Overcoming barriers to learning: Social Imagination

What I might notice in the class room:

- Difficulties predicting what will happen next or understanding abstract ideas

- Difficulties understanding and interpreting others thoughts, feelings and actions

- Difficulties understanding the concept of danger

Strategies to overcome social imagination difficulties:

- **Make explicit the implicit:** provide advance warning of change to routines or task completion.

- Define the sequence of events at the start of the lesson and refer to this during the lesson.

- Teach strategies for coping with unknown situations and provide preparation time for new tasks.

- Define any risks and dangers and provide the 'rule' for managing the risk.

- Monitor signs of stress and anxiety and intervene to support, through clear instruction and reminder of rules or routines.

Understanding and supporting learners with ASD

Evidence suggests that learners with ASD experience difficulties with:

Theory of Mind

This refers to understanding that others have their own thoughts, feelings and experiences that are different from our own. It allows us to make a link between our behaviour and the effect it will have on others.

Executive Functioning

These cognitive skills are necessary for goal directed behaviour and include the ability to initiate and stop actions, monitor and change behaviour as needed, plan future behaviour, anticipate outcomes, adapt to changing situations and form concepts and think abstractly.

Central Coherence

This is the ability to see the 'big' picture or to see how parts fit in to the whole. A learner with ASD may find it difficult to gain the 'gist' of the situation focusing instead on small details.

Summary
- **Make explicit the implicit**
- **Address the learner by name at the start of an instruction or question**
- **Reflect on your literal language and use of visual prompts**
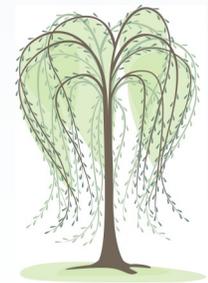- **Talk and listen to the learner and their family**
- **Avoid assumptions...**

Email: judith.carter@willowtreelearning.co.uk

Improving Learning for All

Supporting Learners with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Willow Tree Learning

www.willowtreelearning.co.uk

What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. It is a spectrum condition, which means that while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways.

The three main areas of difficulty which all people with autism share are known as the 'triad of impairments.' This refers to difficulties with:

- Social Communication

- Social Interaction

- Social Imagination

In addition to the three main areas of difficulty, learners may also:

- Seek to adopt fixed routines and rules

- Experience sensory sensitivity either as hyper sensitive (intense) or hypo sensitive (under response)

- Adopt special interests

- Have learning difficulties

Overcoming barriers to learning: Social Communication

What I might notice in the class room:

- The learner may have difficulties understanding verbal and non-verbal language, despite speech being clear

- S/he may have a literal understanding of language

- S/he may have difficulties interpreting facial expressions, tone of voice, jokes, sarcasm and common phrases such as 'cool'

Strategies to overcome social communication difficulties:

- **Make explicit the implicit**. Do not assume understanding of your 'teacher look' or tone of voice.

- Avoid complex instructions and think about the literal interpretation of your words.

- Check out task understanding by asking the learner individually what they are doing, or monitoring their immediate actions. (Be aware that a learner may simply repeat your words verbatim.)

- Use visual cues and prompts to support instructions.

- Use the learners name first, when asking a specific question to them.

Overcoming barriers to learning: Social Interaction

What I might notice in the class room:

- Difficulties understanding other peoples emotions and feelings as well as expressing their own

- May appear insensitive to others and may not seek comfort from others

- Difficulties understanding the 'unwritten' social rules such as personal space, cues in conversation etc

- Difficulties forming and sustaining friendships

Strategies to overcome social interaction difficulties:

- **Make explicit the implicit**: remind students of working space, voice levels and if working in groups, define specific roles.

- Attempt to mediate issues with friendships defining any cause of concerns and explaining why this is upsetting to the other person.

- Explicitly teach a language of emotions and feelings, using social stories to support understanding.

- Monitor risks of bullying and intervene to support, perhaps using circle of friends.