



The National
Autistic Society

Full spectrum awareness

**A toolkit for understanding autism
for secondary school students**

Created by The National Autistic Society's
Young Campaigners' Group



Accept difference. Not indifference.

Full spectrum awareness

Introduction

Welcome to your toolkit for understanding autism

The National Autistic Society's Young Campaigners' Group created this toolkit to help students understand what autism is and to challenge some of the common misunderstandings about the condition.

Inside you'll find a range of activities, each one accompanied by questions to test what students have learnt and to make them think about some of the broader issues affecting young people with autism.

This pack consist of:

> Section one:

A window into our world:

An animation illustrating how young people overcome anxiety and stress.

> Section two:

Hidden emotions:

A play on the difficulties of expressing your feelings and communicating with others.

> Section three:

Exercises in sensory

experience: How you can recreate some of the sensory challenges people with autism face every day.

You'll also find questions and suggestions in **Section four** on how to take the issues explored even further.

We recommend that students complete at least two of the activities to understand the breadth of the autism spectrum, and how it can affect different people in different ways.

We hope you enjoy completing these activities.

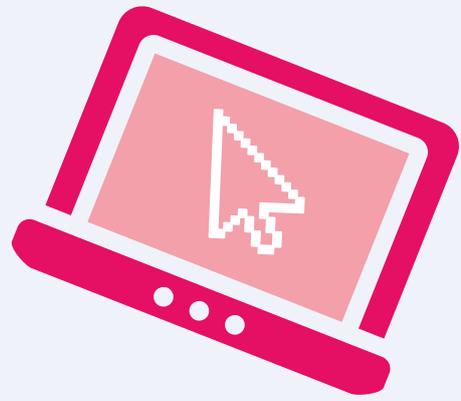
Thank you.

The Young Campaigners' Group



Full spectrum awareness

Section one



A window into our world

Learning objectives

To understand:

- › that autism is a spectrum condition which affects each person differently
- › the barriers that people can face in achieving their ambitions
- › how these barriers can be overcome with the right adaptations and support.

Task

Watch this short animation to see how anxiety and stress can affect a person with autism and what they do to cope with it. Then work through the questions.

View the video at: bit.ly/WindowIntoOurWorld



Questions



B

1. How do you think autism affects individuals differently?

B

2. To cope with anxiety, people with autism will use different strategies such as playing music or talking.

- > How do you cope with anxiety?
- > Do you cope differently from people with autism?

B

3. Can you see why a person with autism may become more anxious because of the sensory environment than someone who does not have autism?

B

4. How do you think people learn different coping strategies?

I

5. There are different goals and aspirations expressed in the film. Choose one goal and think about these questions:

- > Are there any particular barriers a person with autism may face?
- > What support could be offered to help them overcome these barriers?

I

6. Autism is a hidden disability, meaning that you cannot tell if a person has autism by looking at them.

- > This can make it harder to understand an individual's behaviour. Do you think people with autism should have to declare their disability?

I

7. There are many different autism awareness resources.

- > What do you think is the best way of raising awareness about a disability?
- > Why is it important to do this?



Go further

You might also like to invite someone from *Ask autism* to talk about their aspirations and autism, or how they cope with sensory issues.

Information on *Ask autism* can be found at: www.autism.org.uk/askautism.

Section one: answers



1. How do you think autism affects individuals differently?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them.

It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may have accompanying learning disabilities and need a lifetime of specialist support.

People with autism may also experience over- or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light or colours.

2. To cope with anxiety, people with autism will use different strategies such as playing music or talking.

- › How do you cope with anxiety?
- › Do you cope differently from people with autism?

Like for everybody, coping strategies for people with autism vary. Many strategies will be similar to what anyone would do. In addition to the examples shown in the video, it's not uncommon for some people with autism to flap or rock their bodies. This might not be something a person without autism would do.

3. Can you see why a person with autism may become more anxious because of the sensory environment than someone who does not have autism?

People with autism can be hyper- or hyposensitive¹ to different stimuli such as noise. This may make them more agitated due to coping with a stressful environment.

4. How do you think people learn different coping strategies to deal with the sensory challenges that affect them?

People with autism use many different strategies to manage their condition and fulfil their potential. These strategies might include speech therapy or extra social skills training.

Extra social skills training helps people with autism learn the unwritten rules to help them handle social situations. If you don't have autism, it is likely that you will pick up these rules without having to try.

People with autism can make adaptations to help them cope with sensory challenges, such as wearing headphones to cut out noise or tinted glasses to manage light.



Some people also use meditation exercises such as mindfulness training. These techniques can help a person change the way they think and feel about their experiences. This helps them to manage their experiences, rather than being overwhelmed and stressed by them.

5. There are different goals and aspirations expressed in the film. Choose one goal and think about these questions:

- > Are there any particular barriers a person with autism may face?
- > What support could be offered to help them overcome these barriers?

Your answer will depend on the goal you chose to look at. You may want to research training opportunities and what financial support schemes like *Access to Work* or *Disabled Students Allowance* can provide.

6. Autism is a hidden disability, meaning that you cannot tell if someone has it simply by looking at them. This can make it harder to understand an individual's behaviour.

- > Do you think people with autism should have to declare their disability?

There are no right or wrong answers. You could look at why people with autism may need to declare their disability, for example if they need additional support at school.

You could also look at legislation such as the *Equality Act* to see what provisions are available to people who disclose their disabilities.

In addition, you could research the wider issues around disclosure, such as whether disclosing would single a person out for discrimination as well as the stigma around disabilities.

7. There are many different autism awareness resources.

- > What do you think is the best way of raising awareness about a disability?
- > Why is it important to do this?

There are no right or wrong answers. Look for other videos, posters and adverts and compare them with *A Window into Our World*.



¹ Being hypersensitive means having extreme physical sensitivity to particular substances or conditions. Being hyposensitive means having less than normal sensitivity to particular substances or conditions.

Full spectrum awareness

Section two



Hidden Emotions

Learning objectives

To understand:

- › the challenges some people with autism face in building and maintaining friendships and relationships
- › how anxiety and stress can trigger certain behaviours and impact how they communicate with others
- › how people with autism and those around them can adapt their behaviour to overcome these challenges.

Characters



Kais

16-year-old person with autism; a quiet personality

Jade

17-year-old student whom Kais likes; very loud and strong willed

Benedict

16-year-old friend of Kais; a wingman, joker and classmate

Setting: a busy secondary school or college

Scene one: classroom

Benedict walks on stage, glances round to check nobody is looking and begins to rant.

Benedict: I pity those two fools! They literally can't take their eyes off each other when they're outside class. They've been watching out for and helping each other ever since they both had issues a couple of years back. But just what is it with Kais and Jade, what's holding them back? Sometimes it's like they're on different planets when it comes to forming relationships. Watch, listen and draw your own conclusions to this common predicament that falls around autism.

Freeze frame. Exit Benedict. Enter Kais, who sits alone.

Kais: [sighing] Why is life so complicated? I just don't know what went wrong. One minute he wants to see a movie with me and the next he's yelling at me... and he knows how that makes me feel. Why doesn't he want to be friends anymore? Is he ever going to forgive me? He just doesn't make sense.
Kais continues to sit in a brooding manner. Enter Benedict.

Benedict: You alright?

Kais: [hasn't noticed Benedict] Maybe I could...

Benedict: [raises voice slightly] Hey Special K

Kais: [yells] Don't call me that! [turns and relaxes a little] Oh. Hey, Benedict.

Benedict: Hey K, You still upset over what happened on Friday? Seriously don't worry about it, he'll calm down eventually. If he doesn't you don't want a friend who never lets go anyway...
While Kais and Benedict are talking, Jade and Teacher pass across stage talking quietly in the background. Benedict waves to Jade, Jade smiles and carries on.

Kais: Let go? Of what?

Benedict: [shrugs] Stuff. Arguments, mistakes, you know.

Kais: But how-

Benedict: [interrupting] Oh, stop being difficult. It's an expression.

Kais: [angrily] You know I'm not being difficult!

Benedict: [patronisingly] There there, Special K. Uncle Benedict will always love you...

Kais: [glaring] Ben-ne-dict...

Benedict: [laughs] You know I'm kidding. Anyways I came to tell you that Jade was looking for you. Hurry or break will be over.

Kais: [gives Benedict a sideways look and nods] Okay, then.

Kais: [aside anxious] What would Jade want to talk about with me?
Exit Kais and Benedict.

Scene two: stairwell

Enter Kais and Jade from opposite ends of the staircase. Kais comes out of the classroom that he was in during scene one and down the stairs. Jade has come in from outside and is at the bottom of the stairs. Jade is sitting on a chair.

Jade: Kais! There you are
Smiling shyly, Kais displays a 'smile' PECS card.

Jade: I've been looking for you
Kais stares at his feet.

Kais: Oh, um... sorry. *[holds a 'sad' PECS card]* I didn't realise.

Jade: You don't need to apologise. I was just wondering if, um, you were free some time this weekend...

Kais: *[in a panic]* N-no, sorry. I'll have lots of homework... and chores! *[aside]* How can I spend time alone with her? I need to tell her how I feel or I won't be able to take it!

But I don't think that she likes me back. After all, why would anybody want me? Apart from Ben and sort of Jade, I'm a loner and a loner with autism at that.

Jade: Oh, what a shame, I kinda hoped that we could've gone for a meal or watched a movie or something... *[aside]* Why can't he even just give me a try? I'm making it obvious that I like him, but he's just acting awkward. I wish that he would either agree to something already, or at least just say no.

Kais: *[acting scared/worried, he checks his watch]* I need to go, or I will be late for my music class. I hope that I'll see you later! Goodbye!
[Kais exits. Enter Benedict from downstairs, looking around suspiciously]

Benedict: Has he gone?

Jade: Yeah...

Benedict: I told you, he's just too shy. You need to be more direct.

Jade: *[snarky]* I would love to know how you can be more direct than asking to spend time with-

Benedict: Okay, fine, maybe not direct, but less vague than *[in a poor imitation of a female voice]* "I was just wondering if, um you were free sometime this weekend..."

Jade: Oh and how would you phrase it?

Benedict: Something along the lines of... On Saturday, thanks to Benedict, my amazing, wonderful, genius, per-
Jade feints a slap at Benedict. Slap sound effect.

Jade: [and all the cast 'voice only' yell] Get on with it!

Benedict: Ahem, I have two tickets for this modern art exhibition, and I was wondering if you'd like to go with me. We'll get there at 10, spend blah, blah, blah, details, details, details, whatever it takes to make K happy.

Jade: Are you sure that this'll work?

Benedict: Trust me, I'm his best friend!

Jade: [aside] More like his only friend, except for me. [to Benedict] Okay, I'll give it a try.

Benedict: Fine, I have to go and get ready for my football match this afternoon. Let me know how the pair of you end up...
Exit Benedict and Jade.

Scene three: canteen

A school canteen with large tables. The noise of chatting in the background and occasional banging on tables. Enter Kais and Jade who are sitting together. Kais is sitting quietly twitching.

Jade: [sensing that something is wrong, gently] You don't have to come with me if you don't want to...
Kais stares around the room, tries to say something but can't.

Kais: Actually, [pauses] I need to talk to you but I... think we need to go somewhere quiet.
Kais touches his ears and displays a distracted PECS card.

Jade: What about the breakout room?
Kais pushes his hands down in a bid to stay focused opens and closes his eyes, nods head.

Kais: Yeah.

Jade: Ok, let's go
Jade picks up Kais' tray hurriedly and puts it away for him. Kais stands up quietly, looks around the room again and shakes his head. Both exit.

Scene four: breakout room

A few tables and comfortable chairs.

Kais: [takes a deep breath] Thank you Jade... The noise in the dining room was blocking me from thinking about what I needed to say.

Jade: [nods her head and smiles] No problem... So Kais, what do you want to tell me?
Kais paces up and down the room on his toes. He bends his head towards the ground.

Jade: [with more urgency in her voice] Kais, what's going on?
Kais ignores her again and continues to pace. Jade gets up abruptly and gently places her hands on Kais shoulders. Kais twitches and backs away from her. Jades hands drop.

Jade: [as she goes to sit down] Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you. I only want to understand what's going on.
Kais sits down, looking at the floor, clenching his fists, feet tapping. He glances at her in a very lonely manner then looks down at the floor. He takes a deep breath, tries to say something three times but is unable to do so... After another small awkward silence, he gets out a pad of paper from his bag and begins to write. Kais gives a note to Jade. The school bell rings. Kais gets up ready to go to the next lesson.

Jade: Oh don't worry about the next lesson. You can always get a note to say there are extenuating circumstances.
Kais nods and sits back down with his head in his hands. He displays a a 'worried' PECS card. Freeze frame.

Jade: [partly making eye contact] Kais...
Unfreeze frame.

Kais slowly moves his head, glances at her attentively making eye contact then looks away. Takes a breath to brace himself. Jade looks at him this time making full eye contact.

Jade: I've finished reading your letter....

Kais: And...

Jade: It's fine... I-I-I feel the same.
Freeze frame.

Section two: questions – scene by scene



Scene one: classroom

1. People with autism have trouble with understanding language, especially metaphors and phrases. How could Benedict change his expression 'let go' into language that doesn't confuse Kais?

B

2. At what point is Kais justified in reacting to Benedict's teasing? Why can people with autism have trouble distinguishing between bantering and bullying?

Scene two: stairwell

1. People with autism like Kais can have trouble reading subtle visual cues like smiling and slight touches. How does Jade change the way she communicates to Kais so her intentions are clearer?

B

2. Kais uses Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) throughout the play. At other times he uses words. Why do you think Kais has to use his PECS at certain moments?

I

Scene three: canteen

1. People with autism have a great amount of anxiety about uncertainty. How do you think this affects people with autism when forming and maintaining relationships?

B

2. Compare the environment between scene three and scene four.

I

- > How do the different environments affect Kais?
- > If you noticed that someone was visibly agitated in a loud environment like a classroom, canteen or sports hall, what would you do?

Scene four: breakout room

1. People with autism can be very sensitive to being touched, especially if it is an unfamiliar situation. What changes in this scene between Kais and Jade for Kais to be comfortable with being hugged?

B

2. The unfamiliarity of the situation means Kais doesn't know how to react.

I

- > Do you think Kais hugs Jade to mimic her behaviour?
- > Can you think of any consequences for people with autism in copying other people's actions?



Overall issues



1. In what ways has Jade become more aware of autism over the course of the play?



2. At certain points in the play, Kais gets extremely anxious or agitated. How does stress affect his relationships with his friends?



3. Having read through the play, what do you think are the similarities and differences between people with autism and those without autism when it comes to forming relationships?



4. Kais seems to have an inferiority complex as he describes himself as 'a loner with autism'. Why do you think he feels this way and what should be done to address this?



Go further

You could try putting each character in 'the hot seat'. One person plays the character and answers questions from the classroom around a subject:



Kais and his PECS: What makes him become non-verbal and how can he control it?



Benedict: How can a friend without autism be autism-friendly?



Jade: How long has she been attracted to Kais and how has she been trying to show her emotions before the events of the play?

You could hold a question and answer session on autism, bullying and relationships with someone with autism. This can be arranged through the *Ask autism* initiative.

Information on *Ask autism* can be found at: www.autism.org.uk/askautism.

Section two: answers – scene by scene



Scene one: classroom

- B** 1. People with autism have trouble with understanding language, especially metaphors and phrases. How could Benedict change his expression 'let go' into language that doesn't confuse Kais?

People with autism generally prefer clear, specific language free from metaphors and similes – as it can be difficult to grasp abstract concepts. Like Kais, people with autism can have a very literal understanding of language. When Kais asks: 'Let go... of what?' this is because he doesn't understand the expression.

Benedict could say: 'stop worrying about the argument'. This language is clearer as it references the particular event which has upset Kais.

- B** 2. At what point is Kais justified in reacting to Benedict's teasing? Why can people with autism have trouble distinguishing between bantering and bullying?

Benedict openly starts to tease Kais when he says: 'There, there, Special K' (page 9). To a person with autism, banter and teasing can come across as aggressive and trigger a fight-or-flight reaction. This is due to the difficulties people with autism face when reading body language and facial expressions. For those who have experienced bullying, it can be difficult to differentiate between that and playful banter.

Scene two: stairwell

- B** 1. People with autism like Kais can have trouble reading subtle visual cues like smiling and slight touches. How does Jade change the way she communicates to Kais so her intentions are clearer?

People with autism can struggle to process information quickly. While Kais may have listened, he may not have been able to process what Jade was trying to say. This is because people with autism may have problems with what we call 'cognitive function', that is, the intellectual process by which we think, reason, understand ideas and remember things.

Jade gives Kais time and space to express himself in the manner that is best for him in the situation. She is also prepared to go to a quieter environment, such as the breakout room in scene four, which may be less comfortable for her but more comfortable for Kais. The breakout room is a more comfortable space because people with autism can have trouble focusing when there is lots of noise around them. Dealing with the noise in the dining area and trying to talk to Jade put Kais at higher risk of a having a 'meltdown'¹.



¹ 'Meltdown' is one name for when a person with autism becomes overwhelmed by external factors and may behave in a very agitated, loud or upset manner.



I **2. Kais uses Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) throughout the play. At other times he uses words. Why do you think Kais has to use his PECS at certain moments?**

Picture Exchange Communication Systems is a system for people with autism who either find it hard to communicate or are preverbal. It involves pointing or displaying different cards, which express emotions, activities or situations. Kais uses PECS when he is struggling to communicate clearly because of heightened anxiety. Kais may also have a speech impairment that may make his speech less clear under pressure. When this happens, PECS acts as a clear visual indicator of what he is feeling.

Scene three: canteen

I **1. People with autism have a great amount of anxiety about uncertainty. How do you think this affects people with autism when forming and maintaining relationships?**

People with autism often find social situations very difficult. There are so many social rules that people who don't have autism learn instinctively. People with autism often have to work at learning these unwritten rules, which can be confusing and cause anxiety.

I **2. Compare the environment between scene three and scene four.**

- How do the different environments affect Kais?
- If you noticed that someone was visibly agitated in a loud environment like a classroom, canteen or sports hall, what would you do?

People with autism can experience some form of sensory sensitivity either in the form of hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity. In scene three, the noise and busy visuals act as negative triggers. It helps Kais if a person speaks to them clearly, calmly and slowly, as well as helping him to find a more suitable environment.

Scene four: breakout room

B **1. People with autism can be very sensitive to being touched especially if it is an unfamiliar situation. What changes in this scene between Kais and Jade for Kais to be comfortable with being hugged?**

Kais might find touch painful or uncomfortable. This is something that people with autism who are hypersensitive to touch can often experience. People with autism can have difficulty processing and organising information coming in through their senses. This is something people who don't have autism do automatically. As a result, the brain can receive too much information at once and become overloaded.



Another thing to note is that people with autism may have learned from films and TV that hugging and other conduct such as kissing is socially expected in relationships. Kais could also be trying to act in line with perceived expectations.

I 2. The unfamiliarity of the situation means Kais doesn't know how to react.

- Do you think Kais hugs Jade to mimic her behaviour?
- Can you think of any consequences for people with autism in copying other people's actions?

Kais doesn't imitate Jade. Rather, he is guided by her, as she asks him very clearly if he would like a hug. However, people with autism can mimic things they may have seen in the media such as games and films. This can be a partial way to learn social rules.

People with autism looking for friendships or social inclusion have at times been duped into acting as unwitting accomplices in crimes. This can happen as a result of being unable to read the motives of other people. The outcomes of this can be serious such as confrontation, injury or arrest.

Overall issues

B 1. In what ways has Jade become more aware of autism over the course of the play?

Jade has learned that Kais finds it hard to express himself emotionally, especially in certain social situations. She has also learned that certain environments can make it harder for Kais to communicate, such as the dining room. She is aware that environments like the quiet room can make communication easier. She also learned to use clear and precise language.

B 2. At certain points in the play, Kais gets extremely anxious or agitated. How does stress affect his relationships with his friends?

Anxiety can happen for a range of reasons. People with autism vary in their reactions and ability to cope. Anxiety can strain friendships and relationships for people with autism in the same way as it does for others. Stress makes Kais aggressive, which creates misunderstandings and makes the situation worse: for example, when he becomes irritated by Benedict's teasing. The uncertainty of not knowing what will happen or how to react can increase stress, and can result in an individual avoiding or holding back from situations that might act as a trigger.



I 3. Having read through the play, what do you think are the similarities and differences between people with autism and those without autism when it comes to forming relationships?

Firstly, it is important to note that people with autism can and do have relationships like people who don't have autism. However, people with autism can find it hard to express themselves emotionally and as a result may lack the confidence to make the first move and form a connection. People with autism can have communication differences that aren't necessarily understood by other people. This can lead to a lack of confidence when forming relationships which works both ways.

Eye contact

People with autism can find it difficult or painful to make or maintain eye contact, particularly with someone they don't know. Lack of eye contact does not necessarily mean there is a lack of interest. It can be particularly difficult if the person with autism is distressed. For example, in scene two, Kais tries to avoid eye contact, preferring to look at the floor. As he becomes more relaxed and used to Jade, he is able to maintain eye contact for longer periods of time. People with autism can learn to compensate for not making direct eye contact by looking at the forehead or another part of the face.

Sensory issues

Sensory problems such as being sensitive to touch may make certain displays of affection, such as hugging or kissing, difficult.

I 4. Kais' description of himself as 'a loner with autism' implies that he has an inferiority complex. Why do you think he feels this way, and what should be done to address this?

People with autism have said that to them, the world is a mass of people, places and events which they struggle to make sense of and which can cause them considerable anxiety.

This can make society feel alienating, and can result in isolation from activities that they would enjoy doing, such as joining sports clubs and societies. Uncertainty about social rules can also result in failing to engage fully. Misunderstandings can also lead to bad experiences of social interactions which may prevent a person with autism from participating again.

Full spectrum awareness

Section three



Sensory experience

Learning objectives

- › To identify the sensory challenges faced by a person with autism.
- › To understand the strategies used by individuals to cope with these challenges.
- › To learn how adaptations to the environment can help people with autism.

Scenarios and questions

Watch the sensory experiences video to find out how to create each of the scenarios in this exercise. These recreate some of the common challenges people with autism encounter every day. Then work through the exercise and answer the questions.

View the video at: bit.ly/sensoryexperience





Exercise	How did this kind of sensory challenge make you feel?
<p>Sound This exercise will show how some people with autism can find noise difficult, especially when they're trying to focus on a task.</p> <p>Task The participant recites their weakest times table.</p> <p>Meanwhile other students create distractions and noise by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > scraping chairs > making verbal noises > clicking their fingers > playing musical instruments <p>This exercise should last up to one minute.</p>	
<p>Spatial Awareness This exercise will show how some people with autism can have problems understanding personal space.</p> <p>Task The participant must quickly learn to focus on finding the exit to avoid bumping into more people and becoming increasingly disorientated and anxious.</p> <p>The participant is blindfolded. Another class member spins them around.</p> <p>Then, they walk to a designated spot whilst spelling out their first name and surname forwards then backwards.</p>	
<p>Sight This exercise will show the impact of bright lights, as well as the distraction created by moving objects.</p> <p>Task The room is as dark as possible. The participant is asked to name capital cities.</p> <p>Meanwhile, lights flash on and off. Other students wave and flick their finger in front of the participant's face.</p>	

Section three: questions for part one



Sound

1. How did you try to concentrate?
2. How did you react to the noise?
-  3. How would noises at school cause you difficulties when trying to concentrate on different tasks?
4. Fifty-eight seconds into the instruction video, one of the young campaigners is shown covering his ears. What do you think would have helped him to deal with a noisy environment better?

Spatial Awareness

-  1. Where in school could you find a similar situation like the one in this exercise?
2. Can you think of places around town where this could also be a challenge and why?

Sight

1. How did you try to concentrate?
2. Did you find any of the light painful and if so, why?
-  3. Can you think of a situation where lights flicker or turn on and off quickly?
4. People with autism can find bright lights such as fluorescent lights irritating and even harmful. What adaptations could be made to those lights to make them more bearable?

Go further

Each member of the class could make their own sensory profile using the **Sensory profile sheet** and share it with the class.



Is there an average sensory profile amongst the class? What are the similarities and differences?



Exercise	How did this kind of sensory challenge make you feel?
<p>Social situations This exercise will show the problems that people with autism can have with learning the unexplained social rules for new and different situations.</p> <p>Task The participant walks into a room. They have no instructions to explain why they are there. They mustn't ask any questions.</p> <p>Other students stare at them for 30 seconds to a minute.</p>	
<p>Depth perception This exercise will show the problems that people with autism can have with judging distances between objects and themselves.</p> <p>Task The participant follows a moving spotlight around the room.</p> <p>Meanwhile, other students cross their path to make it difficult for them to follow the light.</p>	
<p>Body Awareness This exercise shows the problems people with autism can have with touch sensitivity and orientation.</p> <p>Task The participant walks up to two other people, who are standing very close together. The participant must find a way past the others by going between them.</p>	
<p>Balance and sound This exercise shows the difficulties people with autism can have with focusing on a task when there are multiple distractions, creating confusion and anxiety.</p> <p>Task The participant sits down at a desk and rocks back and forth on their chair. While doing this, they write two sentences about one of their hobbies.</p> <p>Meanwhile other students create distractions and noise by talking loudly in the participant's ear, making clattering footstep sounds and banging mugs on the desk.</p>	

Section three: questions for part two



Social situations

1. What would have helped you to understand the social rules relating to the situation?
-  2. People with autism have trouble picking up and applying rules in different social situations. How do you think that this affects them?
3. Speech therapy is used to train people with autism in how to navigate social situations, in addition to teaching them how to talk. Have you ever had any type of training in social skills?

Depth Perception

1. How hard was it to follow the spotlight?
-  2. What parts of your body did you have to move while following the spotlight?
3. What other problems could follow from a lack of depth perception for people with autism their daily lives?

Body Awareness

1. How did you feel about having to move between the two people?
-  2. How did you feel when the other people grabbed you?
3. What problems can a lack of body awareness cause for people with autism?

Balance and sound

-  1. How did you feel when you were struggling to focus?
-  2. What problems do people with autism have with balance?
-  3. People with autism can do 'occupational therapy', which helps with balance. How might this help?



Balance and sound continued

I

4. People with autism may rock back and forth as a way of relaxing (known as 'stimming'). How do you think this helps?

B

5. People with autism can be extremely sensitive to quiet or loud noises. What problems do you think this can cause them in a classroom or assembly hall?

I

6. What adjustments can be made for a person with autism?

I

7. What can a person with autism do to adapt to a loud environment?

Additional questions

B

1. How do you think the reaction to different sensory stimuli affects a person with autism's ability to do everyday tasks?

I

2. What can be done to help people with autism to cope better with the difficulties caused by different sensory stimuli?

I

3. Take a look at your school's accessibility policy. What rules or provisions does it have around making places accessible to people with autism and other disabilities?

I

4. Autism is a spectrum disorder, so people with autism will each react differently to different sensory stimuli. Choose one of the exercises and write down how two people with autism could be impacted differently.

B

5. People with autism can sometimes flap their hands or talk to themselves in order to calm down and improve their focus. How would you react to someone who was doing this?

I

6. Should a person with autism always have to adapt to the environment?

Section three: sensory profile sheet



Print out these two pages side-by-side on an A3 sheet.

Senses	Hyperstimulated: this means becoming overstimulated which creates the desire to avoid things that stimulate the senses.
Sight	
Taste	
Smell	
Sound	
Balance	
Body awareness	
Touch	



Normal: this means you are neither understimulated nor overstimulated.	Hypostimulated: this means becoming understimulated which builds the desire to seek more things that stimulate the senses.



Section three: answers for part one

Sound

B 1. How did you try to concentrate?

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

B 2. How did you react to the noise?

As above.

B 3. How would noises at school cause difficulties when trying to concentrate on different tasks?

People with autism may be hypersensitive to noise and find it difficult to filter out noises that other people can simply block out or ignore. As a result, they may be unable to focus and have to leave the classroom. They may go into a state of sensory overload in which the stimuli around them become too much to cope with.

Sensory overload can trigger a ‘meltdown’. Meltdowns may include extreme outbursts of emotion, such as sadness in the form of crying, or anger in the form of snapping or shouting.

However, some people with autism who are hyposensitive (under-sensitive) to sound may want to make more noise as a reaction to something that they feel is a pleasurable sensation.

B 4. Fifty-eight seconds into the instruction video, one of the young campaigners is shown covering his ears. What do you think would have helped him to deal with a noisy environment better?

Someone could have given him headphones or ear defenders to block out the noise.

Spatial Awareness

B 1. Where in school could you find a similar situation like the one in this exercise?

A sports hall, library or dining room can be very crowded. Moving through tight school corridors between lessons can also cause problems due to the amount of people in close proximity to one another.

B 2. Can you think of places around town where this could also be a challenge and why?

Going to the supermarket or a busy station where there are a large amount of people going in different directions in close proximity to one another. It is important to note that some people with autism will seek out locations with a lot of noise because they are hyposensitive to noise.



Sight

B 1. How did you try to concentrate?

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

B 2. Did you find any of the light painful and if so, why?

As above.

B 3. Can you think of situation where lights flicker or turn on and off constantly?

Discos, theatres, cinemas, stadiums or other settings where light is used for entertainment purposes.

Classrooms or offices may use lights with different intensities that can also cause problems, as this means that a person with autism has make constant adjustments to adapt to the changing environment.

B 4. People with autism can find bright lights such as fluorescent lights irritating and even harmful. What adaptations could be made to those lights to make them more bearable?

Filters or shades could be installed to dim the glare of the lights or move the beam upwards instead of downwards. Alternatively, light emitting diode (LED) bulbs could be installed instead of energy saving lightbulbs.

Section three: answers for part two



Social situations

- B 1. What would have helped you to understand the social rules relating to the situation?**

An explanation of the situation, rules and expectations before going into the room.

- B 2. People with autism have trouble picking up and applying rules in different social situations. How do you think that this affects them?**

People with autism find it difficult to understand the social rules for different settings. They may also try to impose rules that are applicable to one situation, such as a classroom, in another, like a disco.

Because of this, people with autism sometimes behave in a socially inappropriate manner.

- B 3. Speech therapy is used to train people with autism in how to navigate social situations, in addition to teaching them how to talk. Have you ever had any type of training in social skills?**

People who don't have autism mostly learn social rules intuitively. They are able to pick up cues from those around them, whether parents, teachers or peers.

Depth Perception

- B 1. How hard was it to follow the spotlight?**

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

- B 2. What parts of your body did you have to move while following the spotlight?**

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

- B 3. What other problems could follow from a lack of depth perception for people with autism their daily lives?**

They could have problems with throwing and catching things, as well as feeling clumsy.

Body Awareness

- B 1. How did you feel about having to move between the two people?**

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

- B 2. How did you feel when the other people grabbed you?**

Open question – answers may vary for different students and might include 'scared' or 'violated'.



B 3. What problems can a lack of body awareness cause for people with autism?

People with autism can either have problems with hyposensitivity or hypersensitivity to body awareness. If they are hyposensitive, they may have difficulties with fine motor skills and struggle to do things such as tie laces. They may also move their whole body to look at something, rather than just their eyes.

People with autism who are hyposensitive may stand too close to other people because they find it hard to judge personal space, something that may be misinterpreted. They may also find it hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions that could mean that they are likely to trip or fall. As a result of this, they may bump into people – which may result in a confrontation.

Balance

B 1. How did you feel when you were struggling to focus?

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

I 2. What problems do people with autism have with balance?

Situated in the inner ear, our vestibular system helps us maintain our balance and posture, and understand where and how fast our bodies are moving.

People with autism can be ‘hypostimulated’, meaning they may seek to get some sensory input by rocking, or similar. Alternatively, they can be ‘hyperstimulated’, meaning they have difficulties with activities like sport or anything else in which the head is not upright or their feet are off the ground.

I 3. People with autism can do ‘occupational therapy’, which helps with balance. How might this help?

Occupational therapy uses a range of techniques to help people become more independent. It can help an individual with autism to achieve and maintain normal daily tasks and routines, such as getting dressed, engaging in social interactions, completing school activities, working or playing.

An occupational therapist will often make use of a range of techniques to do this. For example, he or she might invent games to help the individual to socialise with other people, or use sensory techniques to help them process sensory information more effectively. Alternatively, he or she may help the individual to find and use equipment that is most suitable for their needs. An example of this might be finding the right kind of computer software.

I 4. People with autism may rock back and forth as a way of relaxing (known as ‘stimming’). How do you think this helps?

Self-stimulation (often consisting of repetitive actions) can produce an enjoyable sensation which helps a person relax. It can also help to block out unwanted sounds or visuals through distraction, or to bring focus.



B 5. People with autism can be extremely sensitive to quiet or loud noises. What problems do you think this can cause them in a classroom or assembly hall?

If a person with autism is hypersensitive to sound, being in a noisy space can cause a meltdown. A meltdown can result in a state of 'shutdown', in which a person can be too tired to respond to any actions or take part in any activity.

I 6. What adjustments can be made for a person with autism?

You can make allowances for people with autism to be able to sit in a quiet corner away from other pupils if they need to. They could also work outside the classroom in a quiet area.

I 7. What can a person with autism do to adapt to a loud environment?

Wearing headphones or ear protectors to block out noise can help. Another method is to teach relaxation techniques to help with staying calm.

Additional questions

B 1. How do you think the reaction to different sensory stimuli affects a person with autism's ability to do everyday tasks?

It may stop them from doing the tasks. It can mean they experience a fragmented picture of the world, due to sensory input being imbalanced. This can make it harder to focus on the assigned task.

I 2. What can be done to help people with autism to cope better with the difficulties caused by different sensory stimuli?

A number of different methods can be used, including:

- > retreating to a quiet space or using headphones to help reduce the stress of noise
- > wearing tinted glasses to help reduce variation in light
- > wearing clothes of certain materials which don't cause irritation.

I 3. Take a look at your school's accessibility policy. What rules or provisions does it have around making places accessible to people with autism and other disabilities?

- > Does the school have a quiet room where people with autism or other disabilities can go?
- > Has the school considered how to make the colours of the walls autism-friendly (eg using light colours and minimal decoration).
- > Has the school considered how to make the lighting autism-friendly (eg avoiding strobe or sodium lights which tend to flicker)?



- I** 4. Autism is a spectrum disorder, so people with autism will each react differently to different sensory stimuli. Choose one of the exercises and write down how two people with autism could be impacted differently.

People with autism can be either hyper- or hyposensitive to sensory stimuli such as sound, light, smell, touch and taste. This means they can either be over- or understimulated by something.

In the same situation, one person who is hypersensitive could react negatively, while another person who is hyposensitive could need more stimulation and seek it out.

Some people may need to avoid sensory stimuli altogether. For instance, someone who is hypersensitive to light may want to sleep in total darkness, while someone who isn't hypersensitive may need a light to help them sleep. A person who is hypersensitive to light may try to avoid bright lights to the point of leaving a room. A person who is hyposensitive to light may want to actively seek out places where there are bright lights.

- B** 5. People with autism can sometimes flap their hands or talk to themselves in order to calm down and improve their focus. How would you react to someone who was doing this?

Open question – answers may vary for different students.

- I** 6. Should a person with autism always have to adapt to the environment?

Open question – answers may vary for different students. If possible, consider issues relating to accessibility and look at the *Equality Act* as well as accessibility issues. Consider what a person with autism might have to do when it is not possible to change the physical environment.

Full spectrum awareness

Section four



Taking autism awareness further

Questions and debate

Learning objectives

To understand more about:

- › the complexity of autism and the challenges in raising awareness.
- › how organisations attempt to raise awareness.
- › what it means to raise awareness and the consequences of doing it.

Activities

1. Use the **Issues chart** to identify which issues you covered in each activity. What does it show you about the importance of a broad programme of autism awareness?
2. Organise a class debate on this subject: Do you think that improving autism awareness is important?

We have given you a few arguments for and against improving autism awareness that you can use as a guide for your own debate.



Key arguments for autism awareness

- › Awareness can help people with autism live better lives through increased understanding. Our campaigns highlight a number of issues people with autism currently face.
 - › To find out more about our campaigns, visit www.autism.org.uk/current-campaigns.
- › Knowledge is power – did you know that more than 1 in 100 people in the UK have autism? This means you're likely to meet a person with autism, and knowing more about the condition can reduce misunderstanding and make for better interaction with that person.
 - › Find out more at www.autism.org.uk/number-of-people-with-autism-in-uk.
- › Improving autism awareness is part of the Government's *Think Autism* strategy for people with autism in England.
 - › Learn more about *Think Autism* at www.autism.org.uk/think-autism-2014.

Key arguments against autism awareness

- › There are over a billion people in the world affected by different disabilities. Why should autism be a priority?
 - › Read the World Health Organisation's report on disability at bit.ly/VD9yCJ.
- › Autism awareness reinforces the 'labelling' of people with conditions when we should be valuing people instead of labels.
 - › Read this article from the Sun Sentinel: bit.ly/1uSRnIF.

Section four: issues chart



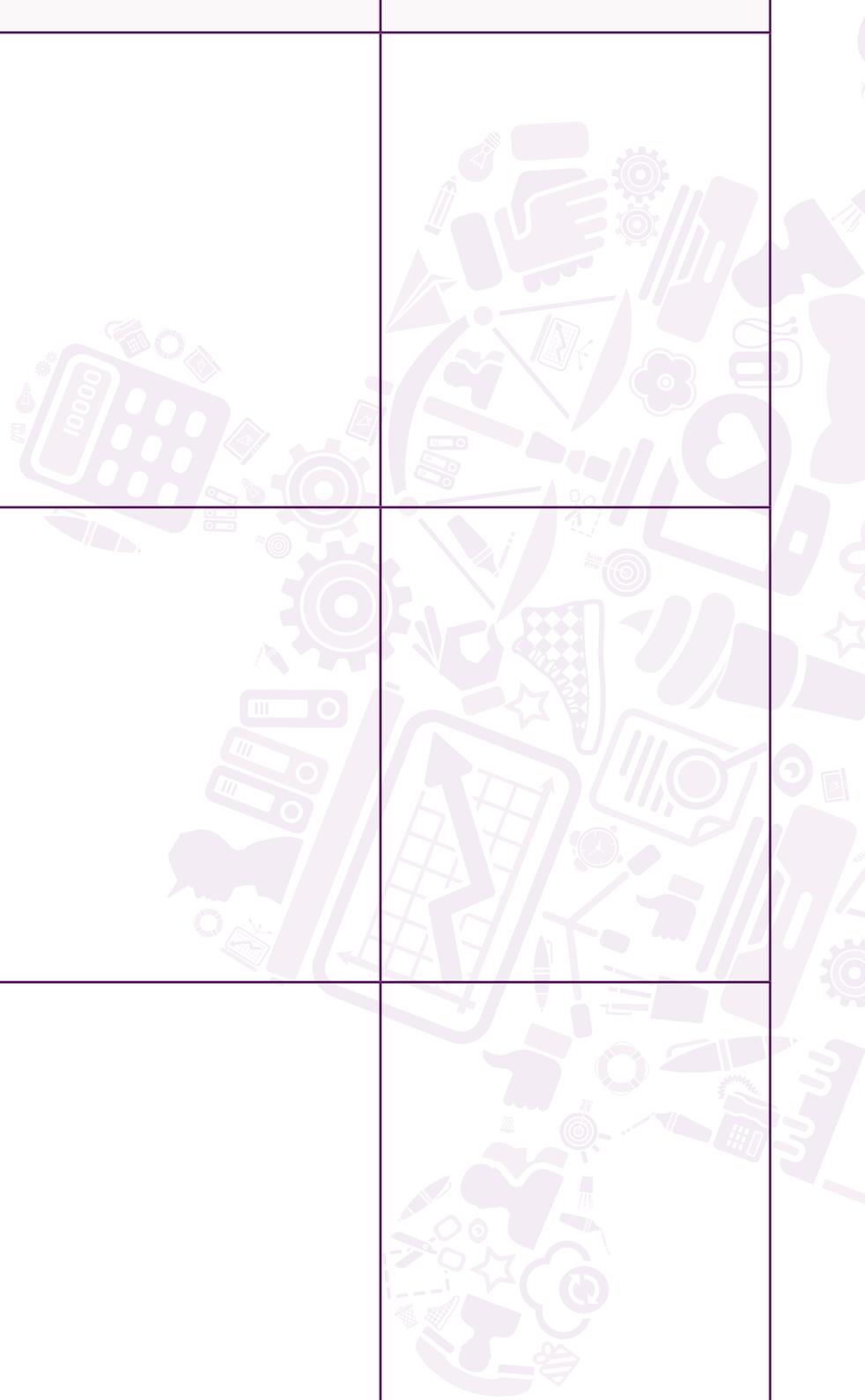
Print out these two pages side-by-side on an A3 sheet. Use this chart to decide which issue(s) were covered by each of the activities.

- > Is there anything missing?
- > What could you do to help you expand your knowledge further?

Activity	Sensory challenges	Bullying	Relationships
Section one A window into our world			
Section two Hidden emotions			
Section three Sensory experience			



Communication	Ambitions	Interests



Section four: suggested answers



Print out these two pages side-by-side on an A3 sheet. The shaded boxes are the ones covered by the exercises.

Activity	Sensory challenges	Bullying	Relationships
Section 1 A window into our world			
Section 2 Hidden emotions			
Section three Sensory experience			



Print out these two pages side-by-side on an A3 sheet.

Communication	Ambitions	Interests

