

Structuring learning for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

The image displays several educational activities:

- Top Left:** A vertical column of four small images: a blue car, a bunch of yellow bananas, a black hat, and a white cat.
- Top Middle:** A 2x2 grid. The top-left cell is a solid blue square. The top-right cell contains a green apple. The bottom-left cell is a solid black square. The bottom-right cell contains a red balloon.
- Top Right:** A photograph of a child's hands playing with a blue bowl and wooden spoons.
- Bottom Left:** A photograph of a child's hand interacting with a matching activity board. The board has four sections with labels and icons: a blue fork, a red comb, a purple ball, and a red comb. The child is touching the purple ball.
- Bottom Right:** A drawing task card. It features the text "Draw a cat" and a small illustration of a cat and a pencil. Below the text is a large empty rectangular box for drawing.

“I can do it my self”

Division TEACCH is a state wide programme in North Carolina USA catering for individuals with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The philosophy of the programme has now been used successfully within schools and other settings catering for individuals with and ASD for some time. The TEACCH philosophy focuses on individuals strengths to enable the development of independence and support weaknesses to enable maximum access and reduce stress.

Visual thinking

It is known that individuals with ASD often think in pictures and process visual information more easily than verbal information, therefore TEACCH advocates using lots of visual support, structure and cues to enable access, independence and increased understanding.



Structure

Like all of us Individuals with ASD thrive on and need structure in their lives in order to feel secure and thus able to thrive and develop, this is even more essential for individuals with ASD in order to create order and security in what is often a very confusing world. This is achieved through visual timetables, physical structure of environment and structure of activities.



Distraction

Individuals with ASD often find it very difficult to assess the essential information and filter out distractions or irrelevant information e.g. buzzing lights, busy displays where they are trying to work or a table full of stuff with no way of knowing what's relevant to them. By providing activities which give visual and structural clarity about what is required and limiting distraction we are able to increase success and independence.



One area of this is the TEACCH philosophy is 'Workstations', the premise behind using this system is that it incorporates structure, routine, visual cues and limits distraction to develop independence, organisational skills, the concepts of working in an ordered manner, the concept of finished and the generalisation of skills.

A Workstation will clearly show the pupil



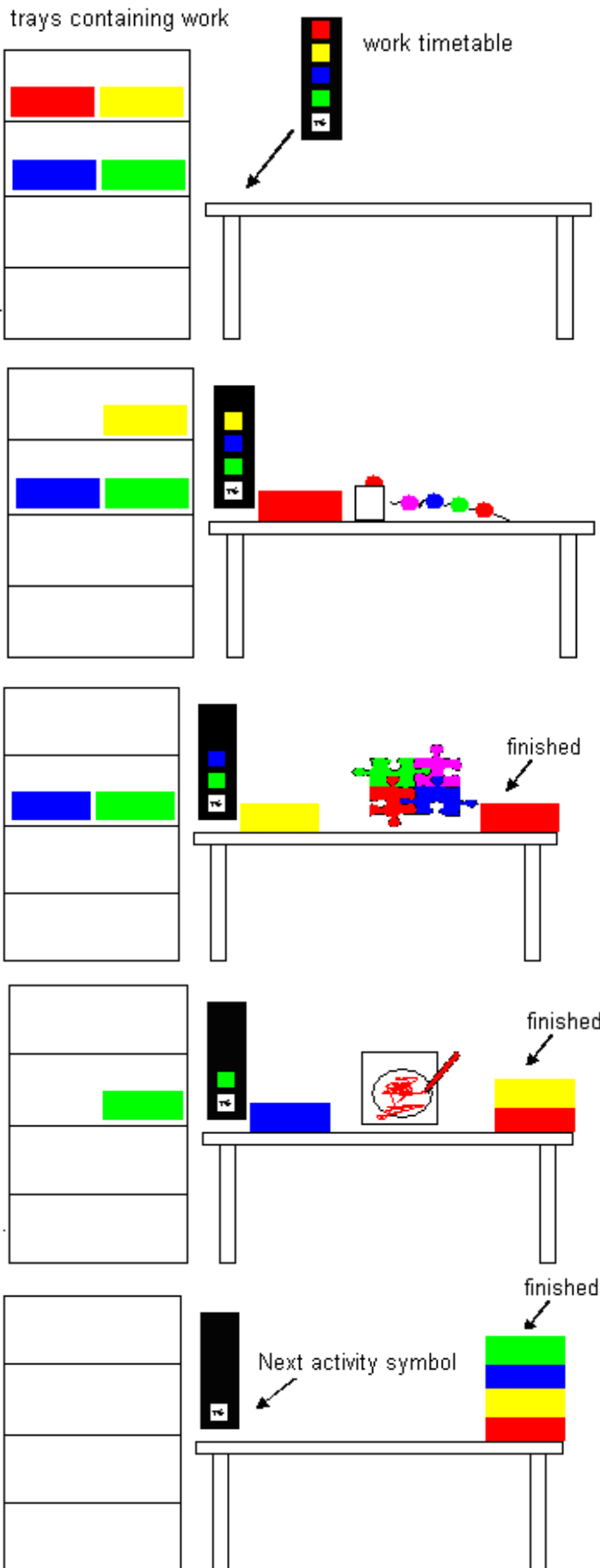
- ✓What am I expected to do? (Using visual or structural cues appropriately e.g. a drawing or photo showing what to do or one piece of task already completed.)
- ✓How much work I have to do.
- ✓How I know I've finished.
- ✓What do I do next?

A good workstation will...

- ✓ Use only activities the pupil can do independently and has a high chance of succeeding at without support.
 - ✓Use activities that are naturally interesting to pupil building on their strengths and interests.
 - ✓Requires little or no organisation of materials by pupil, components of activity organised in a way that enables success and understanding e.g. all objects to sort placed in a pot.
 - ✓Use activities that require physical manipulation generally most successful.
 - ✓Require as minimal support as possible e.g. occasional guiding of pupil's hand, touching needed object. Limit verbal cues which may inhibit independence.
 - ✓Have limited distractions.
 - ✓Help pupils to generalise skills.
 - ✓Develop concept of working in a standard organised fashion e.g. top to bottom, left to right.
- ✓Please note that it is preferable to correct and respond to a child's mistakes after the workstation time, this reinforces the independence element. If the child does not achieve a task maybe simplify it, alter the structure or re-teach.



Workstation Structure



1. Trays containing activities are placed on pupil's left arranged top to bottom left to right, usually on shelves. Strip stuck to table containing squares that match boxes e.g. colour/ number

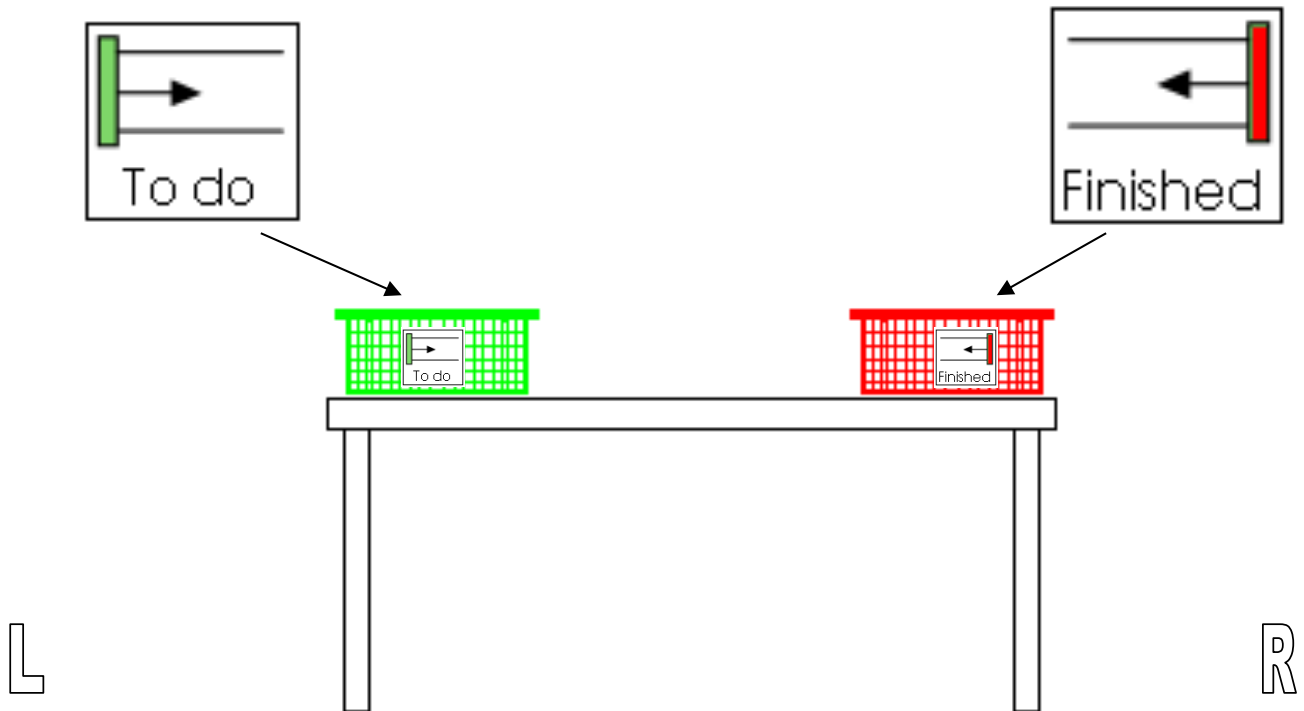
2. Pupil removes top square off strip, takes corresponding tray and matches square to Velcro spot. The pupil then completes activity then discards it to right either on table, floor or in box.

3. Repeat process 2.

4. As process 2.

5. Process 2 is repeated until all squares have been removed and thus all activities completed. When all trays are complete a symbol/ word/ object of ref is provided to cue next activity. This is either on bottom of strip or on individual timetable.

Structuring 1:1 Sessions



Whilst 1:1 sessions need not be as structured as in independent sessions (workstation) it is advisable to continue to provide a structure which will reduce stress and allow the child to more easily focus on the tasks.

✓ Again it is a good idea to provide a visual structure that shows the child what they are expected to achieve, this can be done by placing a basket on the left with the symbols/ words “To do” and a basket on the right that says “finished”, whilst not essential red and green baskets are very useful for this.

✓ Tasks need not be so explicit as in independent work but should still give the child a good sense of what is expected without constant input into this rather than the task being taught.

✓ Tasks should be just above where the child is working independently.

✓ Tasks should encourage as much independence as possible.

✓ Tasks should build in children’s interests and natural motivators.

✓ Tasks can and should be utilised/ altered slightly to be used in independent work once they have been mastered.

✓ 1:1 sessions should ensure that tasks a child is finding difficult independently to achieve are revisited.

✓ It is useful to use a now-next strip if the child does not use a timetable.

✓ For more able children rather than using baskets they can be use laminated cards of ⁵ to do and finished placed on the table in the same way as the baskets or be provided with a list to tick list that states what tasks need doing.

What you will need.



A table that is in a distraction free environment, for highly distractible individuals this is best facing a wall. If the workstation space/ table is to be used for 1:1 teaching it is useful to make a slight change to the environment to ensure the child know that the difference between independent work (workstation) e.g. removing workstation trays and presenting work in an alternative container (see 1:1 teaching)



A shelving unit is optional, but it does offer the benefit of further reducing distraction and a greater organisation of tasks. If used this must be placed to the left of the table facing the child (you can use the top two shelves to put the trays/ baskets in and the bottom one to store future tasks or records).



For the less able child it is advisable to use classroom trays as tasks can be presented in the most visually structured manner without the need for the child to remove the pieces, thus focussing on the task rather than distracting components. Initially begin with two trays one task and one highly motivating activity that has a clear end, build up to four except in exceptional situations always put the most motivating activity in the last tray. As children progress in following this structure they can be given work in plastic baskets and eventually plastic wallets. Initially it can be very useful to have trays of four different colours as this further reinforces what is do be done.



Laminator and pouches for making activities that will last and will not rely on the child needing to put pen to paper but rather focussing on the learning objective.



Sticky Velcro© endless array of uses but particularly essential in ensuring that once a child has completed that aspect of the activity it is held in place and reduces frustration.



Collect empty tubs with lids for making manipulative activities and separating components of a task, e.g. Pringles© tubes, margarine tubs, sauce pots, take away tubs etc.