

TRANSCRIPT: Teaching pupils with ASD

Deb Rattley and Lesley Herriot

Deb: Children with autism are living in a very different world and it's a very scary world because they don't have the same understanding as we do, so they're unable to make those predictions of what's going to happen next or how long time is going to be. For all of our children with autism, it's about reducing levels of anxiety and trying to get them into a calm state that's really good for learning.

We need to make sure that they know, very clearly, what work are they going to have to do, and that'll be visually presented to them; how much work they've got to do; how will they know when it's finished; and what's going to happen next? We then need to look at a visual structure in tasks to make sure that they've got all the information they need to be able to complete the work in front of them.

Lesley: Amy will go to her timetable and look at what she's got to do. First thing in the morning, it will be 'choose'. When 'choose' is finished, she'll go back to her timetable, take the 'choose' off and she'll put it in a little pocket, and then we'll do English and she gets her workbox.

And we start off with a supervised workbox where they're taught to do certain skills. Amy's got eight tasks in her box. She'll take a task out of the workbox. She'll complete it with my help or whichever adult's working with her. When it's finished, it's put into a 'finished' box and then she'll take another task out and complete that in the same way and she'll work through until she has finished her workbox.

She will then go back to her timetable and look at the symbol that's next. The next one is 'choose' and that is the time when they can do what they want to do, as their reward. You'll find a child will want to spin or they might be hung up on, say, putting things in order along a line and then they'll move on to what you want them to do next.

The next workbox is done independently and it's just the routine of learning and repetition. You can teach autistic children to do something one way but they find it quite difficult to transfer that skill, so you quite often have to do the same skill but in a different way.

Amy's been in my class for two years and the difference that it has made to her has been astounding.

Deb: Autism, it's sometimes seen as a problem and really it's not about that at all. Children with autism just think differently and I often say in training that autism is just working in a different culture. It's like if we went to a different country, we have to make adaptations there and our children, it's very similar for them. They're in an alien world and so we have to try and build that bridge and break down those barriers, whilst maintaining an environment for them that they feel they can access.

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