



A Practical Approach
at Home for
Parents and Carers

Aspergers Syndrome

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Falkirk Council
Housing & Social Work Services

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A blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text is written in a white, cursive font in the upper right quadrant.

Creating a
Supportive
Environment

1. Understanding Aspergers Syndrome and the Importance of Creating a Supportive Environment

People with Aspergers Syndrome (AS) are part of a distinctive group with common characteristics. In order to assist individuals to learn and develop, it is crucial that those around them understand AS and assist the individual to develop by providing structured teaching. This includes organising the physical environment and developing schedules and work systems which incorporate the use of visual material to make expectations clear and explicit.

With regard to the physical environment, people with AS perceive the world differently and many have difficulties making sense out of a lot of details.

People with AS first of all see the detail, and then try to get the meaning. It is therefore necessary to adapt the environment to suit each individual, to ensure that everything abstract (vague or theoretical e.g the concept of time) is made concrete and to ensure that structured teaching is carried out in the appropriate context.

If too much stimulation (something that produces a reaction/response) is available, people with AS are unable to grasp the meaning, particularly if stimuli change all the time. Consistency in the environment, approaches and positive routines may assist the young person to cope with daily living.

When adapting the environment, it is important to clear work areas/rooms of any unnecessary stimuli in order to allow the individual to understand the task and focus on what is expected of him.

Some children with AS may:

- Have a need for consistency of approach and for environment and routines to remain unchanged.
- Need flexibility to be specifically introduced to them to complement the consistent routines.
- Need visual supportive environment encouraged
- Have difficulty knowing how to spend time if it is unstructured.
- Have difficulty socially interacting,
- Find it difficult with imaginative play.
- Exhibit unusual or repetitive behaviours, such as hand flapping or fidgeting with clothes etc.
- Have sensory processing difficulties which lead to an extremely high tolerance to heat and/or pain.
- Be over sensitive and become overwhelmed by the noises of equipment or other people, smells and/or visual stimulation.
- Be sensitive to movement and have strong preferences and/or avoid certain movement which affects daily life.
- Not be aware of the consequences of actions or of danger.
- Display difficult behaviour in a car.
- Have gross or fine motor difficulties e.g. find it difficult to manipulate objects.
- Be very dominating in a conversation, talking about their interests.
- Unable to read non-verbal signals in conversation with others.
- Find sharing/turn-taking difficult.
- Have different motivators from others, often more concrete in nature.

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2. Advice Strategies for Parents and Carers of Children with AS

Sensory information from their body and environment may not be processed accurately for a child who has an AS.

Information from all the senses, e.g. touch, taste, smell as well as planned physical movement requires to be organised to do tasks successfully.

Performing self care tasks involves a series of complex processes, such as sequencing, motor planning and body awareness, for example toothpaste has to be put on the brush before it enters your mouth. Other areas also have to be considered: adequate attention levels are required if the activity is to be achieved and a number of sensitivities to tactile experiences have to be overcome e.g. from clothes and towels.

Children who have an AS may not be able to adapt to their environment, therefore changes may have to be made for them to maximise their potential. These changes will be applicable at home, in nursery school, school and any other environment in which the child spends a substantial period of time. The following are suggestions of possible strategies and are split into sensory and general strategies. Each child is an individual and the strategy which works for one may not work for another. Parents often know 'at a glance' which strategies will work for their child, but the Occupational Therapist will be happy to advise if required.

Activities of Daily Living

Dressing

Sensory:

- Use comfortable clothes, consider type of fabric and length of sleeves.
- If the child cannot tolerate labels, cut them out.
- If the child cannot tolerate seams, undergarments can be worn to reduce friction.
- Try washing and drying clothes in unscented products.
- Dressing can be done in front of a mirror so as to provide visual cues to assist with sequencing, motor planning and body awareness.
- Be aware of other visual or auditory noises in the room which may be off-putting.

General:

- Practice dressing skills at home when there is plenty of time to complete the activity.
- Choose shoes with velcro or add velcro to button backs and zips.
- Organise drawers and put a picture label, if necessary, in front to enable the child to choose their own clothes.
- If the child has balance difficulties, try dressing sitting down.
- Play with dolls or teddy bears that require to be dressed to practise skills.
- Grade the activity so that the parent does some and the child does some.
- A dressing chart with pictures may assist to sequence the activity.
- Give a liked activity at the end of dressing or sticker chart towards a prize to motivate.



Personal Hygiene

Sensory:

- Use non-perfumed soap.
- Be aware of bathroom lighting levels and minimise any noises, e.g. run the bath prior to entering the bathroom.
- Use pressure when shampooing or drying with a towel.
- Before bath time, do activities that provide deep touch input, for example, resting your hands on your child's shoulders and applying moderate pressure.
- Make the transition from undressing and getting into the bath as quick and smooth as possible.
- If the child dislikes having his face or body washed, encourage him to wash himself. Self-initiated touch produces a less defensive reaction.
- Use a large sponge or loofah sponge. Rub firmly to decrease defensiveness.
- If the child is showering, use a hand held shower nozzle. Let the child control the direction and force of the water.
- Use a large towel, and quickly and firmly wrap the child in it. Avoid exposure of the wet skin to the air: the light touch may trigger a defensive reaction.
- Provide deep-touch using a towel to the head, hands and feet to decrease defensiveness. If the child will tolerate it, provide a firm massage, using lotion to avoid skin irritation.

General:

- Choice of colour of facecloth, toothbrush etc may give a sense of more control.
- Where the choice is available, allow your child to choose a bath or a shower. (A larger showerhead is often more acceptable to the child, as it distributes the water more evenly)
- Try to incorporate bathing into a play activity, for example use floating toys and bubbles.
- Talk to your child and explain every step, particularly when you are going to touch them with soap or a towel.
- Visual aids can be used in order to help your child understand the activity.
- Consider adaptive equipment that may make the task easier, for example a grab rail may offer more support getting in/out the bath.
- After dressing consider motivation activity or chart.

Hair - Grooming Cutting Washing

- Seat the child firmly on your knee and squeeze the child firmly between your knees (deep pressure).
- Place your hands on top of your child's head and exert gently but constant pressure down.
- Use a firm stroke or pressure as you comb or wash your child's hair.
- Count or have the child count as you comb, wash, rinse or cut the hair.
- Give definite time limits to the task e.g. let's count to 10, then we will stop cutting your hair, provide deep pressure immediately after. (see above)
- Break the task into small steps and eliminate any unnecessary steps or stages.
- Practise each step in isolation in a stress-free environment.
- Gradually combine these steps and perform the task in the natural environment.
- Try stickers and charts with motivational interest.
- Give choice of colour, shape etc. of brush.



Toileting

Sensory:

- The child may be sensitive to toilet tissue, try using moist toilet roll.
- Consider visual and auditory stimulation around and keep it to a minimum.

General:

- Visual aids can be used to explain task.
- Consider adaptive equipment, would an extra rail or infant chair be beneficial.

Eating

Sensory:

- Certain textures may be avoided by the child.
- Play imitation games with tongue, lips and cheeks.
- Weighted cutlery may give an increase in sensory feedback so as to make the child more aware of the appropriate movement.
- Give the child a personal stereo, ipod to wear with calming music, this may make it more tolerable for them to sit at the table.
- Before meal times, provide deep touch and total body exercises to decrease touch defensiveness.
- Try to make mealtimes a relaxed, pleasurable experience. It may not be useful to introduce new challenges at meal times.
- Try to limit the number of new foods introduced at any one time.
- Set aside a separate time for graded feeding programmes to remediate the underlying problem.

General:

- Try cutlery that is in a particular colour or theme to create interest.
- Try plates and cutlery with words on them to associate to task.
- Try playing with foodstuffs at separate times, e.g. cheese building blocks, vegetable monsters.

Oral Challenges



Picky eaters, specific intolerance such as not having different food on the same plate might be part of their routine. Chewing clothes, hands or other items might also be present. There may be a sensory element contributing to the development of these behaviours which an occupational therapist may assess for. In this case the following strategies may be helpful: (See also touch challenges, social and emotional environment)

- Redirect the need to chew to a more positive sensory activity i.e. chewy toys, crunchy foodstuffs.
- Substitute another item for the hand that is readily available e.g. wristband of suitable robust material.
- Provide a range of oral experiences throughout the day e.g. hot, sour, sweet, salty, cold, different textures.
- Try electric toothbrushes in a tooth brushing routine.
- Include some sensory toys as part of daily routine e.g. vibrating snake.

Sleeping

- Develop a calming routine before bedtime. Encourage quiet activities.
- Use a heavy/weighted blanket or flannel sheets to provide deep-pressure and a calming environment.
- Use older fashioned layers of blankets rather than duvets.
- Try using tight sleeping bag.
- Check visually all bed spreads for too much detail or colour.
- Check all bed linen for texture and smell i.e. conditioners, washing powder etc. may irritate.

Hand Function

Many young people with AS have difficulties with hand function. Specific assessment and remedial activities can be accessed via Primary Care Children's Occupational Therapy Service, however the following may be useful to carry out at home.

Fine hand play activities.

When a child only uses finger tips:

- Before activities, provide deep pressure into the palms of the hands, such as firm clapping or full press-ups or half press-ups.
- Carry heavy bags or boxes.
- Grade activities by using the fingertips then moving to use the whole hand. If the child will tolerate it, provide deep-touch input over the hand and writing tool, i.e. hand over hand squeezing.

When a child avoids getting hands dirty:

- Encourage less messy activities.
- Use tools to manipulate the supplies whenever possible (for example, a paintbrush rather than finger paint).
- Use messy materials that provide resistance, such as putties or dough mixtures.
- Lucky Dips – hiding items in different dried goods.
- Use "special interest" ideas to motivate.

When a child 'fiddles' with objects:

Your Occupational Therapist will help you to decide if this is caused by a sensory problem. If so, you could try:

- Small fidget toys e.g. koosh balls, magnetic stones, water snakes.
- Finding the child's own sensory preference and creatively incorporating this into a play activity, e.g. sensory waistcoat, stuffed toy, etc.

Adapting Environments Inside

Developing a routine and a consistent way of doing things can reduce the impact of their difficulty with language or attention. Organisation can give the child a sense of control in how they plan their day.

Sensory:

- Provide a place where the child can take themselves for time out, for example a small tent or cabin bed. Children with an AS often find dark and enclosed spaces calming.
- Avoid visual and auditory stimulation.
- If the child has a positive response to movement try a rocking horse or chair swing.
- Paint the child's room soft, pastel colours and put dark blinds or lined curtains on windows to prevent light distracting the child.
- If possible, situate the child's room in a quiet corner of your house.
- Give your child "heavy" tasks around the house, for example carrying the shopping, arranging tins on shelves. This may have a calming and organising effect.
- Provide a three sided work station in order to reduce distractions. The child can do homework or other activities in this area.
- Activities such as vacuuming may be better kept for when the child is not around. Later young people can learn to tolerate and anticipate such activities.

General:

- Label cupboards in the kitchen or bathroom with pictures so that the child knows where to find things.
- Minimise clutter.
- Try using a diary or photo book with familiar pictures, such as school buildings, family members, to ease the transition to different situations.
- Try to structure the child's time and consider introducing an 'activity schedule'

- When sharing a bedroom with a sibling, setting clear boundaries between personal space may be helpful.
- Provide a range of favourite toys that can be played with independently for short times, e.g. jigsaws, trains, cars.
- Store toys/equipment in closed containers which can be moved to a designated area when it is time to move to another environment/activity e.g. from playtime to bathtime.
- Consider clearly marking a work area at nursery/school.
- Use structured charts to play as well as other activities.
- Timers, clocks, egg timers etc. might help set time limits to special interest activities, topic of conversation etc.

Outside

Playground equipment can be used at home, and school or in the local park or leisure centre to provide an area where a child can play and have time out. Accessing local facilities may be more suitable at less popular times to reduce noise levels and distractions. Play areas that have clearly defined boundaries may be preferable. The following pieces of equipment can help the child to interpret sensory information and make it more meaningful.

- Swing, therapy balls, mini-trampoline or space hoppers for movement.
- Sand and water pits for tactile experiences.
- Play house or tent to provide a safe and calming area.
- Small sheds.
- Whenever possible consider additional planning for special events such as firework displays, birthday parties, football matches.

Noisy Public Environments

Is there a quick exit route if the young person becomes stressed? Is there a special toy/routine/contact that can be used to calm the young person?

- Consider when to carry out everyday activities. Is there a less busy supermarket, or off-peak time? there a quiet space available e.g. dining booth?
- Consider having the child wear snug clothing e.g. lycra undergarments.
- Consider having the child wear earplugs.
- Consider using a music player with headphones, allowing the child to listen to their favourite music. This may help to drown out environmental noises and help the child stay focused on an activity.

Walking

- Young people may not see the point in going for a walk without clear purpose.
- Have a clear route that can be described, or use pictures of your route.
- Have a clear timescale – e.g. we are going on a 10 minute walk round the pond.
- Consider taking a toy along in your/their pocket.
- Use motivators, charts or special interest after walk.

Garden Creativity

The garden can provide positive experience to give a young person calming times, time alone or with friends. Time to 'let off steam' is essential to all young people but especially people with AS. It can be planned to meet individual needs unique to the child and their family.

An assessment can be done by an Occupational Therapist to look at this with families.

A number of positive distraction techniques in the garden for young people with AS and can be discussed with an Occupational Therapist by families who wish to design a garden or buy outdoor toys.



Falkirk Council Social Work Services - Community Service has an interest in assisting in garden development. If parents wish to enlist assistance with design and practical manual work this can be arranged via the Local Authority Occupational Therapist.

Although funding for practical ideas which families may feel beneficial in the garden, is not available, many charities will support this for families and applications/referrals can be made by the Occupational Therapist.

Some of the following may be helpful to consider:-

- Creating sensory areas - small safe hidden areas or use of garden sheds with suitable toys can create a calming experience.
- Large climbing frames, trampolines, chutes and swings may give the young person the experiences of movement they need.
- The dislikes, likes, motivations and pleasures can be carefully looked at to give a unique experience which a young person can have in their garden environment which is vital to family life and support at home.
- Night lighting, gazebos and sheds allow the experiences not to be curtailed by weather or the dark.
- Small water features can be extremely calming or give something to distract when things are difficult for a child. Likewise, small wind chimes, musical chimes, light reflector toys or spinning toys may be both aesthetic and enjoyable.

The garden may be an area where, as a family, a shared experience with a young person can take place or simply be pleasurable for the rest of the family as a calm, quiet area.

Functional Communication to Access the Environment

Young people will benefit from visual schedules for the day even when they have no apparent verbal difficulties. These may be pictorial, symbolic or object reference based. Sometimes a sensory element to this can be helpful to reinforce other senses. This is crucial in the home or other environment. The child in school should be using this.

It may:-

- help the young people predict what will happen
- support spoken instruction regarding transitions
- provide a constant reminder
- support their understanding of the sequence of events
- introduce new activities in the context of familiar activities
- introduce planned change to their daily/weekly routines
- support the young person's independence
- give motivation to see point of activities
- enable to work out timescales

It should be used when:-

- The young person needs structure
- The young person struggles to self-occupy
- The young person has limited sense of his/her day
- The young person needs help to predict or organise his day
- The young person needs to know what is expected of them
- The young person is limited in what they see the point of

Young people
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It can be carried out simply in the home by:-

- Choosing the visual system e.g. concrete objects, photographs, symbols, written word - this can be with advice from the Speech & Language Therapist
- Organising and sequencing timetables, before the start of the day/evening
- Keeping the timetable in a recognisable place for each young person
- Keeping the timetable portable. When the young person makes any physical transitions, help them retrieve their timetable
- Reviewing daily timetable at start of each day/evening, with each young person
- Employing 'Point-Say-Do' principle for each activity on the timetable
- Actively showing and reinforcing when each activity is finished by turning over the symbol/ticking the word/putting the object in the 'finished' box
- Gradually fading your physical/gestural prompting, allowing them to develop their responsibility to use and learn from their timetable
- Using the timetable to emphasise clear beginnings and ends to activities
- Using calendars and planning in advance may reduce anxiety of not knowing what is happening. It might also help with timescales

Creating a
Supportive Play
Environment at Home



Play In The Home

Playing at home is something all children do as part of growing up. Sometimes this play is done alone, sometimes with siblings, friends, relatives or parents. It can be planned or spontaneous. It can involve the whole family. Play is often the occupation of children at home. It happens so spontaneously families do not notice it or how it happens. Children with Aspergers Syndrome (AS) need help to learn to play and/or play with others. Often for them it is a skill to learn, as are other skills such as dressing. Often families need to understand play from their child's world.

Children with AS may:

- Need a routine to play similar to other daily task routines.
- Need to be taught the rules in detail.
- Enjoy playing in different ways, which families need to understand and value.
- Need someone playing alongside if they are to begin to notice another person.
- Be distracted by a lot of detail or sensory difficulties.
- Need encouraged to extend from only one activity or occupation by introducing a second play experience for short periods, over time.
- Need only one sensory channel to attend to at a time e.g. something to see only or something to listen to or something to smell etc.
- Need communication in play at an appropriate level.
- Need no more than a few toys presented at a time.
- Need support playing with peers.

Play for most children regularly includes toys. Children with AS often have difficulty playing appropriately with toys.

Children with AS may:-

- Have set ways of playing with a toy which needs help to change.
- Not be motivated by toys like their peers.
- Become overloaded with too many people and toys.
- Have difficulty jointly playing with toys with another person.
- Easily break toys when first interest has gone.
- Have difficulty with imagination playing with toys.
- Require toys to be limited in detail i.e. plain, not patterns.
- Require toys which are easily built or have few small parts due to co ordination challenges.
- Prefer toys most like real items i.e. pan or phone like a real one.
- Need adults to value motivating “toys” even if they do not seem like a toy to the adult e.g. flapping a ribbon or ripping paper.
- Need adult support to play with peers

Play Environment

Play, both indoors and in the garden, needs to be an environment with careful safety checks on toys and location. Any possible sensory overload needs to be looked at in the environment. Play in the garden needs times when an adult supports. This encourages joint play but also stops a young person becoming too isolated or withdrawn. Play needs to motivate a child. Often a lot of movement, jumping, swinging etc. can help a young person calm down and they benefit from daily exercise, motor skills and sensory systems. Familiar layouts need to be available to relax a young person enough to engage in the serious business of play.

The following may be helpful to try:-

Bedroom

- Structured play.
- Reduce clutter to a minimum.
- Boxed and labelled toys.
- Change toys or boxes available in a routine.
- Consider creating a “den” in a pop-up tent or cabin bed area with enjoyable activities.
- Consider aromatherapy at bed time or other helpful routine if smell is a motivator.
- Consider colour and décor of room.
- Consider visual daily routine, including play, on bedroom wall.
- Use large cardboard box with lots of different ideas inside e.g. tactile box.
- Consider sensory distractions or motivation.

Family Area

- Have activities in a box your child likes to take out and explore as a family or with one other family member.
- Have a box for special visits i.e. “gran’s” box.
- Have 2 duplicate boxes with the same things in each plus a toy that joins with each section in a different box e.g. wooden train track in one box, train in the other.

Outside

Large play equipment - try out swings, climbing frame, trampolines etc. before you buy to see if your child enjoys certain experiences - often certain movements are very motivating for a child.

Garden Activities

- see Garden Ideas

Water - small features, small paddling pools, water pistol, water spray toys are all very helpful to play with your child.

Sand - Try keeping sand to a small amount and dry as it can be quite overloading for some children.

Family Times in the Home

Trying different music together or with cards with happy or sad faces if you like or the child likes the music.

Rough and tumble for all - try using large balls or space hoppers to reduce the amount of time adults have to take the weight of everyone i.e piggy-backs.

Toy Challenges /Reinforcers

Split in your mind activities which reinforce and motivate your child (these would be activities they would voluntarily engage in) and activities that challenge and they would not normally initiate themselves or keep up playing with without help.

Use reinforcers after a short period of challenging play.

Reinforcers could be spinning lids, lining up toys, bubbles, light tubes, ripping paper, edible rewards such as raisins, crisps, chocolate.

Play Challenges /Reinforcers


Playing with peers is often very challenging for a young person with AS. Understanding hidden rules of games, confusion as other children change their minds/fall out etc. are bewildering. You need to be the supporting person to play with friends to build up skills in this area.

Having a child to play or for tea, a school friend party do not come naturally to children with AS and need your help planning and developing strategies for this.



Play challenges you may encounter, with ideas for you to consider:-

Play Challenges	Ideas
Times when they are not able to focus on any toy	Consider keeping box of motivating favourite toys separate for this time e.g. wind chimes, windmills, light vibrating toys etc in a box. A small calm area like a tent or under cabin bed with textured cushions etc might be the best place.
Only likes one piece of music	Try introducing new music at a different time/place i.e. in bath time routine or on a different CD player.
Hates table top games	Keep it to only a few minutes. Consider visual schedule with favourite activity straight after.
New toys are played with rigidly one way	Don't give a new toy to be explored until you play with the toy and the young person in a structured session to open its secrets.
Finds return from school hard to join in with family	Give time out. A young person in school all day needs time to relax. Perhaps time on the trampoline or swing or a walk might help. Time alone or a set homecoming routine before they face mixing with friends.
Specific social events like parties are stressful and not a pleasure for my child but they want to go	Using social stories are helpful. These explain simply the unwritten, confusing rules to young person's experience. Using cartoon drawing with speech bubbles/think bubbles can help a young person understand.
Having someone to 'tea' is stressful	Plan the event carefully. Do something you can do with the children i.e. swing or a game. Only gradually increase 'free play' as it can be bewildering if you don't know how to relate to someone.

A collection of colorful LEGO bricks in yellow, green, blue, and red, scattered on a light blue surface. The bricks are arranged in a way that suggests they are being used to build something. The lighting is soft, creating gentle shadows on the surface.

Creating a
Social Family
Environment

The Social and Emotional Environment

Research shows that a child with Aspergers Syndrome (AS) can cause a great deal of extra stress in family life, particularly for mothers, and over holiday times. Families may benefit from support from services and their extended family to help them meet these challenges. Siblings require support and time with their parents and may also benefit from support from other services.

Siblings require support and time with their parents and may also benefit from support from other services.

Respite, befriending and young carers support groups all give space and time to families. The home environment however can be designed to allow families to get the best out of their time together.

The following are practical, environmental supports might be helpful:-

- Co-ordinating services where possible so that the choice is not either/or but both e.g.. respite and play schemes. Planning in advance with school dates and service providers giving the most family friendly package.
- Help to co-ordinate and plan schedules in the most appropriate visual format can be provided. These are often used in school but are seldom available for families to use at home. If this support works well in one environment, it can be used to support the young person in all environments.
- Planning family routines to include time with activities for each person, different combinations of family members and as a family may help bring predictability for the young person.

Keeping a diary of any challenging incidents can help identify trigger times or situations.

- Planning in advance special events, either social or of more practical or care needs e.g. shopping, hairdresser etc..
- When planning play experiences either with parents, siblings, extended family or carers play boxes with individual, liked toys may be helpful.
- Using choice in small things may be helpful in preventing difficulties in daily life tasks e.g. a choice of blue or red face cloth, the green or blue toothbrush today. This may also help build in flexibility.
- Using emotion cards to display how someone is feeling may help families not only express how they feel but get the message across.
- Planning "free" or "down" time for a young person. Young people with AS often do not cope well with unplanned time. To afford the family the opportunity to have this "down" time it can help to make a selection of choices available for the young person to self-select.
- Keeping a diary of any challenging incidents can help identify trigger times or situations directing alternative ways of doing something.
- Family life is not normally as structured as school. Many families feel that they would like this time to relax and not rely on fixed routines which resemble work. Children with AS however, thrive on routine and it should be seen as a challenge to get the balance right. Achieving this for individual families means that everyone feels supported. Often professional support is helpful here to suggest a diversity of ideas.
- Returning home after a period of intense social concentration e.g. from school, is often a critically difficult time. Planning and thought to using this time is particularly important. It may be that carer support will be the most helpful at this time, or that the young person needs directed to an activity they particularly enjoy, or to use a quiet area.

Each family member needs time to relax

- Transitions between activities often does not seem relevant to the home environment. However, if transition cards, objects or counters are used elsewhere, this may be helpful also to reduce stress moving on to different times of the day within the home.
- The young person's bedroom is often a source of stress or a place of relaxation. Use of the bedroom during the day for activity can be planned and activities, toys and layout considered. Routines or changes in layout (e.g. tidying up in boxes at night) may help night to be different.
- Often more unusual routines begin due to children growing up and developing unique ways of managing their world. All these unique features need to be considered in the light of their developmental stage. The family may need support to help the child manage their world, to prevent unhelpful routines being established.
- Each family member needs time to relax. Parents often feel guilty taking time to care for themselves. It is essential that this time is taken to build a strength and inner support to be enabled to meet the care challenges. Often families need help realising and accepting this.

Response to physical touch can also affect emotional attachments in a family. Sometimes this is affected by the young person's ability to tolerate touch or need for touch. This can have great impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of the relationships with family and friends.

The following may be helpful to consider to help improve physical tolerance:-

Touch Challenges	Suggested Strategies
Child withdraws or punches others who touch him lightly. Child reacts negatively and emotionally when touched lightly (exhibits anxiety, hostility or aggression).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teach others to touch the child firmly. Explain that the child feels light touch more strongly and as if he/she were being hit.• Approach the child from within his/her visual field.• Teach friends and relatives to show affection firmly and directly.
Child reacts negatively when touched from behind or when touched by others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell the child when you are going to touch him/her. Always touch firmly. Assure the child that you will touch firmly and that you will not move your hands unpredictably.
Young person may prefer the father's firm touch over the mother's firm touch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell the child what you will do and how you will do it. ("I'm going to hug you really hard."). Respect the child's need for control.
Child may pull away when approached for a friendly pat or caress from a relative or friend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make kisses on the cheek a form of deep-touch input. Hold the child firmly and give a deep, firm kiss.
Child may reject touch altogether from anyone but his mother or primary care-giver.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teach people always to approach the child from the front and always make sure the child is able to anticipate the hug or expression of affection.
Self-stimulatory behaviours are often oral e.g. hand-biting, spitting and prompted by anxiety. This can deter other people from building relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide as much explanation of the situation as possible.• Use of alternative oral stimulus e.g. chewing gum, crunchy foodstuffs.

Challenging Behaviour and Environment

Often families are aware that many difficult times with their young child can be as a result of frustration, confusion, altered routine and poor communication. Supporting families to give a full home environmental assessment and alterations to day or building can still leave families with times when incidents of challenging behaviour can be displayed. Close liaison between all agencies is vital to support behaviour. However, the routine, environment or communication challenges can also be a vital part. In the home with each family's unique needs, likes, enjoyments and challenges the support should be ongoing and altered to suit these needs.

All the environments the young person is in should share experiences which might reduce the behaviour challenge in one or other environment.

People with AS often find there is an innate weakness in empathising with others' feelings, understanding their motivation and predicting others' behaviour. Specific features which help make life calmer like routines, time alone or rituals when anxious often clash with what is happening in family environments. Understanding that their behaviour is often communicating stress or anxiety or, perhaps, bewilderment at others' behaviour is difficult for a busy family to bear in mind.

Crisis situations when a child displays severely challenging behaviour or distress at home can affect the whole family. Support of Psychology and Psychiatry may be essential.

Challenges may be supported in the home environment by looking at the behaviour at its different stages.

- **Triggers** - The cause of the situation. For young people with AS it may involve their routine being interrupted, a sensory overload of sound or light etc., relating to too many people at once or a demanding situation which is difficult for the young person and where they cannot ask for help. Times of the day - like the return home from school.
- **Escalation time** - Sometimes the stress of socially interacting e.g. school, may mean that suddenly when a child returns home they lose control for a time. Other times a longer period of building up anxiety is a pattern and reading the signs at an early stage could prevent escalation.
- **Crisis** - A clear view of how families are going to handle the problem may need to be planned. Calm and consistent responses by families are hard but essential.
- **Recovery** - Time it takes and best method of achieving this needs clearly stated. It may be time alone or doing enjoyable activities needs to be in place.
- **Discussion & Planning** - Talking about the incident with the young person later may be best supported visually. Showing pictures of feelings displayed and looking at how things can be done differently may help the young person understand. Consider using social stories or cartoon pictures.

Calm and consistent responses by families are hard but essential

Home Safety



Home Safety – Family Responsibility

Safe home environments are a priority for all parents. Families with young people with AS often recognise the need to be even more vigilant about maintaining a safe home environment.

Health Visitors can be contacted for general advice regarding safety by all families.

Other useful sources of information can be – Home Safety Officer based with the Fire Service, ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents).

House

There are pieces of equipment families may feel are essential for general safety. Many high street stores have leaflets of their own that can provide a range of suggestions and ideas including safety catches for cupboards, washing machines, fridges, safety gates for stairs, plug safety caps, seat belt safety covers etc. Safety glass in furniture is also essential and families may wish to check this in their home environment. Promoting an appropriate calming and safe environment is essential. Bearing in mind young people with Aspergers Syndrome are easily

distracted by detail many families try to keep this detail to a minimum e.g. keeping to a plain rather than a patterned colour scheme. Often creativity is needed to make a home environment a clutter free environment e.g. using a toy box to signify end of play sessions. These examples can reduce anxiety and the potential for the young person to become highly aroused and stressed.

Garden

As a safe play area is essential to all young people, this area requires good visual supervision to promote both the safety and developmental needs of young people.

Blind spots to supervision, dangerous objects in the garden, greenhouse glass and areas which can be climbed are all dangerous areas for families with young people with Aspergers Syndrome to address. Many young people feel insecure with a lot of detail in the garden or with too many toys. Positive experience of a safe play area as a place to calm them or to let off energy may not be achieved for the young person if these issues are not addressed.

Home Safety – Occupational Therapy Support/Advice

It is recognised many children and young people with AS require a level of support beyond normal levels of safety provided in a family home environment.

Local Authority is aware of its increasing role in supporting families. Occupational Therapists can discuss these with families.

Some examples would be.

- Clear boundaries when children are prone to wander.
- Clear visual guidelines for lack of road safety.
- Practical visual aides for time awareness.
- Calming techniques and positive distractions for young people who are distressed and unable to sit during a car journey.



If you would like this information in another language, Braille, LARGE PRINT or audio please contact us.



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