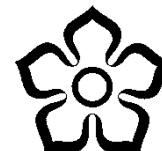# Structured teaching

What is structured teaching?

Structured teaching is based on the TEACCH approach (the Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children).

The TEACCH approach tries to respond to the needs of autistic people using the best available approaches and methods known so far, for educating and teaching autonomy. It is not a single method and can be used alongside other approaches. (NAS)

Some of the TEACCH priorities are:

- focusing on the person, their skills, interests and needs

- understanding the 'culture of autism' and identifying differences based on individualised assessments

- using visual structures to organise the environment and tasks when teaching skills

- being broad-based, i.e. teaching skills but also ensuring that people are supported during leisure and/or social activities

- being flexible and teaching flexibility.

What does TEACCH involve?

Physical structure

Physical structure refers to the layout of the classroom. The physical boundaries are clearly defined and usually include activities like: work, play, snack and transitioning.

Children with autism find their environment easier to navigate if:

- Areas for different activities look different, e.g. a red carpet to sit on for

- group times, a hard, blue floor for wet activities, a table cloth to indicate that an activity

- table is now a snack table etc.

- Activities always happen in the same area and the layout of the room is not changed too

- often or without prior preparation

- Areas are labelled with pictures and words

- Drawers, boxes etc. are clearly labelled (again with pictures and words). This helps *all*

- children tidy up, find things independently etc.

- They know where they should sit, e.g. carpet square, names on chairs

- Physical limits and boundaries are made visually clear, e.g. no entry or no touching signs

Scheduling

A schedule or visual timetable shows the child with autism what to do and when it is to happen during the day, week or month (depending on the age and ability of the child).

Timetables can be displayed from top to bottom or left to right.

Visual cues are *essential* for children with autism; they also help children with speech, language and communication difficulties, learning difficulties, high anxiety, EAL etc. so are a must for any classroom. Visual timetables help children to understand what has happened and what is going to happen.

Consider the following when using your timetable:

- its position in the room

- when you will discuss it with the children to ensure it is given an appropriate level of importance

- how much information to display at one time

- whether you will use a 'finished' pocket for pictures of completed activities (which helps the children to visualise time passing)

- whose responsibility it will be to ensure the correct symbols are displayed each day

- whose responsibility it will be to ensure you stick to the activities displayed on the timetable

- OR if adaptations are needed to the routine who will make sure the symbols are

- altered accordingly

- where you will keep the symbols so that everybody knows where they can find spare ones

- how often you will review its use as a staff group

A visual timetable can be whole class and/or individual, depending on the needs and ability of the child. For young children the visual timetable should not be too lengthy or complex, covering only the main activities of the morning/afternoon. Further support and detail can be added by using generic symbols, e.g. 'choosing time'. This can be followed up by guiding the child to check a 'choice board' to support him/her to engage in constructive play at non-structured times.

Work system

The visual timetable or schedule helps children to know what activities are happening during their morning or afternoon at school. For those children with autism who need even greater detail, work systems can be developed to tell the child exactly what is expected of him/her *during* an activity, how much work to do, and what happens after the activity is completed. The goal is to teach the child to work independently. The work system is also organized so that the child can easily work out what to do, for example, the activity or task should be performed from top to bottom and from left to right. Each activity is also visually clear in itself, e.g. a box of 6 beads to thread on a piece of lace, a puzzle to complete etc
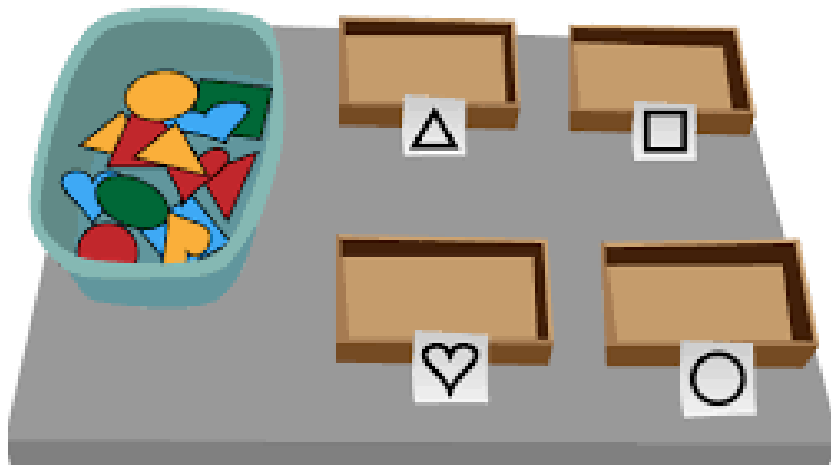
The place where the child completes these activities is often known as a 'workstation'.

Workstations can be in a quiet corner of the classroom, or in another area away from the classroom, depending on the needs of the child and the space available.

Possible workstation activities

Maths

- Matching objects, pictures, colours, numbers, letters, words
- Sorting (as matching)
- Ordering numbers
- Matching objects to numerals
- Puzzles
- Things that go together

Fine motor skills

- Threading
- Puzzles
- Cutting out pre-drawn shapes/pictures
- Pegboards
- Using pegs to put pictures, numbers, colours etc. on a washing line

Literacy

- Matching letters or words
- Matching words to pictures
- Tracing over letters/name
- Sorting letters/words

Routine

We know that children with autism respond well to routine. According to the TEACCH method, the best approach for children with autism is a routine which involves them learning to check their schedule and to follow their work system. This routine can then be used throughout the person's lifetime and in multiple situations and so can be used to help prepare the child for adulthood.

Please contact your link EYST teacher/Area SENCO for further information or training