

5 Useful Tips for Supporting Students with Autism

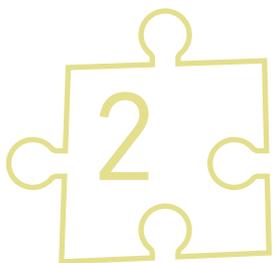




Use a home/school diary to develop good working relationships with the student's parents.

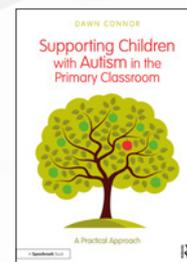
Initiate a good working relationship with parents using a home/school diary. Parents are an invaluable source of information in many areas, and fostering good relationships with them is vital if you want to know more about the child, what makes them 'tick', what upsets them and what motivates them. All of this information is incredibly important in helping you to teach their child in a more meaningful way.

Use the diary to communicate key facts about what the child has learned, how they coped that day (or not), whether they ate lunch (if this is an issue), and any other pertinent information, such as upcoming trips or special visitors. These logs can be a short, bulleted list, and should not in any way be a platform to complain or vent about the child.



Use drama work and sensory-based activities to mediate simple and safe-feeling forms of interaction with the student(s).

Donna Williams (1996) defines autism as difference in processing, integrating and tolerating sensory and perceptual information. She describes how the storing of information about an object, person or experience was for her based on the sensory or perceptual quality of that thing rather than any generalised concept. At first glance, drama offers little in terms of sensory relating. Thinking of drama in terms of colour, light, texture, shape, movement and sound gives it potential as a sensory environment. Drama work with autistic children can focus on the making of an environment, one that promotes sensory experience but, by virtue of the fact it has been thought about, designed and made by people, gives a greater feel of human agency than that provided by a technology-based sensory room. Relating through one-to-one interaction can take place in and through this created environment.



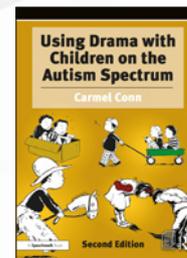
From *Supporting Children with Autism in the Primary Classroom: A Practical Approach* by Dawn Connor

For more practical activities utilizing drama work, read *Using Drama with Children on the Autism Spectrum, Second Edition* by Dr. Carmel Conn

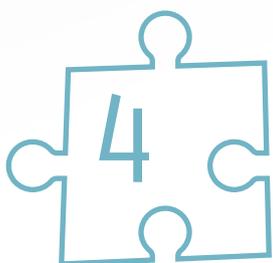


Use drama work to provide students with positive experiences of being part of a group of people.

When we think about work with drama, we normally think of working with a group. Dramatic relating can occur on a one-to-one basis, but more often it takes place between a number of individuals. Drama reflects life and most human life takes place in or relates to groups of people. Drama work with children can give a small taste of this, learning how to function in and negotiate interactions amongst people.

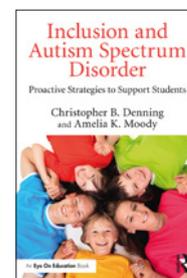


For more practical activities utilizing drama work, read *Using Drama with Children on the Autism Spectrum, Second Edition* by Dr. Carmel Conn

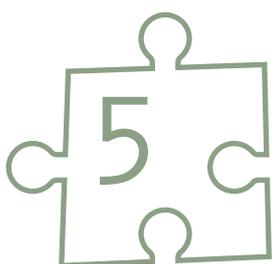


Use simple organization.

Learning centers should be well organized and appear neat. For example, a science station might include a scale, three different objects to measure, and a journal and pencil for recording findings. Having too many options can overwhelm learners and make the task seem confusing. Another suggestion is making a basket of books and activities that students can complete when they have extra time so there is always something to do. Make sure sensory stations are close by the students who use them so they do not disturb other learners in the classroom by moving about the room. Using simple organization can make it easier for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to understand where things go or what to do, and will likely help other students in the room as well.

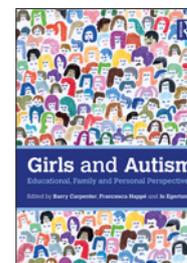


From *Inclusion and Autism Spectrum Disorder* by Christopher B. Denning and Amelia K. Moody



Use the 'wondering out loud' technique when helping autistic girls understand what other people mean.

Autistic girls are constantly trying to work out what other people mean. Not understanding what other people mean is confusing and can lead to high levels of anxiety, isolation and exhaustion. To help with this, you can use a technique called 'wondering out loud'. We wonder if a person is behaving in a certain way or is saying something because of how they feel or something they have experienced. We talk through the process a person went through to arrive at a conclusion – making the invisible thought processes visible. This approach can be used in real life or when watching TV or a film, it helps to explain another person's behaviour, and ultimately helps to reduce anxiety.



Read more first-hand insights, knowledge and strategies for working with girls on the autism spectrum in *Girls and Autism* edited by Barry Carpenter, Francesca Happé, and Jo Egerton

Reference

Williams, D. (1996) *Autism – An Inside-Out Approach: An Innovative Look at the Mechanics of 'Autism' and its Developmental 'Cousins'*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.