

The REACH approach.

How to start.

REACH based on P.L.A.Y.(Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters by Rick Solomon) is about first engaging with the child and then, through following their intent, developing their play into games. The introduction of salient language and imagination leads to the development of simple and subsequently, more complex relationships. The first steps are these:

Observe.

Take a baseline using the Childhoods Autism Rating Scale.

Assess where the gaps are using a Functional Emotional Assessment Scale, this will help with setting your targets.

Take Time.

Take the time to share space with the child, don't be afraid of saying little, aim to engage through reflecting their behaviour. Start with Intensive Interaction if they are pre-verbal or have little communicative intent. Use sensori motor play, (swinging, spinning, rolling, tickles, chase), to engage them if they enjoy rough and tumble noisy play. Use focused activities, following the child's favoured activities if they are quieter or more solitary.

Child Centred.

It is critical to try and work out why the child enjoys doing what they do. We need to start by following their intent, building on their natural interests and starting to turn their play into games, increasing back and forwards interactions.

Emotion.

The REACH style is based on attaching feeling and emotion (affect) to activities. Instead of counting bricks as they are put on a tower say, "Make me taller!" or "I need more bricks!" "I'm taller than you", etc.

Sabotage.

The main aim of a REACH session is to enable the child to extend their communication, aiming for more 'circles of communication' every time. This means initially that the adult initiates and the child responds. Use of gentle sabotage, wooing or careful teasing leads to the child initiating more 'circles', which the adult can close and then initiate more. For example, the child points to a book, you take two down from the shelf instead of just the one the child wants and ask, "This one or this one?", or offer the wrong one. Alternatively you can hold out the correct book and it gets stuck in your hand. This needs to be carefully judged but with over dramatisation and slapstick "Oh no, it's stuck!" it is easy to keep things light and fun!

There are more detailed ideas on techniques, curriculum linked activities and how to work with a pupil who is difficult to engage in the REACH file. However, please don't hesitate to ask Jen or Catherine if you are unsure of ANYTHING! Have fun!