Motivation For Children on the Autistic Spectrum

A Cambian Education information sheet

Trying to motivate any adolescent is difficult, but one who has some form of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), may find starting and continuing tasks especially hard when out of their very structured school routine. A child with Asperger syndrome may have a strong susceptibility to inertia, especially when tired or stressed.

During weekends and school holidays
People with ASDs view some situations differently to the majority of people and this need not be a bad thing. They should not be made to feel less adequate than people without ASDs and should be accepted for who they are. However, that is not to say that poor or rude behaviour should be accepted.

Involvement in planning
Children with autism or Asperger syndrome like routine and structure, they like to know in advance what is going to be happening and when and where and with whom. Involve children in planning events so they feel as if they have some input into it and may feel more inclined to take part. For instance, they could be given their own shopping list of items to put in the trolley when shopping.

Family functions and excursions
Remember that people with ASDs may not like crowds or socialising. The idea of such events can actually be quite frightening to them. A trip to the cinema, swimming pool, parties, weddings and christenings – any typical family outing – will need to be planned ahead to make these events less stressful.

• Prepare a written agenda of what is likely to happen. This may lower anxieties.
• Use visual timetables to show the events of the day – often children with ASDs cannot picture events in their head and therefore benefit from the visual input
• check with your local autism or AS support group as they often organise ASD-friendly trips and outings during the summer

Reward positive participation
Arranging trips out they really want to do can be a good incentive to get them to join in less favourable ones. A visual reward chart can help them understand how much they have achieved and how much more they need to do to achieve their reward.

Offer a wide assortment of activities at home
• Cooking activities can also involve doing the shopping
• TV or DVD viewing (alone - but check content)
• Reading (together - have you tried a play?)
• Games and toys to play together – some areas in the country have toy libraries
• Jigsaw puzzles
• Craft activities, such as salt dough, card-making, sewing, clay, origami, painting
• Construction toys

Have an hour doing what we would call chores, but you may like to call them something else – ‘restyle your bedroom’ instead of tidy up!

Physical activities: can include swimming, walking, tennis, cycling, jogging, nature walks or whatever they enjoy. You can do this as a family or with friends. This can help with socialising and keeping fit.

Some days could be totally inactive: TV or film-watching for the whole afternoon, having spent the morning reading, or project-working.

Intellectual activity
Time on the computer, at the library, reading own books, and whenever possible, being with other children too – good social skill development.

Special interests
If a child has a special interest and if there is sufficient time to organise it beforehand, a holiday project could be devised. This could be timetabled into the daily routine. For example, a child may have a strong interest in machines. Divide the project into small sections, such as decorating a scrap book cover, taking photos, visiting somewhere related to the interest, such as a museum or theme park, draw pictures for the scrap book, write and type information gathered from the library, books from home and the internet (though this would need monitoring).

With other children
Remember that if a child with ASD is of the ‘must be in charge’ type, his play with other children may need to be carefully monitored. Using a timer can help him to understand that it is another child’s turn to be in charge.

Raising self esteem
Ensure some activities will be easier than others so a child can excel. Some should stretch a child’s ability – but be aware of failure and possible reaction if this happens. It may take time for them to learn strategies to cope with the fact that they can’t always succeed.

Independence
Not all activities have to include adults, but to help them progress from one section of an activity to another may need some form of prompting which could be by using a 5 minute timer. Encourage a child to self occupy by having a period of quiet built into the daily routine. This could comprise time alone playing or resting in the bedroom, allowing you to have a break as well!

Parents and carers
Remember yourself as we all benefit from ‘me-time’: this could be exercise, relaxation, time-out (soaps, music, magazines) or out-of-home activities. If you are relaxed, you will deal far better with your family and with any issues which might arise.
USEFUL RESOURCES

Cerebra
Parent Support Tel: 0800 328 1159
Have a Postal Lending Library, (books are available relating to neurological conditions), and sensory items and toys designed for tactile, audio and visual stimulation are all available to hire. (Sensory item for 1 month) with no postage costs – toy deliveries and collections are made by courier and arranged by Cerebra.
Website: www.cerebra.org.uk/parent_support/Library/Library.htm

SenseToys
Website: www.sensetoys.com
Tel: 0845 257 0849
Specialise in providing a carefully selected range of toys, activities and Montessori materials to help parents and professionals, particularly those caring for children with special educational needs and learning disabilities, including poor or delayed language development and skills, dyspraxia, and developmental delays, autism and other spectrum disorders.
Email: info@sensetoys.com

TFH (Special Needs Toys)
Website: www.specialneedstoys.com
Tel: 01299 827820
Produce toys and equipment for all abilities and needs, including multi sensory, swings, trampolines, sensory integration kits, switches, rewards, and small sensory toys, etc. See also Adult section.

The Novelty Warehouse
Website: www.thenoveltywarehouse.com
Email: info@thenoveltywarehouse.com
Tactile, interactive and stimulating multi-sensory resources, toys and novelties. Ideal for play, therapy, and Sensory rooms.

True to Life Ltd
Has a wide range of sensory resources, including a new range of Made to order so allow 6-8 week delivery timed sturdy wooden multifunction resources. Also a new range of equipment to create/enhance sensory room or area.
Website: www.truetolifesensory.co.uk
Tel: 0208 368 7694
Email: truetolife@hotmail.co.uk

Wise Owl Toys – sell home educational toys and products covering all areas of the National Curriculum and are particularly useful for children with dyspraxia, dyslexia, autism, Down’s Syndrome, visual or hearing impairments.
Tel: 01305 266311 or 01905 22353
Email: info@wiseowltoys.co.uk
Web: www.wiseowltoys.co.uk

USEFUL INTERNET SITES

Five Survival Strategies to Help Children with Asperger syndrome Overcome Inertia is a paper by George T Lynn which purports to help overcome the Asperger neural based inertia, rather than one coming from depression or fear of the unknown. It can be found at: www.childspirit.com/5aspergers.pdf.

READING
See also Cambian information sheet ‘Books – where to find them’

Playing, Laughing and Learning with Children on the Autistic Spectrum: A practical resource of play ideas for parents and carers, 2nd edition by Julia Moor. Not just a collection of play ideas, this book also shows how to break down activities into manageable stages and looks at ways to gain a child’s attention and motivation and to build on small achievements.
Tel: 0207 833 2307

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