

RIVERSIDE SCHOOL
FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT GUIDANCE

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This guidance was reviewed and agreed at a meeting of the Governors' Student Development Committee on:

7 March, 2017

(Policy to be reviewed triennially).

Next review date – Spring term, 2020

Introduction

This document outlines the school's approaches to developing flexibility of thought for Riverside students with autistic spectrum disorders. It identifies our aims, objectives and strategies used.

Rationale

Flexibility of thought 'allows us to imagine situations outside our immediate daily routine' (National Autistic Society). We recognise that students with ASD have difficulty with flexibility of thought, have associated difficulties in the development of play skills and social imagination and cannot easily grasp that other people have thoughts and emotions of their own.

Difficulties with flexibility of thought can manifest themselves in obsessive, repetitive routines and behaviours. People with autism tend to have a strong preference for routines and sameness and find security in rigidity or ritualistic behaviours. These behaviours are not seen as behaviours that always need eliminating; we would only consider this if they were impeding the student's daily life, safety or education. We would seek to modify the behaviours necessary to the individual.

Difficulties ASD students experience

Students with ASD are likely to have a compromised ability to use imagination to problem-solve and predict outcomes on a day-to-day basis. If anxiety levels are heightened for whatever reason, the ability to make or accept choices, problem solve, make decisions and negotiate is impaired.

Specifically, difficulties with flexibility of thought mean that students with ASD find it hard to:

- Understand and interpret other people's thoughts, feelings and actions
- Predict what will happen next, or what could happen next
- Understand the concept of danger
- Engage in imaginative play and activities: student with autism may enjoy some imaginative play but prefer to act out the same scenes each time
- Prepare for change and plan for the future
- Cope in new or unfamiliar situations
- Generalise skills across different settings
- Multi-tasking
- Decision and choice making

These difficulties in flexible thinking represent a major barrier to learning for students with autism. As a result, these difficulties may present as:

- Challenging or inappropriate behaviour
- Repetitive behaviours (such as; lining up objects, pacing up and down, repetitive questioning or activities etc.,)
- An inability to empathise with others
- Limited ability to problem-solve
- An inability to accept others' viewpoints
- Restricted play skills
- Withdrawal from unfamiliar people, activities or places
- Obsessive interests

- Reliant on routines
- Resistant to change (desire to preserve sameness)
- Poor self organizational skills
- Difficulties managing unstructured times and transitions
- Limited imitation skills
- Lack of imagination and original thought

Managing change

Change is a contributing factor to causing anxiety. A person with ASD can find any kind of change difficult, however significant or insignificant it appears to others.

There are many changes that require attention and support such as:

- Changing position of (classroom) furniture
- Changing the timetable
- Changing teaching staff
- Eating different foods
- Eating and drinking from different containers
- Wearing different clothing
- Seasonal changes
- Changing traveling routes
- Micro and macro transitions
- Crisis management
- Environmental changes
- Change to structure and routine
- Community outings

Implementation

At Riverside School we address difficulties with flexibility of thought through various teaching strategies: these strategies are identified and recorded in a variety of formats. Some of the daily teaching techniques are listed below. This however, is not an exhaustive list and we will always seek new and other ways to meet individual needs.

- Timetables and schedules
- Alternative and augmentative communication systems
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- Choice-making boards / choosing time
- Offering limited choices and sabotaging events (to encourage problem-solving and seeking /alternatives)
- Teaching across different settings to encourage generalisation skills
- Teaching to ask for help
- Teaching to request breaks, identifying time out, promoting self-regulating behaviour
- Surprises on the timetable (pre-planned changes)
- Behaviour techniques and management strategies (see behaviour policy)
- Opportunities to negotiate throughout the day (lets make a deal / token boards)

- Building sensory activities into the daily routine to reduce anxiety (e.g. exercise)
- Effective transitions between activities is embedded into daily routines so that unexpected change can be managed (teaching the concept of 'finished')
- Social stories (where relevant)
- Social skills teaching
- Setting clear and consistent boundaries for the behaviour (limiting frequency of object / time or place)
- Exploring alternative, more appropriate activities that have the same function as the repetitive behaviour
- Using obsessions to motivate and reward so to develop skills, increase social opportunities and improve self esteem
- Relaxation techniques

Special interests

Special interests can provide great motivations for pupils on the autistic spectrum. Riverside School often use the special interests to motivate our pupils. We do not view a student's special interest as something we need to eradicate (unless there are H&S reasons) but modify to an accepted behaviour (as reward or socially).

Planning and recording

- Annual review and person -centred review targets
- Every ASD student will have individual targets addressing ASD issues not addressed in every day classroom activities
- Individual Behaviour Programmes
- Individual meal time plans (some students eat separately)
- Sensory diets

Monitoring

At Riverside School we ensure that opportunities for developing flexibility of thinking, choice-making and problem solving are pursued and evaluated. This is done through:

- Annual reviews / transition plans
- IEP recording sheets
- Lesson evaluations
- End of term assessments
- Monitoring communication systems
- Ongoing records of achievement
- Monitoring class planning files

Links to other areas of learning

Flexibility of thought links into all areas of learning, all areas of the curriculum and supports policies and programmes such as:

- Behaviour Management policy
 - Behaviour Programmes
 - Communication Policy
 - Communication Programmes
 - PSHEE Policy
 - Intimate Care Policy
 - Sensory Diets
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