

This approach is designed to:

- Include activities which are motivating, a shared experience and worth communicating about.
- Help children to understand and respond to a structured, adult directed routine
- Give children an irresistible invitation to engage in an adult directed activity
- Build attention and listening skills at an appropriate developmental level
- Develop social communication skills e.g. taking turns, using vocalisations.

The approach works because it draws on the child's strengths:

- Stronger visual skills than auditory skills
- Remembering experiences with emotional impact (activities aim to be memorable and enjoyable)
- Ability to follow logic and structure (e.g. following a predictable pattern, use of simple, repetitive language)

#### Stages of Attention Autism

<b>Stage 1: Focus</b>	<b>Stage 2: Sustain</b>	<b>Stage 3: Shift</b>	<b>Stage 4: Transitions</b>
The bucket	The attention builder	The interactive game	The table top activity
The aim is to build up to a single channelled attention level in a short adult directed activity	The aim is to be able to shift and sustain attention, and show emerging skills in anticipation	The aim is to teach the child to shift their attention as they and others take turns	The aim is to teach the child how to shift and refocus their attention for an individual activity and then back to a group activity

#### Top Tips

- Find a quiet space – you may need to put up a barrier to separate off a distraction free area
- Sit everyone in a horseshoe shape, making sure that everyone can see
- Prepare resources ahead of time – make sure your toys work and your activity is ready
- Keep the toys and activities varied to keep the children engaged and excited
- Use visuals to bring children to the group (e.g. the box/ a photo or symbol of the box)
- Try to avoid waiting for everybody to be ready if you've got most of the children sat waiting

- Use a simple visual timetable to show the sequence of activities
- Get everyone in the room on board – all adults should be engaging with enthusiasm to attract the children's attention
- Have control of the toys and keep them close – children start to take turns in stage 3 and should not take turns with toys from the bucket
- Appear confident and try not to rush (even if you are nervous)
- Use simple repetitive language to make comments, rather than asking questions
- Give time for thinking and leave gaps for the children to comment
- Silently lead the children back to the activity without giving a verbal prompt such as "sit down"
- Carry on regardless of the children's behaviour - don't let the children dictate the start and finish point of the activity
- Work towards each stage lasting up to 5 minutes.
- Have fun and enjoy it!

### Communication Targets

- Attention skills: focusing attention in a group, focusing attention on an adult-directed activity, sustaining attention for 5 minutes.
- Non-verbal communication skills: showing anticipation, directing eye contact.
- Understanding of language: core vocabulary, concepts (position, colour, length), routine phrases.
- Use of language: vocalisations of anticipation/excitement, using single words/ phrases to request/comment/show like or dislike.
- Social communication skills: taking turns, sharing attention during another child's turn.

### Curriculum Targets

- Personal, social and emotional: shares experiences, works as part of a group, excited and motivated to learn.
- Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy: knows numbers as labels, recognises shapes, knows language of calculation e.g. more.
- Knowledge and understanding of the world: shows curiosity/ interest by exploring, observes similarities/ differences, builds and constructs with a wide range of objects.
- Creative development: explores colour, explores texture, and expresses feelings/preferences.
- Physical development: moves with confidence, shows awareness of space.

### Stage 1

#### Aim of therapy:

- To focus attention on an adult led activity

#### Equipment:

- Wipe board
- Wipe board pen
- Bucket/ box (opaque) with a lid
- Motivational toys/ objects e.g. wind-up toys, a slinky, a party blower.
- Shower curtain for covering any distracting objects close by.

#### Routine:

1. Draw a 'first and then board' and say 'first box, then ....(whatever is happening next)'
2. Sing the 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 will be..."*
3. Pull one toy out and play with it for around 45 seconds
4. Tell the children what it is called, that it is finished, and put it back in the box: *"light ball, light ball is finished"*
5. Repeat this with 2-4 more toys
6. Finally show the children on the visual timetable that the "box is finished" and it is "time for (the 'then' activity)".

#### The leading adult should:

- Have control of the toys and keep them close
- Put the lid back on the bucket/box in between toys
- Focus on the toys and not on the children to draw their attention to the toy
- Be the most interesting thing in the room
- Use animated facial expressions
- Use key words and sounds, but also leave pauses and space for the children to comment
- Carry on with activities regardless of the children's behaviour (the supporting adults are there to help).

### The supporting adult(s) should:

- Model good attention and listening skills by engaging with the activity
- Respond with excitement and interest
- Support the children to stay at the activity by redirecting their attention using facial expression and gesture, but not verbal instructions e.g. "look" or "sit down"
- Try to silently guide the child back to the activity if they leave.

### Remember to:

- Vary the toys in the bucket to keep the activity exciting and engaging
- Make sure the toys work
- Engage with enthusiasm, anticipate shared good times and have fun!

*For more ideas and tips, visit Gina Davies Autism Centre on Facebook. Photographs and videos of ideas can also be found on YouTube and Pinterest.*

### Stage 2

#### Aim of therapy:

- To shift attention to a new activity once 'the bucket' has finished
- To sustain attention on an activity which has a sequence and builds to a final fantastic experience

#### Equipment:

- A clear plastic box for containing the materials
- Craft items e.g. paint, sand, salt, plastic cups, shaving foam, rice, tissue paper, plastic plant pots, watering cans, black paper, flour, washing up liquid, baking soda and vinegar, balloons, sieve, cotton wool, cling film (the list is endless!).

#### Activity ideas:

- Flour castles: put flour in an empty plant pot, turn them out to make flour castles, when you have a row of castles splat them!
- Volcano: add food colouring into a large bottle of white vinegar, and then add bicarbonate of soda!

#### The leading adult should:

- Work on the floor - from the children's left to right (adult's right to left)
- Let the children watch the activity being set up and cleared away again
- Have control of the materials and keep them close
- Pause and look up to build suspense
- Use animated facial expressions and simple language related to the objects e.g. "splat", "shake", "up", "down", and to model topic based vocabulary "1, 2, 3 ...."

#### The supporting adult(s) should:

- Model good attention and listening skills by engaging with the activity
- Support the children to stay at the activity by redirecting their attention using facial expression and gesture, but not verbal instructions e.g. "look" or "sit down"
- Silently guide the child back to the activity if they leave

#### Remember to:

- Keep the activity exciting and engaging by varying the materials even if you are using a similar activity
- Make it visually appealing with high contrast e.g. white salt on black paper
- Choose things the children will love, but avoid obsessions e.g. dinosaurs.

### Stage 3

#### Aim of therapy:

- Develop non-verbal communication skills
- Shift attention to their turn and then focus their attention back on the group activity
- Develop waiting, anticipation and turn taking skills.

#### Equipment:

- Similar to stage 2 – you don't always have to think of a new idea and can adapt the stage 2 activity to include turn-taking.

#### Activity ideas:

- Raining on you: child hold up an umbrella and adult pours water from a watering can
- Egg splats: adult makes an egg from shaving foam/ paint and child splats it with a kitchen utensil.

#### The leading adult should:

- Offer a supporting adult the first turn, so that they can demonstrate first
- Avoid predictable patterns of turn taking e.g. going round the circle
- Avoid making eye contact with a child who is keen to take a turn but it isn't their turn
- Let children who can be anxious watch to begin with, and move on if a child does not want a turn
- Avoid offering a child a turn if they are not ready e.g. not sitting and watching others
- Make up songs that will encourage language modelling, predictability and anticipation where possible.

#### The supporting adult(s) should:

- Model good attention and listening skills by engaging with the activity
- Model coping strategies when the child does not get a turn e.g. "nevermind, maybe tomorrow"

#### Remember to:

- Use non-verbal communication cues to invite the child to take their turn (standing in front of them, looking at them and offering out a hand), as well as saying "it's your turn"
- Offer a child a turn (if they are ready) and not use turns as a reward/ consequence of any earlier behaviour
- Make sure the rest of the children can see whilst they are waiting for their turn
- Have fun and don't worry about the mess!

### Stage 4

#### Aim of therapy:

- Make the transition from a group task, to an individual task, and then back to the group.

#### Equipment:

- Demonstration of activity for the whole group
- An activity kit for each child: a box/ tray containing a version of the task.

#### Activity ideas:

- Posting activities
- Cutting/ making shapes out of playdough
- Digging for treasure e.g. finding objects in a sandtray
- Stringing beads
- Sticking down paper shapes e.g. to make a face

#### The leading adult should:

- Demonstrate the activity to the group
- Provide each child with their own activity kit
- Count the children down to the end of the activity e.g. "5,4,3,2,1,it's finished"
- Finish the activity as a group, tidying up equipment and completing the visual timetable as before.

#### The supporting adult(s) should:

- Be the first to take their activity kit to the table
- Model completing the task alongside the children
- Offer support to children when needed.

#### Remember to:

- Have your activity and table prepared beforehand
- Avoid distractions on the route between the floor and table.

*For more ideas and tips, visit Gina Davies Autism Centre on Facebook. Photographs and videos of ideas can also be found on YouTube and Pinterest.*