

## Tuning Into Autism Training

### Tuning Up and Tuning In (15 Mins)

Be comfortable, find somewhere in the hall, either sit down or stand, lie down or lean against the wall if you like. Go sit next to a particular friend or be on your own. Notice your motivation for whatever decision you took, are you in tune with how you feel (make a change if you need to). Notice what happened when you 'tuned in' – just notice. Now you have tuned in relax, take a deep breath if you need to, don't worry about anybody else, this is just about you for now. Tuning into yourself, your mind, your body, is there something you would like to do – have a stretch, close your eyes, say something quietly to yourself or out loud. Take a minute to do this, there's no getting it wrong for now, this is just about you and your needs. Notice how you feel, any thoughts of the summer, of those outside school, of those in school.

If you have your eyes closed, open them, notice your hands and feet, your body, your breath, have a stretch if you need to and begin to prepare yourself to bring your attention to the others in the space. Slowly begin to move around the room, acknowledging others, making eye contact, give a little wave – whatever feels appropriate. You may want to say hello, shake hands, give them a hug, share names if you don't know the person, do a little dance of joy to see them – you're here and so are they. Keep moving through the hall, notice when you meet someone, what feels appropriate, what level of animation, to touch or not to touch, to speak or not to speak. Come to a circle.

Welcome – however you are and whatever summer you have had. Can we give a collective wave around the circle – all at the same time. Then holding hands like take a metaphorical step into the new term together.

Now you may want to go and sit with your hand holding buddies next to you, that might be nice, trust whom you have ended up next to (or there may be someone that you are desperate to sit next to) – but lets sit and we'll begin the first session.

### Session 1: What is Autism?

- The word 'autism' comes from the Greek 'autos' – which means 'self'.
- First mentioned in 1911 a scientific paper by Eugen Bleuler (1857 – 1939) first referred to an 'autistic state' (writing in relation to behaviour exhibited to those with schizophrenia) as a lack of contact with reality. The tendency in the behaviour was to relate to oneself, rather than other people.
- In the 1970s: '**Triad of Impairments**' Lorna Wing (1979)
  - Impairments of social interaction
  - Impairments of thinking & Behaving
  - Impairments of Communication
- There has been an explosion in autism diagnosis, referred to as an 'autism epidemic' of the 1990s:
  - o The Guardian article states an increase in numbers from 1 in every 2-2.5k to 1 in every 68 people.

- It's clear that autism is here to stay and that numbers of autistic children at schools is likely to increase.
  - Why?
  - To bring us up to date, 2013 The DSM V: The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual:
    - Autistic Spectrum Disorder:
      - Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity – back and forth communication, failure to initiate or respond to social interactions. NAS referred to as 'mindblindness'
      - Deficits in nonverbal communicative – eye contact, body language, use of gestures, facial expressions.
      - Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships – sharing imaginative play, making friends, adjusting bhv to different social contexts
      - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements – in body movements, speech or with objects (Stimming behaviour and Echolalia)
      - Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, need to take same route or eat food every day). Self-contained looping systems – such as in the art of MC Escher
      - Difficulties in engaging in imaginative play, so the wheel of a truck is spun and spun or marbles entered into Marble Run repeatedly – what Dr Jerome Bruner (Research Professor of Psychology at NYU) has called 'one trackedness' – the same with literal interpretations 'it's raining cats and dogs' and not 'getting' humour.
      - Highly restricted, fixated interests, abnormal and intense attachment to objects – Tustin's 'Autistic objects'
      - 3 Severity levels – requiring different degrees of support. Therefore 'Autistic Spectrum Disorder' is a spectrum condition, which can be placed from one end High Functioning (was previously referred to as Aspergers Disorder) to the other end Low Functioning
      - 'If you've met one child with autism, then you've met one child with autism'
- Dr Joe Cubells, Psychiatrist Emory Autism Centre

### Taking a more progressive view of autism:

- The language in the history of autism has been
- Impairments,
- Difficulties
- Deficits

Leads to 2 things:

- 1/ It suggests that autism is merely something to be overcome.
- 2/locates the 'problem' firmly in the child

Locating the problem in the autistic child or the child's brain suggests a 'one person psychology' but what of social factors:

- The example of year 2 girl leaving her class (and interruptions to the class).
- The little girl managed to communicate (indirectly) what was going on in her environment – what we needed to do, as adults was tune into that.
- The irony is, we can learn a lot from those with autism.

Steve Silberman: *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently* (2015)

- Talks of the labels we have placed on those with autism and how autistic adults have come up with a label for non-autistic people, called 'neurotypical' – almost a pejorative term, to think normally could be a limitation.
- We perhaps become focused on 'cures and causes' rather than 'what can we do for people already there'
- The very word 'Special Needs' implies something more is needed, when it may be that something less is required:
  - o Less stimulation
  - o Less words
  - o Less labelling
  
- we have to be careful not to lump those with autism together as either the same, special or needy, perhaps even creating a 'spectrum'

The challenge in working with autistic children is 'crippling anxiety and fear', therefore the first imperative is to 'lower anxiety levels'.

Jude Reagan, Headteacher at The Queen's Mill School, London ('one of the best state run special schools in the country' – BBC programme)

Social Communication Exercise (15mins)

- What makes us anxious – other people? Talking out loud?
- Sartre says: 'L'enfer c'est les autres'
- If that is the case for adults – how is it for an autistic child
- Let's try an exercise – can really listening/tuning in help to somebody else to communicate
- What do we do to encourage, to support, to listen – nod heads, eye-contact, physical contact – are we even aware of what we are doing?
  
- A to talk, B to listen and tune in, to make to as comfortable and as anxiety free as possible. C to observe the A and B.
  
- Play with it a little, exaggerate, see what happens?
  
- Because these social cues are often unconscious. C is to observe what goes on
- A is to share moments where he/she felt most connected to what was being said

Discussion (15mins)

- Ask questions or share thoughts
- Other people can respond, rather than just me

## Session 2

(play music for the group to return to)

Introduce the session – on attunement

Dr. Albert Mehrabian (Professor of Psychology, UCLA): (1981). *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*

- 7% - words
- 38% - tone of voice
- 55% - body language

The Still Face Experiment: (25 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>

Is this what it must be like not to read body language, facial expressions, non-verbal cues? Highly anxiety provoking, unsure, feeling of threat or engulfment. It perhaps helps to explain:

The need to control one's environment and to keep the other at bay (ART of MC Escher)

- We talk about 'secure bases' in attachment, but the opposite seems to have occurred in autism, which has been talked of as a 'profound collapse' (Alvarez)
- Repetitions can provide the apparent safety of 'reassuring stuckness' (Alvarez), a sense of 'omnipotence', power and control

**The emphasis then, in working with autism is try to meet the child, whilst lowering the child's anxiety. How to do this....**

**We can take some advice from the work attunement** work of Daniel Stern (Psychoanalyst and Psychiatrist) and author of: *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (1985)

- Attunement is: **A performance of behaviours that express a shared emotional state.**
  - It is what the mother was doing in the early part of the video
    - She was 'performing behaviours' by coming down to the infant's level, making noises, eye contact, movements, physical contact and facial gestures.
    - They are performed as a kind of improvisation, they are not pre-planned or mapped out.
    - Not just mirroring back what the child is doing, but tuning into the emotional state that is BEHIND the behaviour (The Vitality Affect)
    - Though the mother is letting the infant take the lead (she is tuning into the child), there is a reciprocity - that is each are informing each other's states.
    - The challenge with autism is the very notion of a 'shared emotional state' – with autism it may be the case that the

emotional state is heavily weighted towards the child – Child-Centred. Approach.

- What then might be needed initially, or at times of difficulties are what Stern calls: *Communing attunements* (what I call – letting be)
  - To share in another’s experience with no attempt to change what the person is doing or believing. To match exactly the other’s internal state, i.e. to be in sync
  - Letting the child draw, play, rest, - be-with them.
  - In Escher terms, in is about being-with the repetitions, tolerating them, staying with them, surviving them.
  - (I know this is difficult in class, I’ll give more time for this later, but there may be other options - sensory room)
  - It may be necessary when the child is just getting to know you, or establishing some degree of trust.
  - Don’t underestimate that it may be difficult for the child just to be with you – this can be a real success for some autistic children.
  - The notion is to establish a sense of security in the child and in the world, via the others around the child, when it’s to a significant carer, this is called a secure Attachment and functions as a secure base in the child – not so the child can remain there, but so the child can grow and develop.
  
- Development and growth then come from *Purposeful misattunements*: To over or under match the child’s emotional state. To tune up or tune down the child.
  - Example: When a child is upset or crying, we naturally rise our voices to meet the emotional intensity and then calm then down (or tune down...OOOOHHHHHH.....OK.....ok.....ok and slow down the movements gradually (we therefore ‘purposely misattune’) to alter behaviour (p140)
  - We adopt the emotional state that we tune the child towards. It’s about finding that state in oneself.
  - For autistic children involved in repetitious and fixed behaviour, we are more likely to bring them out of this, by meeting them first – i.e. communing, before we can ‘purposefully misattune’
  - Referring to Escher it is about showing the child a way out of the repetitions. This is likely to take time and patience and is something that is gradually done i.e.:
    - Introduce a sheet of paper that says ‘Now’ and ‘Then’
    - Introduce a sand-timer to signal the approaching end and a switch to something else
    - P.Miss can be artful interventions, create and fun, rather than strict instructions to change.
      - Turning an object into a flying saucer as you hand it back to the child

- My paper 'Unexpected Moments' – both find yourself momentarily outside a repetition, when something goes wrong, something unexpected happens – you can be drawn together – these are the golden moments. For what RD Laing says 'to make an appeal to the freedom [of the child]' (p.61) *The Divided Self* (date)

Nonpurposeful Missattunements: Incorrectly identifying the baby's internal state, or being unable to find the corresponding state in oneself.

- Usually when things break down, there is an emotional mis-match, the adult and child do not meet, they are adrift, not relating but rather 'clashing' with each other. Can often happen with anxiety, tiredness or anger.

To summarise, Attunement is about:

- Reaching the child emotionally, behind the behaviour and performing/showing/expressing the state back to the child.
- It is therefore an externalisation of an inner state, which provides the experience of being seen
- Through this the child feels safe enough to be who they are and to show whom they are

An example of attunement:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MykZfESyA4>

- 'here I am as I really am'
- They are tuning into something that is unsaid – behind the words (the vitality affect)
- They communicate this something mostly through the body, the squeeze of the hand, the squint of her eyes, her hand to her face (Embodied communication)

It is one of the most natural and simple things to do, attunement is about a safe, deep and core connection – not only between the adult and the child, but between the child and the outside world. They are key to a school as Stern says, learning is 'connecting experiences' (p47):

- The hands of the clock and the time of the day
- The words on the page and the words spoken.
- The child needs some primary basis of connection with the world, before leaning can really take place, therefore making these connections for autistic children is a very important form of learning
- Can we make them learning objectives – if so, we will explore how this afternoon.

Exercise on 'group attunement and group intuition':

This may all be very well in 1:1 work or in therapy, but what application does it have in the classroom?

- For a moment try to tune into the group you are sitting with, how does it feel to be in this group.....is there something that you feel that your group needs? What's going on behind what is being said, can you tune in to what is needed, include yourself in this. Have a think about it and write it down. It's ok to be honest, it's ok to get it wrong.
  - o It may be some words or quietness, a group hug, a funny story, less eye-contact or more eye-contact, to move closer together or to move further apart? It may be to stand up together and move to another part of the room, it could be to have a little run around the hall.
- Then, one at a time share your thoughts, ideas with your group and decide as a group, what to do. You may want to do all of them. Nothing is ok to.
- (If this doesn't work – then is there a wider focus – is there something that you feel the group feeling as a whole, here in the school, in this training day?)

Share thoughts, reflections, questions – on the experience of the exercise or on any part of the morning.

#### Discussion/feedback

Can we use attunement in the classroom?

Was there a difference between what you felt the group needed and what you needed? ]

What's the feeling in your group, now, if you shared your attunements?

#### **Break for lunch**

#### Session 3: Autism at Earlsmead: Experiences, ideas and strategies

Show Tommy excerpt (Youtube)

- The narcissism of the mother character is broken at the same time that there is a breakthrough to Tommy.
- We have to challenge ourselves, in our neuro-typical ways, to reach autistic children.
- It may involve a deconstruction/a breakdown of usual teaching methods of what we think of as 'learning'

A 'piece of work' for those with autism – may not always be written, buy may be something else.

Examples qualitative progress:

- Variations in language – words, or sounds, emphasis, tone, rhythm, intensity (which may come from ‘play’, as much as from more structured occasions)
- Developments in non-verbal communication: eye-contact, facial expressions, physical contact
- Variations playing with objects, sharing, using them in different or imaginative ways (i.e. pretending it’s a space ship)
- interactions with people, using names, handshakes, asking how they are – questions
- Reduction or Increase of stereotypical movements and vocalisations, when are such movements and sounds made, any patterns:
  - o What happens if they are communicated back to the child
  - o Can a base form of communication ensue?
- Showing sensory sensitivity – to light, sound, colours i.e. getting upset. Are there occasions when sensory sensitivity is reduced?
- Initiating physical contact or being able to receive appropriate physical contact from others.
- Producing ‘work’ – worksheets, engagement in activities and learning set by staff
- Speaking, writing, reading in full sentences
- Being calm in assembly or sitting next to a different person

The real learning and development is likely to come from the child – the important thing is to notice it, to tune into it (i.e. respond) and to record it:

- Notice,
- Tune in
- Record.

‘The emergence of organisation is a form of learning’ (p46) Stern.

How do we record this ‘qualitative’ progress:

- o Use the STAR Sheets in the Autism booklet
  - Settings (1:1 in the sensory room)
  - Triggers (What happened just before – the child was relaxed and playing with play-doh)
  - Action (the child heard an Ice-cream van outside and said for the first time: ‘Ice cream van’)
  - Result (Tune-in: I whistled the tune and the child gave me extended eye-contact and held my hand)
- o Also use the STAR Sheets to record ‘challenging situations’
  - Useful for gathering a log of what does and doesn’t work for calming the child/avoiding outbursts
  - Provides a log that can be reflected on, over a term, not only to record the number of incidents, but to indicate interventions that have worked – this can form good case studies and show real improvement (to parents, Ofsted, ourselves and even the child)

- Could also be a way of recording what happened at the end of the outburst – did the child receive a hug, get his toy, was sent home – this helps to show the motivation for the outburst. Can we deliver this and miss the outburst in some way?

#### The behaviour Support Plan/Pupil profiles

- If the STAR analysis gathers the data, then the behaviour support plan is a strategy for the term ahead.
- I suggest that the SNA/TA together with the teacher writes this out at the start of each term. It is then reviewed at mid and end term times (shown to Sarah too)
- The approach for the Bhv Plans is:
  - Assess – from the gathered data from the STAR analysis over the previous term.
  - Plan – by writing up the Behaviour plan
  - Do – Implement the plan
  - Review – Did it work and if so how
- Therefore begin the first behaviour plans in January 2016.

#### Other helpful parts of the Autism booklet:

NAS book recommends, (p.32) the use of signs and symbols, to create visual timetables in the classroom, ideal for 'making connections' given in the Autism handbook.

- I suggest this is done straight away , so each child has, as standard, a visual timetable in the classroom (prob have these already)
- What came out of the SNA reflection group was to standardise them across the school, so the children see the same symbols as they progress through the Recommendations for helping with tuning in:
- Photos of Staff members
- Emoticons
- Repetitive questions board : A P. Missatune to help reduce repetitions
- 'Working for' charts – 'Golden Ticket' charts
- Now & Then

#### Other Suggestions for a strategy for autism:

Tuning in, includes physical contact – helps to form literal connections with self and others:

- Might want to bring some simple physical activities into PE lessons or even in class, such as:
  - Back to back sitting and standing up together
  - Feet to feet – lying on backs
  - Show Veronica Sherbourne book

The use of sand-timers in class-rooms (little ones)

- To introduce concepts of time-boundaries
- To assist in signalling when one activity will end and another one begins
- Assist by the Now and Then sheets in the Austim Toolkit

The pre-emptive finish – in 15mins we will be ending

- To use language, physical contact and reassurance to signal the end of activities and the beginning of a new one

The 50minute system

- To regulate and manage degrees of attunement of staff towards a special needs child, to use 50minute cycles (show diagram), and then psychologically pulling back, resting, perhaps physically so for 10 mins before going back to the child

Working as a team/unvelcro-ing the SNA member of staff to the child

An attitude of exploration and healthy attitude to failure:

- If you are tuning in, it's ok to try things
- Non-judgemental
- The example of K and being a dog – what he said to me
- I feel autism calls for difference, for being different – it can have good results:
  - o Kivanc and the dog

### **Plenary**

Can I suggest that TA/Teachers/SNA/SMSAs sit next to each other for this final part

Discuss amongst yourselves your own thoughts on the day and how it relates to your special needs or autistic children:

- Is there anything you feel that you'd like to implement – or really not like to implement
- What's your view of the un-velcro-ing of the SNA from the child?
- Any thing that you feel anxious or very positive about
- What of other children in the class and the disruption of learning?

Open for reflections/questions/sharings:

Differences can be brought up, discussed with the class in circle time:

- have a conversation about 'autism' about difference and about different ways of learning
- What ideas do the children have for inclusion – should we as adults always come up with the answers – example in other school I work in where the autistic child has responded much more to his peers, than he has staff.
- damage limitation – its better perhaps that the autistic child is contained at quietish play, than by valuable upsets and disruptions.

Come together at the end – symbolic move onward, to the side, pat on the back.

**End**