



# Creating a Foundation for Communication Success in the Classroom

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# About me

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**What do you want  
teachers to know  
about autism?**

# Connection and regulation

# Connection and regulation

- Connection over compliance
- Regulation is the foundation for optimal participation and communication
- Audit the classroom environment and practices to ensure safety and trust
- Greg Santucci's Model of Child Engagement
  - Safety → Regulation → Participation

# THE MODEL OF CHILD ENGAGEMENT

BY GREG SANTUCCI, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

**PARTICIPATION**

Can't PARTICIPATE?  
Go back and  
Get REGULATED!

**REGULATION**

**TRUST & SAFETY**

Not REGULATED?  
Go back,  
re-build TRUST and  
help them FEEL SAFE!

START

If you don't feel SAFE, you can't be REGULATED.  
You MUST be regulated for skill building and learning!

# What constitutes 'safety'?

- Not just a physical or emotional threat
- Common classroom expectations or systems can also threaten feelings of safety
- What contributes to safety?
  - Knowing what will happen
  - Adults doing what they say they will do
  - Being heard and listened to
  - Unconditional access to regulation tools such as breaks

# Rewards: carrot or stick?

- Creates anxiety and fear about not getting a reward
- Assumes all behaviour is volitional, ignores stress behaviours
- Assumes children are not inherently motivated to do well
- Not a substitute for teaching a skill





yesterday Prep g  
dressed

DRESS UP

PREP g  
dressed

Dwarf

# **Autistic learning style**

# Autistic learning style

- Literal, 'black and white', specific, precise
- 'Absolute thinking in a relative world' *Peter Vermeulen*
- Teach concepts and skills in a way that matches this processing style
  - Direct, explicit, concrete teaching of concepts
  - Visual supports
  - Contrast
  - Association

# It's all about context

- Black and white, literal processing style can mean that skills are:
  - Not automatically generalised to other situations, or,
  - Overgeneralised to other situations (quick to pattern)
- Skills often need to be taught in each different context
- Look beyond standardised language assessment scores





Home

- Familiar
- Relaxed
- Own routines, preferences, freedom, can follow own agenda
- Role of family member, not student – different relationship



Therapy

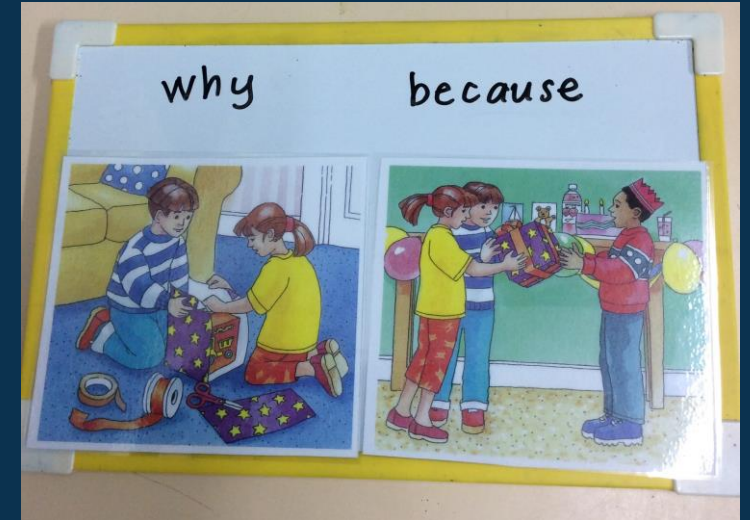
- Quiet room
- Two supportive adults working with one child
- Highly structured
- Only once a week or fortnight



School

- Busy, noisy environment
- Lots of people, some are unfamiliar
- Mix of structured, and unstructured
- Movement to different locations (toilets, playground, buses, office)
- Required to follow a group plan/agenda

# Visual, clear, concrete

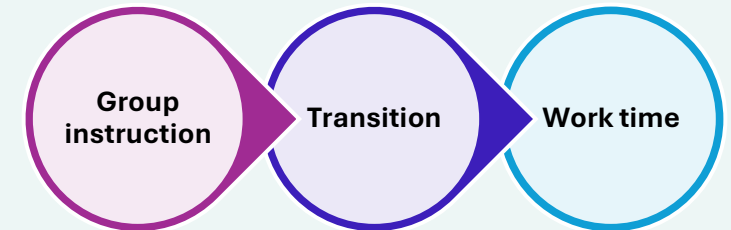


Get Ready	Do	Done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer</li> <li>• Library books</li> <li>• Uncle Tom</li> <li>• Printer/paper</li> <li>• Construction paper</li> <li>• Glue</li> <li>• Scissors</li> <li>• Trifold board</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gather materials</li> <li>2. Research using three sites, two books, one person</li> <li>3. Find 10 facts</li> <li>4. Find effect on econ</li> <li>5. Type info</li> <li>6. Mat neatly/be creative</li> <li>7. Print 5 photos</li> <li>8. Practice and present</li> </ol>	

Get Ready	Do	Time	Done	Get Done
	English	Due:		
	Read:			
	Do:			
	Math	Due:		
	Read:			
	Do:			
	Social Studies	Due:		
	Read:			

# Visual, clear, concrete, prepared

- Break down and paraphrase complex instructions
  - Often results in many more instructions
- Reveal the hidden or implied steps
- Use priming – review vocabulary and concepts prior to tasks
- Allow for processing time
- Transition time can extend into work time



# Pragmatic language skills



# What about language?

- Receptive language
- Expressive language
- **Pragmatic language**

# Pragmatic language skills

- Pragmatics is all about the ‘why’
  - To argue, to protest, to ask for something, to joke, to question, to agree, to give information...
- Expressive = **what** are they expressing?
- Pragmatics = **why** are they expressing it?

Negotiate or bargain

Gaining attention

Asking for clarification

Correct or rebuke

Persuading

Asking for help

Accepting or refusing

Requesting objects or actions

Express feelings

Having a conversation

Greeting or farewelling

Repairing communication breakdown

## **The dish = pragmatic skill**

- To ask for help
- To express an opinion
- To explain a problem

## **Ingredients = what we need to work on to get there**

- Receptive and expressive skills: e.g. vocabulary, sentence structure, understanding of questions...

## **Method = how the student learns best**

- Teaching strategies tailored to the student's learning style
- AAC or visual supports



# ‘A different culture of communication’

*Rachel Dorsey*

- Less small talk, more direct
- Precise, specific
- Intense focus on passions and interests
- ‘Information dumping’
- Differences in tone, prosody

# Pragmatic profile

## How do they:

- Request objects, actions
- Ask for help
- Give information
- Explain a problem
- Indicate yes or no
- Get someone's attention
- Negotiate or compromise

- Repair a communication breakdown
- Seek information

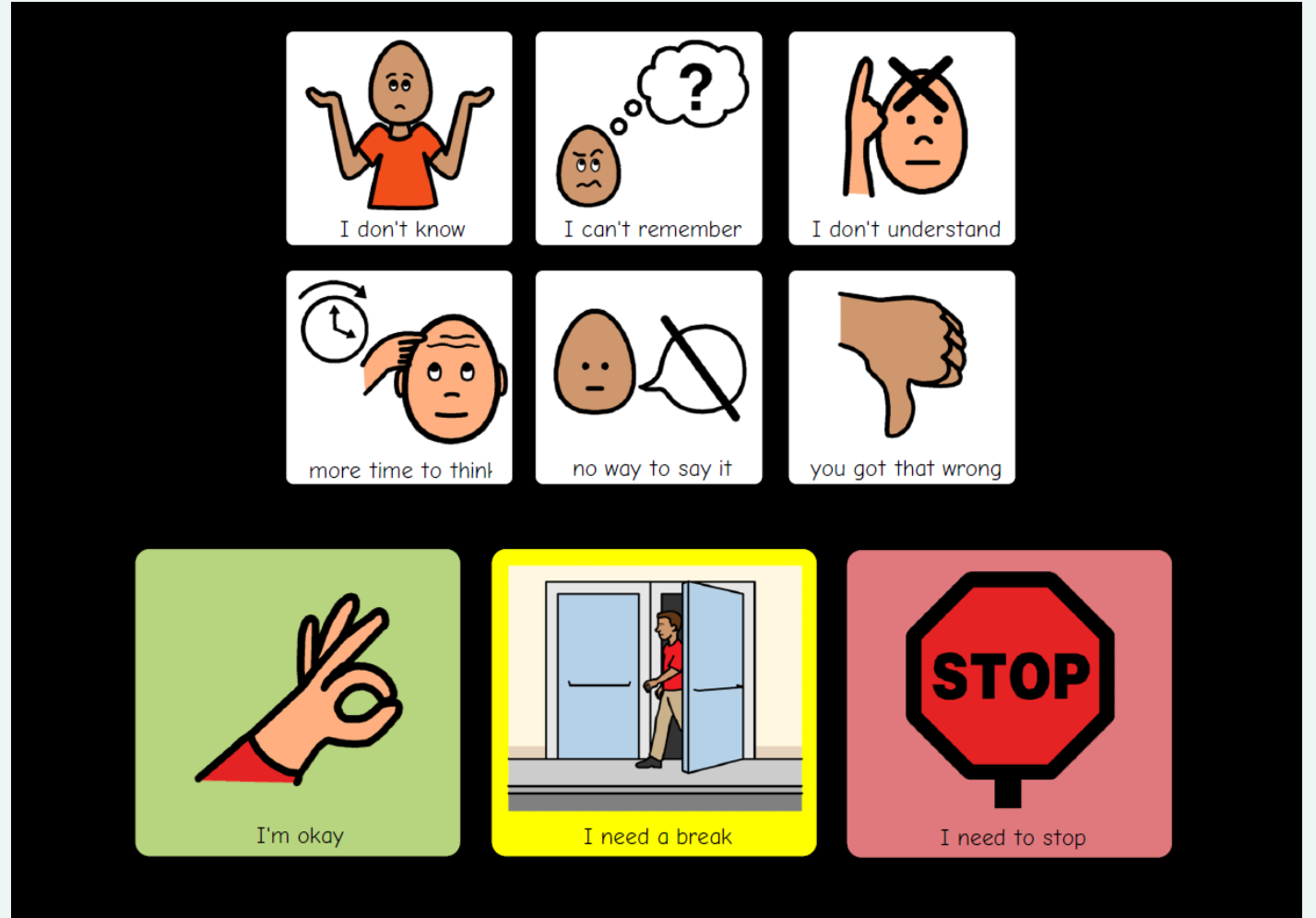
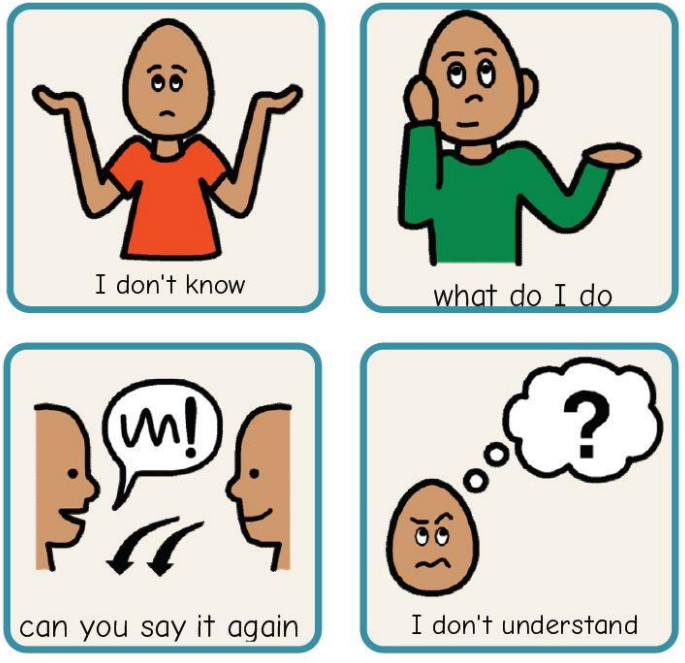
## How do they do this in different contexts?

- Structured vs. non-structured
- Home vs. school
- Trusted vs. unfamiliar person

# Asking for help

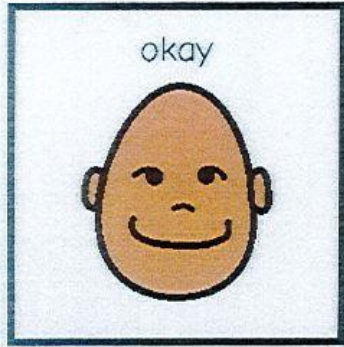
- Involves initiation, often in a novel or unexpected situation
- Can result in stress responses or red herring responses
  - Abandonment
  - Frustration
  - Becoming stuck

# Teach, practice, and prime



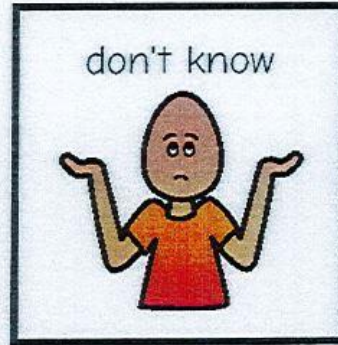


# Ask what works for the student



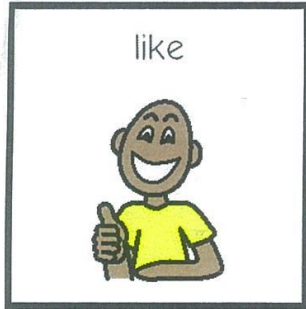
teacher coming  
over and asking  
'charlie, do you  
need any help'

asking another  
kid for help.

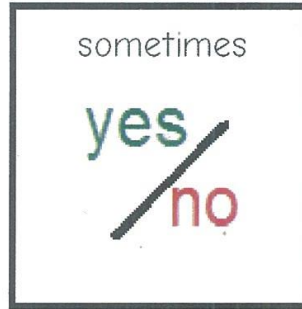


putting hand up

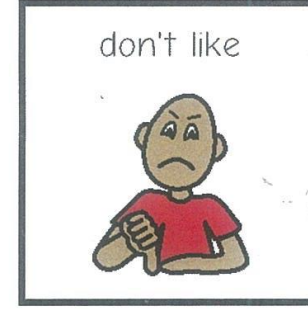




excursion  
art  
playground  
MPR



music  
✓ Tuesday  
art  
x sometimes  
art is hard  
~~maths~~  
Show and Tell  
x boring  
✓ when someone  
brings something  
interesting



sports  
(difficult)  
maths

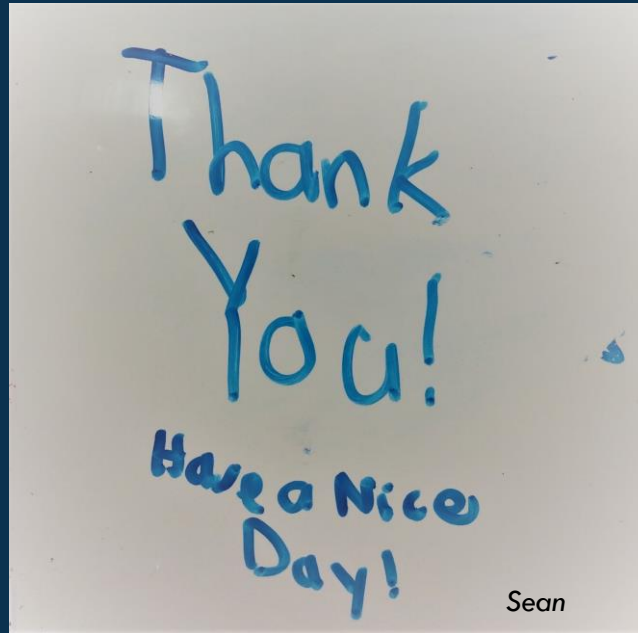
**It's a  
pathway**



# With thanks to...

- **Christine Kendall and Gloria Staios**, Spectrum Speech Pathology
- **Mary Thomson and Adele Field**
- The **teachers and education support** staff of Western Autistic School
- All of the incredible **Speech Pathologists and Occupational Therapists** I have worked with over the years
- **Ruth Connor and Hilarie Kohn**, Occupational Therapists
- **Students, clients and families** for all they have taught me

# Questions



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