A Parent's/Carer's Guide to Supporting your Child's Social Communication & Interaction Needs throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic

Barnsley Education Inclusion Services:
Social Communication & Interaction Team

Town
Spirit
Working together for a better Barnsley

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Your SCI Team

We are a team of 8 members of staff, made up of:

- A Principal Educational Psychologist/SCI Team Manager
- A Senior Specialist Advisory Teacher
- 3 x Specialist Advisory Teachers
- 3 x Specialist Support Workers

Barnsley Social Communication and Interaction (SCI) Team

In our role, we support children and young people with a range of social communication and interaction needs, including those children who have a diagnosis of autism. On a day to day basis, we work in a range of educational settings, providing advice and hands-on strategies to meet the holistic needs of the child.

Our aim is to support practitioners to remove barriers to learning for children with social communication and interaction needs, in order to give them equal access to the curriculum and social situations. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our support has been extended to parents too. This guide will hopefully provide you with some support materials, which can be used at home with your child.

However, we appreciate that every child is different and some children will need more tailored support. Please feel free to contact us; we are working, we are here for you and it's good to talk. During this difficult time, just remember, you are doing your best!

Autism recapped…

'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.'

National Autistic Society

Autism recapped…

➤ Autism is a developmental disability usually present from birth, however, this may not always be immediately obvious.

➤ The core area of need for Autism is social:

- Social Interaction
- Social Communication
- Social Imagination /Flexibility of thought

➤ Children and young people may struggle with the above skills, which can have a significant impact on their day-to-day life.

➤ The core areas of need are often accompanied by a narrow pattern of repetitive activities. As we know, people with autism think, learn and experience the world differently, so it is not surprising that they hold onto the desire of sameness and appear to lack flexibility, in an attempt to make sense of the world.

➤ Flexibility requires the need to imagine socially that something can be different and understand that this is okay. This is a core area of need and many children and young people require support with developing their flexibility of thought too.

➤ Consideration needs to be given to the sensory sensitivities that children and young people may also be struggling with.

➤ Despite the above, there are a range of strategies and approaches to support and enable learning and development.

Top Tips!

Remember that during this difficult time, keeping happy, keeping safe and keeping busy is key, because we know that some of our children with SCI needs require routine and structure in place in order to keep them reassured.

- Routine – your child's routine will have changed. Support your child in understanding that the routine has changed and allow them to be part of creating a new one.
- Sensory needs – your child's sensory environment will have changed. Can you create a quiet area in your home?
- Build in points of the day for exercise.
- Communication – at times of stress and anxiety, your child's communication skills may change. Consider other forms of communication e.g. signs, symbols, writing, texts.
- Social interaction – your child could video call a friend or make a traditional phone call. There may be photos on your child's school/setting website of their friend to share with them.

- Family time – spending time together can help your child practice their social skills. Watching a film together, baking, playing a board game.
- Lunchtime – your child will be used to a predictable lunchtime in school. Can your child help prepare their meals? This is a great way to practice life skills. Creating a meal plan will provide your child with structure and routine.

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Social Stories

'Social Stories © are a social learning tool that support the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals, and people with autism of all ages' (Carol Gray)

Links to Social Stories that you may find useful during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus-1.pdf

- https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-I-Can-Help-1.pdf

- https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Watching-a-Pandemic-on-Television-by-Carol-Gray.pdf

- https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Washing-hands-carefully-with-reprint-permission.pdf

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Visual Structure: Workstation approach

What is a workstation?
Some children in schools engage with tasks at a workstation.

If your child is engaging with some home learning activities whilst schools are closed, you can help to structure the activities using a workstation.

If your child has difficulty knowing where to work, a workstation will give them somewhere consistent to do their work.

The workstation will help your child focus more easily on their home learning tasks and provide them with some structure during this current period of change.

Please do not feel that your child needs to be engaging with every home learning task, the priority is about your child being safe and happy.

Aims of a workstation

A workstation will show your child:
* What they are expected to do
* How much work they have to do
* What they need to do next
* How to know when they have finished

Workstation example:

How do I set up a workstation?

It is important to get visual structure in place:

- If possible, try and have a consistent and clearly defined place for a little table and chair where there are no distractions. At home this may be at your dining table. For some children who become highly distracted, the table is best facing a wall to minimise distractions.

- The child should be encouraged to work from left to right.

- Tasks are placed to the left of the table. This is generally in a green basket labelled 'start.' (The baskets are not essential, so do not worry if you have not got a basket, you could use another object. For some children rather than using baskets, you could use paper with the words 'start' and 'finish' and provide a tick list that shows them what tasks need doing).

- To the right of the table is a red basket labelled 'finish'.

- The 'start' and 'finish' approach provides visual structure to show your child what they are expected to do.

- Tasks (home learning tasks) are placed in the 'start' basket. You could put each task in a plastic wallet with a coloured sticker on or a coloured number. This will show your child which task is 1st, 2nd and so on. This gives a clear visual cue of how many activities need to be done and in which order.

- You could then create a visual timetable showing the order of activities e.g. 'start: red, yellow, blue, finish' or 'start, 1, 2, 3, finish'.

- Initially you could begin with one home learning task in a wallet e.g. labelled up as red and then increase slowly e.g. two home learning tasks in separate wallets labelled up as red and then yellow. You could put the most motivating activity in the last tray.

- The child removes the first colour/number from the mini visual timetable and takes the corresponding plastic wallet. The child then completes the activity and places it in the 'finish' basket.

- If your child is new to this way of working you can support them to understand the concept of working from left to right by sitting behind them and using hand over hand guidance to work through the structure of the system.

- You could use the 'First and Then' approach alongside the work station e.g. 'First learning and Then (motivator)'.

Depending on your child's age and level of ability, you may adapt the tasks to be more practical.

Other information

The website 'Twinkl' has some ideas of activities to use at a workstation:

www.twinkl.co.uk/search?term=autism+workstation

'YouTube' shows some videos of pupils using a workstation.

Examples of activities to use at a workstation

For more ideas you can also access the following link:

www.tes.com/teaching-resource/teacch-workstation-ideas-autism-asd-6033682

Visual Structure: Visual Timetables

A visual timetable sets out the activities that will take place throughout the course of a day. It helps to create a routine and provides a frequent reminder of that routine. You will need to set it up and go through it with your child so they know what the sequence looks like overall. You then need to refer to it whenever there is a transition to a new activity. Once an activity is over, the relevant card should be posted with/by the child into the finished envelope, as this helps them to monitor the course of events.

The timetable needs to be suitable for your child, therefore think about the examples on the next two pages and notice how they differ. Choose the type that you feel will suit your child best.
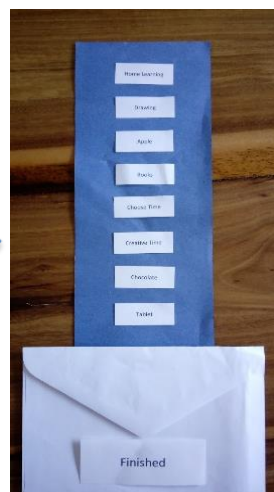
Does your child understand symbols? If so, these can be used so that they are consistent with those often used in schools.

Use Blu Tack or Velcro to attach the cards onto a colourful strip of paper or directly onto the wall at home.

If possible laminate the cards or print multiple copies to make them last longer.

If your child doesn't yet work with symbols, use photographs instead.

Can your child be very specific about things? i.e. they only eat green apples, therefore the image used would need to be of a green apple. If so, using photographs of the actual items being used may be better for them to relate to.

Make sure you include the name of the item or what it represents on the card such as 'Homeworking', 'Choose Time', 'Drawing'. This way, anyone who is helping your child with the visual timetable will use the same word and avoid causing confusion.

Is your child able to read independently and do they prefer the written word to images? If so, use these instead.

Books

Choose Time

Once a visual timetable has been used to support your child to understand their routine, they can become very upset/anxious if it is not followed. It is very important to be consistent with its use and to plan for any changes from the norm.

The use of a **?** card is a great idea to help your child deal with changes having to occur.

If a change from the routine is needed, revisit the timetable with your child and explain the sequence that will be the same, the part that will change and what it will change to, and what will happen afterwards (it will revert back to the norm).

Would your child be overwhelmed by the whole day being presented at once?

If so, provide the information in chunks ending with a motivating activity to look forward to. Once this has been completed, provide the next chunk of time and so on. Time accessing activities could be increased or reduced depending on levels of anxiety or engagement.

If an activity that you do not usually do is going to happen, or you don't have a card for a particular unexpected activity, you can use a ★ card to represent 'something different'.

Visual Structure: First and Then
(Sometimes known as Now & Next)

What is a First and Then Board?

A First and Then Board is a visual strategy to support children to complete a specific task.

| First	Then

Aims of a First and Then Board

- It increases motivation to complete tasks outside of their choosing.
- It is predictable, provides clear expectations, and supports creating a structured environment.
- It supports you to reduce your language and give clear, direct information that is supported by a visual.

What could I use a First and Then Board for at home?

- To motivate your child to follow your instruction, e.g. first brush your teeth, then TV time.
- To motivate your child to engage in a less preferred activity e.g. encourage your child to complete work set from school or nursery; first work then snack.
- To support understanding of transitions e.g. in routines
- To support them to access other experiences if they are requesting their motivators often.

How to use a First and Then Board

- Identify your child's motivators and collect images to represent these, this could be photographs or symbols. Print and laminate if possible. Then use Blu Tack or Velcro to attach.

tablet

snack

garden
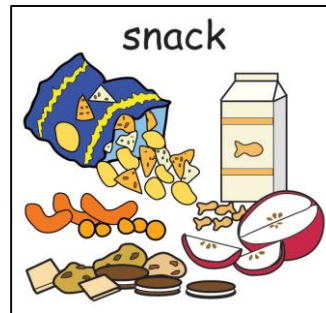
- Place the non-preferred activity in the (First) box and the identified motivator in the (Then) box.

How to use a First and Then Board continued

- Once displayed, point and label each picture, e.g. "First bath time, Then Story". Repeat if needed.
- When the First activity is completed, praise and then point to the first activity and state that it is finished e.g. "Well done bath is finished, now its story".
- Try to ensure the 'Then' activity is readily available to offer an immediate reward. This will support your child to trust the motivating item is coming once the first is completed.

Top Tips

- Ensure the second activity is motivating, their motivator may change regularly. It is worth exploring on a frequent basis to check the items/activities that you are offering continue to be of interest.
- The "Then" MUST ALWAYS be honoured or your child will not trust the tool. For example, if they attend to the first task for 10 seconds, they have still achieved and followed the instruction and should therefore receive the motivating 'Then' item. You can then gradually build up the time they spend on the First activity over time.
- Your child may need additional prompts to complete the First task e.g. hand over hand prompting.
- If they are finding it tricky to engage in the first task, consider using portable activities so you can take it to them, e.g. 'First paint, then iPad'. You should take the paper and brush with paint on, use a hand over hand prompt to make a mark, then provide the iPad.

Visual Structure: Choice Boards

What is a Choice Board?

A Choice Board provides a visual display of preferred items (e.g. food, toys, and activities).

My Choice Board

| crisps | biscuit | slqqp | orange |
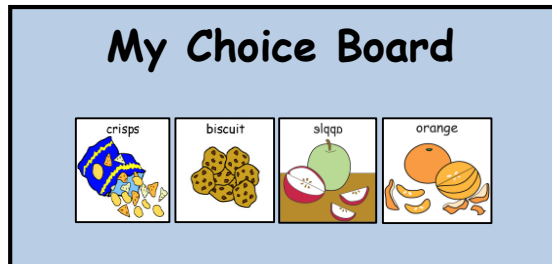
What could I use a Choice Board for at home?

Offering choices of food items at snack time.

Offering choices of indoor activities.

Offering choices of outdoor activities.

Home learning tasks: If your child is engaging with home learning tasks from school you could show them a few of the activities and allow your child to select which one to engage with.

Aims of a Choice Board

- Provides structure, routine and familiarity which can help to reduce anxiety for your child.
- Narrows the selection of choice down – Sometimes our children can be overwhelmed by too much choice.

- Encourage communication by giving the child a means to request a particular object.
- Promote an interaction with a family member by the child making a choice and another person giving the desired object

choose

I choose…

| ball | drink | outside | tsldot | bricks |
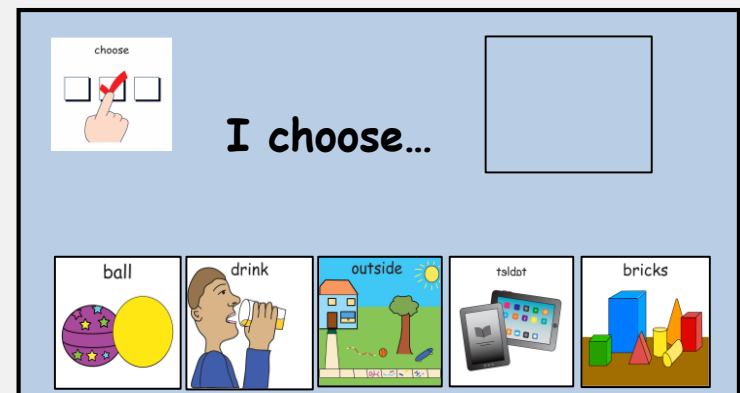
How do I use a Choice Board?

- You need to determine in advance which choices to place on the board. Only give options that are available and appropriate at the time. You can show the choices available by using photos, symbols, text, or objects, depending on your child's language and cognitive ability.

- Some children may only need two options at a time, whereas others may be able to choose from several options.

- Indicate that it is time for your child to make a choice by presenting the Choice Board to them. Read the choices aloud, pointing to each one as you say the word.

- Ask your child to make a choice.

- Wait for your child to show you which item they want either by pointing, removing the choice and handing it to you, or verbally choosing.
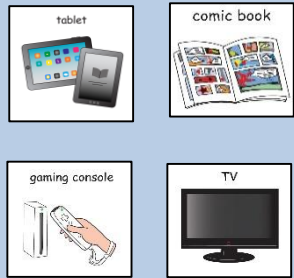
1. **I choose**
2. **Pull off card**

tablet

comic book

gaming console

TV

3. Place choice card here

4. Set time for…….
5. When timer goes off, choosing is finished.

Resources:

Some symbols are available on the following websites:

www.twinkl.co.uk

www.do2learn.com

www.widgetonline.com

Understanding and Managing Behaviour

- When trying to understand and manage behaviour, it is important to look at the function of the behaviour, or you might say: " What's in it for the child?"

- All behaviours have a function, or a reason for happening and positive or negative results may follow.

- For example, a kick to your leg, gets your attention without fail, and often results in them getting something that they want. However, if this way of gaining your attention appears to be the child's only way of communicating, this learned behaviour needs to be changed, so that they can gain attention in a more positive way. One well known method of understanding and managing behaviour comes from Division TEACCH and is called the Iceberg Metaphor.

- This method allows us to look at the behaviour as a whole, e.g. not just the behaviour that we can see (at the top of the iceberg), as when trying to understand behaviour, we **always** need to consider the underlying factors (what is happening below the water and cannot always be seen).

- TEACCH suggest that we look for the underlying factors which may explain or give reason to the behaviour we are seeing.

- As this is a visual way of looking at behaviours, it helps us to look at behaviours objectively – removing the understandable emotion.

- This helps us to look at what we can do differently next time.

TEACCH Iceberg Metaphor

Behaviours we may see:

spitting   refusal

shouting   kicking

hitting   biting

Underlying factors (what is the behaviour telling us and what can we do differently?)

Social Communication

Social Interaction

Sensory Perceptions

Social Imagination (Flexibility of Thought)

Let's imagine that Bobby is outside in the garden, playing on the trampoline. Mum calls him in for lunch and Bobby's first response is to squeal at his Mum.

He does come down from the trampoline. As Mum holds her hand out to take Bobby inside, he begins to kick and hit her.

The example on the right shows some of the possible underlying factors that cause the behaviours that are seen.

Iceberg Metaphor Example

Behaviours we see:

kicking

crying

hitting

scratching

Underlying factors:

He cannot understand why he's been asked to come inside

He can't predict what's going to happen next

This isn't his usual routine! (Coronavirus)

He doesn't like what's waiting inside

He wants more time bouncing

He loves his trampoline

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A better understanding of behaviour

- When we use the Iceberg Metaphor, it helps us to look at the underlying factors of a behaviour. The next step is to consider them and work out how to manage this behaviour next time.

- Remember you cannot change whatever behaviour has just happened and we need to draw a line under it, walk away, and be prepared for next time, e.g. to pre-empt this behaviour.

- We can do this by using the STAR approach to try and manage and unpick behaviour (Zarkowska and Clements 1994).

- They recommend that "problem" behaviours are looked at as purposeful actions, aimed usually at gaining specific results and therefore serving a particular function for the child or young person with autism

- The idea behind the analysis is to teach a more appropriate skill, or encourage a more appropriate behaviour.

- An example would be: offering a picture or symbol to ask for an item, rather than displaying a negative behaviour, such as kicking.

- Always start with the ACTIONS – What behaviour did you see?
- Consider the SETTING – where did the behaviour happen? Think about room temperature/light sources, location, is your child hot, cold, hungry, tired?
- Consider the TRIGGERS – what happened before the behaviour? Make sure you think about everything, no matter how small; details matter!
- Finally, consider the RESULT – what was in it for the child? Was the result positive? Did they get something they needed? Did the child gain comfort or a cuddle? Was it a material result, e.g. a drink or food?
- When you have completed a STAR you can then look at whether you could do anything differently to support your child next time.

STAR Analysis
(Zarkowska and Clements, 1994)

SETTING

Environmental/ personal/ WHERE?

TRIGGER

What might have set off the behaviour?

ACTIONS

What behaviour did you see?

RESULTS

What happened for the child?

Sensory Needs

At this present time, your child's sensory environment and diet has changed. If you would like further information around understanding and managing your child's sensory needs, please visit the following website:

https://www.autism.org.uk/about/family-life/in-the-home/environment.aspx

Rewards and Motivators

Why use rewards and motivators?

During times of change, your child may present with different behaviours. By using rewards and motivators, this can help you to encourage your child to change a particular behaviour; it can also support you to encourage your child to follow instructions and routines. (NAS, 09/04/2020)

Types or rewards and motivators:

The underlying factor to successfully using rewards and motivators is knowing the child – which you do best! By having a good understanding of your child's likes and interests, you have the foundation for implementing this strategy. Some examples may be:

Working Towards Boards: This strategy is a visual reminder of a reward they will receive after completing work or carrying out preferred behaviours. Initially the reward will need to be instant, e.g. one token then reward, depending on your child's level of understanding. You could then add more or less tokens until receiving the reward, depending on their levels of anxiety/wellbeing. Your child may be involved in choosing the reward/motivator that they would like to work for. If your child has difficulty making a choice, you as parents could choose activities or items that you know they may/will enjoy.

I'm working for..

tablet

Behaviour Boards: This strategy supports you to give clear expectations of what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. The board is split into two, provide your child with pictures of different behaviours and support them to place them into the categories. This can then be displayed for your child to refer back to.
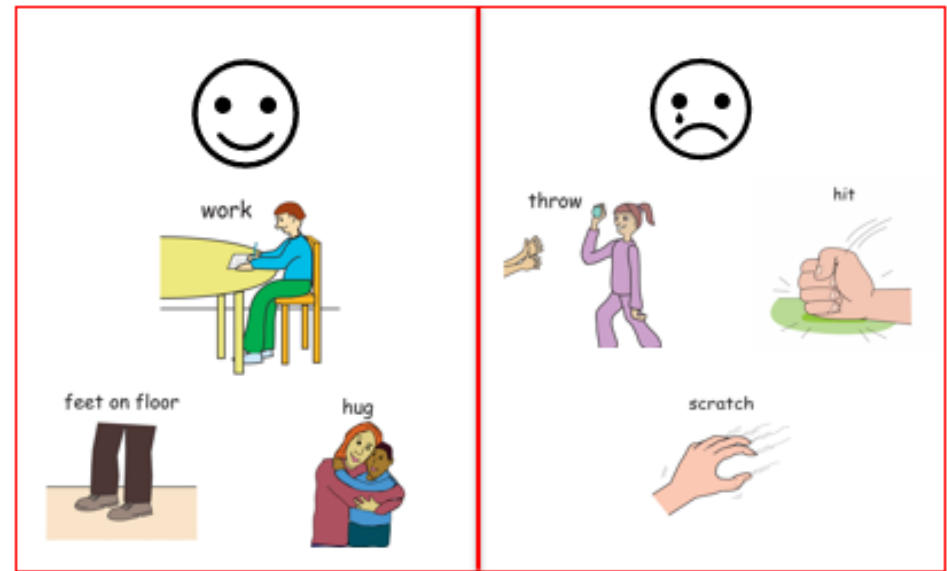
Success Charts: These are again used to target preferred behaviours. The child/young person is able to tick off the targets as they are met.

Timetable	Target		Reward
Maths - 4 questions	Am ✓	Pm ✓	10 mins choosing
Science - 4 questions			
Play - Share			

Jigsaws: You could use an image of your child's motivator and cut it into sections to create jigsaw pieces. As they display the wanted behaviours, they earn a piece of the puzzle. Once the puzzle has been completed, they then have time with the item. This can be adapted to more or less pieces depending on your child's development.

Verbal rewards: Your child may prefer verbal feedback. Try to be really specific when you are using this strategy, e.g. " I really like the way you…" "I can see you tried to…"

First and Then: Refer to the 'First and Then' pages in this booklet (p.12, 13, 14).

First	Then
get dressed	garden

feet on floor

I need help

Visuals: To provide further reinforcement of the behaviour you are promoting, you could display a visual of the wanted behaviour.

Resources:

The Twinkl website has provided free, printable templates, which are available here: www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-687-i-am-working-for-support-cards

If you don't have access to the internet or a printer, homemade resources are just as effective! Simple line drawings on paper can be used for all of the strategies suggested.

Top Tips when using rewards and motivators:

- Keep checking that the items you're using are still of interest to your child; you may need to change the motivator regularly to ensure they are still engaging with the system.

- Have a clear idea of what behaviours you are trying to promote. Depending on your child's development and level of understanding, you could work together to decide what method they prefer, or your child could design their own.

- Where possible, try not to give attention for negative behaviours, e.g. if your target is to stop them from throwing, if they throw where it is safe, do not comment, however when they display the preferred behaviour, give your child lots of praise and attention.

- Get everyone involved – encourage everyone in the household to praise and reward your child's efforts.

- When giving verbal feedback try to keep it positive, e.g. tell them what to do, rather than what not to do: "Don't run!" would become "Walking feet please."

- You may need to use hand over hand prompting or backward chaining to support your child to engage initially, e.g. when tidying toys, put all of the toys in the box, except one; support your child to put the last toy in the box. Offer praise and their chosen token, this way your child is experiencing success. This can gradually be built up until they are completing all of the task independently.

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Picture Exchange Communication System ® (PECS) ®

Your child may be supported by the SCI Team in using the Picture Exchange Communication System to support their communication skills. If so, your child will have involvement with one of the Specialist Support Workers: Gemma Whitfield, Melanie Booth or Lucy Shea.

Please feel free to contact them if you require any support and guidance:

educationinclusionservices@barnsley.gov.uk

Makaton

Gemma Whitfield from the SCI Team is a local Makaton Tutor and can support with Makaton queries.

Other helpful information for pupils who use Makaton can be found via the following links:

The Makaton Website: www.makaton.org

Information about the coronavirus (Covid-19), translated into Makaton symbols:
www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/freeDownloadDetails/Coronavirus-information

Coronavirus social story:
www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/freeDownloadDetails/Coronavirus-social-story

Social story about school closures:
www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/freeDownloadDetails/My-school-is-closed

Makaton signs and symbols related to hygiene:
www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/freeDownloadDetails/Hygiene

Link to various free games using Makaton:
www.makaton.org/shop/shopping/browseStore/Free-resources

Facebook site: The Makaton Charity

Useful Websites

You may find the following websites useful for further support & resources:

- The National Autistic Society - www.nas.org.uk
- PECS - www.pecs.org.uk
- Makaton - www.makaton.org
- Do 2 Learn - This website gives access to a range of educational resources that may be useful: www.do2learn.com
- Twinkl - This website gives access to a range of educational resources that may be useful. For free downloads, visit: www.twinkl.co.uk/offer and enter the code 'UKTWINKLHELPS'
- Widget online –This website gives access to symbols that may be useful for creating visual supports. For free downloads, visit: www.widgitonline.com/offer and signup using the code 'WIDGIT30'
- Government Publications include:
  - www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-support-for-schools-and-parents-to-help-cope-with-coronavirus
  - www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education
- Coronavirus book for children - https://issuu.com/nosycrow/docs/coronavirus_ins/6?ff&hideShareButton=true
- Barnsley Education Inclusion Services - www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/education-inclusion-services

References

- Autism Education Trust *'Tools for Teachers': Practical Resources for Classroom Success -* Victoria Erbes
- NAS EarlyBird Plus book - Jane Shields 2004
- Teaching Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders to learn - Liz Hannah NAS 2001
- Pics for PECS
- National Autistic Society
- https://www.autism.org.uk/global/content/search%20results.aspx?q=REWARDS retrieved on 09/04/2020
- https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-s-687-i-am-working-for-support-cards retrieved on 09/04/2020
- https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/
- retrieved on 23/4/2020
- https://www.autismcircuit.net/tool/first-then-card retrieved on 02/04/2020
- https://childrensautism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/first-then.pdf retrieved on 02/04/2020
- https://do2learn.com/picturecards/howtouse/first_then.htm retrieved on 02/04/2020

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If you need any support at all during this difficult time, please do not hesitate to contact us through the email link below:

educationinclusionservices@barnsley.gov.uk

Please remember, we are working, we are here for you and it's good to talk.

Contact Us

Alternatively you can visit the below website and submit a query:

www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/schools-and-learning/education-inclusion-services/

Please include your child's name and the name of the member of staff supporting them (if you know it):

- Dr Naomi Robinson – Principal Educational Psychologist / SCI Team Manager
- Toni Harvey – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Andrea Eaton – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Louise Stringer – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Lora Moore – Specialist Advisory Teacher
- Melanie Booth – Specialist Support Worker
- Lucy Shea – Specialist Support Worker
- Gemma Whitfield – Specialist Support Worker

*Please note that some team members work part time, however we aim respond to you within 7 days during term time.

Resources:
Visuals for 'Play'

You may find some of these resources useful if you are making any of the visual support tools mentioned in this guide.

Lego	Bricks	Paint
Cars	Trains	Doll
Sand	Draw	Write
Playdough	Water	Books
Sticking		
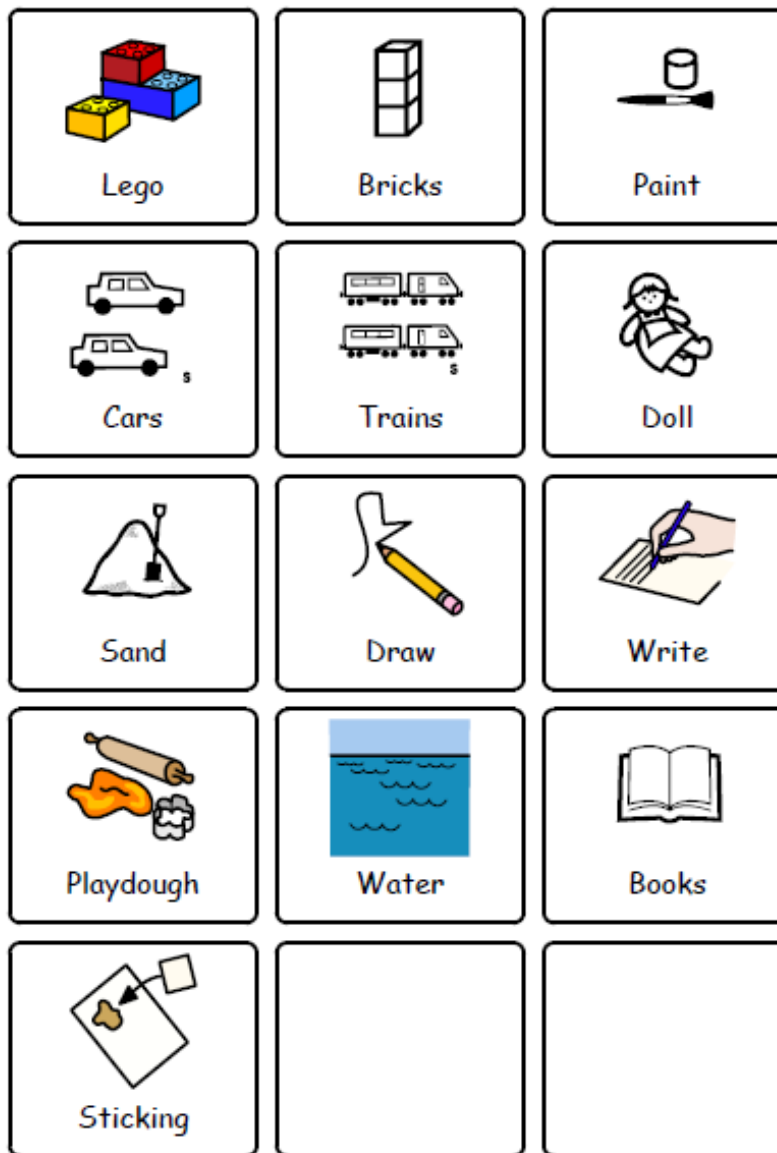
Blanks have been provided if you would like to make your own symbols
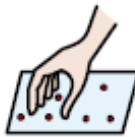
Resources:
Visuals for 'Snack Choices'

Resources:
Visuals for routine or timetables