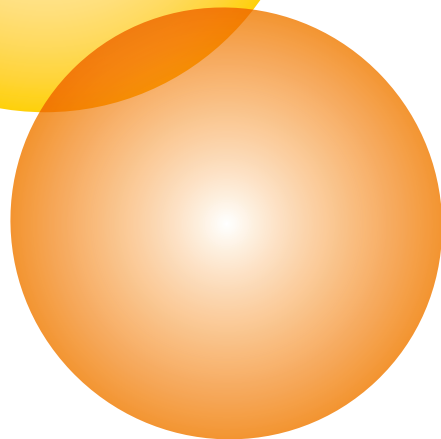
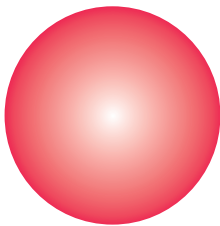


A Positive Start to Life



The KEYHOLE[®] Rainbow Resource Book 1



Connecting With Autism: What can I do for my child?

Dear Family,

This set of booklets has been produced to offer you interventions and strategies that work throughout play. They will mould together your understanding of a range of strategies that will work uniquely for your child.

This Rainbow Resource Kit was created as part of Autism NI's Connecting with Autism Project. The need for this practical support kit was identified within the research period of the KEYHOLE® Early Intervention Programme, one of the most comprehensive and holistic autism specific Early Intervention Programmes in the UK.

This kit is part of a menu of supports that Autism NI can offer parents pre and post diagnosis. These supports include our Helpline service, home based support, support groups across NI and our range of training workshops.

It is hoped that this resource will provide a proactive toolkit to connect with your child. We trust you and your child will find it fun learning together. This is where we start... this is a start for life.



Kerry Boyd
Chief Executive, Autism NI.



Structured Play

Spontaneous play may not come as naturally to autistic children due to difficulties with communication, interaction, sensory needs and behaviours.

However, playing with structure can make more sense to a autistic child as it answers the following questions:

- Where do I play?
- When do I play?
- How do I play?
- What's next?



Where do I Play?

- A space free from distraction
- A table top clear of other objects
- Suitable chairs for a child and adult (ideally a child's table and chair)
- An object to indicate to your child that they are going to this area (e.g. a blue block)
 - Give this to your child every time you use this area so this becomes meaningful and tells them what to expect.

When do I play?

- At a regular and predictable time
- A time with few interruptions or distractions
- At a time when the child is not hungry, tired or unwell
- Just before something that the child enjoys, e.g. bathtime. This activity after play will reward the child for participating in structured play.



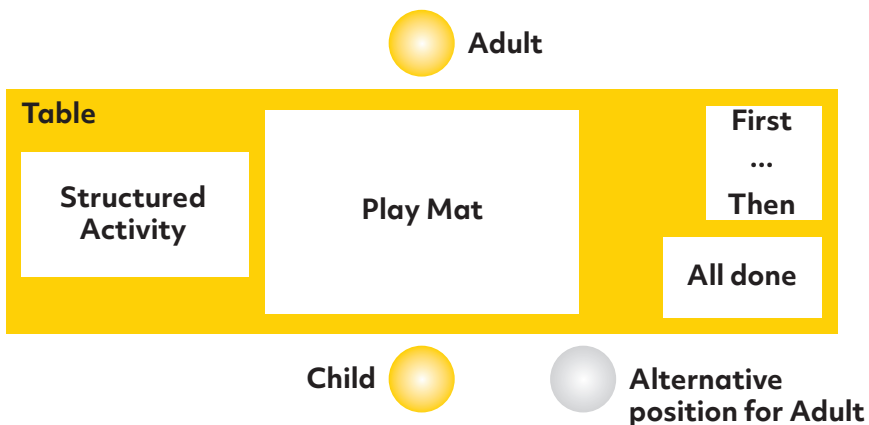


How do I play?

- With patience
- Place activity on a playmat or specific area laid out for activities on the table
- Give your child time to respond
- Keep your language short and simple
- Support your language with clear and simple gestures
- Where necessary, guide your child's hand whilst engaging in an activity
- Shorten the task if needed (for example, by starting the jigsaw when it is half completed so there are only a few pieces left to complete).
- Always work from left to right
- Always end activity by putting completed work in the 'all done' area
 - This is an area to set finished tasks, usually to the right of the child. A large storage box can be useful.

What comes next?

Always ensure your child knows what is happening next. This can be done using a 'first and then' card or an object to represent the next activity (e.g. spoon for snack).



Structure Checklist

How will I organise and present the activity for my child to play with?

.....
.....

Where will my child do their activity?

.....
.....

How will they know when it is time to do the activity?

.....
.....

How will they understand what to do during this activity?

.....
.....

How will they know when the activity is finished?

.....
.....

How will they know what is next?

.....
.....





Getting Connected

The relationship between a child and their parent provides a firm foundation for future development.

You are the most important person for your child and it is you that they will connect with most easily.

No matter what challenges the child has, we should continue to try to encourage 'connection'. For some, this may be easier and for others, more challenging.

Never force your child to connect at a time that they don't seem to want to. Connecting should be a pleasurable experience for both you and your child.

What does 'connecting' with your child mean?

- Being engaged with them and them with you
- Feeling that at that moment, they are interested in you
- It is something you can feel at an emotional level and others observing can see that, in that instant, you and your child are 'together'

How can I connect with my child?

- Observe your child and their interests – follow their lead.
- Be sensitive to your child's personality, likes and dislikes – don't overwhelm or underwhelm!
- Use a very expressive face and voice
- Be sensitive to your use of touch and volume – it can be easy to use too much or too little
- Aim to be irresistible to your child

- Attempt to join in with what your child is doing.
 - If they are running around, copy them and try to develop a chasing game or ready steady go game.
 - If your child is sitting staring, get in the way and start 'peekaboo'
 - If your child is spinning a toy, start a 'start, stop' game or spin a similar toy to copy them
- Treat whatever your child does as purposeful and try to mimic to connect with them.

What toys should I use?

- It is very important to remember that you are your child's best toy. You want to be more interesting than objects to them.
- To be more exciting than a toy, sometimes you will need to be silly, e.g. using big facial expressions, words like 'wow', using an exciting tone or tune in your voice, being dramatic.
- If you are using toys, make sure you are part of that toy, i.e. that you are involved within the play.
- Try to develop turn taking games and get into rhythms with the turns.
- If your child starts to get absorbed with a toy then start to get involved in a playful way, e.g. pressing the buttons on a light up toy.
- Rough and tumble play is often a good starting place for children who like this sensory feedback.
- Bubbles and balloons can be very useful. Don't tie the balloon so your child will need to connect with you again and again to continue the play.
- Have fun!

What if I feel it is not working?

- It may be very difficult to get that connection started. Remember that if your child turns away, they have shown initiative and are reacting/paying attention to you. If you are engaging with an activity/toy that already holds an interest for your child, you will eventually connect.
- Treat everything your child does as purposeful. Try to understand what they may be gaining from a particular activity.
 - e.g. lying on the floor may be satisfying because of the pressure or temperature of the floor. Try other activities that provide similar feedback.
- Sometimes, imitating your child will provide a helpful connection. Try to get them used to your presence beside them, while you imitate them quietly. Gradually build on this tolerance, working towards the child noticing you and your mimicking behaviours. When you recognise that they have noticed you copying them, suddenly stop and see what they do. You may be able to progress to a two-way game or practice interaction through this.
- Once you have found a way of connecting that works for you and your child, keep that connection going for as long as your child is interested. Be creative, funny, persistent and have fun. Find ways to keep the game going and don't be afraid of adding in new ideas to the game. Small steps is key – don't try to change too much too quickly. If your child becomes disinterested, move onto something else or try again at a later stage. Even small or short connections are useful!



Autism: Top Twelve Tips

- 1** **Learn as much as you can about autism.** Knowledge of your child and how they see the world can help you predict and react appropriately to situations.

- 2** Most episodes of behaviour that is challenging can be anxiety or panic attacks in reaction to various triggers. These triggers are important to be aware of and can include noise, smell, lights, routine change. Observing behaviours over time can help you to **recognise these triggers and plan accordingly.**

- 3** An autistic child may take longer to process verbal information. To help, remember the **'10 second rule'** – wait for 10 seconds after asking a question to allow your child to process information and respond.

- 4** When information is presented verbally, keep words to a minimum and use only the **essential language**, e.g. 'coat in hall'. Use **concrete language** and avoid abstract ideas like 'hop into the car'.

- 5** When instructing your child, think about the **behaviour you want the child to do**, rather than what you want them to stop doing. For example, if you tell your child to 'stop hitting', they may not know what to do instead and become confused. Instead, telling them 'hands down' reinforces the positive behaviour that you want them to complete.



6 Use **visual information** to help your child to understand. This could be objects, pictures or symbols. This will help your child to understand concepts like choice and be able to answer by pointing or touching the visual material. For example, show cup of water or juice and allow the child to take the one they would like.

7 Your child may have a fixed interest which makes them feel secure in an unpredictable world. It is important to **allow your child to engage in this interest** (unless dangerous) as it is pleasurable and calming. You can use structure to balance this interest with other activities. For example, first jigsaw (activity we are practising), then trains (preferred item).

8 An autistic child can have more difficulty **generalising new skills** (using a skill in lots of different environments rather than just the area it was taught in). You may have to support generalisation by teaching or practising the skills in multiple environments (e.g. putting coat on at home and in playgroup, using different types of soap dispensers).

9 Some autistic children prefer rules (they bring order and consistency to the world). Having a **clear, predictable routine** will help your child to cope and feel comfortable.

10 If your child is going to be introduced to a new situation, make this as familiar as possible to them by **letting them know what to expect**. You can explain in simple language, using visuals or a schedule to show what they will be doing or read a story to them about the new activity/environment. This could be used for many situations like going on holiday, starting a new school or going out for a day out to the zoo.

11 Life is full of things that are not expected and that don't always follow the rules. Since change can be difficult for some autistic children, help your child to cope by **teaching strategies to deal with change**. You can practice this by introducing change in controlled and positive ways, for example, going to the park instead of the shop after school. Show your child the photo of shop, then show an 'x' over this and a photo of park instead.

12 **Carry a distractor toy** with you when possible. If you know that squeezing a stress toy or playdoh calms your child, keep this with you to use when your child is stressed.



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