Medication for other conditions

Medication may be prescribed to manage co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, challenging behaviours, mood issues, or sleep difficulties.

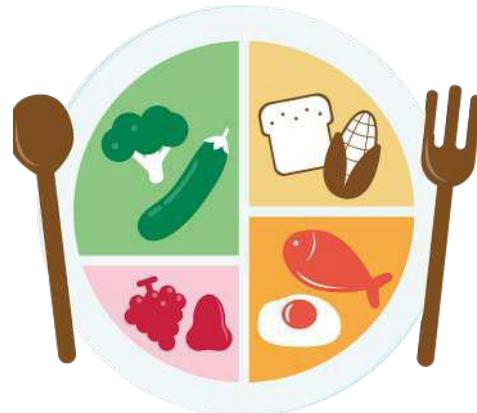


These work best when combined with psychological, behavioural, and environmental strategies.

Other Interventions

Complementary and alternative treatments (CAM) have limited evidence. Always discuss these with your child's doctor before trying them.

A healthy lifestyle is also important—encourage a balanced diet with fresh foods and regular physical activity. For more information, visit the Health Promotion Board website.



CHAPTER 05

Resources & Support



Autism Collaborative

This centralized platform brings together professionals and the autism community, providing a space to access resources, collaborate, participate in research programs, and enhance professional knowledge and skills.

The website offers a wide range of resources, including books on understanding autism, behavioral management, social skills, caregiver experiences and support, executive functioning and learning skills, experiences of siblings of individuals with autism, sleep, puberty and sexuality, and works authored by individuals with autism.

It also includes caregiver resources covering self-care, financial guidance, educational training, social media communities, exercises, skills training, and healthcare services.

In addition, the platform highlights community resources, offering opportunities in art, sports, horticulture, training and employment, as well as initiatives promoting inclusivity.



Autism Collaborative website



Resources and Guides

Enabling Guide

www.enablingguide.sg

This guide, compiled by SG Enable, is designed to support caregivers as their loved ones progress through different life stages. It highlights the various needs that may arise at key points, including at diagnosis, during early childhood, throughout the teenage years, and into adulthood.



Tools for Social Skills and Scheduling

Do2Learn

www.do2learn.com

Provides activities for social skills and behavioral regulation.



Social Workers' Toolbox

www.socialworkerstoolbox.com

Checklists, social studies, videos and workbooks including on emotional regulation, coping with loud noises, timetables



Social Stories Template

www.paautism.org

An editable template to create your own social story



Timetable Checklist Template

An editable template to create your own timetable and checklist.

Alternatively, you can use physical whiteboards or paper.



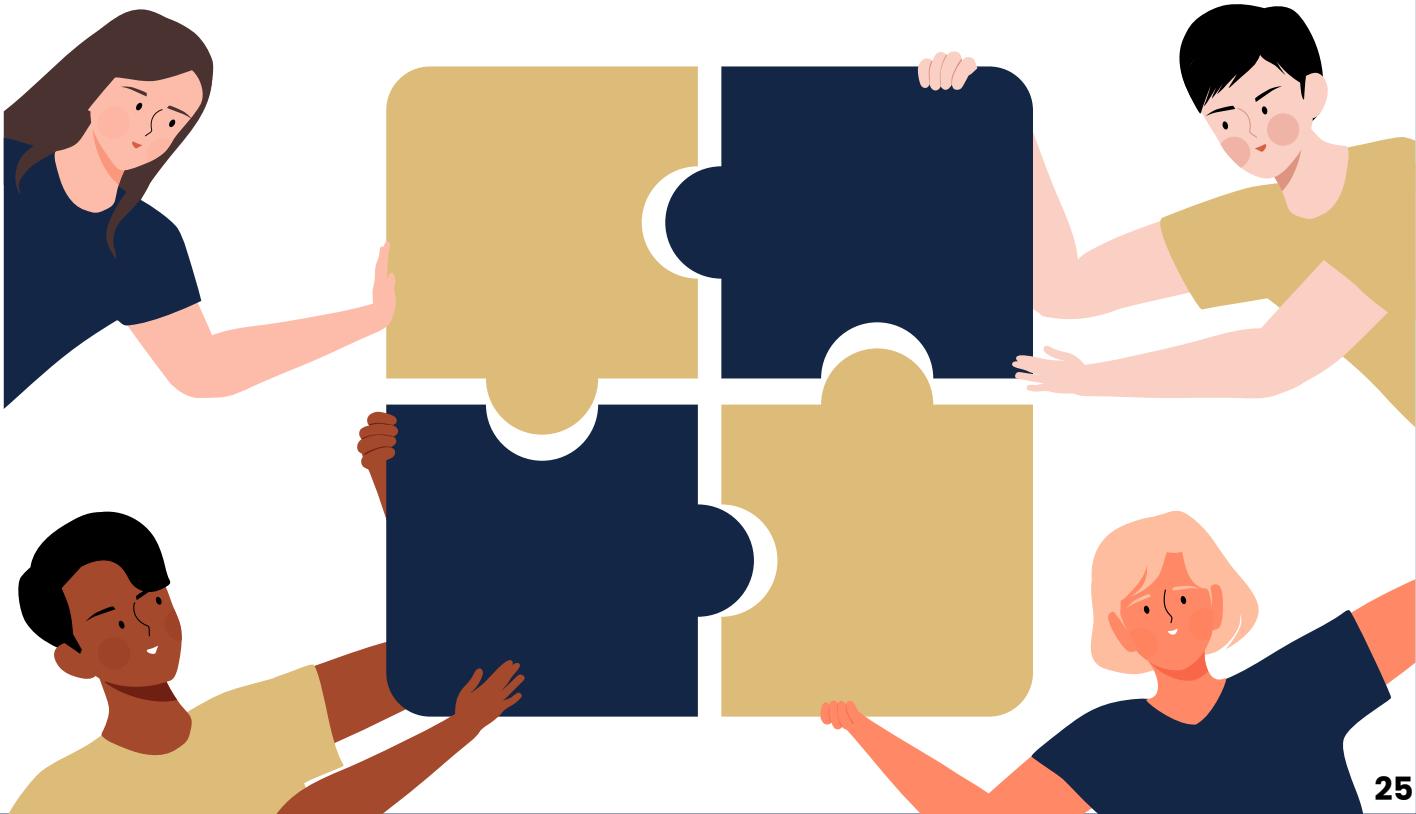
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