

EASY-TO-IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

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- *"Hello is Mrs. Thompson there?"*
- *"Yes, this is she."*
- *"Hi. This is Ms. O'Conner, Jacob's teacher. I'm calling today because there was another incident in class. Jacob is struggling with listening to directions. We were at morning meeting and, like always, he was jumping up and down and calling out. Another student asked Jacob to sit and be quiet because he couldn't hear. Jacob screamed at him and ran down the hall. Can you come in for a meeting on Friday so the Principal and I can talk with you about what our plan is from here?"*

How would you like to never, as a parent, get or, as a teacher, make this call again? What is behind the impulsive, irrational, and unexplainable symptoms for children with Asperger's and what simple interventions can be done to help? Let's first quickly explore why children with Asperger's may exhibit difficult symptoms and then we will devote the rest of this article to quick and easy to implement recommendations.



Children with Asperger's tend to have specific symptoms that fall into three broad categories:

1. **Executive Functioning Skills** which enable us to create a goal and plan, sequence, initiate, sustain or inhibit behaviors to work towards that goal. Executive skills also enable us to reflect upon our behavior and make adjustments as necessary.
2. **Sensory Processing, Regulation, and Modulation Skills** are "the ability to attain, maintain, and change arousal appropriately for a task or situation (Kranowitz, 1998)". Self-regulation also refers to the ability to control one's emotional, mental or physical responses to sensations.
3. **Social Skills** refers to all verbal and nonverbal skills that are required to have fluid interactions with others. This can encompass reading and giving nonverbal cues (such as body posture, eye contact, tone of voice, etc.). Social skills also involves taking another's perspective, knowing what to and not to say, when to and not to say it, and to whom it should be said or not said to.

Because many children with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty understanding the subtleties in life, the below interventions make the subtleties obvious. Additionally, there are interventions to help children regulate their bodies and creative ideas for social interaction. The interventions are broken up by interventions that target specific areas of difficulty. There are many interventions listed here and not all will work for everyone. Pick and choose what you think will work for your individual child.

Some interventions listed below are just good teaching practices, whereas others were created specifically for our kids by our agency or others. The asterisk below the intervention indicates that this is a specific strategy created by someone outside our agency.

Executive Functioning Interventions:

| Intervention | Rationale |
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| Daily Schedule Posted | By writing out what the daily schedule is (at home or school), the child's day becomes more predictable. At school, this should be at the child's eye level, large enough so the child can see, in view at all times, and when a subject is completed the subject should be erased or checked off so visually it is easy to see what is coming next. |
| Oops Board <i>*primary method of Bateson Therapy</i> | A list of daily events that are unexpected changes (i.e., Surprise Math test today or No Gym today). This is helpful to prepare students in advance that there will be a change instead of telling them 2 minutes before. Some students may perseverate on these changes, in which case this is not a useful technique. Keep this list in a consistent place.  |
| Physical Boundaries | Because children with Asperger's have difficulty inferring, they may miss cues about where to stand or where the physical boundary is of where they can and can't go. Create a visual support by adding shapes by the door so the children know where to stand when they are lining up. If the child tends to bump into people while in line, have him/her be the leader or caboose so there are less kids to bump into. If the child is fidgety and pokes people at his desk, move his/her desk a little further away from people or put tape on the floor around the child's desk so the child has a physical marker and knows where the boundaries are. During meeting times use carpet squares, shapes, or desk chairs so the child knows where to sit. |
| Bin System & Graphic Organizers | Instead of having children keep their work in their desks, provide the child (or all kids in the class) a clear, plastic bin (one for each subject) to keep their work in. This will limit the chaos of having all subjects in one binder and will also increase the likelihood that papers will stay sorted. Graphic organizers can help children focus and guide them in a good direction. By giving children a system to use, it also frees up their brains for other tasks!  |
| Consistency | Whatever rules you create, stick with them and be consistent with follow through. For children who have difficulty inferring, making sudden changes, which might seem logical to the teacher or parent may go right over the child's head. While all the other kids have caught on, the child with Asperger's is still following the old rules. By only picking a few rules, but always following through consistently you will achieve success. |
| Point of the Lesson <i>*primary method of Bateson Therapy</i> | Although it may seem obvious to you, telling children and <u>writing down</u> on the board the point of the lesson is crucial. For children with Asperger's, often what is retained from lessons are random facts. By providing the point of the lesson, you are giving the child a framework to attach the facts to, creating a whole picture. Additionally, if the student's attention wanders, it is a great tool to pull the child back and refocus. |
| Be Specific | Always tell the child what you want him to do, not what you want him to abstain from. I.e., if you say, "Stop that" (which is too vague) or "there's no talking out in class" (all negative) it doesn't tell the child what he <u>should</u> do instead. By saying, "Write down your questions" or "Hold your questions until 11:00 am and then you can ask me" you are giving the child tools for what is appropriate and will often curb the child's anxiety. |







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| <p>Reciprocal Teaching *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>To assure that a child really understands the concept of what you are teaching, first teach the group and then have individual children re-teach others. One fun method is also to provide an assignment for homework or in small groups and have the children then teach others what they have learned. This is also really good practice for children with AS to teach perspective taking since they need to take their audiences reactions from the lessons into account to determine if the audience needs more information or if it's too much information.</p> |
| <p>Decrease Clutter</p> | <p>Organize the environment so everything has its place and is labeled. Decrease any extraneous stimuli (i.e., nothing hanging from the ceiling, cover shelves with sheets, take down old class work from the walls, etc.). Use privacy boards (board that goes around the top of the child's desk minimizing distractions so s/he can concentrate on his/her work) as necessary. For many children with AS, all stimuli is as important as others – therefore the teacher is competing with objects dangling from the ceiling. By decreasing clutter, the teacher can be the most important thing to focus on (or at least decrease the amount of things that the child needs to focus on). This can really help with sensory regulation as well.</p> |
| <p>Transition Warnings</p> | <p>At 5 minutes, 3 minutes, and 1 minute prior to ending an activity give children warnings. If you are teaching, set a timer to go off 5 minutes before the lesson is over or assign this task to a student. This is useful to slowly prepare the child there will be a change.</p> |
| <p>Ignoring Points *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>Have children earn points (tally marks) when s/he ignores inappropriate or irrelevant information in the environment (such as peers who are acting inappropriately or something s/he is perseverating on). This is a helpful way to “train your brain” to ignore unimportant things.</p> |
| <p>Thought Boxes *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>A box on the child's desk so when s/he has thoughts that are inappropriate (wrong topic, wrong time, wrong person) s/he can put them in the box and close it away.</p> |
| <p>Math</p> | <p>For a child who has difficulty with visual organization, have the child use graph paper to write out math problems. Use one box per number. This can help keep numbers in line.</p> |



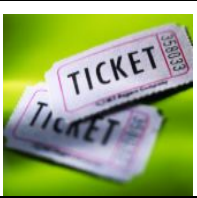

SENSORY

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| Classroom Warm Ups | Have kids up and moving every 20-30 minutes. This can be doing simple things such as 10 wall pushups, 10 jumping jacks, get up and run around your desk 3 times, etc. This will help switch gears and help fidgety bodies. |
| Reduce the Number of Problems on a Page | For children who become overwhelmed easily by work, take the 20 math problems you have assigned and instead of giving the child one page with 20 problems. Give the child 5 pages with 4 problems each. This will help decrease anxiety. |
| Auditory Interventions | Close the classroom door to decrease noise, permit the child to use an ipod when working on individual quiet assignments, place tennis balls on the bottoms of chairs, have a one-person-talks-at-a-time rule, or place a rug on the floor to muffle sound.  |
| Tactical Interventions | Have a fidget box filled with small manipulates such as modeling clay, play dough, pocket koosh balls, lotion, and other small things that kids can use to fidget with. Have the option of working on the floor or standing instead of sitting at the child's desk (this can help with low muscle tone as well). Use weighted blankets to provide input to students.   |
| Frequently Scheduled Breaks | Provide child with frequent breaks that are predictable. Think of breaks like food – if you wait too long between them or don't give them until the child absolutely needs them, the child will be distressed. If you provide regular, predictable, short but frequent breaks, the child can remain regulated. |
| Keep Furniture Placement the Same | For children with motor planning and sensory issues for whom it is a struggle to remember where things are and how to avoid furniture, keeping furniture placement the same all year reduces anxiety. This includes where the children sit. If you need to move furniture, have the child help you move the furniture – this way there is some participation on the child's part which may help with visual memory. |
| 1-5 Scale <i>*Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis</i> | The 1-5 Scale, created by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis, provides a visual representation for the range a child can be experiencing. This range was originally created for sensory regulation. However, at Milestones we often use it for sensory regulation, behavior, or social appropriateness.  |

Below is an example of a 1-5 scale that I used with a child who had difficulty understanding how much of an emotional response he should have. This child will often “catastrophe” emotions, meaning, he will become upset with others or himself for small things. This chart provides an idea of what a “1 problem” is vs. a “5 problem” and how he should respond.

| Using the 1-5 Scale for: Sensory Issues, Volume Control, Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Behavior, or Processing Thoughts | |
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| 5 Disaster / Horrendous | LEVEL 5 –Disaster / Horrendous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Someone died. My house was on fire. The world exploded. |
| 4 A big deal | LEVEL 4 – A Big Deal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I physically hurt someone or myself I used threatening language or actions toward someone else or myself. I yelled at someone, or threw objects. |
| 3 Inappropriate | LEVEL 3 – Inappropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I used inappropriate or swear words instead of saying my feeling words. I engaged in name calling instead of saying, “I feel...” I hit the desk, wall or other object with my fist. |
| 2 Unpleasant or Disappointing | LEVEL 2 – Unpleasant / Disappointing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I had a disagreement with my friends or someone else didn’t like my idea. I was asked to participate in something that I don’t want to do. Someone didn’t want to play the game I wanted to play. I keep thinking over and over that I’ve done something wrong. |
| 1 Not a big deal. Just think about it. | LEVEL 1 –Not a Big Deal / Just Think About It <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I accidentally bumped into someone. Someone accidentally bumped into me. |

SOCIAL SKILLS

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| <p>Talk Tickets *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> |  | <p>When students talk too much on one given topic, provide the student with a set of talk tickets (the number of tickets will vary depending upon how much the student can talk). Every time she wants to talk about a specific topic, she needs to cash in a ticket. When the tickets are gone, the topic is done for the day. The next day she can have a new set of tickets.</p> |
| <p>Conversation Placemats *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>To help with stimulating conversations. Have children cut out pictures of things they are interested in, laminate it, and use it as a placemat. Have children swap placemats during snack (or lunch) so the child has a prompt of how to start a conversation about someone else's interest.</p> |  |
| <p>News Boards *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>Have a board in the classroom where students can write "big news" about their lives. Teacher's can prompt the student with Asperger's to check the news board and this will provide the student something to talk about with peers.</p> | |
| <p>Guess Who Article *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>To help children learn about each other. Assign one student the "guess who job". It is this child's job to interview another student using a template the teacher pre-made. Once the interview is complete, the interviewer writes clues on the board that s/he obtained from the interview without using the child's name and other students guess who it is.</p> | |
| <p>Agree to Disagree</p> | <p>Teach kids to learn the golden rule – of treating others as you yourself would like to be treated and understand that sometimes you need to agree to disagree. This will help with conflict resolution.</p> | |
| <p>Friendship Points *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>Keep a large board posted in the classroom or at home. Every time a student does something towards being a positive friend (such as giving a compliment, helping a peer, etc.) the class earns a point. When they reach 100 points, the whole class has a friendship party.</p> | |
| <p>Compliment Counter *primary method of Bateson Therapy</p> | <p>Same as above, only children are being reinforced for making positive compliments. This can be helpful for children who often say negative things.</p> | |
| <p>Symbol Strips *Alex Laufer, SLP / Barbara Laufer, SLP</p> | <p>Create specific symbols which represent different social cues such as an "=" for "remember to give equal talking time." Put this symbol strip on the board or child's desk. Each time the child needs a prompt, point to the symbol instead of talking. This can be very helpful to teachers or parents because it eliminates long conversations about an issue and provides the child with what the social cue is.</p> | |