

Lesson Guide

Introduction and plan

These materials have been prepared for a two-lesson introduction to autism and Asperger syndrome. They include two case study sheets and some games for introducing autism to a class.

★ **Points to highlight in the lessons are:**

- That autism affects a person's social and communication skills
- That autism is a broad spectrum of need and different individuals have different needs
- That structure can really help someone with autism
- That it is important to treat all people with autism as individuals

Lesson 1

1 – 10 mins

★ **Do a 10 minute brainstorm with the whole class on what social and communication skills mean**

- Speaking
- Listening
- Making friends
- Understanding people

This list can be added to.

You can also use the ideas on the games sheet on pages 3 and 4.

10 – 30 mins

Explain that autism is a disability that affects a person's social and communication skill and that it affects different people in different ways.

Over the next two lessons the class will be looking at what it involves, how it can affect different people and discussing what support can help people with autism, leading to a written piece on the subject.

★ **Hand out case study sheets including questions**

Read through with the class and have a discussion. Ask the students to study the different ways David and Helen are supported in matters of structure, routine and anxiety. Ask them to answer the questions below:

- How autism affects them

- How independently do you think this person is able to live? (Give three reasons for your answers)
- How would they deal with social situations?
- In what ways are they able to communicate and express themselves?

30 – 55 mins

★ In groups of 4 or 5 ask students to discuss the questions

Give each of the groups a case study to work on, then ask them to answer the question below

- How can you best support someone with autism or Asperger syndrome?

Ask them to prepare 3 key points for a class discussion on the issue in the next class.

55 - 60 mins

Plenary – draw class back together and go over the key points discussed in the class.

Lesson 2

1 - 10 mins

Recap points from previous lesson. What is autism?

10 - 25 mins

Go back into groups and go over key points discussed last lesson, for whole class discussion

25 - 50 mins

★ Class discussion on how to best support someone with autism

Draw out points such as being reliable, making things structured, giving clear instructions and helping individuals not to feel anxious. Sign language can help for those who are non-verbal. Emphasise that both case studies are very different. David Downes is very able. Helen Burnell is much more dependent. Highlight the importance of treating people as individuals with different needs.

If a person with autism is in the class, they should be encouraged to explain things that help them. Other students should be encouraged to explain things they do that help support that person.

Games for introducing autism to a class

Memorise a sequence game

This is a game that some people with autism that have a fascination with order and sequences would find very enjoyable and would be very good at.

Ask the class to form a circle and choose one person to start the game by saying. 'Today I went to the shop and brought myself a....', thinking of an item and adding it to the end of a sentence. The next person in the circle then has to say the sentence with the item the last person said along with their own choice of item. This continues around the circle until someone makes a mistake. That person is then asked to sit down, and the game continues around and around the circle until the last person is left. You can adapt the sentence to suit the class's interest.

- You can introduce an off-putting noise such as a drum, vacuum cleaner or a radio. This will make it harder for people to concentrate, giving a clearer understanding of why people with autism find distractions hard to cope with.
- Ask the students how this game made them feel. Did any of them feel frustrated when the loud noise started?

Sensory Game

This game is good to help the students to understand why unexpected occurrences can be uncomfortable, which many people with autism have to cope with every day.

Select a range of edible and textured object and place them in a box. These things can range from instant coffee granules to jelly. Ask for one volunteer to sit up at the front of the class and blindfold them. With each of your selected sensory objects, allow the student to either taste or feel them. The more unexpected the sensory object, the more surprised the student will feel. Things like coffee granules will be very unpleasant and give a better understanding of how unexpected events can sometimes be distressing. With the different students you selected, ask them to explain how they felt when experience a taste or feel of an object they did not like.

- You could also offer the class something to eat or drink that looks like something they are used to but in fact is something else like a chocolate spread sandwich, with a dollop of mustard hidden inside or a glass of lemonade or water with some colourless flavouring in it such as aniseed. The unexpected can be more shocking than we expect. Ask them how important trust and respect is when building relationships with people with autism.

Speaking game

Address the class in a severe tone of voice, but saying friendly, positive words. Then speak to them in a friendly voice, but using negative words eg. 'You are a very naughty group and I am angry with you all.'

This highlights the importance of tone and volume in communication.

People with autism can miss these clues.

Listening / understanding game

Address the class in 'gibberish' or a foreign language, at the same time focusing on one pupil. Through gesture, indicate you wish them to stand. When they do so ask them why they are standing. Tell them you weren't indicating for them to stand but were actually indicating to them to do something else (dependent upon what your gesture looked like!)

This highlights the importance of non verbal clues in language and how instinctively we react to them.

Explain that someone with autism would not be able to follow non-verbal clues. They might misinterpret them or not notice them at all.

Making friends game

One young person with Asperger syndrome, Mark Segar, put together a list of his 'Rules for Life' – advice and tips for others with Asperger syndrome and autism on how to interact and communicate with people. Share the following examples with the class:

- "If you wish to chat up someone else, the best thing to do when you first meet them is just to talk to them and NOT get too close.
- Suitable boundaries may vary from one person to another (see body language).
- It is important not to appear too eager.
- If you are a man, don't wear too much after shave.
- Don't chat up just anyone, make sure it's someone you like."

Ask the class, what do you do when you go out? Do you go with someone? How do you get a girlfriend?

What do the class think it would be like doing these things for someone who doesn't understand the ways that people communicate and interact?

Understanding emotions game

Make two pupils face each other at a space of about 5 metres apart. Ask one to walk towards the other, then stop when it's comfortable. Ask them why they feel it's comfortable.

Then tell them to take one more step, then another, until they are practically touching. Then join them.

Ask the class where this level of closeness is acceptable – eg. On the bus, in a football crowd, on the tube etc.

Ask them where it is not acceptable – eg. At the beach.

Ask where this understanding is written.

Highlight that we do things instinctually, but people with autism have to learn these social rules, which are changing all the time dependent upon who is involved, where and when.

Case Study 1: David Downes

David Downes is an artist who has Asperger syndrome. He is becoming increasingly well known for his art and works part time in an art shop, supported by The National Autistic Society's employment consultancy, Prospects.

David is very successful in his art work. He completed an MA at the Royal College of Art in Communication Design in 1996. In September 1999, he set out to record the BBC's most important architecture at the turn of the century. In June 2000, he became artist in-residence to BBC Heritage. In 2000, David's life and career were the subject of a book written by Shelia Pain titled 'Artists Emerging'.

David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in July 2002. David has always been aware that he deals with things like money and relationships differently from other people. 90% of the time David says that he feels like he does not have Asperger syndrome. He explains that his disability means he can see things very clearly, like the buildings he paints, but that other things are sometimes confusing, such as communicating with people. David finds unpredictable events difficult to cope with. At an important exhibition David had this year, he became anxious because an aspect of the show did not go as planned. Because David was anxious, he forgot about other important aspects of the show, even though he had only been working on them the day before. Before David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, he did not understand why he would get so anxious about things. Since he has been diagnosed he and his family can find ways of dealing with problems. David's family have been very supportive throughout his life and have helped him to achieve his full potential.

David found out about Prospects, the NAS employment consultancy that supports people with autism and Asperger syndrome, who helped him to find a job and support him at work. David said that Prospects help him at work by offering different perspectives on a problem and coping strategies with uncomfortable situations. They have given support and advice for David when he has organised exhibitions.

Case Study 1: David Downes - differentiated work sheet

David Downes is an artist who has Asperger syndrome, a disability that affects the way a person understands other people and the world.

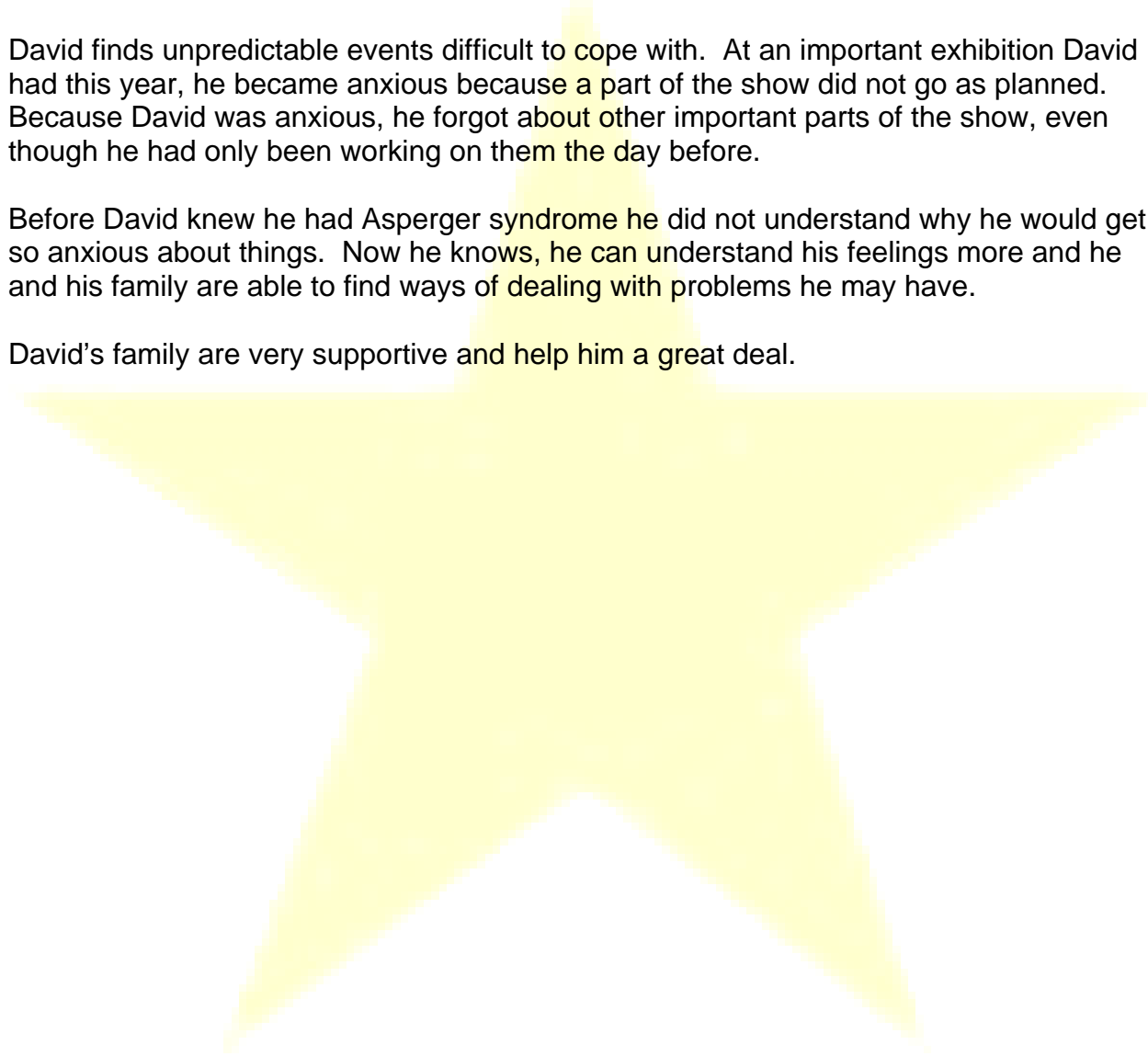
David was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome in July 2002.

David says that having Asperger syndrome means he can see things very clearly, such as the buildings he paints, but that other things can be confusing, such as having conversations with people.

David finds unpredictable events difficult to cope with. At an important exhibition David had this year, he became anxious because a part of the show did not go as planned. Because David was anxious, he forgot about other important parts of the show, even though he had only been working on them the day before.

Before David knew he had Asperger syndrome he did not understand why he would get so anxious about things. Now he knows, he can understand his feelings more and he and his family are able to find ways of dealing with problems he may have.

David's family are very supportive and help him a great deal.



Case Study 2: Helen Burnell

Helen Burnell was diagnosed with autism at the age five and attended the first NAS School in 1965. Back then there was even less of an understanding about autism; psychiatrists believed that Helen should go to a home. It was with the help of her mum, Ilse, Sybil Elgar (a dedicated teacher) and a group of determined parents that the first National Autistic Society (NAS) school was set up. The Sybil Elgar School for children with autism. Helen was one of ten children who attended the school in Ealing. The school followed the same curriculum as the national system and taught the children, initially deemed unable to be educated, to talk, read, write and socialise with others.

Once Helen and other pupils reached the age of fifteen, their parents realised that there were not any other options or education available to them and worked together to provide a safe, happy environment for their children to grow and develop into adults. They worked together to build a residency in Somerset called Somerset Court which Helen still attends today.

Helen is one of the less able residents and because of this she is unable to work. This does not mean that she prefers to do nothing. Helen enjoys routine and helps her carers with keeping her home tidy. She also enjoys activities in the form of games which help her with social situations, Helen also enjoys swimming and going on outings.

Makaton is a form of sign language and symbols which Helen uses to communicate to people because she is unable to talk. This allows Helen to express herself. Not being able to have a form of communication and expression would be very frustrating and could result in negative behaviour. When Helen was a young child she would often break things, this was the only way she was able to express herself without Makaton. Helen is very attached to her mother and father and, with the help of a residency like Somerset Court, Helen and her family are able to have a positive and loving relationship and she is able to be quite independent.

“Somerset Court has given Helen an environment where she is able to get the most out of life”

Helen’s mum, Ilse Burnell

Case Study 2: Helen Burnell

Helen Burnell was diagnosed with autism when she was five and attended the first National Autistic Society school in 1965

Helen is unable to talk.

Helen now lives in a residential service in Somerset called Somerset Court.

Helen is one of the less able people at Somerset Court. She is not able to work.

She enjoys routine and helps the people who care for her to keep her home tidy.

Helen enjoys activities like games, and playing games can help her to work with other people.

Helen also enjoys swimming and going on outings.

Helen now uses a form of sign language to communicate because she is unable to talk.

Before she learnt this sign language she would often get frustrated because she couldn't communicate with people. She often behaved badly because of this.

Helen is very close to her mother and father and with the help of them and the staff at Somerset Court is able to lead a positive life.

Helen's Mum, Ilse Burnell says:

"Somerset Court has given Helen an environment where she is able to get the most out of life."