



Communication and Interaction Team

Learning Independence and Organisation skills

How these difficulties might present:

Many autistic people find it difficult to organise themselves and their belongings. They can have the skills to complete component parts of a task but often lack the necessary skills to sequence the steps required to achieve an end goal. They often have differences in their executive function, which impacts on their working memory, ability to be flexible, and to plan effectively.

They may also have a poor concept of time, which impacts on their ability to be independent and organised. They often rely on others to prompt them to carry out daily tasks and activities: reminding them of the sequence and the equipment that they need.

Strategies to support organisation and independence:

Structured Environment and Organisation:

- Set up and consistently use a visual timetable to indicate the key routines of the day. These can be either objects of reference, photos, symbols, hand drawings or written words. Hand-drawn images on a mini white board can work just as well as professionally produced laminated symbols and are more flexible to support with unexpected or last-minute changes.
- Support the CYP to go through the sequence of the day when they arrive at school. Use the timetable to prepare the CYP for any change to the usual routine.
- Pre-warn and give the CYP time for preparation to shift focus from one activity to another. This change in focus can be difficult. (Simple visual cues can be helpful at these times to back up verbal warnings about an approaching change).
- Organise, structure and plan individual activities supported by visual cues. Remember

to “show” not just “tell” the CYP what they need to do. For example the CYP may benefit from a visual schedule to support the dressing/undressing sequence for PE.

- Consider drawing up, with the CYP, a visual checklist of “things they need to do when they arrive at school” and “things they need to do before going home”. For example: Hang coat up, take out reading book, put water bottle on the table, put lunch box on the trolley, etc.
- Support the CYP to make a clear, clutter free environment to work in: clear desk, organised, labelled equipment, visual cues telling them what they need to do, in what order and importantly when they will be finished.
- If prompting a CYP to complete an everyday task, consider ways to teach them to complete the task independently. They may like to use a visual schedule sequencing the steps that need to be completed. (They may need to be taught how to use the schedule.) For example: get maths book, do 5 questions on board, show teacher.
- Break work tasks into small, achievable chunks. For example cut “worksheet” in half. This makes the activity less overwhelming.
- Adjust your communication: speak clearly, slowly and calmly. Give the CYP time to process what you are saying by pausing and waiting before giving the next bit of information. Give them the time to respond to your instruction. Only “prompt” them when absolutely necessary. Do not offer support too soon, as this could lead to dependence on adult support.
- Provide structure to unstructured times, such as break and lunch time. Through visual planners and choice boards.



Supporting Independence

- Resist always prompting and telling the CYP what is going to happen next. Consider teaching them to go to the visual timetable and find out for themselves what they need to do.
- Include breaks in focussed activities so that the CYP can “recharge” their batteries. (Consider teaching them to ask for breaks when needed. Using rehearsed set phrases or using a “break” card to show when they need a break can be helpful).
- To support the CYP to follow an instruction or complete an adult directed activity independently, show and tell them what they can do once they have completed the activity. Use their interests to motivate them. Possibly link to using a first/next board.
- To support attention and independence give each activity a purpose for the CYP: For example “Write down the instructions so that you know how to do this experiment next time”.
- Do not always anticipate and meet the CYP’s every need.
- Consider all adults supporting the child to use a “script” for example: “what do you need?” rather than anticipating their need. This will encourage the child to think for themselves.
- Allow them to make a “mistake” and support them to find a solution: For example the CYP may sit down to start a ‘work’ activity, but not have the necessary equipment. Ask them what would help them to ‘remember’ what equipment they need. The CYP may make a ‘list’ which could be placed/taped on their work space so that it doesn’t get lost etc.
- Use consistent clear language for everyday events, to support the CYP in understanding what they need to do (All supporting adults to decide on the language to be used).
- Using “backward chaining” can support independence. This technique involves the adult assisting the CYP with most of a task (such as dressing/putting on their coat) and supporting the CYP to complete the final step. Over time the final number of steps are slowly increased leading to independence.
- Develop independence in social interaction with others through activities such as “Lego therapy” where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Useful resources, links and further reading:

Schools and Early Years Competency and Standards Frameworks - www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk

National Autistic Society information on visuals - <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/visual-supports.aspx>

Examples of visual supports - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/atnair-p-visual-supports-and-autism>

YouTube video of how to implement visual strategies such as ‘now and next boards and visual timetables
-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXUypxTIAx0&feature=emb_rel_end

- <https://www.autismwestmidlands.org.uk/online-resources/visual-resources/>
- <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/visual-supports-best-way-use/>
- <https://www.totalcommunication.org.uk/objects-of-reference/>
- <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/visual-supports-best-way-use/>
- <https://www.totalcommunication.org.uk/objects-of-reference/>