Developing Social Communication Skills in Children and Young People



Developed by Neath Port Talbot Inclusion Service

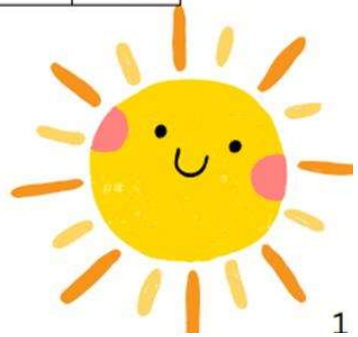
as part of a joint project with Swansea Council ALN Inclusion Team

Introduction

This booklet was developed by Neath Port Talbot Inclusion Service. It aims to share information, resources, guidance, activities etc to support parents/ carers and school staff to develop a child or young person's social communication and interaction skills. There is also information and resources related to other associated issues which may be helpful.

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What is Social Communication?

Basic social communication skills are the everyday 'bread and butter' behaviours that enable an individual to relate and interact with others. They provide the essential framework of skills that can be developed over time, with regular practice.

It is proposed that there are nine fundamentals of communication (Nind and Hewitt, 1994):

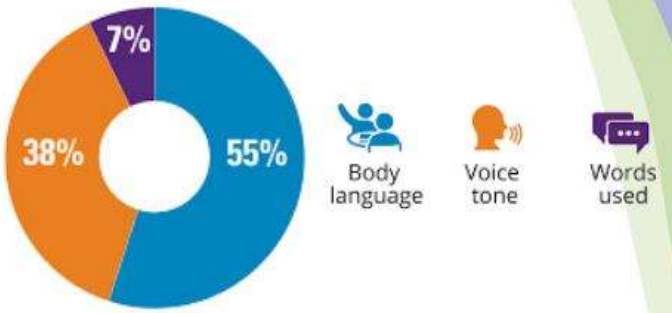
- Enjoying being with another person
- Enhancing concentration and attention span
- Developing the abilities to attend to another person
- Taking turns in exchanges of social behaviour
- Sharing personal space
- Using and understanding eye contact and facial expressions
- Using and understanding non-verbal communication
- Using vocalisations with meaning
- Learning to regulate and control arousal levels



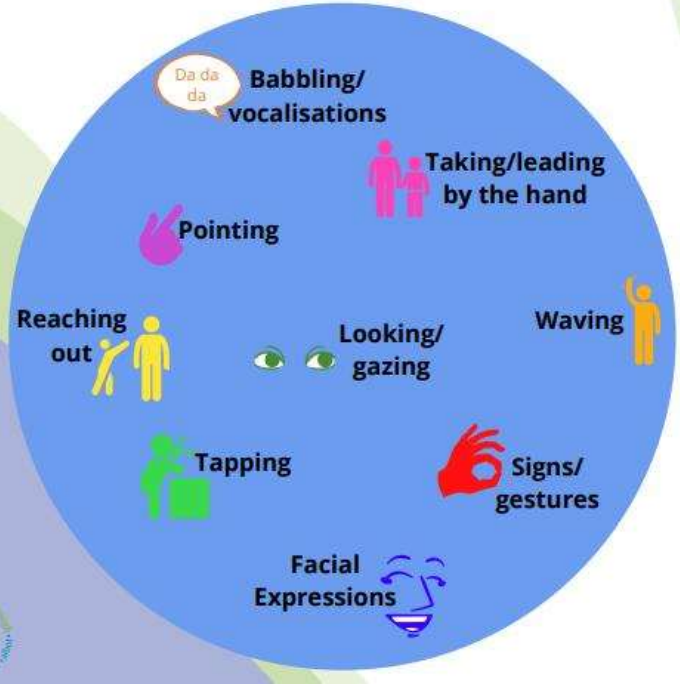
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Why is Social Communication Important?

In order to communicate effectively with others we do not only use the spoken word. The diagram below demonstrates how much we communicate without using spoken words (Albert Mehrabian).



Other ways of communicating are shown below:



Adult Well-being

Looking after your own well-being is one of the most important things you can do. As parent/ carer or teacher, you are one of the most important people in the child or young person's life, championing their wellbeing needs every day.

It's really important that you find ways to look after your own well-being needs too. Ways to support your well-being could include:





Think of the 'oxygen mask' analogy; you must put on your own 'mask' first in order to support a child or young person.

Books:

- A Toolkit for Modern Life: 53 Ways to Look After Your Mind written by Dr Emma Hepburn
- Day by Day: Emotional Wellbeing in Parents of Disabled Children written by Joanna Griffin

Developing Communication Skills

Creating Opportunities for Communication

As adults we want the best for our children and young people. We want their needs to be met. However, if children have everything they want to hand, they do not have a reason to communicate with others. It is important to create situations which encourage communication.



For example...

Before creating an opportunity for communication...
A child wants a biscuit and the packet is kept on the table where they can reach. In this case they have no need to communicate with anyone that they want a biscuit, they can just go and help themselves.

After adult creates an opportunity for communication...

The biscuits are kept in a clear container in sight, but out of reach of the child. The child has to make it known to an adult that they want a biscuit in order to get one. This may be through pointing, vocalising, talking or using hand gestures. This stage of communication wouldn't exist if the biscuits were easily accessible.

Further examples

The following are suggestions which will help you set up situations to encourage a child or young person to communicate for a variety of reasons including to request, comment and make choices.



Bubbles

Children often love bubbles but it is difficult for them to blow them themselves. They need your help to make them work. Open the bubbles and blow a few. As soon as the child starts to watch or pop the bubbles, close the pot or pause, holding the bubble wand. Wait until the child asks you, in some way, for you to blow them again.

Balloons

Blow up the balloon, then let the air out. Hold the balloon to your mouth and wait for the child to ask you, in some way, to blow it up again. As you're blowing, maybe pause and wait for the child to ask, in some way, for it to be blown up some more.

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Mechanical toys
Make the toy go. When it stops wait for the child to request, in some way, to make it go again.

Food
Give the child a little bit of food so that they communicate that they want more. This works best when it is food the child likes! Some foods work better than others, for example it is easy to use an orange which divides into segments. But this can be done with lots of foods. Even toast can be cut into small pieces and given bit by bit.

Toys
Toys that have pieces and parts can be given bit by bit. Hold puzzle pieces, crayons, blocks, cars, train track etc. back (but where the child can see them). Give one and wait for the child to request, in some way, that they want another.



Do the unexpected
Create routines that are predictable then create a surprise.

Books
Look through a book a few times and name the same pictures each time. Then the next time you look at the book, point to one of the pictures and say nothing.
Wait for the child to communicate with you in some way, to tell you to name it or to attempt to name it themselves.

Songs
Choose a song that the child likes. Each time you sing it: start the song in the same way, sing it through with the actions and end it in the same way. Once they are familiar with it, choose a point in the song to pause and wait. Wait for the child to communicate with you, in some way, that he/she wants the song to continue.



Tickling/ Peek a Boo games
Start the game with the child, then pause and wait for them to request, in some way, for you to continue.



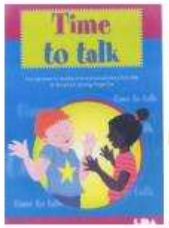
Daily Routines
This can even be built into typical daily routines e.g. meal or snack times. Always do things in the same order then, once the child is familiar with the routine, miss part of it out and wait for them to communicate with you about what they need next.

Adapted from Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust



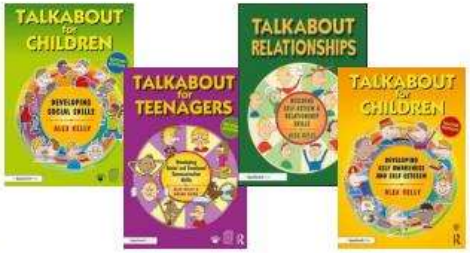
Resources:

Time to Talk - (Alison Schroeder)
This is a programme to develop oral and social interaction skills for children aged 4 to 7 years.





Talkabout - (Alex Kelly)
This is a social communication skills package which aims to improve social communication skills such as listening, conversation skills and body language.
Here are some examples of the books available:



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Developing Attention and Listening Skills

Attention and listening development is an essential component of a child or young person's speech and language development and is the basis of all learning.

Why are attention and listening skills important?

Good attention and listening skills will support a child or young person's:

- Social skills development
- Understanding of language
- Use of language
- Speech sound development
- All areas of learning

All children and young people will develop attention & listening skills at different speeds.

Why are attention & Listening skills important?

As demonstrated in the pyramid below good attention and listening skills are key to supporting:

- Social skills development
- Understanding of language
- Use of language
- Speech sound development
- Learning





By carrying out activities with children and young people, you will be supporting them to develop joint attention skills. This will allow them to share an interest in an object/ event/ activity with another person. Joint attention skills are needed in order to be able to effectively communicate with others.

What can I do to develop attention and listening skills:

- Reduce distractions e.g. turn off the television/ radio; have fewer toys/ activities out.
- Sit opposite the child or young person, so that you are both at the same level, facing each other.
- Be sure to use their name to gain his/ her attention before giving them an instruction.
- Follow their lead during play. Children will often attend to activities for a longer period of time when they have some choice in what they are doing.
- Try to comment on what they are doing rather than asking questions e.g. try "A blue car" rather than "What colour is the car?".
- Be sure to wait after giving an instruction/ commenting on what they are doing/asking a question, to allow them time to process what you have said and respond.
- Give instructions in small steps – one piece of information at a time. Emphasise the key words that will help them to know what to do. e.g. you need your shoes ... and bag.
- Throughout the day, use the word "look" and then point to show them interesting objects. When the child looks, bring the object back to you and label it. Give them the object to play with and join in the play too.
- During play be sure to take the same number of turns as the child (adults often take the most turns). Show them how to take turns – "your turn, my turn".
- When reading stories for the child make them more interesting by using 'voices' for different characters.
- Give the child specific praise focusing on their attention and listening skills e.g. "Well done, you listened really well to that story."

Adapted from Cooper, Moodley and Reynell's (1978) Stages of Attention Development



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Tap Tap Box

This activity is designed to support early language development in children, using familiar nursery rhymes. Objects linked to nursery rhymes, e.g. a star (twinkle twinkle), a spider (incey wincey), a bus (the wheels on the bus go round) and round, or a cat (hey diddle diddle) are hidden inside individual boxes and placed inside one large box.



Step 1

Sit closely next to the child – if there are several children, sit in a circle.
Chant 'Tap tap box, tap tap box, tap tap (name of child), what's in the box?'

Step 2

The child chooses an individual box from inside the large box and opens it. Sing the nursery rhyme, which corresponds to the object, together. Encourage the child to place the object back into the small box and place the small box back inside the large box.
Repeat for the next child, ensuring all children have a turn.



Bucket Time



Bucket Time is a useful tool for developing attentional and listening skills in children. It provides an opportunity for spontaneous engagement in adult-led activities, using highly motivating, sensory toys. The sessions encourage joint attention and shared enjoyment by offering an 'irresistible invitation to engage.' Bucket Time aims to increase a child's verbal and non-verbal communication in a natural, relaxed environment. How to get started:

1

Small White board
Draw a bucket, write the word bucket, THEN say 'bucket' while looking at the board.
Draw a picture of what the child will do next, e.g., TV/snack, write the word, THEN say the word', while looking at the board.
Place the whiteboard to one side so that the child can see it.



2

Bucket
Reach for the bucket, sing a song while looking at the bucket, place the bucket in front of you.
'I've got something in my bucket, in my bucket, in my bucket,
I've got something in my bucket.....
(LOOK UP – TRY TO ESTABLISH EYE CONTACT)
I wonder what it is?'



3

Toys
Take out the first toy, close the lid, place the bucket to one side.
Show what the toy does first (e.g. move / flash / make sound).
Make an appropriate gesture linked to the toy with your body (e.g., if the toy is a bouncing frog, bounce up and down). Choose a word to describe what the toy is doing e.g. flash, bounce, jump etc ensuring that you are looking at the toy, when speaking, not at the child. Repeat for two more toys, showing 3 toys in total.



4

Small Whiteboard
Draw a cross on the bucket. State 'The bucket has finished.'
Point to the next picture and say 'Now, time for.....'







Remember:
- Use different toys every time.
- Children do not touch the toys.
- If the child reaches for bucket / toy, say 'My bucket, my toys'

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Developing Play Skills

What is play?

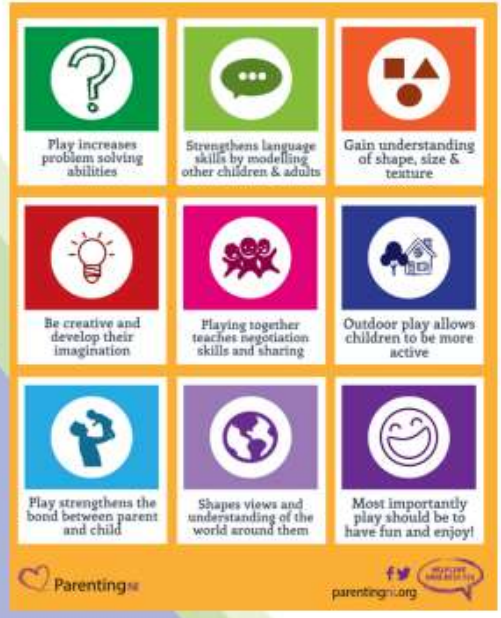
Play is vital to a child's development. A child will use play to help them make sense of the world around them, and also to work through various emotions and experiences. It also helps them to learn how relationships between people work.

The best way to support a child's development through play is to allow them to lead the way. A child should also be encouraged to explore the world, whilst being within the safety of an adult's gaze. The person caring for them should be sensitive to their signals and respond to their needs during their play time. This will help the child to develop a secure attachment to them, which is also important for their development.

Play comes in all shapes and sizes – imaginary, rule-bound, verbal or non-verbal, pretend, on your own or social, rough and tumble or quieter play – and all of these are beneficial for a child's development.

What's important is allowing them to make their own decisions and follow their own interests. While being actively engaged with them at the same time, you can boost their confidence and self-esteem and expand their imagination and creativity.

Adapted from Anna Freud.



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Created by the Neath and Port Talbot Educational Psychology Service

Cause and Effect Play

Developing cause and effect is an important stage in a child's play, learning and social communication development. This kind of play helps the child to learn that their actions can cause something to happen, for example pressing a button to play music, or pulling an adult towards something they would like. When engaging in cause and effect play, your child has the chance to develop a range of skills, copy actions and take turns, for example you could take it in turns to press a button to make a toy pop up and push it back down again.

Understanding and supporting 'cause and effect' can be helpful for supporting a child's communication/skills development. A child's desire to communicate comes from the knowledge that their actions, or words, cause a change. They need to understand this relationship before they are going to look at you and point to that toy they want or eventually construct a sentence to request it. Try to follow your child's lead and choose activities that they enjoy (for more information on child-led play click here). Keep these interactions fun and 'game like' so that it is more engaging for the child. React to the child's actions and sounds with a fun familiar response, for example, every time the child drops a toy, say "uh oh!".

Benefits of Cause and Effect Play

- Helps to develop hand eye coordination
- Helps to develop curiosity, shared attention and communication
- Provides an opportunity for sensory exploration
- Teaches turn taking
- Helps children to learn words, sounds and actions
- Gives children a sense of control in their play
- Helps to develop object permeance
- Helps to strengthen positive and trusting relationships

Play Ideas:

- Pull and push toys
- Toys to squeeze or shake (sensory toys)
- 123 go/ready, steady, go games
- Musical instruments e.g. shakers, drums etc.
- Stacking cups/blocks
- Pop up toys e.g. Jack-in-a-box
- Toys you can blow e.g. bubbles, balloons or a whistle
- Switches to record sounds or phrases, which are repeated when the button is pressed.
- Wind-up toys
- Light up or spinning toys

Remember to consider any sensory needs that your child may have, e.g. if they don't like loud noises then avoid loud musical toys etc.

For more information and ideas for cause and effect play activities, click here!

Reference: Play and autistic children (2020) Raising Children Network. Available at: https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/school-play-work/play-learning/play-asd#cause-and-effect-play-nav-title (Accessed: 15 May 2023).
Cause and effect play in early childhood - play'n'learn. Available at: https://campaign.playnlearn.co.nz/blog/cause-and-effect-play-in-early-childhood (Accessed: 15 May 2023).

Sensory Play

Sensory play is developed before other stages of play e.g. symbolic play, when a child will pretend to feed a teddy bear or pretend to be a doctor and role play. A child is mostly interested in the way a toy tastes, looks, feels, sounds, or smells. They may explore the toy by putting it in their mouth and/or spinning, rolling, flicking it etc for sensory enjoyment.

Sensory Play Activities:

Squishy bags

Fill clear food bags with a variety of sensory materials e.g. paint, baby oil, sequins, glitter. You could add shapes / numbers / letters / pictures. Ensure the bag is tightly sealed and allow the child to explore the bag and its contents.







Rubbery gloop

Slowly add one cup of cold water to two cups of cornflour in a bowl. Stir the mixture until the water is absorbed by the cornflour. Add a few drops of food colouring to brighten the gloop. You could add glitter / sequins etc. The child can stretch / mould / roll it and / or squeeze it through their fingers.





Rainbow rice

Pour uncooked rice into a food bag and add food colouring. Shake the bag vigorously ensuring the rice is coated. Pour the rice onto a lined baking tray and allow to dry overnight. As the rice dries the colour will deepen. When dry, pour the rice onto a flat service with sides and add toys of their interest e.g. trains, dinosaurs, animals.





Spaghetti worms

Cook and cool a packet of spaghetti, ensuring it is still relatively firm. Place the spaghetti into separate bowls for the different colours. Add a few drops of food colouring to each of the bowls and stir to disperse the colour. Allow the spaghetti to dry overnight. When dry, place in a large container and add toys of their interest.





Messy jelly

Make up bowls of different coloured jelly. Exploring the texture of jelly will develop the child's fine motor skills and co-ordination in a fun and engaging way.



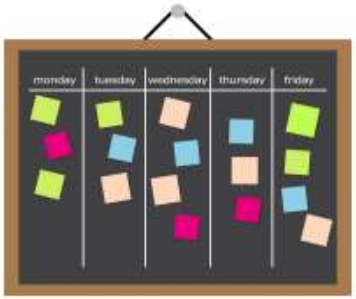


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Supporting Change

Change affects everyone differently. As adults, we learn how to manage our feelings over time. But children and young people don't always find it easy to understand or express their emotions.

Sometimes this will impact on how they behave. They may need some guidance to process what's happening. As an adult you can help them learn to cope with these new situations.



The use of visual supports can help:

- children/young people to prepare and process change to their daily/weekly routine.
- the development of speech
- prepare children/young people of upcoming activities or outings
- support transitioning from one activity to another.
- develop structure and routine to the child/young person's day.
- prompt interactions and communication
- give a child/young person choice and control over their life.
- build their confidence and self esteem.



Website Link

- Young minds have a resource sheet for parents to help children and young people cope with change https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/2odjlktz/top-ten-tips-for-[illegible]ents.pdf

Visual Supports

All these activities and ideas promote sharing attention, turn taking and exposure to everyday and descriptive language. All are fundamental to learning and are a chance to relax and play with each other. Using visuals cards can be a supportive way to communicate for a child with speech and language and communication needs. Visuals help to provide structure and routine whilst helping to build understanding and reduce anxiety. Using a simple visual routine allows a child to know what is happening and when. It can be used as a positive intervention to avoid frustrations whilst encouraging some independence. There are different kinds of visual supports and for you and your child and when introducing them it can feel a little trial and error to find which works best for you.

Visuals come in the form of:

- Objects of reference
- Photographs
- Coloured Pictures
- Black and white Symbols
- Written words
- Plain squares of card or paper with drawings

The visuals can be real objects, printed symbols or images on a smart phone or tablet or they can be drawing on a white board.



Objects of reference

One of the first stages of introducing visuals is to use objects of reference to support routine changes or transitions. For example you may use the child's coat to indicate it's time to go outside or show the child a banana when it's time for snack. Always use verbal language alongside visuals, keeping it simple "garden or snack time" and allow a little time for the child to process the instruction. Try counting to 10 before repeating the instruction. It may appear the child is not hearing you when they are processing what you have said.



Now and Next/First and Then

These are broken down visuals to help develop and understand a routine. They indicate with pictures what is happening now and what will happen next. When using a now and next it is a good idea to use visual warnings in the form of sand timers to countdown to the transition change.



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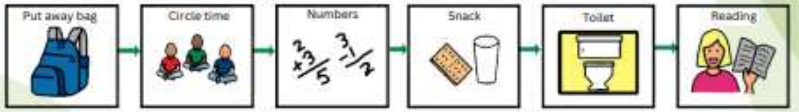
Offering rewards
Visuals can be used to offer rewards for a child or young person to complete a task. For example, the 'now' section might be sorting shapes and 'next' section offers a reward such as a light up toy.

Once visuals are established they can be used to offer choice in activities and develop independence. You may ask the child what they would like to play and offer two choices of visual cards one in each hand. Any efforts the child makes to communicate their response should be affirmed whether it's taking one card, pointing or using eye gaze.

They are also great for encouraging your child to express their opinion and emotions. You could use simple face cards to help with your child's emotional regulation or indicate when they are feeling frustrated.

Visual timetables
Visuals can also be used to create a timetable for the day or specific routine such as toileting or prepare for transitions e.g. starting school. These should be displayed where the child is able to view them. See below for examples.

Adapted from Brighter Futures for Children







Sensory Processing

A Sensory Approach to Help Calm and Regulate Arousal
(General advice for parents and teachers)

This handout has been created as a resource for parents/teachers to help assist your understanding of sensory processing and guide you as to how a sensory approach can be used to help your child regulate their arousal levels so that they are better able to participate in tasks and activities both at home and in school. The handout includes an introduction to sensory processing, further explanation of proprioception and deep pressure, activity ideas and some information about how these activity ideas that you can be incorporated into your child's day if you find them help.

Understanding Sensory Processing
Information is taken in through our sensory systems and processed. This begins to develop our understanding about the world and how we relate and integrate within it.
We have seven sensory systems through which information about our self and the environment is obtained;
- Vision
- Hearing (auditory)
- Taste (gustatory)
- Smell (olfactory)
- Proprioception (body awareness) – arises from receptors in our muscles and joints
- Vestibular sense (movement) - responds to changes in head position and movement through space. Arises from receptors in our inner ears.
- Tactile (touch) - arises from receptors layered in our skin

Sensory information is received from our body and surroundings and interpreted in the brain to make the body effective within its environment.

The brains ability to combine and organise all this incoming information, and respond effectively is called sensory integration. We use and manipulate sensory experiences not only to further develop our motor skills but to maintain or change our alertness or level of arousal.

Difficulty using and processing this information may make it challenging for a person to self-regulate and control their arousal level. Sometimes too much information can be taken in and not filtered; at other times too little. Children with difficulties with sensory processing can be over-responsive or under-responsive to sensory information.

Each child has a unique set of sensory needs. Generally, a child whose nervous system is on "high trigger/too wired" / fight / flight needs more calming input, while the child who is more "sluggish/too tired"/ or in freeze needs more arousing input.
The great news is that if a sensory diet works then the effects of the sensory diet are usually immediate AND cumulative. Activities that perk up your child or calm him or her down are not only effective in the moment; they actually help to restructure your child's nervous system over time so that he is better able to:
- regulate their alertness and increase attention span
- limit sensory seeking and reduce sensory avoiding behaviours

General strategies may be implemented within daily routines

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Useful bedtime reading about sensory processing:



Your Essential Guide to Understanding Sensory Processing Disorder:
PLUS : Travelling with a Sensory Kiddo!
Voss, OTR, Angie



Understanding Your Child's Sensory Signals: A Practical Daily Use Handbook for Parents and Teachers: Volume 1
Voss OTR, Angie

Proprioception and Deep Pressure to Calm and Regulate Arousal

Proprioception:
Proprioception is one of our body's senses. Just as our eyes and ears send information about what we see and hear to the brain, parts of our muscles and joints sense the position of our body and send these messages to the brain as well. We depend on this information to know exactly where our body parts are and to plan our movements. Proprioception has a calming & regulating effect on our central nervous system.

Proprioception is achieved from active use of the muscles in 'heavy work' activities e.g.

- Whole body actions involving pushing, pulling, lifting, standing on tip-toes, crashing.
- Oral actions such as chewing, sucking, and blowing.
- Use of hands for squeezing, pinching, or "fidgeting".

Deep pressure:
Deep touch pressure refers to a form of tactile sensory input which is often provided by firm holding, firm stroking, cuddling, hugging, and squeezing. Deep touch pressure acts as a calming or focusing agent which also has a calming & regulating effect on our central nervous system.



Proprioceptive and Deep Pressure Activity Ideas
The following is an extensive list of heavy work/proprioceptive activities and deep pressure activities that may help regulate a child's arousal level, concentration, ability to fall asleep or sit still and attend to a task.
It is important to note which activities calm your child, arouse them, or over arouse them. This is very unique to each individual and must be observed and treated as such.
You want to choose activities THEY are interested in and that IMPROVE their state of arousal to its most functional point.
Be creative with these activities, make them playful or incorporate them into a learning environment. Use your imagination.

Hand wrestling:
Assume high kneel position facing each other with arms straight out and palms touching. Have them push and resist to avoid losing balance.

Play Wheelbarrows:
Child holding weight on arms, adult supporting legs, may walk around and pick up objects, follow a path chalked on the floor or chase a ball.



Animal Walks:
Walrus walk – lying on tummy, child extends arm, lifting upper trunk and walks on arms, trunk and legs drag behind.

Snail walk – child on all fours and place a "shell" on their back e.g. large beanbag, backpack, heavy blanket, have the child walk through a maze.

Frozen Arm:
Have the child sit on the floor, kneel or high kneel. Have them hold onto a hoop, the adult holds the other side of the hoop. Have the child make himself like a statue while the adult tries to move them.

Jumps (can be done on or off a trampoline or small trampette)

- Star jumps
- Tuck jumps
- Pencil jumps
- Hopping



Throwing a catching a ball. This can be a heavier ball.

Have the child squat like a frog, every time you say "jump" or "hop" he springs up and down like a frog.

Delivery Jobs:
• Push a wheelbarrow filled with heavy objects along a path and deliver items.
• Try a weighted rucksack
• Take and carry library books
• Deliver items to the office
• Wall Push ups



Bridges:
Get the child to lift his bottom off the floor and balance so you can roll a ball or car under him. (you could use building blocks to build a wall so the car goes under the bridge and crashes)



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Potato sack/jumping bag:
Races/chases (could use an old pillowcase).



Climbing Wall:
Ask the child to hold certain positions on the wall and see how long they can stay there. Fit your own climbing fixings on a wall.

Gardening:
Have a small gardening patch to plant flowers/veggies. The digging, watering, pushing a wheelbarrow etc. all provides natural proprioceptive activities.

Body Sox:
Explore shapes in the body sox – 'wide, tall, tiny' and enjoy the proprioceptive squeeze of the lycra against the body. These are available from www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk or other online stores.



Vibrating Squeeze Cushion:
These cushions gently vibrate when they are squeezed. They are very soothing and calming. Please note that it is important that the child is able to control the amount of vibration that they receive in order to avoid discomfort.

Sandwiches and hot dogs:
Make a 'sandwich' out of your child – between couch cushions. Gently add pressure as you pretend to put on pickles, cheese etc. You could also make a 'hot dog' by rolling your child up in a mat or rug so that they are the sausage, you can add onions/sauce etc, again with gentle squeezing, patting or chopping movements.



Pressing on a gym ball firmly on the child's body as pictured. Not on the head though.

Gently providing **pressure down** through your child's shoulders or thighs as some children respond well to deep pressure and can find this calming.

Pulling, Pushing and heavy work activities:
Pulling, Pushing and Heavy work activities help provide a child proprioceptive input. See pictures for some suggestions. There are lots more, be creative!





Hanging from rings or a door way pull up bar:
Hanging from things offers lots of proprioception input. There is a gorilla pull up bar with attachments which can be great for indoors and wet days!



Sitting on an air cushion e.g. Movin'Sit Cushion or therapy ball:
This is a dynamic air filled, wedge shaped cushion with a 'bumpy' side to increase tactile input. The cushion can be used either on the floor on a chair. As the cushion allows some movement and provides tactile feedback, it can help 'fidgeters' to remain seated and focussed for longer. The wedge shape also helps to improve posture. The cushions are available in two sizes, and are available from www.amazon.co.uk or other online stores. Some children like to sit on a therapy ball. (Consider using Thera band on chair legs of table/chair for extra resistance when sitting)

Using a space hopper, gym ball, peanut ball & or Thera band:
-Dribble the ball along the floor.
-Roll the ball up and down the wall
-Push it into the ground
-Bounce on it



-Lay on it, roll back and forth
-Gently roll it over the child as they lay back on a carpet
-Tie Thera band into a circle and stand and stretch as pictured.

Swimming:
Swimming provides lovely proprioceptive input. You could also try pushing a float through the water, walking through the water or pushing a 'noodle' through the water.

Squeezy fidget toys:
Let child apply deep pressure/proprioception to themselves self by squeezing a soft stress ball or similar squidgy toy.



Compression garments:
Compression garments are comforting and calming such as tight fitting Under Armour garments or a Bear Hug Vest.





Mouth Comforts:
Heavy work for the mouth is calming: sucking on a sports bottle, drinking thick liquid such as a milkshake through a straw, chewing on chew toys of chewing gum. A range of chewy items such as 'chewy tubes' or 'chewelry', harder chews and these are available from www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk, https://specialneedstoys.com/uk (Other sites are available on line).







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Make a 'quiet corner':
Children love a quiet area they can hang and chill out. Have a tent with a beanbag chair and blanket inside. Use only for quiet things such as reading, puzzles or getting composure when upset. Dim the lights, add calming scents, play soft relaxing music.

Suspended hammocks / womb spaces:
If you are considering this, you will need to ensure you have an appropriate ceiling bracket that is designed to take the weight. However once you have this, there are lots of different options available. You may also want to consider a small cubby/safe space which is dedicated for calming. This doesn't have to be just suspended.



Additional note:
This handout discusses a sensory approach to help manage a child's level of arousal. This may need to be used in addition to other approaches. It is also possible that other approaches may be more appropriate.
For those activities that help your child better regulate and therefore better participate in class or at home. Make a note of these activities and try to provide regular access to these throughout the day as required.
If your child becomes easily worried, anxious or stressed levels of arousal are difficult to regulate. A sensory approach may help ameliorate stress levels but consideration should also be given to managing the root cause of the stress.

Developed by Neath Port Talbot Occupational Therapists

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Supporting Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is important for a child/young person's development to enable them to build resilience and communicate with others. When children and young people are regulated they will find it easier to use their social communication and interaction skills and understand what others are communicating to them.



Everyday we all feel many different emotions from happiness to sadness to fear or anger. It is okay for children and young people to feel all these emotions, however some children and young people can find it difficult to regulate their emotions on their own. In order for a child or young person to self-regulate their own emotions they must first co-regulate with a supportive adult.

Co-regulation is critical to support children's well-being. It can support children to feel secure which may help them to explore their environment, practice new skills, and learn from their mistakes.

There are lots of different ways to regulate emotions. It is important to practice these strategies when everyone is feeling happy and calm. Children and young people find it hard to learn or use these techniques when they are already overwhelmed by big feelings (so do adults!). It is helpful to find strategies that use their strengths and interests. Here is one example of a emotional regulation strategy called 'Take 5 Breathing'.



Five Steps to Feeling Calm (use this as a guide to teach a child or young person)

1. Spread your hand and stretch your fingers out like a star. You can choose your left hand or your right hand. Pretend the pointer finger of your other hand is a pencil and imagine you are going to trace around the outline of your hand and fingers.
2. Start at the bottom of your thumb and slide your finger up your thumb, pause at the top, and then slide your finger down the other side. Now slide your pointer up your second finger, pause, and slide down the other side. Continue tracing your fingers up, pause, and down. Slide your finger slowly, watch your finger move and notice how it feels. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fifth finger (pinky).
3. Now you are ready to add some breathing. Breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Remember to keep it slow and steady.
4. Place your pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb, and breathe in as you slide up. Breathe out as you slide down. Breathe in as you slide up your second finger, and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your fingers and you have taken five slow breaths.
5. How does your body feel now? Do you feel calm or would you like to take another five?

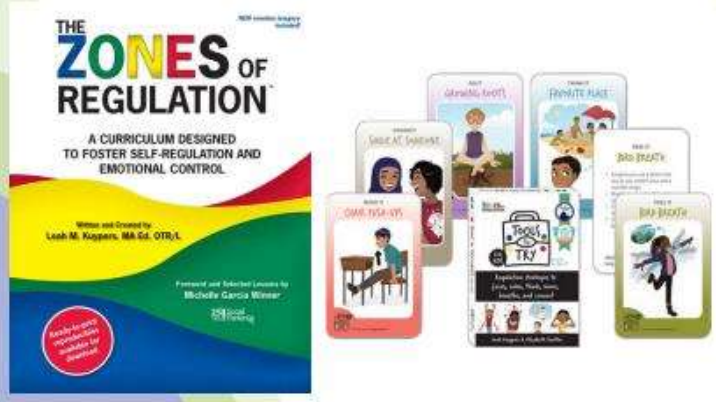
For more information please see https://childhood101.com/take-5-breathing-exercise/

Website Links:

- Action for children have information on their website to support emotional literacy, https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/stages-development/social-emotional-development/emotional-literacy-child/

Books:

- Interoception and Regulation: Teaching Skills of Body Awareness and Supporting Connection with Others written by Emma Goodall (Author) and Charlotte Brownlow
- A Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger: A Resource Book for Parents, Caregivers written by Whitehouse and Pudney
- Millie's Socks written by Chris Passey
- Zones of Regulation: A programme designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control.
- Tools to Try: Regulation strategies to focus, calm, think, move, breathe and connect. for ages 10 plus.



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Using Technology

Being online can be positive for all. So much communication now happens online, either by messages, in a game or through a video call. Sometimes online platforms like apps, social media sites and games a child or young person may access can help them connect and make friends with new people that they might not know offline.



As a parents / carers or school staff, you play an important role in helping a child or young person to have positive experiences online. In a time where technology is now part of our day-to-day lives and screen time may have become part of their daily routine, it is important to spend time with a child or young person focusing on developing their attention and listening skills.

While a child or young person may be able to sit and focus on a screen for a long period of time (e.g. tv, phones, YouTube), this only focuses on an early stage of attention and listening development – single channelled attention. At this stage of development they will be able to focus on a motivating activity of their own choosing. They will typically 'switch off' from other distractions in their environment and it may often appear as if they are 'ignoring you'.



HOW TO KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFE ON THE INTERNET

tutor doctor

Be aware of what your kids are looking at online. Even child friendly sites can be hacked.

Follow your child on any social media platform so you can see what they are exposed to.

Get to know the social media platforms and what they are mainly used for.

Teach your children not to share any personal information or photos online at any time.



Know what sites your kids are on and sit with them when they are online to get a feel for the content.

Make them aware of cyber bullying and let them know to always come to you if someone is not nice to them on social media.

Regulate the amount of time kids are online outside of school requirements.

Have all online activity take place in a common area of the home where others are present.

Remember it is still important to be aware of your child's online activity when they become a teenager.

Check your child's browser history to see what sites they visit.

Apply parental controls where possible, but don't trust that they will catch all inappropriate content.

Ensure they never reply to a message or email from a stranger or upload any photos of people/your home.

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Here are some helpful links from the NSPCC:

- Keeping children safe online | NSPCC
- Use Parental Controls to Keep Your Child Safe | NSPCC
- Teaching Your Child about Internet & Online Safety | NSPCC
- Online wellbeing | NSPCC

Here is a useful link from Welsh Government with activities, videos and guidance suitable for all age groups:

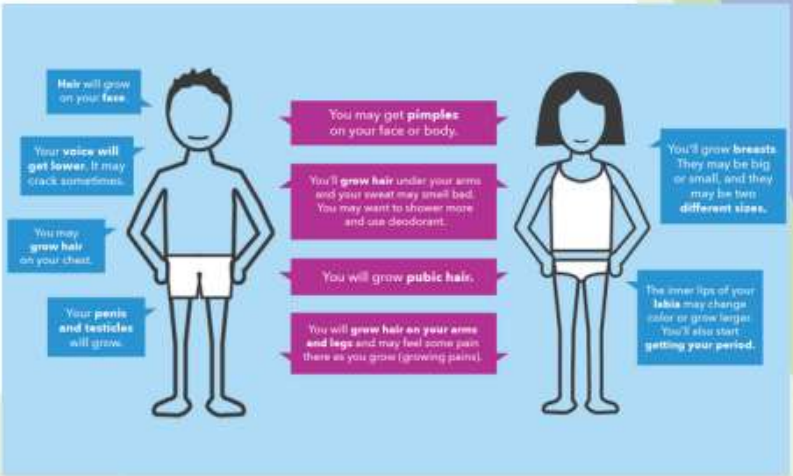
- Welsh Government Online Safety at Home Resource
- Keeping safe online



Puberty

Children and young people with social communication difficulties will benefit from having more time and support to prepare for puberty.

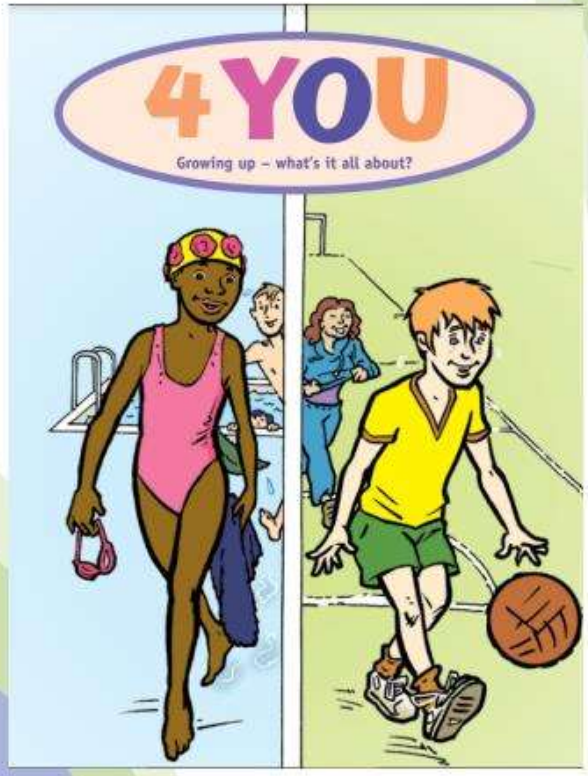
The following diagram could be useful to share with a child or young person to develop their understanding of the physiological changes associated with puberty:



It is also important to consider the emotional changes children and young people may experiences during puberty. These may include:

- Feeling overly sensitive – easily irritable, angry, sad and low mood
- Looking for an identity – figuring out how you are different from others.
- Feeling uncertain - for example, about the future
- Feeling peer pressure
- Conflicting and confused thoughts
- Frequent and maybe extreme mood swings
- Feeling conscious about themselves - Possible impact on their self-esteem
- Experiencing sexual thoughts and feelings

- The National Health Society (NHS) recommend the following booklet written by Liz Swindon on behalf of the Family Planning Association. https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/puberty/documents/4youmarch2010nonprinting.pdf



- Childline have a website with lots of different information that explains what to expect during puberty: https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/puberty

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