



ABILITY
Program

Providing Care for Neurodiverse Patients at Home and in the Community

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Today's Session will be Recorded for Future Use

- Participation is encouraged! Use the chat or raise your hand.
- Please mute yourself when not speaking.
- Please refrain from sharing personal and identifiable details about your clients.

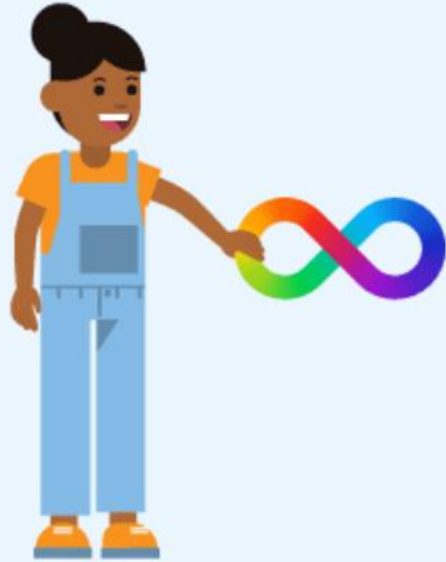


Objectives:

1. Increase knowledge and understanding of autism spectrum disorder
2. Gain a better understanding of sensory sensitivities
3. Understanding the functions of behaviour
4. Building rapport
5. Strategies to support neurodiverse children at home
6. Visual supports



Person-first language



“I am a person with autism”

Identity-first language



“I am autistic”

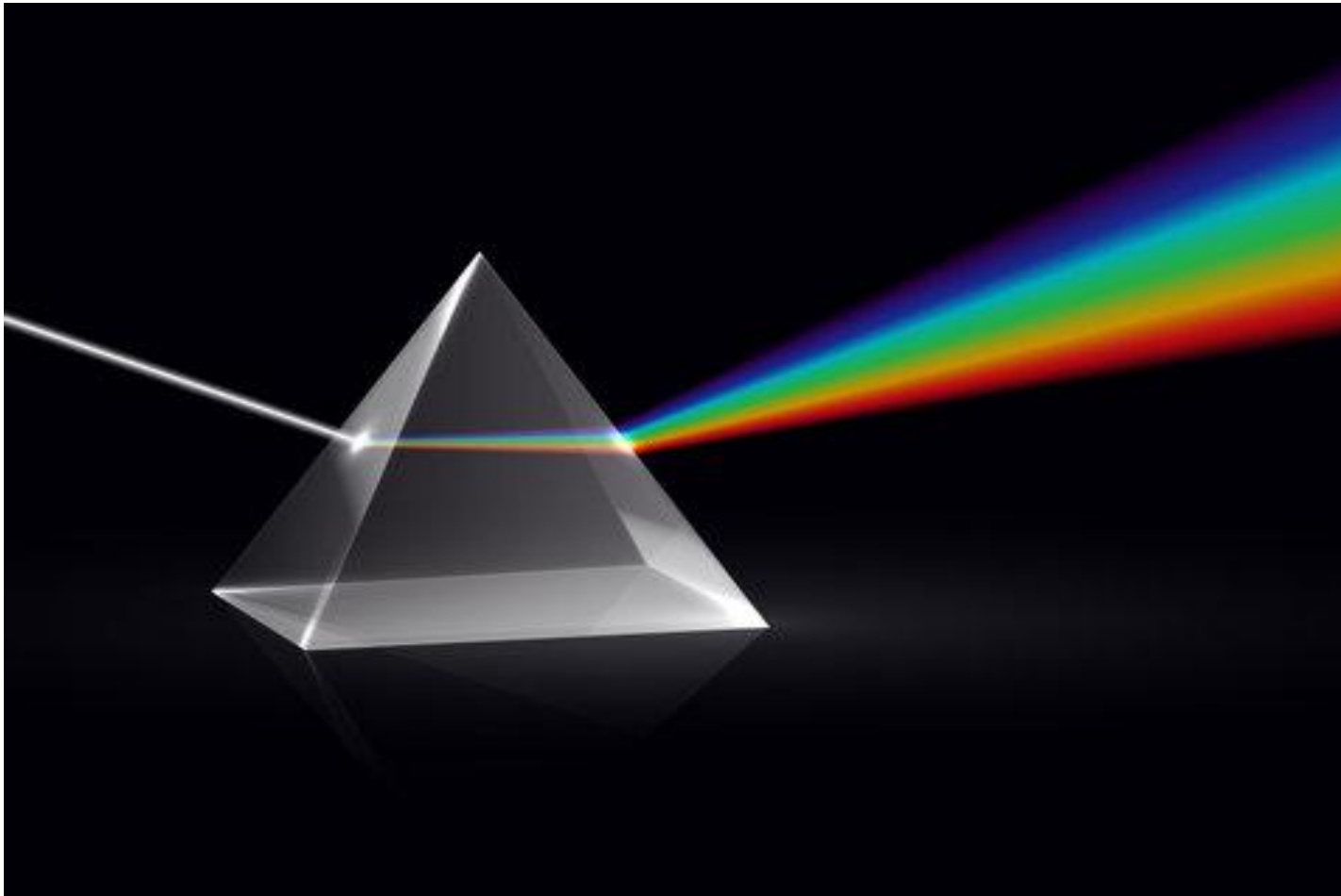
Autism Spectrum Disorder

Universal Symptoms of Autism
All of the below symptoms must be present for a diagnosis:

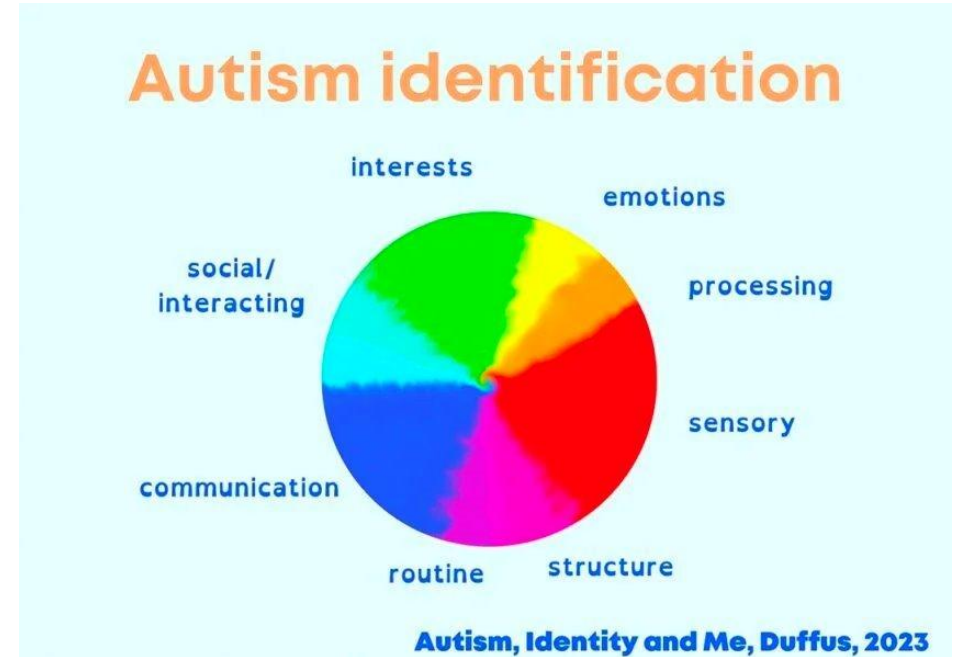
- Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input
- Fixated interests considered abnormal in intensity
- Repetitive behavior, interests, or activities
- Difficulties in relationship development, maintenance, and understanding
- Attachment to sameness, routines, and behavior
- Social and communication deficits (verbal and nonverbal)

verywell

What does "Spectrum" mean?



Diagnose Faster. Treat Smarter. Predict Better.



Levels of Autism



Level 1

Requiring support

- Trouble understanding and following social rules
- Rigid or inflexible behavior
- Some stress during transitions
- May benefit from therapy or life skills coaching



Level 2

Requiring substantial support

- Atypical social behavior, like walking away mid-conversation
- High interest in specific topics
- Noticeable distress when faced with change
- May need school accommodations like reading help or social skills support



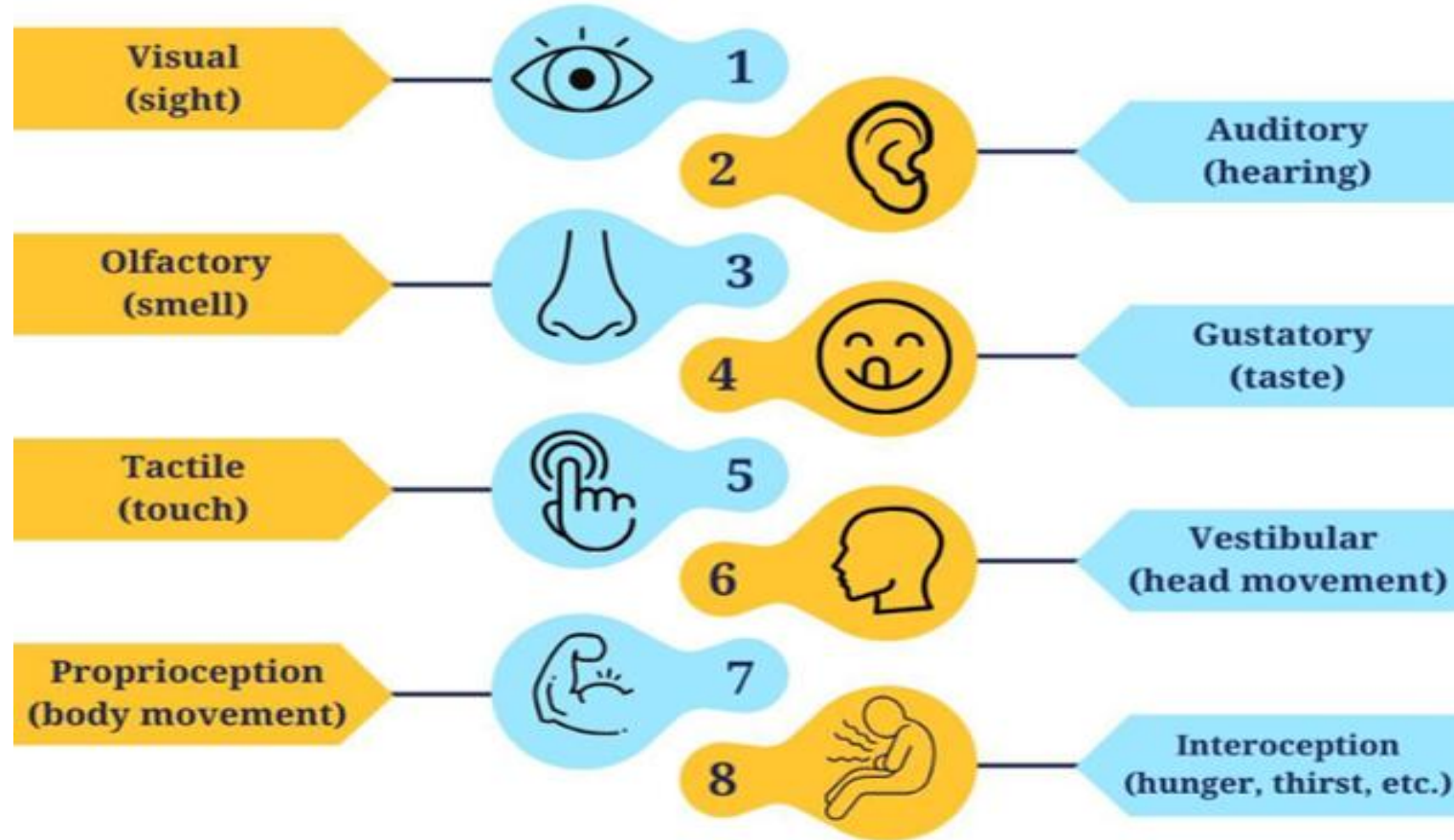
Level 3

Requiring very substantial support

- Severe communication deficits, such as being nonspeaking
- Repetitive behaviors like rocking or spinning
- Extreme distress when asked to switch tasks
- May need one-on-one time with an education assistant and may use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools, like picture symbols

Autistic Sensory Processing

8 Senses People Regulate:



Sensory Overload

Sensory Processing - Hospital Environment:

Autistic people can experience both:

- **Hypersensitivity** (over-responsiveness)
- **Hyposensitivity** (under-responsiveness)

Most people have a combination of both.

Hypersensitivity	Hyposensitivity
Heightened sensitivity to input	Seeks out sensory input
AVOIDS:	SEEKS:
Loud Noises	Jumping
Crowded spaces	Tight squeezes or hugs
Smells	Loud, repetitive noises
Bright or flashing lights	Swinging or crashing into objects
Textures of clothes or food	Lack of pain response

Sensory Overload:

Many autistic people use **repetitive** behaviours as a form of **sensory seeking** to regulate

- Repetitive movements, sounds, or fidgeting can help people with autism stay calm, relieve stress or block out uncomfortable sensory input.

Sensory overload

- happens when an intense sensory stimulus overwhelms your ability to cope.
- When the brain puts all of its resources into sensory processing, it can shut off other functions, like speech, decision making and information processing.
- *Difficulty communicating or responding as the brain shifts resources to deal with sensory input (ie. **shutdown**)*
- *Escalating, overwhelming emotions or need to escape a situation (ie. **meltdown**)*

SIGNS OF OVERSTIMULATION IN AUTISM

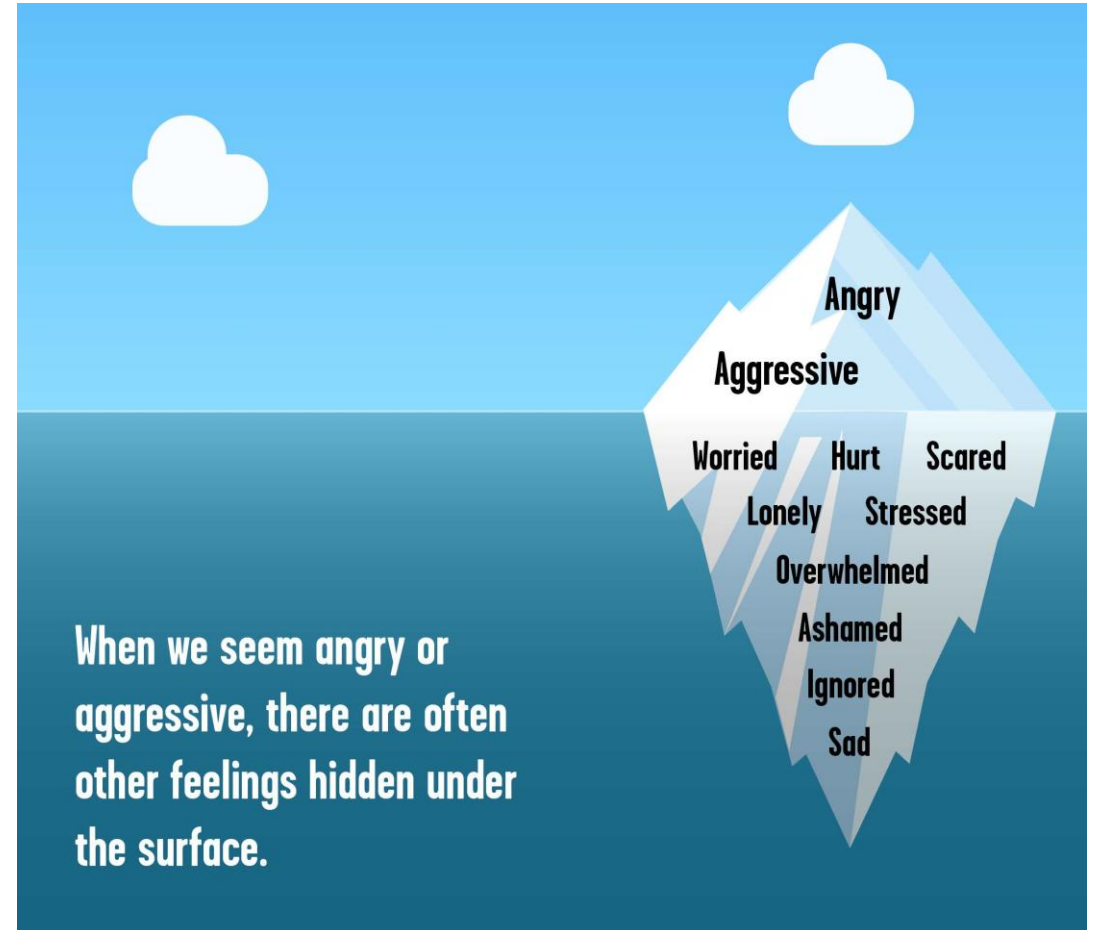




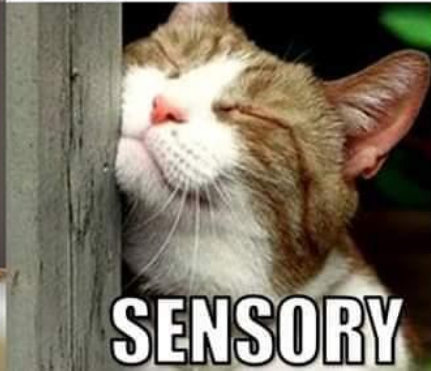
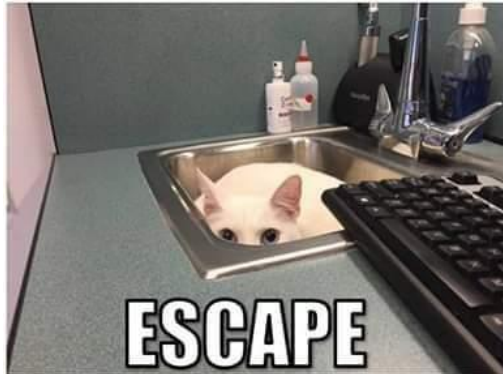
Understanding behaviour

A child or youth's behavior **reflects their very best effort to get their needs met** using the strategies that have proven to be the most effective over time & the current skills in their repertoire

It's important to do our best to identify the function ('why') of their behavior so that we can teach and reinforce new, healthier or more adaptive skills to meet their needs



Functions of Behaviour



Escape: I don't want to!

Attention: Look at me!

Tangible: I want it!

Sensory: Feels good

2 categories:

Avoiding something unpleasant

Getting something desired or pleasant

When we understand the “why” of behaviour, we develop a better understanding of our child; we can help them build life-long skills to meet their needs/wants in healthier ways

Supporting Autistic Children at home

Each Autistic child's experience is unique and therefore requires individualized care

Consider:

- Interests
- Communication
- Sensory needs
- Incorporation of visual supports
- Challenging behaviours





Building Rapport

Parents = Experts!

Ask: *“What works best for your child?”*

- Communication style (verbal, AAC, gestures, scripting)
- Sensory sensitivities and preferences
- Motivators and interests
- Triggers and early signs of distress
- Deescalation strategies
- Validate their expertise:

“You know your child best . I’d love to learn from you.”

Building Rapport



Safety builds trust. Trust builds cooperation.

Follow the Child's Lead

- Join what the child is interested in first.
- Use their favourite topics, characters, or activities to connect.
- Stay calm and match their energy.
- Give extra time for the child to think and respond.

Create a Safe and Predictable Space

- Give choices
- Use clear, simple words.
- Reduce noise and other sensory triggers when possible.
- Tell the child what will happen next (for example: “first–then”).
- Respect the child's space, touch, and eye contact preferences.
- Use calming strategies when the child is upset.

Building Rapport

Observe, Understand + Respond:

- Behaviour = communication.
- Notice the child's strengths and interests.
- Tell the child what you are doing so they know what to expect.
- Give choices and solve problems together.
- Acknowledge feelings and stay calm.

Consistency Across Settings:

- Use the same strategies as the caregiver.
- Use familiar rewards.
- Keep routines the same when possible.



Safety builds trust. Trust builds cooperation

Strategies to support cares

Communication Supports

- Communicate at the child's level- Simple and clear messaging
- "First and then" language
- Use visuals when appropriate
- Provide choice
- What language does the family use to talk about illness/procedures with the child?

Family support- Allow family in the room as much as possible when providing cares

Staff consistency- Keep staff consistent so they can learn unique needs and the patient can become familiar with the staff

Coping skills- deep breathing, counting, progressive muscle relaxation, sensory awareness

Reduce sensory stimulation- turning off lights, using a white noise machine, turn off TV, reduce various fabric textures

Visual schedules and tools- Incorporate the use of visuals, social stories and timers where appropriate

Positive reinforcement- provide rewards and praise for good behavior and treatment compliance

Examples of visual supports:

Visual Schedules + Visual Sequences

First-Then

Social Stories

Positive Reinforcement Token Economy

Check lists

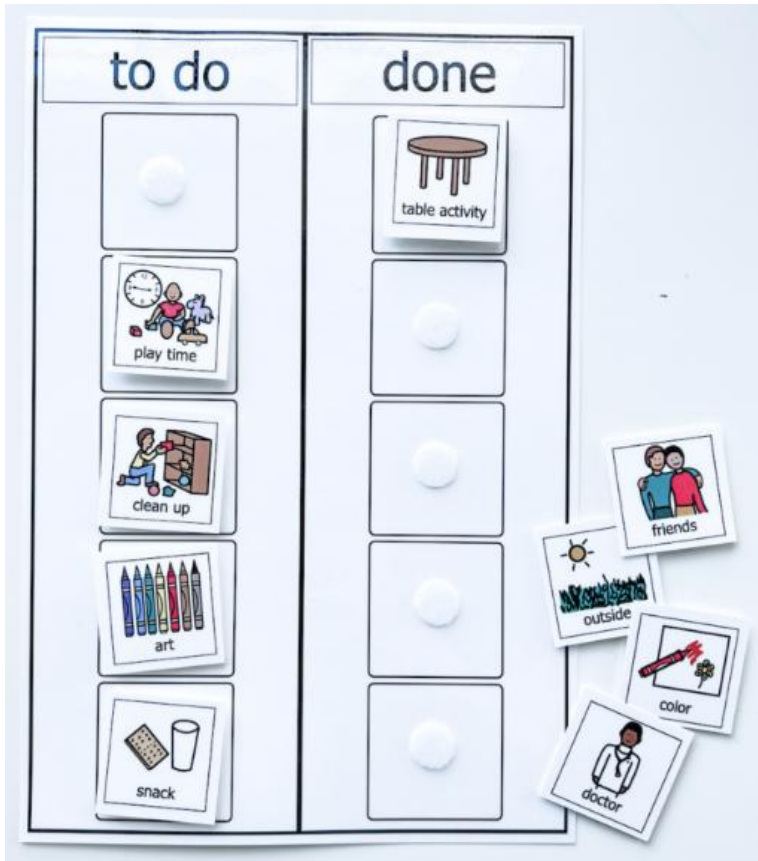
Choice Boards

Pain scales + Communication charts






Visual timers

Visual Schedule

A tool that uses pictures, symbols, or written words to show the steps of a routine or the order of activities.



AM Schedule

1.  get dressed
2.  vitals
3.  medicine
4.  walk
5.  breakfast

Visual Schedule Freebie!

My Visual Schedule

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10



Visual Sequence:

Getting an ECG

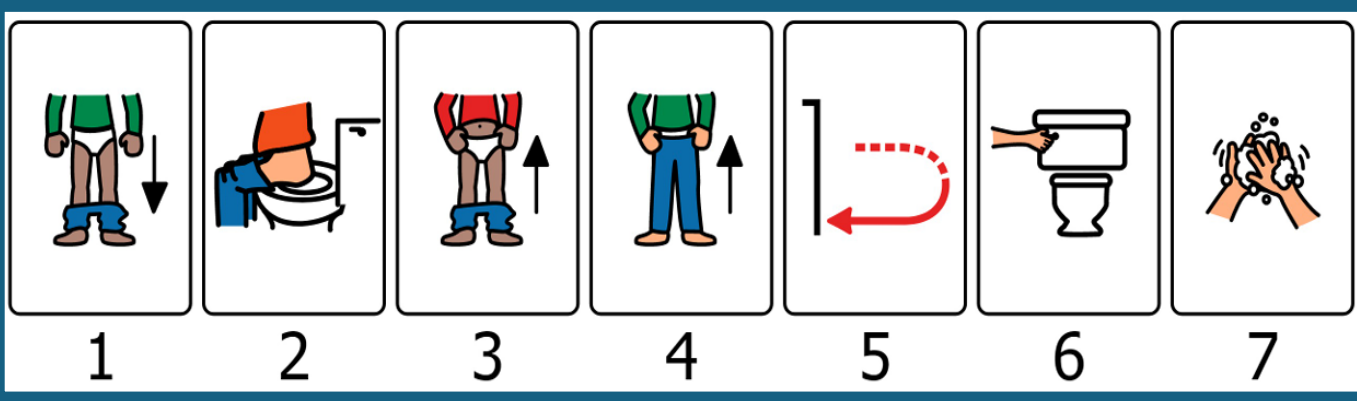
 shirt up	 stickers on	 hands off	 my hands busy	 watch ipad	 All done! stickers off
1	2	3	4	5	6

My Vitals:

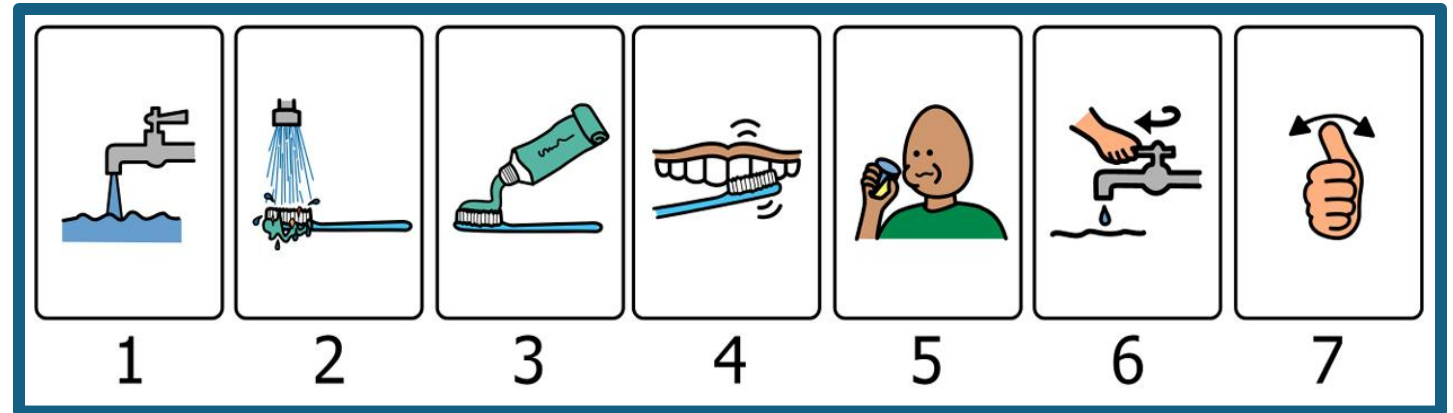
				 all done!
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Visual Sequence:

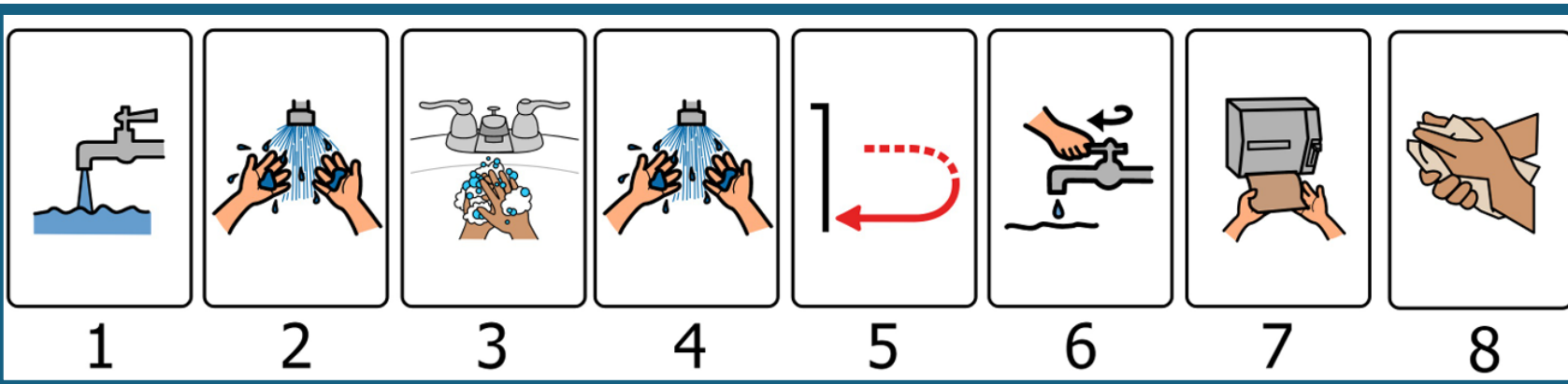
Using the toilet



Brushing teeth





Washing hands




First-Then Boards

A First-Then strategy shows a child what to do first, and what will happen next.

It helps children understand steps, follow instructions, and feel more in control.

First	Then
	

First	Then
 <p data-bbox="1523 1196 1712 1270">Emergency Department</p>	 <p data-bbox="1997 1216 2150 1248">New room</p>

Social Stories

What is a 'Social Story'?

A social story is a short, personalized story that explains a situation, skill, or social rule in a simple way.

It explains to the child what they can expect to happen and the appropriate ways to respond.

It breaks things into small, easy steps that match how the child learns best.

Social stories are useful for:

- Preparing for new experiences or changes in routine
 - Including medical procedures like G-tube care, blood tests, or scans
- Explaining social norms and expectations
 - What is expected during medical visits or interactions with staff
- Teaching self-care and daily living skills
- Addressing challenging behaviors
 - Outlines coping skills and how to respond appropriately
- Developing coping strategies for anxiety or sensory sensitivities
 - Touch, sounds, lights, or medical equipment can feel different – what will they experience?
- Promoting independence
 - Children learn to manage tasks and feel confident in new situations

Social Story Resources

Free Online Inventories:

- <https://bmcautismfriendly.github.io/socialstories/>
- <https://happylearners.info/social-stories/>
- <https://abaresources.com/social-stories/>
- <https://autismbehaviorservices.com/social-stories/>

Autism Friendly Social Stories



Social Story Generator:

<https://musely.ai/tools/social-stories-generator>

Story Scenario *



the child is going to the dentist, they will have to wait in a waiting room, they can play with toys to help with distraction, they will be sedated. When they wake up, they will go home with family.

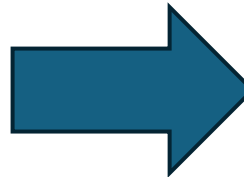


Reset

Target Age Group *



Preschool (3-5)



#1 102 words 404 characters



Copy

Going to the Dentist

Sometimes, we need to go to the dentist to keep our teeth healthy. When we go to the dentist, we might have to wait in a waiting room. There are usually fun toys to play with while we wait.

The dentist will help us take care of our teeth. Sometimes, the dentist might give us some medicine to help us relax. This medicine will help us feel sleepy.

When we wake up, we will be all done at the dentist. Our family will be there, and we can go home. We can tell them all about our visit!