Over the previous sessions, we've discussed the different learning profile of children who have a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. Because they have followed an atypical developmental pathway, they have many gaps in knowledge. In this session, we will discuss ways to use modified teaching strategies and materials to fill in those gaps.

Social Skills:

Individuals with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome tend to have difficulty processing and understanding auditory information - they also have difficulty "reading" the transitory social cues (e.g. body language, facial expression, tone of voice) that others use to modulate their social responses. As a result, children with ASD frequently have difficulty coping with social situations in a predominantly auditory-verbal world.

You can use the relative strength of the visual channel to directly teach missing social information.

1. Emotions

Here are some common facial expressions. Notice that most of the emotional information is carried in the shape of the mouth and the eyebrows:

- Happy
- Sad
- Mad
- Surprised
- Scared
- Confused
You can also picture "mixed" facial expressions, which can be very difficult for the AS child to understand:

![Facial Expressions]

Once the child can sort emotions into basic "categories", you can introduce the concept of "emotional scales" (this comes from the work of Tony Attwood). Connect degrees of emotion to facial expression, words (use a thesaurus) and situations. Here is an example of an anger scale:

![Anger Scale]

Take photos of family members and close friends making a variety of facial expressions. Sort these into emotional categories, and also arrange them by "degree" of emotion.

Connect visible emotions to the "real-life" situations that they match. You can make "emotion books" that show happy/angry/sad situations for a variety of people (what makes me happy may not be the same thing that makes you happy). This leads into discussion of perceptions and thoughts of others.

Body language (posture, gestures, movement) also carries information about people's emotions. You can use cartoon figures to represent the body language that matches each emotion or emotional situation. To make the figure represent a specific person, simply put the first letter of the person's name on the body, personalize hair and add features like glasses. Body movement is simple to represent. Remember that you're not creating great art, you're trying to clearly represent "people information" in a visual form. When the figures are simple, you will find that the child can then start to draw their own representations of social situations that they find difficult (they can also learn how to formulate solutions using the drawing mode).
Here are generic figures that I use in teaching emotion, and in representing a variety of social situations. I've also included the simple ways that you can make these people move. Notice how some of the small figures easily suggest a certain emotion by their posture and movement:

2. Thoughts/Perceptions of Others

Individuals with AS have great difficulty guessing the thoughts and perceptions of other people. This is a necessary skill to have when navigating social situations. These thoughts and perceptions are the "invisible" steps that must be understood before many of the cause-effect relationships in "people interactions" make sense. You can teach the AS individual to read multiple clues (facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, situational clues) and put them together to make reasonable guesses about what another person is thinking. You can highlight these clues by drawing a "social vignette", and having the student fill in the thought bubbles. Here's an example:
3. Social Problem-Solving

- use detailed information about school and home situations to teach these skills directly in a one-to-one situation
- use "social vignettes" to put key information on one page - allow the student to fill in missing pieces (eg. facial expression, thought and speech bubbles) - then work on multiple solutions and their consequences - afterwards, you can mark preferred solutions with a green circle, and less useful solutions with a red circle with a line through it
- all useful strategies for dealing with emotional/social issues can be transferred to classroom situations
- one useful concept is an "emotional toolbox", with multiple specific strategies that the AS student can choose to use in coping with difficult social situations - here are some examples of strategies that may be useful:
  - disengage / walk away
  - ignore the other person
  - think about happy things / favourite things / funny things
  - imagine revenge (but don't do it)
  - tell someone you trust
  - call for help
  - take a deep breath
  - wait a minute (and think)
  - hit a pillow
  - use your words
Academic Skills:

AS individuals are very good at "surface learning". The problem is that they can often get the right answer for the wrong reason. As academic tasks demand more sophisticated thinking, gaps at the early levels of knowledge become apparent.

1. Learning in a Group Situation

- back-up all auditory information with visual supports (combination of written information and illustrations to highlight key information points)
- have support available for individual review of key points before starting activities (eg. EA or teacher goes to student to see if there are any questions - may get student to explain to you what they plan to do before they start their work)
- to improve comprehension of new subject material in a classroom setting, pre-teach vocabulary and key concepts through resource (school) or parent/tutor (home)

2. Vocabulary

- should always have a dictionary (of appropriate level) beside student as s/he does school work - another useful tool is a junior thesaurus
- a personal dictionary is also be a good idea - record specific new vocabulary words (eg. from new school topics), along with their meanings - you can use a binder or index card box, to allow new words to be filed in alphabetical order
- play various vocabulary-building games (Pictionary Jr., Outburst Jr., Balderdash Jr., Tribond Jr.) - you can also play games like "guess what's in my secret bag?", where people take turns hiding a mystery object, and then giving other players clues about what's in the bag - you can add "clues" to the commercial vocabulary games as well, with the leader giving clues to help the others guess a word - this type of activity builds a more complex web of meaning around a specific vocabulary word, improving the chances that the AS student will be able to find the word when they need it

3. Functional Reading Comprehension

- include a variety of fiction and non-fiction books in the reading program
- reading for factual information may be easier than reading a story
- to improve story comprehension, you need to work on cause/effect in a visual form (also emotion, thoughts/perceptions of others) - generally, concepts that are not understood in fiction reflect concepts that are not well understood in real-life situations

4. Writing Skills

- support fine motor - use letter stamps, computer keyboard, having an adult "scribe" for the child (write down what they say) - don't hold development of written language back to level of poor fine motor skills
- allow child to formulate using drawing/pictures, then write text to match

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5. Math
- computation skills tend to be learned easily - the challenge is to connect the written equations to what they represent in real life situations
- word problems - difficult because of the language piece - use drawing and concrete objects to "picture" the problem, then find the equation to solve it

6. Science
- teach in an "experiment-based" model
- use science experiments to improve reading for meaning (use written/picture instructions)

7. Social Studies
- use pictures and movies to give background information
- some AS students may enjoy maps, and you can use this as a basis for discussing events that are remote in time (history) or place (geography)
- connect remote events to familiar events (eg. medieval history - visual comparison of castle to your own house)

8. Use of Favourite Topics
- it takes a little imagination, but it is well worth brainstorming around teaching new concepts using favourite topics
- Here are some examples:
  - Superheros take a tour of the world
  - How the life of pioneers was shaped by natural disasters
  - Beatles math (eg. figuring out how many people are at a concert)
- the advantage of teaching through favourite topics is that you exploit the high focused interest that the child gives to that topic
- you will have to use your judgement re: when a topic is too favourite, and using it in a classroom takes the child's attention away from the learning concept (eg. the child becomes overwhelmed by emotion, or is very rigid about the topic and won't allow anyone else to add information)

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