

# Social Communication for Older Children and Young People

A Session for Parents and Support Staff

# Aims of the Training



- Explain what social communication is and how it applies to all of us
- Talk about why skills might break down
- Learn strategies to support 5 different areas of social communication difficulties:
  1. Supporting social skills with strategies in everyday situations
  2. Supporting how to think about and understand social situations
  3. Conversation skills
  4. Friendships and relationships
  5. Listening and processing information

# What do we mean by Social Communication...

# What do we mean by ‘Social Communication’?

- Non-verbal communication
- Conversational skills
- Social understanding / awareness
- Relationships
- Flexibility and imagination



# **Social Communication Difficulties... We all get it wrong sometimes!**

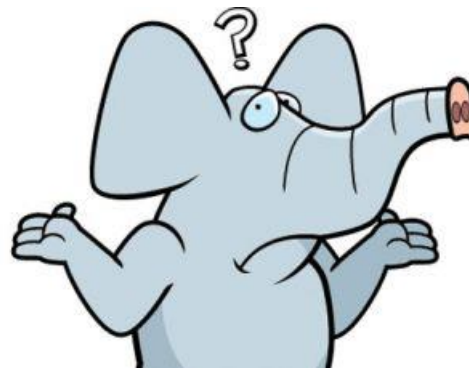
# What happened?



**Socially Unskilled**

# What is the result of the breakdown in communication?

- Immediate result – How does it make people act and feel?
- Long term result – How does it change the young person's behaviour and motivation around future communication opportunities



# Examples of Social Communication Difficulties (1)

## Non-verbal communication

- Appearing bored
- Mismatch
- Too close

## Conversational skills

- Talking for too long/not at all
- Interrupting
- Inappropriate topics





# Examples of Social Communication Difficulties (2)

## Social understanding / awareness

- Not being able to read a social situation
- Not understanding unwritten social rules that come naturally to most of us
- Not being able to predict or appreciate what other people may be thinking and feeling
- Unexpected behaviours

## Relationships

- Difficulty making and keeping friends

## Flexibility and imagination

- Difficulty applying previous information to new settings/situations.
- Thinking literally
- Lack of flexible thinking
- Anxiety around change

# Activity 1

- In pairs/small groups, discuss what your young people find difficult on a regular basis.
- Write down one or two specific skills that they struggle with or one or two situations in which they may struggle



# Why do Social Communication Difficulties happen?



# Why might social communication difficulties happen?

- Difficulty processing information
- Hearing Impairment
- Attention and Listening difficulties or diagnosis of ADHD
- Speech and Language difficulties
- Learning difficulties or disability
- Autism Spectrum Condition
- Adverse childhood experiences or trauma
- Low confidence and self esteem
- Mood and emotions
- Medical needs and health
- Emotional health and wellbeing difficulties
- Sensory needs

# Activity 2



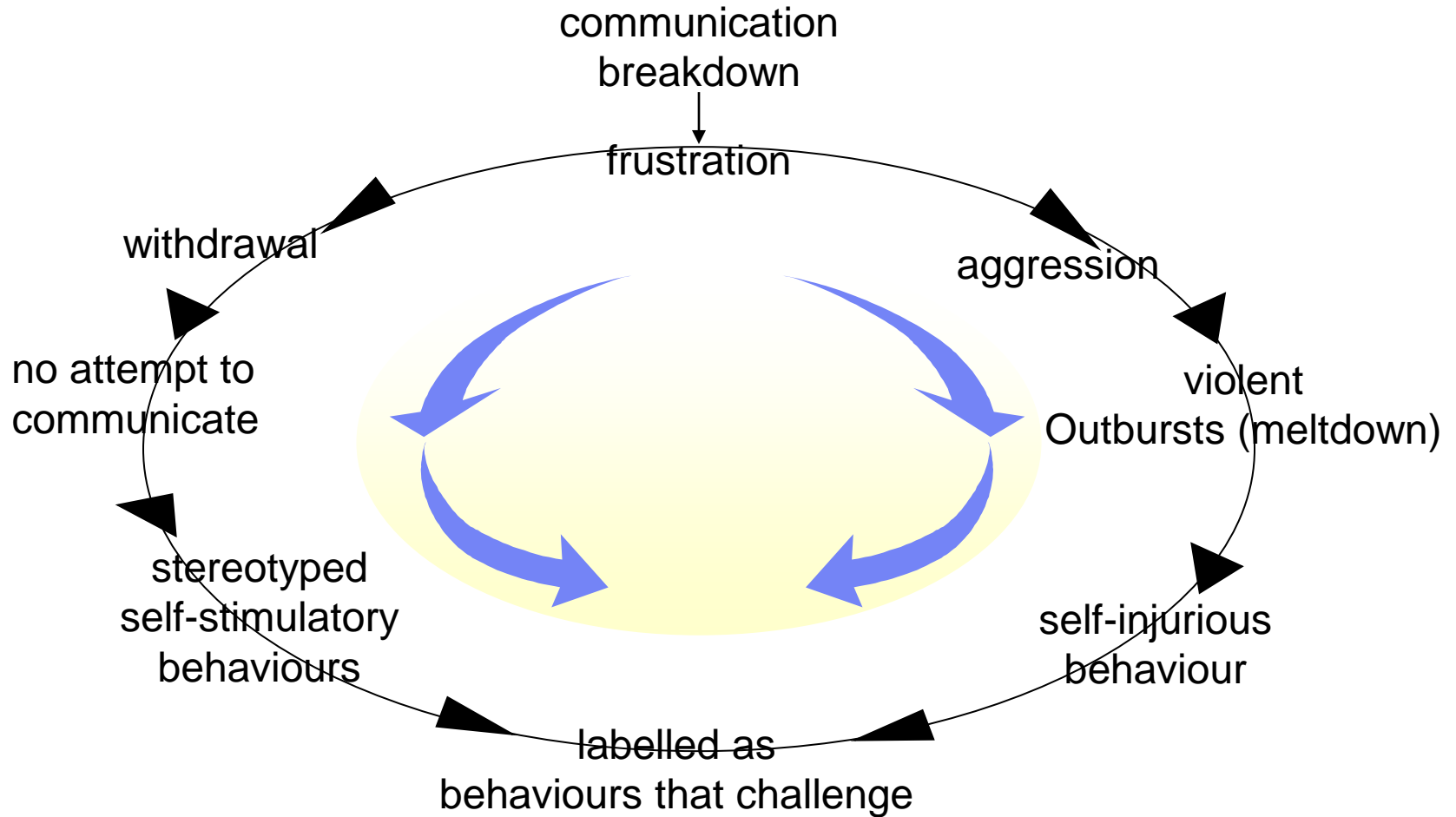
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# How can we help?



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# Communication and Behaviour



## Understanding behaviour as communication

Negative behaviour in children and young people with SLCN could mean:

I don't understand what you want me to do



I can't understand my feelings or do anything about them

I know you don't understand me and its making me very anxious



I can't explain what I mean



This work is too hard for me



I'm in a fight again and I don't know how to make it better




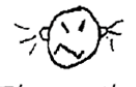
From RCSLT Factsheet:  
Understanding the links between  
communication and behaviour

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# Incredible 5 point scale

Name: David My Scared/Afraid/Trembling Scale

Rating	Looks/Sounds like	Feels like	Safe people can help/ I can try to
<b>5</b>	 Wide-eyed, maybe screaming, and running, hitting.	I am going to explode if I don't do something.	I will need an adult to help me leave. Help!
<b>4</b>	 Threaten others or bump them.	People are talking about me. I feel irritated, mad.	Close my mouth and hum. Squeeze my hands. Leave the room for a walk.
<b>3</b>	You can't tell I'm scared. Jaw clenched.	I shiver inside.	Write or draw about it. Close my eyes.
<b>2</b>	I still look normal.	MY stomach gets a little queasy.	slow my breathing. Tell somebody safe how I feel.
<b>1</b>	Normal - you can't tell by looking at me.	I don't know, really.	ENJOY IT!

Reprinted with permission from Buron, K., & Curtis, M. (2003). *The Incredible 5-Point Scale: Assisting students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in understanding social interactions and controlling their emotional responses* (pp. 1-3, 42-43). Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company. [www.asperger.net](http://www.asperger.net)

# Information Gathering

## ABC chart examples

### Example 1

Male autistic adult, non-verbal, with sensory difficulties, lives in a placement. His mum visits on weekends and Wednesday evenings

Day, date and time	Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence	Notes
Wed 1 Nov	Son calm. Watching TV with staff and other service users.	Son ran away from mum. Shut door of room and would not come out. Screamed and lashed out when she came into room.	Mum left. Son eventually calmed and was distressed mum was not there.	
Wed 8 Nov	Son calm. Playing with tablet computer in room alone.	Son screamed and covered face when mum entered room.	After trying to talk to son Mum left. Son calmed down.	
Wed 15 Nov	Son calm. Watching TV with staff and other service users.	Son ran into bathroom. Would not come out. Screamed and lashed out when mum came into bathroom.	Mum left whilst son calmed down.	Mum tried to come back when son calmed down and the process repeated itself.

### Interpretations:

Son is reacting to mum but only on Wednesdays. Does not display this behaviour at the weekends when she visits. After thinking about what is different about her visits on Wednesdays, Mum realised that she dresses differently and wears perfume on Wednesdays as she goes to a book club after visiting her son. As son has sensory difficulties, she concluded that he may be reacting negatively due to her perfume.

### Strategies:

After not wearing perfume, her son didn't react negatively to her Wednesday visits.

# 1. Supporting social skills with strategies in everyday situations

# 1a) Supporting routine and change

- Change / unfamiliarity can impact on communication and emotional wellbeing
- We can support our YP to manage change by:
  - Using visuals
  - Demonstrating and discussing routine/ events in advance



# 1b) Social Prompting and Coaching

- A common difficulty is that young people can tell you what they are supposed to do but don't apply it in situations.
- Social coaching involves gentle, supportive coaching in situations as they occur.
- Try to be positive and focus on what they could do rather than criticising them for getting it wrong.
- This is useful for extending skills beyond structured environments.



# 1b) Social Prompting and Coaching continued...

- Who can be the coach?
- Model coaching on yourself
- Don't forget to model and narrate good non-verbal skills as well as spoken communication
- Notice real life good examples



## 2. Supporting how to think about social situations

## 2a) Specific Social Coaching Activities

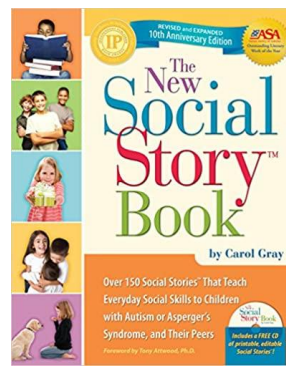
- Role play
- Watching TV shows/ films/ YouTube (especially soaps) with the sound off and predicting thoughts/feelings
- Coaching before and after (as a debrief) a social situation.





## 2b) Social Stories

- This tool was created by Carol Gray (1994).
- Useful tool for explicitly teaching social rules and situations
- Useful to help manage anxiety around new and unfamiliar events (e.g. parties, holidays, new school years) and to explain exactly what will happen.
- Useful for reinforcing positive behaviours which may not come naturally (e.g. “how to act if I receive a disappointing present”)



## 2b) Social Stories (continued)

- Social Story needs to be:
  - Descriptive (explain the information around a situation)
  - Written from the young person's perspective
  - Supportive (tells the child what they can try to do, not what they shouldn't do.)
  - Not directive (phrases such as "I can" "I will try to", not "I will" or "I must")
  - Explicit – avoid non-literal language. Factual, objective and debate free
- Should always be read before the situation (not as a punishment for getting it wrong)
- The young person should take ownership of the story and read it to themselves where appropriate.
- If you would like more information and support to write specifically tailored Social Stories, speak to your named therapist.



## 2c) Comic Strip Conversations

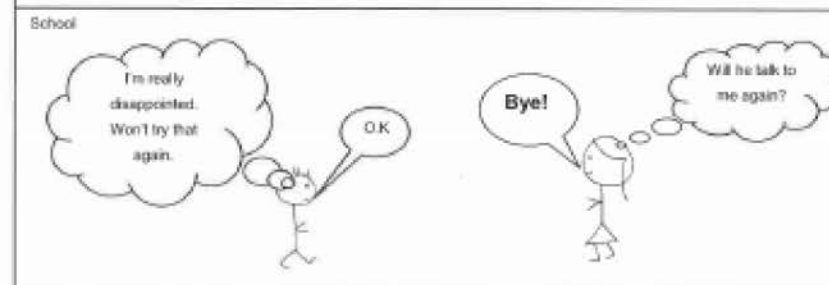
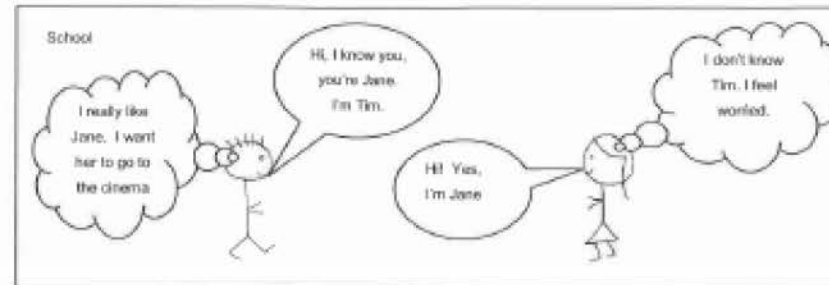


- Useful tool for teaching perspective taking and reflecting on breakdowns in communication.
- Our children/ young people don't always pick up on subtle non-verbal cues or read social situations appropriately.
- They may miss social rules and not understand why misunderstandings have happened.
- They may struggle with flexible thinking and seeing things from others' points of view.
- Comic Strip Conversations are a way of taking “snapshots” of social situations, allowing the child / young person more time to think and reason around situations that often happen too quickly for them to process.

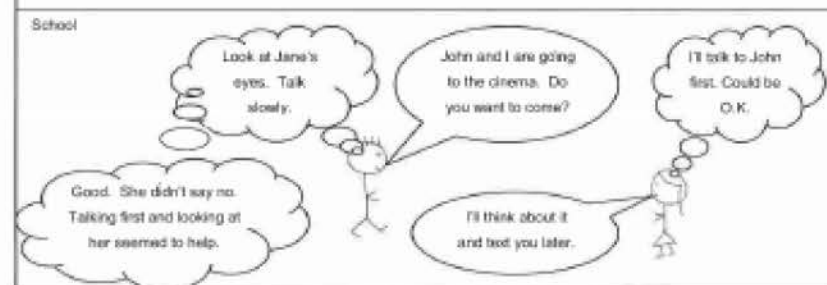
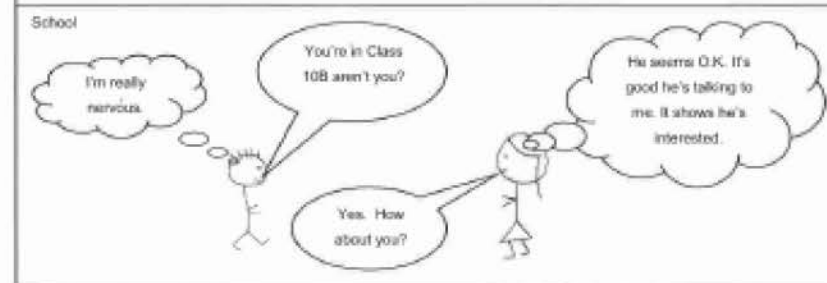
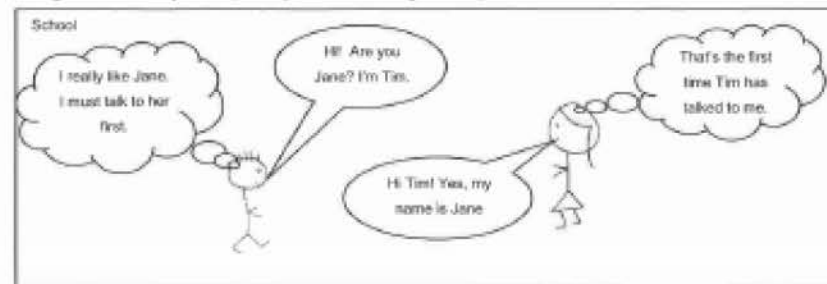
## 2c) Comic Strip Conversations



- Explain that you are going to draw a comic together
- Encourage them to do the drawing (or at least to provide the information). The more ownership the young person has, the more it will resonate
- Don't worry about the quality of the drawing! Stick figures are fine
- Each situation should be broken down into several freeze frames (usually including before the breakdown, during and afterwards)
- Use speech bubbles to indicate what was said and thought bubbles to predict what each person might have been thinking at the time.
- Faces can be used to show emotions.



Using a Comic Strip Conversation to explain possible reason for what happened.



# Activity 3



- Have a go at drawing out the following situation using a short comic strip.

Our young person goes out into the school corridor at the end of the lesson. Someone brushes past them down the busy corridor. They then say something rude and the other person shouts at them.

- The key is to try and teach the information which our young people may not automatically take into account (e.g. thoughts, feelings, perspectives, intentions of others)
- We are not necessarily trying to tell the young person what they should or shouldn't have done. We are encouraging them to see the entire situation from a different perspective.

# Comic Strip example









## 2d) Social Behaviour Mapping

- Useful tool for some of our more inflexible thinkers, as a means of understanding consequences for actions.
- Takes away the judgemental vocabulary of many social behaviour approaches (expected/unexpected rather than appropriate/inappropriate).
- Often involves looking outwardly at others rather than spending time analysing and evaluating the young person's own behaviours (can be useful for some of our more anxious learners)
- It demonstrates to the child that their behaviours can impact their own and others' thoughts and feelings


 <b>INITIATING PLAY WITH OTHERS</b> Behaviors That Are UNEXPECTED			
Behaviors, feelings, and consequences are listed in categories in arbitrary order. There is not a one-to-one correlation between the information listed in each column. For example, whatever behavior is listed first does not have to match to the first emotional reaction or the first consequence, and so on.			
Unexpected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Consequences You Experience	How You Feel About Yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walking up to others and grabbing their ball when you want to play.</li> <li>• Insisting on going first.</li> <li>• Cutting in line.</li> <li>• Yelling at others or pestering them when all you really want to do is play with them.</li> <li>• Not asking people to explain the rules</li> <li>• Yelling at people and telling them they are not fair.</li> <li>• Not looking at others.</li> <li>• Not appropriately showing others you are thinking about them with your body, eyes and words.</li> <li>• Choosing to play with people who have been mean to you or who you don't like.</li> <li>• Crying if you lose the game.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angry</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Frustrated</li> <li>• Angry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher may bench you or ask you to stand on the wall.</li> <li>• People will not understand your plan. They will think you are just being mean. They will not ask you to play.</li> <li>• You will miss important information.</li> <li>• People will probably ignore you or worse they might tease you.</li> <li>• Students call you names.</li> <li>• People want to fight you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustrated</li> <li>• Embarrassed</li> <li>• Lonely</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Upset</li> </ul>
	→		
		→	
			



## INITIATING PLAY WITH OTHERS

### Behaviors That Are EXPECTED

Behaviors, feelings, and consequences are listed in categories in arbitrary order. There is not a one-to-one correlation between the information listed in each column. For example, whatever behavior is listed first does not have to match to the first emotional reaction or the first consequence, and so on.

Expected Behaviors	How They Make Others Feel	Consequences You Experience	How You Feel About Yourself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Think about the people you want to play with.</b> See if you can figure out how they feel by looking at their face and body language. Do they look like they want you to play right now? Or should you try again another time. Is the activity full or is their room for you to play. Have they been nice to you before?</li> <li>• <b>Use your eyes to show others you want to be part of their group.</b> Look at the person or people you want to play with. Observe them, do they look like they want you to play with them?</li> <li>• <b>Walk up to others and put your body one arms length away from them. Face your shoulders toward them.</b></li> <li>• <b>Add your words.</b> Ask if you can play. Make positive comments about the activity. Ask questions about the rules if you don't understand them.</li> <li>• <b>Be flexible.</b> Go along with others rules (It's just a game). go with the flow! Be a good sport. You are okay if you lose the game. You remember it is just a game!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Great</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Calm</li> </ul> <p>→</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others will see that you are thinking about them and that will make them feel good. They are likely to invite you to play with them.</li> <li>• When you look at others, you will be able to see how they are feeling and make better guesses about what they are thinking,</li> <li>• Others will know your intentions. They will see that you want to play and they may invite you to play with them.</li> <li>• Others will know what you are thinking and will enjoy being around you.</li> <li>• Everyone will have a good time playing with you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great</li> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Proud</li> <li>• Calm</li> <li>• Ecstatic</li> </ul> <p>→</p>
			

# 3. Conversation skills

## 3a) Strategies to Support Conversation Skills

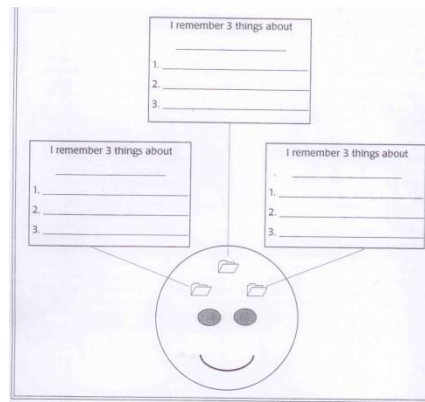
- Social prompting and coaching in the here and now
- Role play and social coaching as practise activities
- Comic strip conversations
- Social Behaviour Mapping
- Visuals e.g. Chat cards
- Chat time



# 3b) Worksheets to Support Conversation Skills



- Conversation toolkit
- People files
- Good and bad conversation starters
- Are you joining in or butting in
- What to talk about when hanging out with others (Social thinking, Michelle Garcia Winner, 2011)
- Talking About Conversations



I remember 3 things about

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

I remember 3 things about

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

I remember 3 things about

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# 4. Friendships and Relationships

# Friendship difficulties

Social communication skills underpin the skills required to make and maintain friendships and relationships. Everyone has difficulties with friends sometimes.

Young People may need help with:

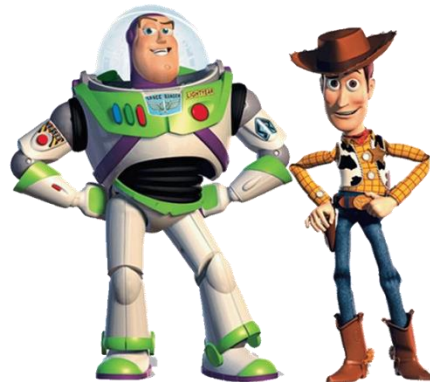
- Understanding the purpose and benefit of having friends.
- Understanding what a good friend is.
- Understanding and practicing how to make and maintain friendships/relationships.
- Understanding and practicing how to interact appropriately with friends.

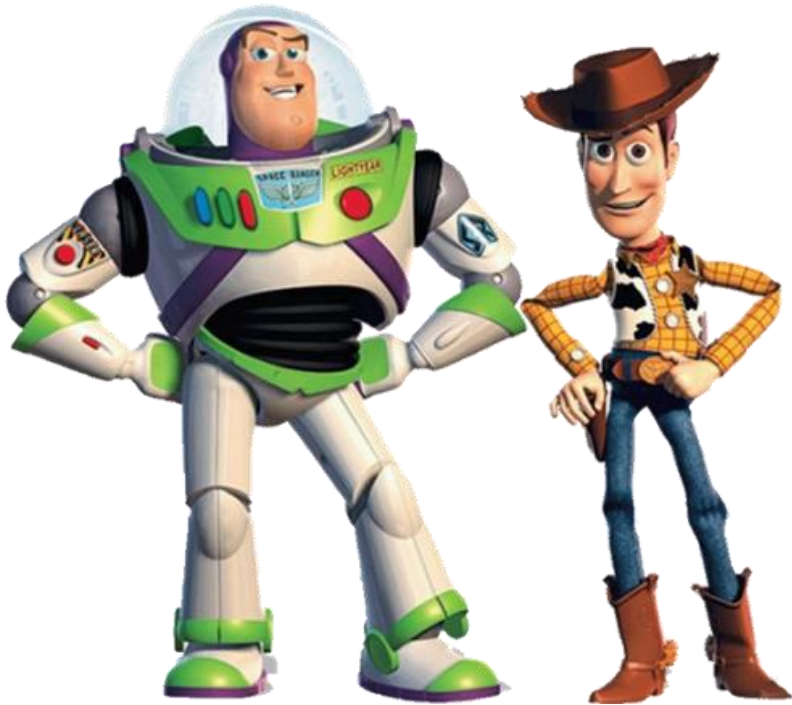




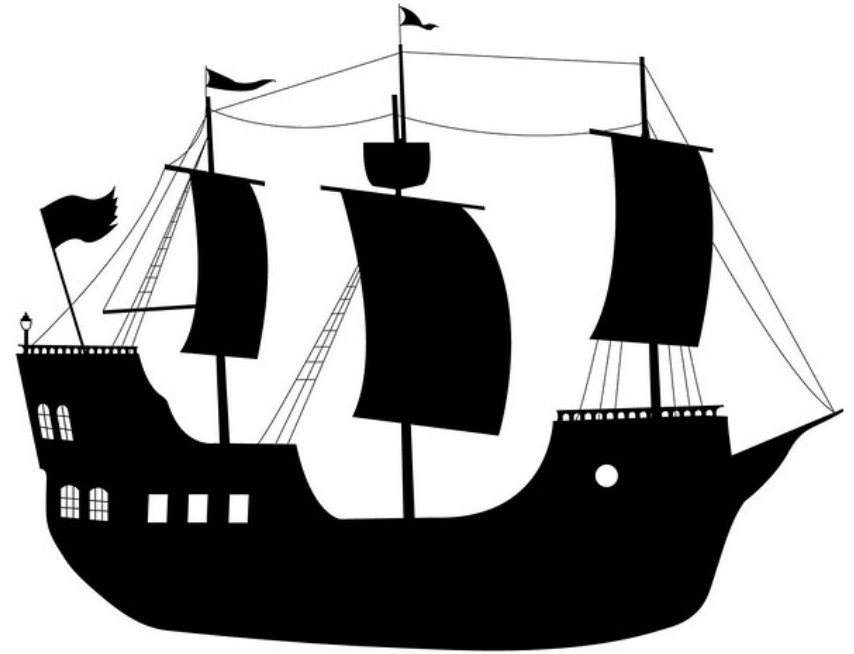
# What do we need to build our friendship skills?

- **Self awareness:** an understanding of our own interests strengths and weaknesses.
- **An ability to interpret non-verbal signals** e.g. to understand whether the other person is bored/ interested/ annoyed.
- **Conversational skills:** actively listening, knowing when to join in or when to stop talking, staying on topic as discussed.
- **Explaining and understanding how we feel:** can we share this with our friend?
- **Negotiation skills:** friendship requires compromise, and young people must learn how to repair small fall-outs and learn to forgive others.





**Friend**



**Ship**

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# Understanding Friendships

## Steps to friendship

- Understanding of what a friend is (e.g. a friend is not just someone who says “hi” to you in form)
- Understanding what the young person *wants* out of a friendship (motivation is key). What they want from a friend may not be what we expect!
- Knowing the levels of typical friendship and how to move between levels.
- Assertiveness- knowing that we can't wait for friends to come to us, we have to take an interest and about others.



# Levels of Friendship



# 5. Listening and processing information

# How do listening and processing difficulties link to Social Communication?

- Children and YP with Autism/neurological conditions struggle more with working memory.
- Tasks which involve flexibility, planning, remember lots and remembering things in the environment are particularly difficult.
- Due to the increased pressures in adolescence e.g. more complex information and greater demands, working memory difficulties become more apparent.

# Strategies to support

## Strategies for the communication partner:

- Make YP aware of good listening and active listening
- Speak slowly
- Pause
- Simplify information
- Check that information has been understood/remembered
- Chunk information
- Visual Supports
- Routine



# Strategies to support

## Strategies for the young person to use:

- Use active listening
- Articulatory/verbal rehearsal
- Elaborative rehearsal
- Relational strategies
- Key points/words
- Chunking
- Imagery
- Note taking – support with what to write (not all of it!)
- Colour and mind-maps

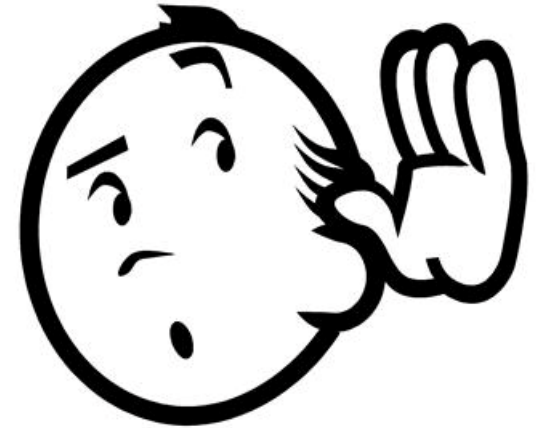




# Strategies to support

## Active Listening

- Teaching knowing/not knowing
- Teaching to ask for help
- Teaching to ask to slow down
- Teaching to ask to repeat a word
- Using a help card/visual



# Signposting

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, wavy horizontal bands in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to dark navy blue, flowing across the bottom half of the page.

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# Signposting – who else can help?

## Specialist Nursing Team at the CDC (if your child does have a neurodevelopmental diagnosis):

- Emotional health and wellbeing support
- Autism specialist nurse and ADHD specialist nurses

## Occupational Therapy:

- Sensory needs (if they have a significant affect on the young person's functioning/daily activities)
- Organisational skills (planning, sequencing, dressing)
- Fine/Gross Motor skills (shoe laces, buttons, use of cutlery)

## CAMHS and St Joseph's Family Centre:

- Significant emotional/mental health concerns. <https://www.saintjosephsfamilycentre.co.uk/>

## School health advisors

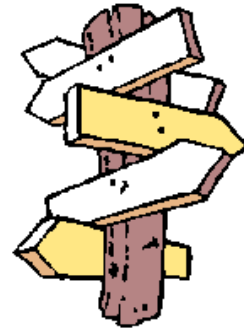
## ADDvanced Solutions:

- Community network, offering support, advice and groups for children / YP

[www.advancedsolutions.co.uk/home.html](http://www.advancedsolutions.co.uk/home.html)

## Early help:

- You may receive support from services such as; Family Outreach, Targeted Youth Support, Drug and Alcohol Service (young people) etc... Contact the Early Help Support Team: Tel: 01925 443136 Email: [earlyhelpsupport@warrington.gov.uk](mailto:earlyhelpsupport@warrington.gov.uk)



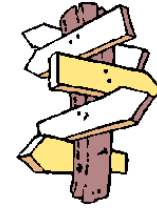
# Emotional health support

- **IAPT** - (Improved Access to Psychological Therapies) –This service can help you with mental health difficulties which may be impacting on your daily living (16+). [www.mhm.org.uk/talking-matters-warrington](http://www.mhm.org.uk/talking-matters-warrington)
- **Young Minds** - Call the Parents Helpline: 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am – 4pm, free for mobiles and landlines)
- **YoungMinds Crisis Messenger** - Provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. If you need urgent help text YM to 85258.
- **Mind works Warrington**
- **Kooth** – Chat to the helpful team about anything on your mind <https://www.kooth.com/>
- **#Clic** - Online support community where you can access 24/7 free mentalhealth support <https://clic-uk.org/>
- **Calm Harm (app)** – Tasks to help you resist / manage the urge to self-harm. You can make it private by setting a password. You will be able to track your progress and notice change. Please note the app is an aid in treatment but does not replace it.
- **Samaritans** – Call any time, day or night for free, on 116 123
- **PAPYRUS** - UK Charity for the prevention of young suicide. For PAPYRUS HOPELINEUK call 0800 068 4141 (open 9am-10pm weekdays, 2pm-10pm weekends and bank holidays)

# More support groups

- **National Autistic Society** - Warrington branch:  
<http://naswarringtonbranch.webeden.co.uk/>
- **ADHD Foundation** - [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/)
- **My Life Warrington / Ask Ollie** – This explains Warrington’s local offer –  
<https://www.mylifewarrington.co.uk/kb5/warrington/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>
- **Warrington Youth Club** - [www.warringtonyouthclub.co.uk/](http://www.warringtonyouthclub.co.uk/) - This provides the Buddy up befriending project which supports children and young people aged 7-18 with disabilities; who are at risk of becoming socially isolated and also the Pretty tough and Tough mind groups and junction gym.

# Useful Resources and Links



- Social thinking by Michelle Garcia-Winner - social emotional learning strategies.  
<https://www.socialthinking.com/>
- Autism.org.uk
- Scenari-Aid - A free website containing over 100 digitally recorded real-life social scenarios for people to work through in their own time and style  
<http://www.scenariaid.com/>

# Activity 4



- Look back over the specific difficulties your young people are facing which you identified at the beginning of the session.
- In pairs/small groups, pick one or two and have a think about which strategies discussed today could be useful to target these.

# What happens now?



- Many of our young people's differences will be longstanding throughout their life. The people that have the best knowledge of the young person and their situation, are the people in the best place to support them through the many changes that will occur throughout their teenage years.
- Use the strategies we have discussed today to help support your child at home. School Staff can support them in School using the same strategies.
- If your child would like support with a specific area of their social communication skills, there is an additional resource pack on our website.
- This training was recommended to you by the Neurodevelopmental Pathway Assessment (NDP) Team.
- If you have ongoing concerns after 6 months of implementing the strategies, or new concerns in relation to your child's speech, language or communication skills arise, you can request a referral to the Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Team.