



EASEYS for ASN

Encourage And Support Early Years Skills for Additional Support Needs

Highland Council
Pre-school Home
Teaching Service

'Support Strategy Toolbox'

Have you looked here first?

EASEYS for ASN Meeting Additional Support Needs

<https://highlandcouncilpsychologicalservice.wordpress.com/easeys-for-asn/meeting-additional-support-needs/>

PSA Handbook - Additional support needs manual, PDF 19.56 MB - Highland Council

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/205/pupil_support_assistant_handbook

Useful Websites, apps and publications

Words Up Key Messages <https://bumps2bairns.com/what-to-expect-language/>

Space to Grow <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/06/9822/5>

Makaton <https://www.makaton.org/>

Hints and Tips!

Use a solution focussed approach:

- To identify various support strategies
- To be an active participant in the learning process
- To value the various roles you play in supporting learners

If it works, do more of it; if it doesn't work, try something different.

A bit about Support Strategies

In order to have quality conversations about children we need to reflect on our practice and the skills we use to support them. We also need to have a shared knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary relating to support strategies.

Our aim in supporting a child with Additional Support Needs (ASN) would always be for them to achieve the best possible level of independence. There are a wide range of strategies which might be used for different children and situations, some of which are described in this leaflet. Flexibility in your approach is a core message. Each skill could be used to support a number of different situations providing it is tailored to the individual child you are supporting. Children will respond in different ways and keeping a record of what does and doesn't work helps to build a picture of successful approaches for that individual.

Recommendations from parents/carers and supporting professionals

When working with a child with ASN it is important to make sure you have a clear understanding of the child's needs and the types of support they respond to best. You could do this by:

- Talking to the parents/ carers – what works well at home?
- Identifying current targets and recommendations from existing paperwork: Personal Care Plans, Form 1, Child's Plan, 'All About Me' booklet and Professional Reports, etc.
- Familiarising yourself with the child's strengths, pressures, interests and motivators
- Maintaining good communication links with parents/carers and professionals already involved

Useful Contents for a Support Strategy Toolbox

Consider aspects of the learning environment

A useful document from the Scottish Government: [Space to Grow - Design guidance for early learning and childcare](#)

Some children's play and learning can be compromised by the environmental aspects of a setting. The nature of their needs may have practical implications, for example wheelchair access or sound proofing. Reasonable adjustments can be made to reduce environmental barriers to learning and increase opportunities to participate. Even small changes should be considered to optimise the play and learning environment for an individual child.

Some examples could be:

- providing a distraction free area for easily distracted children or for teaching new skills in
- creating a low arousal space to provide for quiet time or to meet sensory needs
- clearly labelled storage to promote independence, using objects of reference, photos, pictures, words, etc.
- providing a range of different play environments for the child to choose from
- providing a good flow of space or clearly marked areas for children with visual impairments, mobility issues or who use mobility aids; walking frame, turning radius for a wheelchair, etc.
- consider how you position yourself when playing or talking with the child; maximise their vision and hearing, reducing distraction. Clever seating arrangements can help to 'block escape routes'.





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Observation

Never underestimate the value of purposeful and objective observation. Try reading [EASEYS for ASN Meeting Additional Support Needs](#) for ideas to support initial observations.

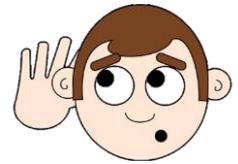
Follow the child's lead in play – building a relationship

Find their interests and strengths and play to them. 'Copy and Add' to the play situation but not just verbally. You could add to the child's play by doing something different with the same toy. Try to develop a non-threatening balance between copying and adding and ensure the child feels comfortable with this. Consider trying some strategies from [EASEYS for ASN Intensive Interaction](#)

Consider attention skills within an activity:

Some children need help to sustain their attention to play activities. Strategies which support concentration and attention are:

- Being realistic about an appropriate duration of an activity. What would you expect from their developmental level? Perhaps being short and brisk in your pace is the best approach?
- Chunking - breaking up bigger activities into smaller bite-sized chunks and using sensory/ movement breaks in between these steps can help some children stay engaged in play for longer.
- Optimum times during the day – does the child perform better at the start of a session? After snack? Do sensory breaks improve their attention? Do they tire as the week progresses? Do they need a settling in time in a quiet space after they have just been dropped off?
- Consider using visual supports (first/ then boards, choosing boards, etc.) timers (sand, digital, countdown, etc.)
- Consider different ways of presenting the same activity and the different places and positions you could use. Variety keeps things more interesting.



Alter your expectations and plan accordingly. Work to their strengths.

Making choices:

Some children with ASN can be overwhelmed by the full range of activities available in a setting.

Offering a reduced choice can:

- help children focus on a play activity
- may help reduce aimless wandering or flitting between activities
- can develop independence skills for children with more complex needs by allowing them to influence or have control over what is happening to them and around them
- can increase motivation as we are involving them in decision making

All of the above can help to build communication skills and reduce learned helplessness and passivity because we are actively involving the child in the decision making process.

We may need to build in opportunities to teach choice-making skills using a small step approach individualised to the child's developmental level and where the choices are meaningful and motivating to them. At this stage you would refer to any advice and recommendations given by supporting professionals e.g. Speech and Language Therapist.

- Consider whether you are using real objects (objects of reference), photos, symbols, etc.
- Use motivators: offer choice from two objects - one favoured and one less so
- Build in choice-making throughout the ELC session to enable the child to get used to this process and practice this skill but make the practices meaningful; offer choices for play activities, for snack, for sensory breaks, etc.
- Initially limit the choices to two then gradually increase to three or more if appropriate
- Demonstrate and model choice making and perhaps use another adult or child to help with this
- Offer a choice with minimal language so that the child can point to/ reach towards/ look at the physical object or visual symbols/photo
- Give time for the choice to be made
- Accept whatever decision is made even if you know that it is not necessarily what is actually wanted. It might make the child more accurate next time but be mindful of frustration so keep inaccurate choices short
- Generalise the skill to other settings e.g. in the library, at swimming, out on walks, etc.





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Demonstrate or model the task

One purpose of demonstrating or modelling can be to let a child experience or observe an activity in its entirety. This helps children see the context, the sequence, the outcome and their possible role in the activity. For some children seeing the whole activity benefits their visual learning skills. There are benefits for some children in peer modelling while others learn well by copying adults.

'Imitation skills develop in steps. Each step builds on the previous one, until the learner no longer imitates, but uses the skill spontaneously.'



[Quest for Learning](#)

Analyse and simplify the task

Consider which main skill you want the child to learn. Break the activity down into small steps and identify your target step or skill. Support the development of this skill using an appropriate range of supports strategies e.g. visual sequences, other prompts, backward chaining, etc. Then consider increasing the challenge by reducing any prompts used or the level of adult support given. You could also try practising in a different context or environment to help embed or generalise the skill.

Backward chaining

"When teaching skills to children with ASN, backward chaining refers to breaking down the steps of a task and teaching them in reverse order. This gives the child an experience of success and completion with every attempt. Instead of the child starting at the beginning and getting lost somewhere in the process the adult does all but the last step and lets the child complete the work. Then the adult fades back, doing less and less while the child does more and more, always ending with the child performing the final step."

[Verywellfamily.com](#)

We typically use this strategy when supporting early dressing skills e.g. pulling up zips; however this can also be applied to the development of play skills e.g. an adult completing all but the last piece of a jigsaw, adult building a tower for the child to knock down, teaching tidy up skills, etc.

Pause and Wait... and wait some more

'Pause and Wait' is a key strategy recommended to support early language development. See [Words Up Key Messages](#). This same principle can be applied to the development of other learning skills. Waiting can allow time for a child to process not only language but other new experiences and to communicate a cognitive or physical response. Although it may feel an uncomfortable wait for you it can be essential for many children with ASN. Pausing is an opportunity to watch for anticipation which may be a sign of recall (learning). Giving this extra time allows for a child to be able to make their own attempt before an adult steps in to support. This can build confidence and avoid over-supporting or deskilling the child. It is also a great way to measure the child's progress.

Practice - Repetition

The use of repetition is essential, particularly for children with complex needs. Often a skill can require hundreds of practices before becoming fluent and efficient but some children may require extra motivation! Be confident in knowing what skill you are supporting and how you will know if the child is making progress. If you become 'stuck' or unsure discuss it with others supporting the child. Sharing your observations with others is what informs next steps.

Some children resist repetition perhaps feeling that if they have done it once why would they do it again? Keeping the child stimulated during this period can require creative thinking and knowing what motivates them!

Skills maintenance

Skills may need to be re-taught over time or in new environments. This may arise due to complex needs or a deteriorating condition.

Knowing when to step in and step back

There is a balance to supporting without deskilling. A more intensive and "close" support might be needed when teaching a child a new skill or routine and then this support would be faded. Having the confidence to know when to step back and allow the child to demonstrate their learning or skills acquisition is an effective way of gathering information. We also need to be prepared to alter our response on the days a child is not performing so well.



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Prompts

The reason for using prompts with children with ASN is to help them work towards a greater level of independence. So, as we consider what prompts are best to use and how frequently we should use them, it is equally important to factor in prompt reduction in a careful and gradual way once a skill is being mastered.

Physical Prompts

Hand over Hand: These prompts are most frequently used with children who have a physical difficulty but could also be used with children who require extra support with fine motor skills. You need to make sure the child is not resistant to being touched before using this type of prompt and also be aware if they begin to show any sign of being uncomfortable. The adult may place their hand over the child's hand to guide or lead them through a task promoting their active involvement.

Other physical prompts include hand under hand, gently tapping the back of a hand as a nudge, supporting a child less intensively by the elbow, or even pointing. Physical prompts may be accompanied by verbal prompts. As the verbal prompts stay in place, the adult fades the physical prompt e.g. hand over hand can be faded by lightening the touch to a simple touch on the back of a hand or arm to guide the child through the task.

Verbal Prompts

Verbal prompts include one-word instructions or a specific phrase. For example, when teaching a child with ASN to wash his hands, you might say "Turn on the water" to prompt the next step. You should be consistent with the phrase/word you choose so that the child links it to the specific step you want them to do. Consider the fading of verbal prompts by pausing as the skills become more familiar thus allowing the child to demonstrate their learning.

Gestures

Use of natural gestures e.g. pointing, shaking or nodding your head, facial expressions, body language, etc. can be used to support communication. [Makaton](#) might be recommended for some children by a Speech and Language Therapist as part of a total communication approach.

Visual Prompts

We all rely on visual structure and organisation: signs, labels, calendars, diaries, maps, etc. For children with ASN the benefits of using visual prompts are to promote communication, participation and independence. Visual prompts remain in place long after the spoken word has faded. They can help children to:

- cue into activities and stay on task
- manage their emotions and anxieties
- make choices
- communicate their needs
- adjust to changes and know what is coming next

A visual prompt can use a range of items: a 3D object, toy, photo, symbol, drawing, etc. In ELC settings we can use visual prompts for labels, timetables, sequences, photos to support turn taking, etc. Use whichever visual prompt best supports the child's communication and participation and learning.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/visualsupports>

<http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/canaanbarrie/learningtogether.pdf>

Follow advice and recommendations from professionals involved with the child and parents to ensure that whatever is being used meets the child's needs and is being used consistently across environments.



Using motivators and rewards

Knowing the child that you are supporting well is essential in order to use motivation and praise effectively. Some children are not motivated by the social rewards of affection, praise or attention and some find them difficult to cope with. Sometimes tangible rewards such as a favourite toy or activity, computer time, etc. can be more motivating for them.

Personalise your approach to the individual, their developmental stage and their specific interests. Find out what works at home and use similar strategies in your setting.

Some examples: 'Let's make a deal', putting stickers on paper rather than on the child

