



**Strategies to Support Teaching Assistants working with Pupils with Autism**

by  
Lesley Martin

(Google images, 2020)

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**Introduction**  
Lesley Martin

Autism affects everyone differently

Think **SMART**:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable/Attainable
- Relevant/Realistic
- Time-Bound/Framed

**Person Centred Plan (PCP)**

- Review
- Learn
- Listen

(Google image, 2020) (Debenham 2018)

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**Triad of Impairments:**  
Social interaction  
Social communication  
Social imagination

**Difficulties**

- Sensory Processing
- Sensitivity Problems
- Obsessions
- Specific Interests

(Google images, 2020)

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### Dr Temple Grandin

**Autism is:**

- An **Ability** not a handicap
- An important part of a person's form, but not their primary identity
- Time Magazine 2010: named her 1 of the top 100 most influential people

(Fischbach, 2007, Grandin, 2020, Hauser, 2010, Poshier, 2015, Winard, 2020)

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### Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

Sometimes referred to as **Sensory Integration Disorder (SID)**, occurs when someone has difficulty organising information received via their senses

(Google image, 2020) (Child Mind Institute, 2020, NAS, 2020, Understood Team, 2020)

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### Hyper / Hypo-sensitivity:

**Hyper-sensitivity:** Causes sensory or information overload which others may not notice, but can trigger, stress, anxiety and physical pain. This results in withdrawal or meltdowns, which are difficult to manage and usually need to run their course.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycCN3qTVVyo>

**Hypo-sensitivity:** Results in not enough information being received and what is, appears muffled or suppressed, so it doesn't make sense. These children usually need physical contact or pressure and have higher pain thresholds, so do not always realise when they are hurting themselves or others.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKKrZSkzywl>

Can happen together or separately, but by adulthood most have developed strategies to control them.

(Covington, 2012, NAS, 2014, Underwood Team, 2020)

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## Obsessions, Repetitive Behaviour and Routines

Used as coping mechanisms or to provide pleasure and comfort but can also restrict a person's involvement and exacerbate their anxiety or pain.

### Specific Interests

Habitual features people with autism use to reduce stress. Previously children were deterred from using them other than as rewards, but more recent research has led to the recognition of their benefits, from a learning and social perspective at school and for successful careers in later life.

(NAS, 2020, Singer, 2020)

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## Self-stimulatory Behaviours



(Google image, 2020)

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## SPELL PHILOSOPHY



(Google image, 2020)

|             |                                                                         |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Structure   | Reduces anxiety from inflexible thoughts                                |
| Positivity  | Recognises and embraces autistic neurodiversity to increase self-regard |
| Empathy     | Ability to see the world from a person with autism's perspective        |
| Low arousal | Reduce anxiety issues related to sensory association                    |
| Links       | To other interventions and relationships within society                 |

(NAS, 2020)

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### Structure

**Environment:**

- Whole school approach
- Safe
- Structured / Boundaries
- Predicatable
- Accessible
- Visual activity areas
- Limited distractions

**Benefits:**

- Promotes independence
- Reduces anxiety
- Regulates emotional behaviour

(Google image, 2020, Middleton Centre for Autism, 2020, NAS, 2020)

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### Positivity

**Use:**

- Accurate assessments
- Realistic expectations
- Support
- Rehearse

**Build on:**

- Strengths
- Specific interests
- Knowledge
- Understanding
- Autistic intelligence

**Acknowledge:**

- Barriers

**Benefits:**

Increased self-esteem



(NAS, 2020) (Google image, 2020)

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### Empathy

**Be:**

- Calm
- Respectful
- Understanding
- Patient
- Predictable
- Approachable
- Good-humoured
- Methodical
- Use simple language

**Benefits:**

- Reduces anxiety
- Provides reassurance



(Google image, 2020, NAS, 2020)

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### Low Arousal

**Classroom:**

- Calm
- Orderly
- Individual work desk/cubicle
- Reduced noise levels
- Moderate lighting
- Limited colours
- Neutral odours
- Soothing background music
- Flooring

**Benefits:**

- Reduces anxiety

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9j6rQ4rtQY>

**Sensory:**

- Room / Corner
- Tent
- Swing
- Punch bag
- Slam balls
- Ropes
- Crash pad
- Light wall
- Toolbox
- Toys
- Fidgets

(Google image, 2020) (Edutopia, 2017, NAS, 2020)

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### Links

- Parents/Carers
- Advocates
- Schools
- Cluster schools
- Charitable organisations
- Professionals
- Medical professionals
- Wider community

**Benefits:**

- Share information
- Work together
- Reduce misunderstandings

(Google Image, 2020, NAS, 2020)

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### Sensory Stories:

Are safe, fun, 4 dimensional and bring a book to life by using senses rather than words and pictures.

**Benefits:**

- Develop communication
- Increase concentration
- Encourage interaction
- Flexible
- Creative
- Simple
- Suitable for all abilities
- Can relate to specific interests/familiarity
- Engage senses with new/old experiences to help make sense of the world

(Ryan, et al., 2014)

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### Sensory Circuits

Short alerting and calming activities used to stimulate the senses

**Promotes:**

- Physical
- Sensory

**Develops:**

- Balance
- Co-ordination
- Bodily awareness

**Includes:**

- Bouncing
- Spinning
- Wobble boards
- Wall pushing

**Benefits:**

- Promotes self-esteem
- Reduces incidents

(Google image, 2020)

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### Sensory Diets

Restore balance

Usually designed by Occupational Therapists. Involves physical activities which can be scheduled into the school day to meet the individual's sensory needs:

**Sessions:** 10/15 minutes  
**Affects:** Lasts hours  
**Helps:**

- Retain attention
- Stimulate senses
- Learn new skills
- Encourage adaptive responses
- Increase socialisation
- Home and school life

(Google image, 2020) (Morin, 2020)

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### Emotional self-regulation

The ability to adjust behaviours in situations where emotions may be overstretched:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Distress
- Nervousness
- Pain
- Anger




(Pepperdine Graduate School of Education & Psychology, 2018) (Google image, 2020)

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**Advantages of emotional self-regulation skills:**

- Regulates emotional behaviour
- Reduces anxiety
- Considers consequences to reactions
- Allows the application of coping strategies
- Helps achieve realistic goals

**Disadvantages of insufficient emotional self-regulation:**

- Exaggerated responses to situations compared to other pupils
- Negative emotions
- Meltdowns
- Low self-esteems
- Insecurities

(Pepperdine Graduate School of Education & Psychology, 2018)



(Good and Beautiful, 2020)

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**Yoga**

- Develops sensory and bodily awareness
- Calms and energises the body
- Increases self-regulation
- Promote social interaction
- Enhances speech, language and motor development
- Reduces anxiety levels
- Promotes independence
- Improves self-esteem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVUF5fNGIOU>

(Google image, 2020)



(Good Health, 2018)

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**Obsessions, Routines or Repetitive Behaviours**

If they do not restrict the child's learning, are safe and not causing them or their peers any distress or inconvenience, intervention may not be necessary.

However, if causing problems, support to modify or reduce their reliance may be required.

Identify its purpose and triggers and record the specific details over a set period: date, time, place; what happened before, during and after; how the child was feeling; how the other children reacted.

Contemplate if any changes have taken place to the child's routine or environment that may have affected their behaviour.

(NAS, 2020)

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### Specific Interests

**Advantages:**

- Help engage
- Support learning

**Disadvantages:**

- Intense
- Obsessive
- Repetative

Be flexible unless causing distress or interfering with another child's learning

(Google image, 2020) (Singer, 2020)

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### Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

Helps understand why specific behaviours happen due to real life situations or the environment. To begin visual and/or verbal prompts are broken down into simple **ABC** steps:

**Antecedent > Behavior > Consequence**

Prompts are gradually withdrawn and replaced with positive reinforcements or incentives until the child recognises that something good will happen for them if they continue to repeat their pleasing behaviour.

**The aim:** to replace negative behaviours with positive ones.

(Ayers, et al., 2000, Child Mind Institute, 2020)

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### Practical Tasks

**Group 1:** Create a Sensory Story around a Specific Interest for when the school bell rings

**Group 2:** Design an Emoji System to support a child with their emotional needs

**Group 3:** Design a classroom with a sensory corner to reduce the amount of time spent out of the class

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Group 1: Practical Activity Sheet

N.B. Each group would also be given an A3 sheet of paper to present their completed Practical Task to the whole group

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Group 1: Notes

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Group 2: Practical Activity Sheet

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Group 2: Notes

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Group 3: Practical Activity Sheet

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Group 3: Notes

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### Feedback Ideas from Group Tasks

**Group 1:**  
Sensory Story:

- Could include something to replicate the noise of the school bell and give the child the opportunity to touch and control the sound in a real-life scenario, to raise their awareness and understanding of its purpose and when it is expected to help reduce anxiety.

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**Group 2:**  
Emoji System:

- To support Emotional needs. Think about text messaging and what emoji's you would use to express your feelings of sadness, fear, happiness, anger etc. Could be a wall chart they could hang by their individual work area or individual cards.



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**Group 3:**  
Design a classroom with a sensory corner.  
Include: Moderate lighting, soothing background music, fidget toys, sensory books & fidget spinners etc.

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### Advantages of Inclusive Education

- Everyone gains access to a quality education
- Children with autism are given the opportunity to learn important life skills, such as social, emotional and behavioural development in a more natural environment
- Raises awareness of non-disabled children to learn about diversity and empathy
- Prepares children for life in the community
- Inspires children with autism to shine academically by presenting them with realistic challenges
- Expectations are higher in mainstream classrooms which encourages children to perform better
- Fulfills the legal obligations of Education Laws and Human Rights

(Lawrence, 2020, Reagan, 2012)

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### Disadvantages of Inclusive Education

- Children learn at different speeds, therefore children with autism may not be able to keep up with the speed of the curriculum
- Appropriateness of support provided
- Teaching staff may have had little or no training in teaching children with autism and place unreasonable or impossible demands on them
- More able children may receive less attention which can impact on their education and cause resentment
- It is seen as a money saving practice rather than in the best interest of the child

(Lawrence, 2020, Reagan, 2012)

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### Conclusion

- Autism is not a life sentence, but it is lifelong and covers a full range of abilities
- Appropriate interventions must be introduced and implemented to modulate reactive behaviours and enable pupils with ASD to flourish in congenial mainstream environments
- It is the Governments responsibility to work in partnership with Local Authorities (LA's), Schools, outside Agencies and Professionals to ensure this happens
- Teachers may need to rethink the way they teach and recognise the importance of support staff to ensure all children received the same opportunities for inclusion to be a success

(Grandin, 2020, NAS, 2020 and Reagan, 2012)

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- The sooner it is recognised by everyone, the more chance there is for all children with autism to be fully accepted in society and succeed in life.

**Stephen Shore:**

If you've met one individual with autism, you've met one individual with autism.

### Temple Grandin:

Kids have to be exposed to different things in order to develop. A child's not going to find out he likes to play a musical instrument if you never exposed him to it...

**Anthony Ianni:**

At the end of the day, we don't  
dream our lives...WE LIVE THEM!

(Grandin, Lanni and Shore, 2018).

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**Some useful websites:**

- <https://network.autism.org.uk/knowledge/insight-opinion/top-10-tips-new-teaching-assistants>
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/professionals/teachers/classroom.aspx>
- <https://www.thepightofthesendparent.co.uk/teaching-assistants-and-children-with-special-educational-needs>
- <https://www.tes.com/news/autism-tips-teachers-autistic-teacher>
- <https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/how-to-support-a-child-with-autism-in-the-classroom/>
- <https://engage-education.com/blog/supporting-students-with-autism-in-the-classroom/>

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <p align="center"><b>Soprinette and Developmental Artistic Learning Workshop</b></p> <p align="center"><b><u>Training Evaluation Form</u></b></p> |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
| Please circle the appropriate number:                                                                                                             |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
| The workshop was:                                                                                                                                 | 1 = not at all                      5 = extremely |   |   |   |   |
| Helpful                                                                                                                                           | 1                                                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Easy to understand                                                                                                                                | 1                                                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Retained my attention                                                                                                                             | 1                                                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fulfilled at correct level                                                                                                                        | 1                                                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Fulfilled at correct pace                                                                                                                         | 1                                                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| What I liked about the workshop?                                                                                                                  |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
|                                                                                                                                                   |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
| What I did not like about the workshop?                                                                                                           |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
|                                                                                                                                                   |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
| What I would suggest to improve the workshop?                                                                                                     |                                                   |   |   |   |   |
|                                                                                                                                                   |                                                   |   |   |   |   |

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