Introducing Attention Autism

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This Action Research case study was completed as part of the Department for Education (DfE, UK) nasen Universal SEND programme.

Abstract

Context: This study explores the implementation of the Attention Autism intervention within a mainstream primary school's autism Resource Unit. The intervention was introduced to support children with autism in developing sustained attention, turn-taking, and positive peer interaction.

Aims: The primary aim was to evaluate whether the Attention Autism programme could improve the social skills and social development of children with autism. The study also sought to assess whether progress made during structured sessions would transfer to less structured parts of the school day, such as break and lunchtime.

Methods: The study employs an action research methodology, adhering to ethical guidelines for participant consent and data anonymity. It comprises two distinct cycles of action research, where planned interventions are developed, implemented, and subsequently reviewed. The research draws upon established literature on Attention Autism and incorporates structured observations during specific activities aimed at enhancing child engagement.

Findings: The findings suggest that the Attention Autism programme effectively supports children in enhancing their attention and engagement. Increased participation in activities and improved turn-taking were observed, although progress in some areas was slower than expected within the typical timeframe of the programme. Consequently, Stage 4 of Attention Autism was not reached. Observations during break and lunchtime indicated that some children were beginning to apply their learning from the programme in different contexts.

Implications: The findings suggest that Attention Autism can positively influence attention and social development in children with autism, with some evidence of skill transfer beyond intervention sessions. The study highlights the importance of pacing the intervention appropriately and tailoring resources to sustain engagement. Educators may find value in adopting this structured, engaging approach to support inclusion and emotional well-being in similar settings.

Keywords

Inclusion, special educational needs and disabilities; Attention Autism; social skills; Resource Unit; engagement

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Action Research for Inclusion and Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND): Case Study

Introducing Attention Autism

Attention Autism appears to be supporting children in the Resource Unit to develop sustained attention, improve turn-taking, and engage more positively with peers. Progress through the programme may take longer than initially anticipated, and it is helpful to conduct playground observations to assess whether the intervention is influencing children's engagement during these times of the day (Primary, Resource Unit).

Contents

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Type of setting	Mainstream Primary School with Autism Resource Unit
Age range of pupils	Five children in Year 1 to Year 4 (age range 5-9) identified as having Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), specifically with an autism diagnosis. These children are currently accessing the Resource Unit provision.
Roles of the Research Team	Head of Resource Unit/Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Co-Ordinator (SENDCo)

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

Appendix 1 illustrates the Action Research Cycles

Ethical consent has been sought to publish this data anonymously.

SUMMARY

Research focus	Attention Autism, autism intervention, autism, social skills, social development
Research question	Can the *Attention Autism* intervention improve the social skills and social development of children with autism?

Overview/Key information	**Background** I began by researching how Resource Units operate within mainstream settings, focusing on Communication and Interaction as a broad area of need. Through this, I identified the development of social skills as a key priority for children diagnosed with autism. Following discussions with support staff about individual needs, I completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for each child (see *Appendix 2 – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*) and consulted with their parents and carers. After reviewing the children's Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), including current provision and key targets, I explored suitable interventions to support social development. This led to the decision to implement *Attention Autism*. I trained staff by modelling the intervention and monitored its effectiveness throughout the process. **Research Summary** This case study explores the implementation and impact of the *Attention Autism* intervention within a mainstream primary school's autism resource unit, focusing on five children aged 5–9 with autism and EHCPs. Delivered over two action research cycles, the study examined whether the intervention could improve social skills and development. Findings suggest that *Attention Autism* contributed to increased sustained attention, improved tolerance, and reduced behavioural incidents, with some children showing progress in turn-taking and self-regulation. Although Stage 4 of the programme was not reached within the timeframe, observational evidence indicates that learning began to transfer beyond intervention sessions, positively influencing peer interaction and emotional well-being. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was used to monitor progress, with plans to trial the Autism Education Trust Progression Framework in future research.
Evidence-informed practice	Attention Autism appears to be supporting children in the Resource Unit to develop sustained attention, improve turn-taking, and engage more positively with peers. Progress through the programme may take longer than initially anticipated, and it is helpful to conduct playground observations to assess whether the intervention is influencing children's engagement during these times of the day.

RESEARCH TIMELINE

October	November	December	January	February	March
Action Research Cycle 1 Step 1: Establish the research focus	**Action Research Cycle 1** Step 2: Study Steps 3-5: Plan 1	Step 6: Do 1 Steps 7-8: Review 1 **Action Research Cycle 2** Step 9: Study 2 Steps 10-12: Plan 2 Step 13: Do 2 Step 14-15: Review 2			Share and disseminate the research (anonymised) with other interested parties.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 1

RESEARCH FOCUS: Step 1

Initial research interest, aim/question (Step 1)	How can we support the development of social skills for children with autism?

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 1): Step 2

Key Literature: References	Courtman, S. (2018) *An evaluation of the effectiveness of using the Attention Autism programme as an intervention for increasing the level of attention during an adult led activity in pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition*. University of Birmingham. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322939272_An_evaluation_of_the_effectiveness_of_using_the_Attention_Autism_programme_as_an_intervention_for_increasing_the_level_of_attention_during_an_adult_led_activity_in_pupils_with_Autism_Spectrum_Conditio
Key point(s) of note	**Courtman (2018)** This study evaluated the Attention Autism programme's impact on attention and joint attention (JA) skills in four boys with Autism Spectrum Condition over six weeks. Prior to implementation, staff received basic training from the researcher, who had completed Gina Davies' two-day Attention Autism course. This ensured consistent delivery and reduced reliance on a single adult, which helped avoid what is known as a 'therapy register'. This term refers to a set of learned responses that children with Autism Spectrum Condition may associate with a specific adult or setting; for example, only making eye contact or engaging when a familiar adult is present. By involving a range of adults in leading sessions, the intervention aimed to encourage generalisation and prevent children from linking their responses solely to one person or context. The study then evaluated the impact of the Attention Autism programme on attention and joint attention (JA) skills in four boys with ASC over six weeks. Key points of note:

	- All participants showed marked improvements in sustaining attention, increasing from under three minutes to up to thirteen, and demonstrated more frequent JA behaviours such as eye gaze shifts, pointing, and re-engaging attention. - Stage 3 (interactive turn-taking) proved particularly effective; these results are similar to those of Buckingham (2012)[1] who also found stage three to have the greatest impact on pupils' behaviour. - Due to the time constraints and the notion that Attention Autism is a child-led approach, they were unable to reach stage four within the six-week period. Limitations included a small, all-male sample, limited video recordings, and no data on generalisation beyond the intervention setting. The study supports Attention Autism as a valuable classroom intervention, especially when tailored to individual needs and interests.

Secondary Literature: References	**Peer-Reviewed Articles** Hanley, M., Khairat, M., Taylor, K., Wilson, R., Cole-Fletcher, R., & Riby, D. M. (2017). Classroom displays—Attraction or distraction? Evidence of impact on attention and learning from children with and without autism. *Developmental Psychology, 53*(7), 1265–1275. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000271 Jones, E. K., Hanley, M., & Riby, D. M. (2020). Distraction, distress and diversity: Exploring the impact of sensory processing differences on learning and school life for pupils with autism spectrum disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 72(101515) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101515 McDougal, E., Riby, D. M., & Hanley, M. (2020a). Profiles of academic achievement and attention in children with and without Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Research in developmental disabilities*, *106*, 103749. DOI: 10.1016/j.ridd.2020.103749 McDougal, E., Riby, D. M., & Hanley, M. (2020b). Teacher insights into the barriers and facilitators of learning in autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, *79*, Article 101674. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101674 Spaniol, M. M., Mevorach, C., Shalev, L., Teixeira, M. C. T. V., Lowenthal, R., & Paula, C. S. (2021). Attention training in children with autism spectrum disorder improves academic performance: A double-blind pilot application of the computerized progressive

[1] Buckingham, K. (2012). *The impact of the Attention Autism approach on joint attention skills in a Key Stage One class in a special school.* School of Education, The University of Birmingham.

	attentional training program. *Autism Research*, *14*(8), 1769–1776. https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2566 **Other useful literature** Davies, K., & Henderson., P. (2021). *Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools: Guidance Report.* Education Endowment Foundation. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED612231.pdf James, F. (2022, March 24). *The ShREC approach – 4 evidence-informed strategies to promote high quality interactions with young children* [Blog]. Education Endowment Foundation. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/eef-blog-the-shrec-approach-4-evidence-informed-strategies-to-promote-high-quality-interactions-with-young-children Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust (n.d.) *Developing joint attention strategies and activities to try at home.* Gloucestershire: https://www.ghc.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/Developing-Joint-Attention-Sept-2020.docx#:~:text=DEVELOPING%20JOINT%20ATTENTION,%E2%80%A2 National Autistic Society. (n.d.). *Focused and dedicated interests.* https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/about-autism/focused-and-dedicated-interests National Autistic Society. (n.d.). *How to request an autism assessment*. https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/before-diagnosis/how-to-request-an-autism-assessment National Autistic Society. (n.d.). *Making friends – a guide for autistic adults. https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/family-life-and-relationships/making-friends/autistic-adults* National Autistic Society. (n.d.). *Strategies and interventions. https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/strategies-and-interventions*
Key point(s) of note	*Peer-Reviewed Articles* **Hanley et al. (2017)** Classroom visual displays significantly distract children, especially those with autism, reducing attention and learning outcomes during lessons. **Jones et al. (2020)** Sensory processing differences in pupils with autism often lead to distress and distraction in school, negatively affecting learning and participation.

	McDougal, Riby & Hanley (2020a) Children with and without autism show varied academic achievement profiles linked to attention abilities, highlighting the importance of individualised support. **McDougal, Riby & Hanley (2020b)** Teachers identified key barriers and facilitators to learning for pupils with autism, including pupil traits, classroom environment, and teacher expertise. **Spaniol et al. (2021)** Computerised attention training (CPAT) significantly improved reading, writing, and maths performance in children with autism, with sustained benefits over time. *Other useful literature* **Davies & Henderson (2021)** This guidance report from the Education Endowment Foundation outlines five evidence-based recommendations to improve outcomes for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools. **Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust** The report emphasises using a graduated approach, 'assess, plan, do, review', to tailor support for children with autism, focusing on their individual communication, interaction, and sensory needs. It advocates for inclusive environments and structured interventions that reduce anxiety and promote participation, such as safe spaces and adjusted routines. **James (2022, March 24)** The ShREC approach offers a structured, evidence-informed framework, Share attention, Respond, Expand, and Conversation, that supports attuned, child-led interactions, which are especially beneficial for children's spontaneous communication. By prioritising sensitive engagement and modelling language just above the child's current level, educators can foster meaningful, low-pressure communication that respects neurodiverse needs and promotes language development. Joint attention is when two people share an interest in the same thing. It happens when one person shares the moment with another by making eye contact, pointing or using words/sounds to alert them to something they are looking at. **Focused and Dedicated Interests** People with autism often develop intense, long-term interests that can support wellbeing and identity, though they may sometimes require support to manage their impact on daily life.

	How to Request an Autism Assessment To request an autism assessment, individuals should speak to a GP or relevant professional, prepare examples of observed traits, and understand local referral pathways and potential barriers. **Making Friends – A Guide for Autistic Adults** Autistic adults may experience social isolation due to communication differences, but with planning, support, and understanding, they can build meaningful and lasting friendships. **Strategies and Interventions** Effective autism support should be person-centred, respectful of neurodiversity, and focused on enabling wellbeing rather than attempting to 'treat' autism, with interventions tailored to individual needs.

Overview of Attention Autism	Oxford Health, NHS Foundation Trust (2020) *Speech and Language Therapy Attention Autism*. Oxford: Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Attention-Autism.docx#:~:text=Attention%20Autism,switching%20attention%20and%20turn%2Dtaking.
Key point(s) of note	Attention Autism is a structured intervention developed by speech and language therapist Gina Davies to help children with autism improve attention, communication, and social interaction. It uses highly engaging, sensory-rich activities delivered in stages to build joint attention and listening skills. The programme is designed to be fun, motivating, and accessible, fostering spontaneous communication through shared experiences. The Attention Autism programme is structured into four progressive stages designed to build attention and communication skills in children with autism: 1. **Stage 1, Focus – The Bucket**: Captures and sustains attention using highly motivating objects presented by an adult. 2. **Stage 2, Sustain – Attention Builder**: Extends attention through engaging, visually stimulating activities led by the adult. 3. **Stage 3, Shift – Interactive Game**: Encourages turn-taking and re-engaging attention through fun, shared activities. 4. **Stage 4, Transition – Independent Work**: Promotes focus and independence by having children replicate a modelled task individually. For more information, see *Appendix 3 - Attention Autism.*

PLAN 1: Step 3

As part of the process of planning Action Research Cycle 1 and having completed the 'study' phase, the research question can evolve and become further refined.

Revised research question	Can the *Attention Autism* intervention improve the social skills and social development of children with autism?

PLAN 1 and DO 1: Steps 4 and 6

Methods of data collection

- Document collection: Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs), specifically Section F, which details the specific special educational provision required to meet a child's or young person's identified needs.
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
- Staff observations

Description of research sample, timing and location

Prior to the children starting the Attention Autism programme, we completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for Children as a baseline assessment; see *Appendix 2 – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.*

Initiated the Attention Autism programme with a targeted intervention involving a focus group of **five children** from our setting, all of whom are on the SEND Register and have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). The sessions, delivered by a trained member of staff, took place in school and gradually built up to 30 minutes in duration.

PLAN 2: Step 5

Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 1: Step 7-8

Data Analysis: process

Drew together the findings from each of the data strands.

Summary of Findings

Research Question

Can the *Attention Autism* intervention improve the social skills and social development of children with autism?

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) served as a quick baseline measure for the Attention Autism programme. There was an alignment between the SDQ's emphasis on attention and peer relationships and the core aims of Attention Autism, which focus on developing sustained attention, promoting social interaction, and supporting emotional regulation.

Attention Autism – Overview of intervention approach

Stage 1, Focus – The Bucket: Captures and sustains attention using highly motivating objects presented by an adult.

Stage 2, Sustain – Attention Builder: Extends attention through engaging, visually stimulating activities led by the adult.

Stage 3, Shift – Interactive Game: Encourages turn-taking and re-engaging attention through fun, shared activities.

Stage 4, Transition – Independent Work: Promotes focus and independence by having children replicate a modelled task individually.

Outcome of Attention Autism intervention

Stage 1, Focus – The Bucket

This is something the children liked and engaged with fully on most occasions.

Stage 2, Sustain – Attention Builder

Over time, we have managed to increase sustained attention; originally, this was less than 5 minutes, and the children struggled to even sit alongside each other. Over the study, this increased to around 25 minutes.

Stage 3, Shift – Interactive Game

Stage 3 was trickier, and the children took longer to accept turn-taking. This required more support than originally anticipated (turn-taking).

Stage 4, Transition – Independent Work

Similar to the research findings by Courtman (2018), we didn't get to stage 4 in the given timeframe.

Summary

Attention Autism is a longer process than we anticipated, and I wrongly thought that children would be able to move between stages quicker than was possible. I needed to work at a slower pace than originally anticipated and put more careful thought into the bucket time resources to gain and sustain the children's attention.

Outcome

Before starting Attention Autism, individual workstations were required for each child. After the intervention, the children are now able to sit alongside each other within the Resource Unit classroom environment.

Analysis and next steps leading into Action Research Cycle 2

The findings indicate that Attention Autism has had a positive effect on the children's social development. However, the research was only conducted with a small number of children in a classroom setting. Further exploration will therefore be required to see if these skills can be transferred to other aspects of school life: for example, playtime or lunchtime.

Next Step(s): Action Research Cycle

Observe children involved in Attention Autism during playtimes and lunchtimes.

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE 2

KEY LITERATURE SHAPING THE RESEARCH (STUDY 2): Step 9

Reference	Marsh, F. (2019). *Attention Autism for children and young people on the autistic spectrum: A critique of the current evidence-base* [Blog, University of Southampton]. https://blog.soton.ac.uk/edpsych/files/2019/09/Attention-Autism-March-2019-Fiona-Marsh.pdf Maasland, L. (2020) *The impact of Attention Autism on early social communication skills.* Beyond Autism Impact Stories Series. https://www.beyondautism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-impact-of-Attention-Autism-.pdf

Key point(s) of note	**Marsh (2019)** While early studies and practitioner-led research show promising outcomes for Attention Autism, including increased engagement and enjoyment, the evidence base remains limited and calls for more rigorous, independent evaluation to confirm its effectiveness. **Maasland (2020)** This case study demonstrates that Attention Autism Stage 1 significantly improved the child's joint attention, engagement, and early social communication skills, particularly when delivered in a low-stimulus environment with appropriate sensory supports and consistent reinforcement from the class team.

PLAN 2: Step 10

Revised research question	Following completion of Action Research cycle 1, the researchers continued to explore the original question further; thus, no revisions to the original research question were needed for Action Research cycle 2.

PLAN 2 and DO 2: Steps 11 and 13

Methods of data collection
Observation of children at breaktime and lunchtime

Description of research sample, timing and location
Children were observed during breaktime and lunchtime.

PLAN 2: Step 12
Ethical consent was sought from each participant to publish this data anonymously.

REVIEW 2: Steps 14-15

Data Analysis: process
Analysis of observation notes.
Summary of Findings
Action Research Cycle 2 Research Question Observations of children involved in the Attention Autism intervention showed a noticeable reduction in physical incidents during breaktime and lunchtime while playing near others. This suggests that the children may be developing greater tolerance and improved turn-taking skills. The children also required less intensive support during these unstructured periods. For example, one child was able to wait for the bat he wanted, which had previously been a challenge. This indicates progress in self-regulation and social interaction. Scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) have reduced for some children.
Analysis and next steps leading to the conclusion
Over the term that we have been running Attention Autism in school, we have noticed that children have required less intensive support during unstructured times of the day, such as breaktimes and lunchtimes.

CONCLUSION

Research aim/question
Can the *Attention Autism* intervention improve the social skills and social development of children with autism?
Conclusion(s) *Overview* Although several other changes were introduced at the same time, making it difficult to isolate cause and effect, observational evidence suggests that **Attention Autism has had a positive impact**. The intervention has enabled children to develop their **attention span, and also encouraged our children to interact positively with each other**. Since starting the project, children now **attend full-time**, there has been a **reduction in behaviour incidents** and peer challenges, and scores on the **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) have reduced for some children**. Observations have indicated positive results and **increased tolerance in waiting and turn-taking**. Regarding the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, this was a useful starting point tool, but we'd also like to trial the use of the **Attention Education Trust (AET) Progression Framework**[2]. The framework is designed to help educators identify priorities, personalise targets, and track progress in areas beyond the National Curriculum. *Detail* The Attention Autism programme proved to be a more gradual process than initially expected, requiring a slower pace and extra care in planning resources, particularly for ***Stage 1: Focus – The Bucket***, which was key to gaining and sustaining attention. During ***Stage 2: Sustain – Attention Builder***, children's sustained attention improved markedly from under five minutes to around 25 minutes, showing clear progress. However, ***Stage 3: Shift – Interactive Game*** required more time and support than anticipated, especially around turn-taking. As a result, ***Stage 4: Transition – Independent Work*** was not reached within the timeframe, which aligns with findings from Courtman (2018). A notable outcome, however, is that children are now able to sit alongside each other in the Resource Unit classroom, whereas previously individual workstations were necessary. Observations during **breaktime and lunchtime** showed that, for some children, physical incidents reduced and less intensive support was needed, suggesting improvements in tolerance, turn-taking, and self-regulation. These developments, alongside reduced SDQ scores for some, indicate that learning from the Attention Autism intervention is beginning to **transfer beyond the boundaries of the intervention time**, contributing positively to these children's social interaction and emotional well-being. Regarding the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, this was a useful starting point tool, but we'd also like to trial the use of the Attention Education Trust (AET) Progression Framework[3]. The framework is designed to help educators identify priorities, personalise targets, and track progress in areas beyond the National Curriculum.

[2] Autism Education Trust. (n.d.). *Framework documents*. https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/framework-documents

[3] Autism Education Trust. (n.d.). *Framework documents*. https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/framework-documents

Next Steps
I would like to share this case study with other schools within our Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and also within local SENDCo meetings.

Appendix 1 – Action Research Cycles

Action Research Cycle 1	**Establish the research focus**	**Step 1:** Identify the ISEND area for development which requires research.
	Study 1	**Step 2:** Review the research literature.
	Plan 1	**First Plan**
		Step 3: Start the process of refining the research.
		Step 4: Decide what kind of direction you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 5: Consider research ethics (engage with the ethics checklist).
	Do 1	**Step 6:** Implement the first plan (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 1	**Step 7:** Review and Reflect.
		Step 8: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.
Action Research Cycle 2	**Study 2**	**Step 9:** Review further literature if required.
	Plan 2	**Second Plan**
		Step 10: Based on the 'reflect' phase, refine the research (this may involve revising or developing the research questions) and plan the next actions.
		Step 11: Decide what kind of action you are going to take (direct or enquiry).
		Step 12: Seek any further ethical permissions if needed (engage with ethics checklist).
	Do 2	**Step 13:** Implement the second plan – (either direct action or enquiry as action).
	Review 2	**Step 14:** Review and reflect.
		Step 15: Analyse the meaning of the data gathered.

Appendix 2 – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* is published on the Anna Freud website:

Goodman, R. (2005) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. London: Anna Freud Mentally Healthy Schools. https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/the-strengths-and-difficulties-questionnaire-sdq/

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name ..... Male/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	☐	☐	☐
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	☐	☐	☐
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	☐	☐	☐
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	☐	☐	☐
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	☐	☐	☐
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	☐	☐	☐
Many worries, often seems worried	☐	☐	☐
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	☐	☐	☐
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	☐	☐	☐
Has at least one good friend	☐	☐	☐
Often fights with other children or bullies them	☐	☐	☐
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	☐	☐	☐
Generally liked by other children	☐	☐	☐
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	☐	☐	☐
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	☐	☐	☐
Kind to younger children	☐	☐	☐
Often lies or cheats	☐	☐	☐
Picked on or bullied by other children	☐	☐	☐
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	☐	☐	☐
Thinks things out before acting	☐	☐	☐
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	☐	☐	☐
Gets on better with adults than with other children	☐	☐	☐
Many fears, easily scared	☐	☐	☐
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	☐	☐	☐

Signature ..... Date .....

Parent/Teacher/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help

Appendix 3 - Attention Autism

Oxford Health, NHS Foundation Trust (2020) Speech and Language Therapy
Attention Autism. Oxford: Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.
https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/08/Attention-Autism.docx#:~:text=Attention%20Autism,switching%20attention%20and%20turn%2Dtaking.

Speech and Language Therapy
Attention Autism

What is it?

Attention Autism is an intervention approach by Speech and Language Therapist Gina Davies which aims to work on the early fundamentals of language including awareness of others, attention, listening, shared attention, switching attention and turn-taking.

Attention skills are an integral part of how we connect with people, the world around us and how we learn. These early skills can be particularly difficult for children with Autism. Gina Davies suggests that the answer is to make your interactions irresistible by using activities that are worthy of the child's attention. If the child is having fun, they will be more likely to join in and engage.

How does it differ from traditional therapy approaches?

Traditional therapy approaches are often not as effective for children with Autism compared with typically developing peers. For example, A child is shown a picture, the therapist explains that 'The boy is riding a bike' and then asks the child, 'What is the boy doing?' This requires many skills from the child including attention, listening, memory, social skills, language, and many other skills that children with Autism find difficult. This can often lead to confusion and lack of engagement in therapy.

Children with Autism are often visual learners and have a good memory for things they find interesting. Attention Autism uses these areas of strength to scaffold learning. It aims to engage children using highly motivating activities and using this as a base to introduce other skills including joint attention, turn-taking and vocabulary development. The aim is to get spontaneous engagement from the child rather than simply telling the child to listen, look and attend to an activity.

How does it work?

The approach consists of 4 stages. These steps follow the typical pattern of attention development shown in young infants, starting from highly distractible, fleeting attention, and working up to multi-channelled well-established attention.

Children learn through play so remember to keep the activities fun!

Stage 1: FOCUS- The Bucket

The aims are for the child to...

- Focus their attention on the adult led activity
- Engage their attention with enthusiasm
- Relax and enjoy these times
- To anticipate shared good times

What do you need?

A bucket filled with highly motivating, visually appealing items (e.g. wind-up toys, flashing toys). Take one out at a time to show the child. Do not let the child touch the toys, and do not use the toys for any other activities outside of bucket time.

What is it?

- Fill a bucket with highly motivating, past paced toys.
- Sing the bucket song: *'I've got something in my bucket, in my bucket, in my bucket. I've got something in my bucket, I wonder what it is?'* to build anticipation.
- Produce an object that offers excitement immediately. Repeat for 3 or 4 objects.

Things to remember:

- Show first then add words
- Give time for thinking and stay quiet!
- Remember rushing adds anxiety
- Practice and make sure the toys work
- Get your colleagues/parents on board!
- Enjoy the toys

Stage 2: SUSTAIN- The attention builder

Offer an activity that has a sequence building to a final fantastic experience. This can get long or short as you like depending on attention levels. Additional vocabulary can be added at a later stage.

It must be:

- Highly visual activities
- Highly appealing activities
- The only thing available
- Delivered on the adult's agenda

Things to remember:

- Keep it simple
- Go for things children love
- Avoid obsessions
- Add colour
- Organise everything you need in advance
- Check the background
- Make sure everyone gets a good view
- Sell it with body and soul

Stage 2 Attention Builder Activity Ideas:

Salt Streaming
You will need:
- A black piece of paper
- clear box filled with salt
- a plastic cup with a hole in the bottom

What to do:
- Place the black paper on the floor
- Open the box and fill the cup with salt (place your finger over the hole to stop the salt coming out)
- Hold the cup over the black paper and take your finger off the hole
- Let the salt stream onto the paper and make patterns with the salt
- Hold the cup up high so it is more visually appealing.

Variations of salt streaming: Use rice, coloured sand, glitter, salt onto a different surface.

Flour Castles
You will need:
- Flour
- Plastic container to place flour in
- Plastic cup (different sizes)
- Plastic sheet

What to do:
- Lay the plastic sheet out on the ground
- Place the plastic cup into the flour tub and fill it with tower
- Then place the cup upside down on the plastic sheet and lift up the cup to leave a cup shaped flour castle behind.
- Do this again until you've created about 4 flour castles.
- Then one at a time, squash the castle with your hands
- Take time folding up the plastic sheet and pouring the flour back into the tub.
- If children are still attending, make more flour castles.

Variations of flour castles: Spray castles with food dye, use different shaped containers to make flour castle.

Sound Sprinkle
You will need:
- Plastic sheet/wipable work surface
- Different containers (e.g. plastic bowl, tin sheet etc.)
- Rice/ couscous/ dried lentils
- Tinned spaghetti/baked beans/ custard
- Plastic cup/ bowl
- Bowl of water/ toy drum
- Funnel

What to do:
- Lay the plastic sheet on the floor and place your different containers down
- Count the containers as you put them down
- Use the plastic cup to scoop up your rice/couscous/ lentils
- Hold the plastic funnel over each container and pour your rice/ couscous into it – try to comment whilst completing this e.g. 'pouring'

- Listen to the sound it makes – again comment e.g. loud/quiet

Variations of sound sprinkle: Use different materials to pour (e.g. beans, small rocks), pour onto metal tray for different sound, pour onto a xylophone.

Football Frenzy
You will need:
- Small paper footballs (cut out from paper, preferably tissue paper)
- Shower curtain
- Watering can
- Bottle of water and green food dye

What to do:
- Lay the shower curtain on the floor.
- Take out the bottle of water and place drops of green food dye in it. Put the lid on and shake it.
- Get the watering can and pour the green water into it.
- Stand over the shower curtain and pour the green water over the shower curtain.
- Then open the box with the paper footballs, stand over the shower curtain, and drop the footballs onto the shower curtain (hold them up high) and watch the drop onto the green surface. Drop one at a time

Variations: Fish in the sea using blue dye and paper fish, drop numbers or letters onto surface, use different colours/topics to target curriculum vocabulary.

<u>Stage 3: SHIFT- Interactive game</u>
Once the children are attending to an adult led activity for a longer period, it is time to begin modelling turn-taking skills and how to shift attention from self to the rest of the group.

<u>Stage 4: 1, 2 & 3 TRANSITIONS- Table top activity</u>
Once they have reached stage 4, it is time to practise attending to a self-led activity. The children should watch a demonstration of the activity carried out by an adult, take their pack of resources, go to their own space and carry out the activity independently. The focus should be on the progress and attention rather than the end result. The children should then come back together and share in celebrating the end result!