

INTERVENTION SHEET #1

CRITICAL GUIDELINES

By Brigitte Harrisson, 2019

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE REFER TO:
HARRISSON B, ST-CHARLES L. L'AUTISME EXPLIQUÉ
AUX NON-AUTISTES. QUEBEC CITY: TRÉCARRÉ; 2017.

OBJECTIVES

- ▶ a. Create a consistently safe and coherent environment.
- ▶ b. Help reduce anxiety for autistic individuals.
- ▶ c. Promote the autistic person's availability.
- ▶ d. Intervene in the absence of the SACCADE Conceptual Language™ (SCL™).

1) STRUCTURE THE ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ Structure the space to enable the autistic person to better situate themselves.
- ▶ A student's anxiety will subside when they have consistent, stable, and precise reference points.
- ▶ Ensure that you clearly outline and define work, learning, or play areas.
- ▶ Help autistic students explore new areas but remember to give them time to adjust to these new spaces.

2) STRUCTURE TIME

- ▶ Autistic students won't have any notion of time (even if they're great at remembering days or dates).
- ▶ An autistic individual must be allowed to represent time with visual clocks and conceptual sequences.
- ▶ An autistic person should work with analog watches, or use clocks with hands, as this will help them see the passage of time concretely, and therefore register an image of the passing of time.
- ▶ Since the information they have is "static" (like a picture rather than a film), it can be unsettling for an autistic person to be late.
- ▶ Someone with autism should be reassured on this point of timeliness as they can be unsettled by the concept of being tardy, which only increases their anxiety.
- ▶ An autistic person must learn the start and the end times of the various activities in their everyday lives.

3) USE VISUAL AIDS TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

- ▶ An autistic individual, regardless of the intensity of their condition, understands and thinks in images.
- ▶ Visual support, therefore, allows people with autism (including those diagnosed as having Asperger's) to organize their thoughts and to better integrate information on the long term.
- ▶ Visual support can vary, and may include objects, images, pictograms, written instructions, etc. depending on the autistic individual's abilities.
- ▶ Visual support gives meaning to things, especially those things that are invisible (for example, the unsaid).
- ▶ The "visual channel" is the only one that works when someone with autism is anxious.
- ▶ A guardian or chaperone must ensure they always carry a notebook and pencil when they are with an autistic person.
- ▶ Don't repeat an instruction that hasn't been understood; the best thing to do is to show it visually.

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4) USE SIMPLE WORDS

- ▶ Use the same basic vocabulary whenever possible.
- ▶ The information provided to autistic students must be adapted to their level of understanding and not to their age.
- ▶ Just use a single word at first, and then gradually increase the complexity of your vocabulary according to their evolving understanding.
- ▶ Any information you share must be clear and precise.
- ▶ Remember to use short, one- or two-word sentences with only one object.
- ▶ Don't rush! It's important to speak slowly.

5) MAKE THE ABSTRACT (THE UNSPOKEN, THE ABSTRACT) CONCRETE

- ▶ Use visual support (pictograms, an agenda, etc.) as often as possible.
- ▶ Verbalize or use images to explain whatever is invisible or not obvious to an autistic person, such as contexts, intentions, feelings, etc.

6) EXPLAIN GENERALIZATIONS

- ▶ An autistic person will describe their experiences, whereas a neurotypical person is more likely to interpret their experiences.
- ▶ An autistic person thinks very precisely, while a non-autistic person will tend to think more generally, more "big picture".
- ▶ These gaps between accuracy and understanding will be reflected in an autistic person's communication, interactions, and behaviors.

7) HELP AUTISTIC PEOPLE CREATE LINKS BETWEEN CONCEPTS

- ▶ Autistic people can find generalization challenging.
- ▶ Help them transpose a situation by providing examples (both theoretical and practical) of the same situation in different contexts.
- ▶ Help them make connections between different situations in real time whenever possible.

8) SIMPLIFY LEARNING

- ▶ An autistic person thinks with a great deal of precision; they tend to focus more on details and must consciously move through more stages to understand something than a non-autistic person, who can more easily grasp the essence of a given situation.
- ▶ It's essential to simplify whatever information is shared with an autistic individual whenever possible.

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9) DECREASE EXTERNAL STIMULI

- ▶ External stimuli, such as sounds, movements, lights, etc. can quickly overwhelm autistic people.
- ▶ This will lead them to tire easily.
- ▶ An autistic person needs a quiet environment to work or rest.
- ▶ Before entering a highly stimulating environment, like a shopping mall, for example, ensure that the autistic person is sufficiently calm and rested to withstand the noise, encounters with new people, and other stimuli they may experience in a public space.
- ▶ For optimal learning, an autistic student should be set up in an area that won't stimulate their senses, and over which they have some control.
- ▶ When things aren't going well, check to see if something external, such as a fan, hasn't contributed to their accumulated fatigue.

10) REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF UNPREDICTABLE SITUATIONS OCCURRING

- ▶ An autistic person needs to know what's coming, but they can only rely on the information they already have.
- ▶ They must be provided with any new information as it becomes available.
- ▶ Anything unexpected will create a lot of anxiety for them because they won't understand it.
- ▶ Unexpected events or changes, therefore, must be clearly explained to them.
- ▶ Whenever possible, an autistic person should be informed of a change before it occurs, and this change must be clearly explained.
- ▶ In case of an unforeseen event, intervene as quickly as possible to help the autistic person get their bearings—this will help calm them.
- ▶ A new or unforeseen element not previously in someone's pre-existing internal information bank threatens their entire ability to function.
- ▶ An autistic individual may no longer be able to access their ability to process information. This can trigger a major autistic crisis.
- ▶ Use a specific pictogram, or a particular written instruction in such cases.
- ▶ An autistic person must be taught that when a situation is different from what they expected it to be, they may feel anxious, but they shouldn't panic—someone will explain what's going on to them.
- ▶ They should also be taught that changes are a part of everyday life, and that they must learn to observe and adapt.
- ▶ Autistic individuals should be taught not to schedule their activities too far in advance.
- ▶ The anxiety created by the unexpected comes from an autistic person's fixed frame of reference and their ignorance of unspoken concepts, like the fact that unexpected things can happen at any time, in any place. This is something they must be taught to be made aware of.

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11) MANAGE SENSORY REACTIVITY

- ▶ Sensory reactivity varies from person to person, and from situation to situation.
- ▶ Help an autistic person manage irregular elements (such as noises, lights, tones of voice, movement, etc.) in their environment.
- ▶ Help them by giving them time to manage it, by providing them with an image of what's going on, or by allowing them to withdraw until they regain their balance.

12) LEARN TO SPOT INTERNAL DESYNCHRONIZATION

- ▶ An autistic person consciously perceptual fragments to function.
- ▶ This ability, however, becomes more difficult if they're tired, anxious, or if they've experienced a great deal of emotion, whether positive or negative.
- ▶ An autistic individual will show signs of desynchronization by swinging, holding their ear, moving their hands (flapping), rubbing their skin, and sometimes even biting themselves.
- ▶ This creates an inability to measure their body and is very unpleasant to bear.
- ▶ In its extreme, this desynchronization effect causes a state of distress for the autistic individual, who may feel that their body and their senses are exploding. This is the cause of many autistic crises.
- ▶ When experiencing an autistic crisis, an autistic individual may first seek to regain a sense of their body while looking for something with which to measure it. To do so, they may even hit their head against a wall.
- ▶ Help them react preventively as soon as the signs of desynchronization appear by teaching them to take refuge in a quiet location.
- ▶ For outings that cause more anxiety, you can also provide them with a large sweater.
- ▶ It's useless to try to stop the gestures (autistic manifestations) associated with the desynchronization effect. Work related to the body is done on the long term with specific intervention techniques.

13) RESPECT INTERNAL / EXTERNAL PROCESSING TIME

- ▶ Autistic people tire faster than a non-autistic people because they're constantly overloaded with information.
- ▶ An autistic individual, therefore, requires regular breaks to recover.
- ▶ Don't wait until they're exhausted, and don't wait for them to express that they need a break before planning for one.
- ▶ A break is a structured period of time with a beginning and an end where there is no stimulation.
- ▶ During a break, the autistic individual should be left alone with an activity they consider relaxing.

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14) UNDERSTAND THAT AN AUTISTIC PERSON IS CONSISTENT

- ▶ An autistic person always has a reason for a particular behavior, gesture, or word. Their behavior is always connected to what is happening internally and the way they interpret the world with what little information they have.
- ▶ Internally, the individual is trying to find coherence, to derive meaning from the world from the fragments of information they are receiving.
- ▶ Thanks to their judgment and intelligence, they can build their internal framework coherently from the little information they had initially.
- ▶ The individual with autism only has their internal frame of reference to create links with the world around them.

15) USE THEIR FRAME OF REFERENCE

- ▶ A non-autistic individual observing someone autistic will typically try to make sense of the autistic person's behavior by understanding them from their own, neurotypical frame of reference. This is a mistake.
- ▶ Even if both individuals are in the same situation, the autistic person has a very different frame of reference than a non-autistic person.
- ▶ An autistic person's internal frame of reference isn't necessarily the same as other people's.
- ▶ It's critical to start from what the autistic person already knows to teach them something new or to understand the logic of their behavior.
- ▶ Observe, describe, but do not interpret.
- ▶ Since autistic people lack a lot of information in their internal frame of reference, they may not know that something is important to someone else. They must be told. Similarly, a detail that is very important to them may seem trivial to another person.

16) UNDERSTAND THAT AN AUTISTIC PERSON DOESN'T KNOW THAT THEY DON'T KNOW

- ▶ An autistic person only has access to whatever pre-existing information they've already stored.
- ▶ They cannot apply new information from one situation to another.
- ▶ The world around them appears to them as they receive information—only then can they process it. You might compare this to going to the theater where lights illuminate room one by one. Before the full set appears, the rest of the room is in the dark.
- ▶ Remember that with interventions, we often tell autistic people what not to do but rarely what they should do. The autistic individual won't get there on their own. Always provide as much information as possible about what is expected of them.



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17) UNDERSTAND THAT MEANING IS DERIVED FROM THE OUTSIDE

- ▶ An autistic person must be provided with as much information as possible to help them make connections.
- ▶ Remember: an autistic person isn't cut off from reality, rather, they're cut off from the meaning of things, from a coherent understanding of the world.

18) RESPECT THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL AGE (RATHER THAN THEIR AGE)

- ▶ Set expectations according to someone's level of development across various sectors (communication, skills, social, behavior) and not according to their actual age.
- ▶ Learning is, after all, based on someone's developmental level.
- ▶ Find the right balance between someone's developmental age and their actual age to normalize certain situations.

19) ENSURE CONTINUITY

- ▶ An autistic person lives in the present and has a fixed frame of reference.
- ▶ They must work from whatever information is accessible to them, which is information they've already stored.
- ▶ If we want to promote an autistic person's evolution, we must ensure continuity in learning.
- ▶ A person's autistic thought structure, or autistic condition, will exist for life. Continuity must therefore be long-term.
- ▶ Autistic individuals are permanently autistic—no matter whether their surroundings or services are adequate.
- ▶ Autism is a condition.

20) DON'T GIVE IN TO THE PRESSURE FOR NORMALIZATION

- ▶ An autistic person needs tools that correspond to their condition.
- ▶ They may require more time than others to process information.
- ▶ It's essential that we slow down to give them time to process the information we're sharing with them.
- ▶ We must base ourselves on their needs and not on any external needs if we want to progress.

PLEASE NOTE

- ▶ Apply these guidelines as continuously as possible, throughout the individual's every living environment.
- ▶ An autistic person lives with their condition every day—it doesn't change depending on their surroundings.
- ▶ Relying on only one of these strategies won't be effective—the work has to be done as a whole.
- ▶ Depending on the severity of the autistic condition, these tools may be applied more or less intensely.
- ▶ These tools are valid for anyone on the autism spectrum since they are directly related to the Internal Structure of Autistic Thought.