

ADVICE SHEET

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WITH SOCIAL COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES THROUGHOUT THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

Environment

Sensitivity: Children with social communication difficulties can be very sensitive to light, movement and noise.

- Try to provide a calm, structured environment.

Visual Timetable: This gives structure to the day. The child can see what comes next and learns to recognise the pattern of the session.

- Try and ensure the environment is supported by photos / pictures.

Circle/Story/Register Time: Often the child will prefer to have his /her own space.

- Try a special carpet square that the child will recognise as their own, when they see it on the floor they will begin to know it is time to sit down.

Task Setting: Children with a lack of social interaction need plenty of repetition to learn new skills. They also need lots of opportunities to generalise the skills learnt.

- Try positioning the work area in a quiet place. Some children do not like other children passing them, so place their chair facing out from the wall (not towards it).
- Try working with only one toy or activity at a time and keep the rest out of sight.
- Have the activity in a basket on the left of the child's table. When it is finished, it goes in a basket on the right of the table.
- Keep the tasks manageable, e.g. if the child can only complete 2 pieces of a puzzle, only remove 2 pieces.
- Visually show the child what to do.
- Make sure the child succeeds.
- If the child can only concentrate for 3 minutes, they are successful if they achieve this; target 4 minutes next time.

Choices: The child is often confused by too many choices.

- Show the child 2 activities (car & sand) and let them choose.
- Objects themselves can be used or photographs or symbols.

Chill Out Zone: The child often finds his environment stressful.

- Try creating a quiet area where he knows he can calm down.

Language

- Say the child's name first - then give the instruction.
- Simplify the language used, by using keywords e.g. "Tom, sit down" not "come and sit next to me Tom".
- Visually support all language e.g. signing, symbols, pointing and demonstrating
- Use the same words every time for things e.g. "drink" for juice, milk or water.
- If you repeat an instruction, use exactly the same words again. If you change them, the child has to start re-processing all over again.
- Use names instead of pronouns - "give car to Meg" not, "give car to me".
- Encourage the child to show what he wants - don't anticipate his needs too quickly, but don't leave it so long that he becomes frustrated.
- Use photos of objects that the child normally uses e.g. drink, biscuit, favourite toy etc
- Use photos to support your own language e.g. a picture of a cup with "drink" written underneath.
- Don't insist on eye contact, sometimes it is hard to listen and look at the same time.
- Start a "home/nursery" book, to record what the child has done at home and at nursery; this then becomes a basis for shared discussion later.
- Keep your voice calm and slow, especially if the child is becoming stressed.
- Don't ask long questions e.g. "do you want to play in the sand?" Show him the sand and the lego and say "sand or lego".
- Break instructions down into small achievable steps.

Social Communication

To encourage eye-contact: children with social communication difficulties find this very difficult.

- Try sitting/kneeling at the child's level.

- Hold an object that the child wants, parallel to your eyes, just above your shoulder.

To encourage participation: at circle/register time.

- Use a special carpet square for your child
- Blowing bubbles near the carpet square will often encourage him to join the group
- When calling the register, have their name at the beginning, he will then wait for his name, respond (a glance, a nod) & then move onto an activity. Gradually place the child's name further down the register.
- Always ensure that the child has a good view of the story book/object etc, to maintain interest

To encourage initiation: it is important to create the need to initiate.

- If the child wants something, pretend you don't understand immediately and they may take your hand to show you or they may point.
- Rough & tumble games will encourage the child to initiate eye contact e.g. swinging child round and stopping, child may lift his hands to repeat activity; say "again" or "more" and repeat the action. Stop again and eventually wait for the child to ask by look or word.

To encourage interaction: this social skill is very important to develop.

- Play alongside the child and make your game very interesting, e.g. using loud noises, large movements, etc., the child may pause or copy.
- Copy what the child is doing but make it more stimulating.

To initiate a turn taking activity: this is the beginning of shared activity time.

- Use an activity that needs several pieces to be put together e.g. a rocket that explodes or a "marble run".
- The adult & child take turns (give one piece at a time)
- The child presses the button/knocks bricks down when complete.

Behaviour

Difficulties changing activities: this is often a very difficult area.

Try-

- giving a warning that the activity will change, using an egg timer or counting down
- saying "finished" supported by a visual sign
- saying what will come next e.g. "trains finished, drink time"
- showing the child a picture of what will happen next.
- being consistent - stick to what you have said
- using the word "stop" rather than "no".
- telling the child what he should be doing rather than what you don't want him to do e.g. "put your hands on your knees" rather than "stop flapping".
- keeping toys out of sight that the child continuously wants
- consistency of approach with *all* staff.
- praising good behaviour whenever possible e.g. "good sitting", "good listening" etc - this will promote positive self esteem
- ignoring negative behaviour wherever possible
- providing a quiet area for child to use when needed - limit time spent there

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