



DESIGNING INCLUSIVELY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

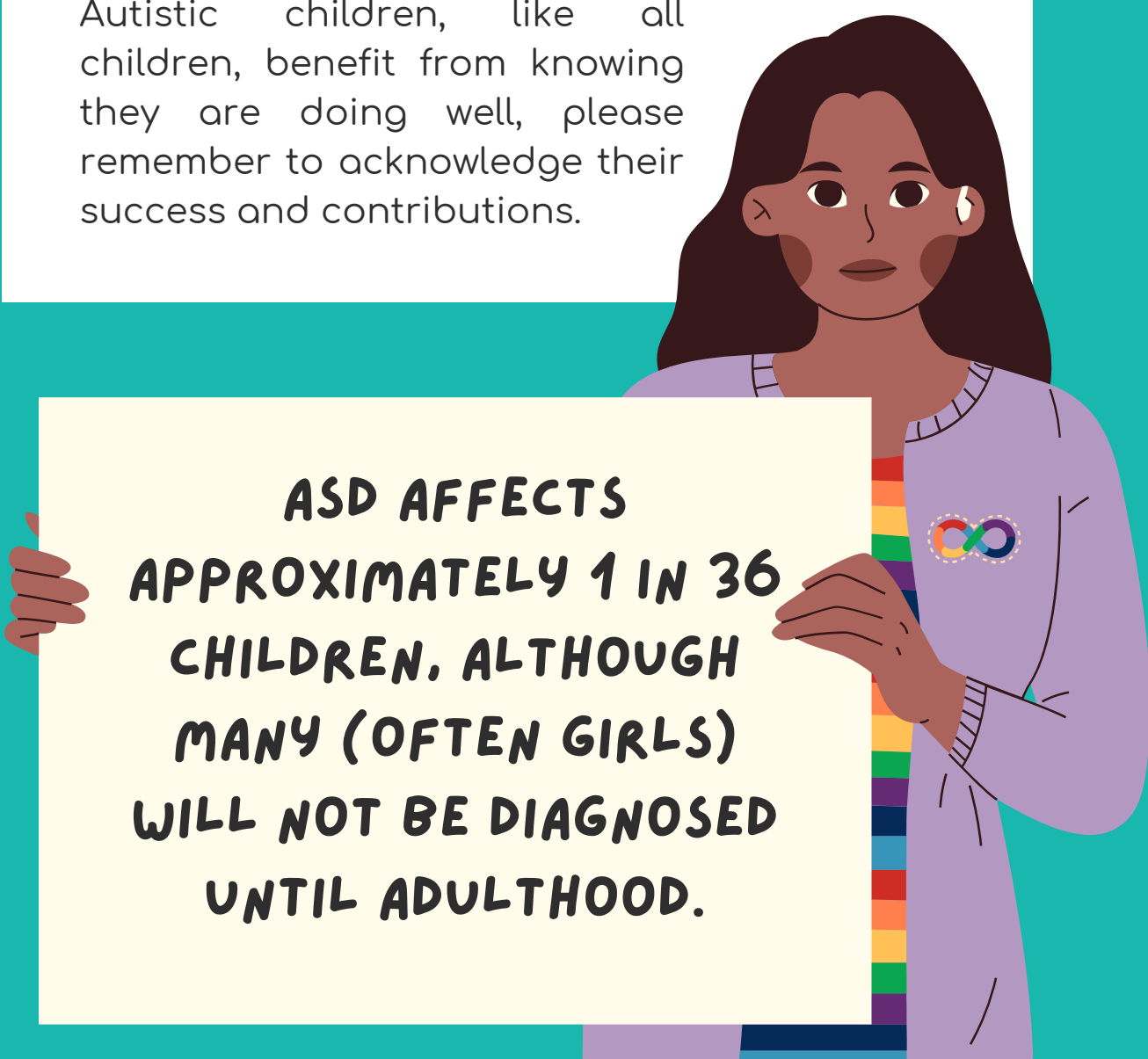
A guide to
designing
with children
and young
people on the
autistic
spectrum



At Dream Networks we want our workshops to be a safe and engaging environment for all. We recognise that each child has their own unique interests, preferences, fears, and needs.

Below are some tips to help you work with children with autism. Please read them and let empathy guide you into supporting them to design and thrive.

Autistic children, like all children, benefit from knowing they are doing well, please remember to acknowledge their success and contributions.



**ASD AFFECTS
APPROXIMATELY 1 IN 36
CHILDREN, ALTHOUGH
MANY (OFTEN GIRLS)
WILL NOT BE DIAGNOSED
UNTIL ADULTHOOD.**

Here are 12 strategies to help you create workshops that are engaging and beneficial for the autistic children and all children:



1

SENSORY CONSIDERATIONS

Many autistic individuals may experience sensory overstimulation. They are wide-ranging, one child could be hyper-sensitive to sound whereas another might be hypo-sensitive (under-responsive). It's important to take time out to understand the individual sensory needs of the children you are working with. Checking in with teachers beforehand is an excellent way to understand sensory accommodations ahead of time.

2

SENSORY ENGAGEMENT

Providing a variety of sensory experiences can help you to understand the needs of the children you are working with and work towards creating an environment where they feel comfortable and able to engage. Many SEN children may carry sensory or fidget toys to engage or self-soothe with.

3

AVOID OVER-STIMULATION

Create a sensory-friendly environment that works to minimise the likelihood of children who have hyper-sensitive needs by being overly stimulated. For example, minimize bright lights, loud noises, and strong smells. Provide sensory tools like fidget toys or weighted blankets that can help regulate sensory input. Take extra time for students to engage with the tactile elements of the sessions.



REMEMBER, NOT ALL
AUTISTIC PEOPLE HAVE THE
SAME NEURODIVERSITY
TRAITS.

EVERYONE IS UNIQUE!



4

STRUCTURED AND PREDICTABLE SCHEDULE

Autistic individuals often benefit from clear, structured schedules. Outline the workshop activities in advance and use visual schedules or timers to help participants understand what to expect. Continually checking in at what stage you are at now in the workshop may help students understand the session more.

5

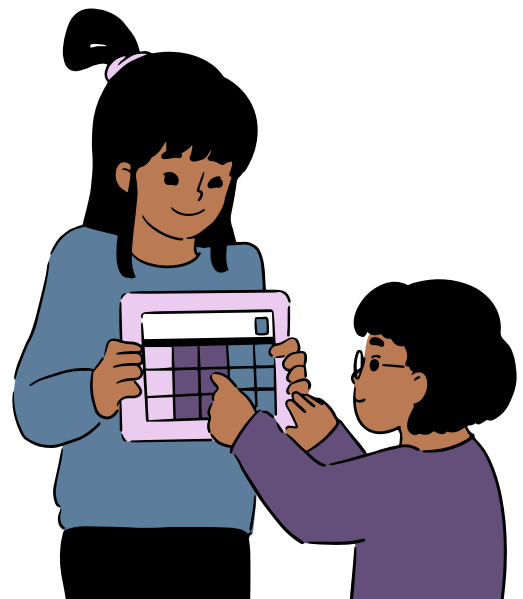
CLEAR COMMUNICATION


Use clear and concise language when giving instructions. Avoid idioms or ambiguous phrases that can confuse people. Try to avoid presuming which language students may be familiar with.

6

PROVIDE SUPPORT

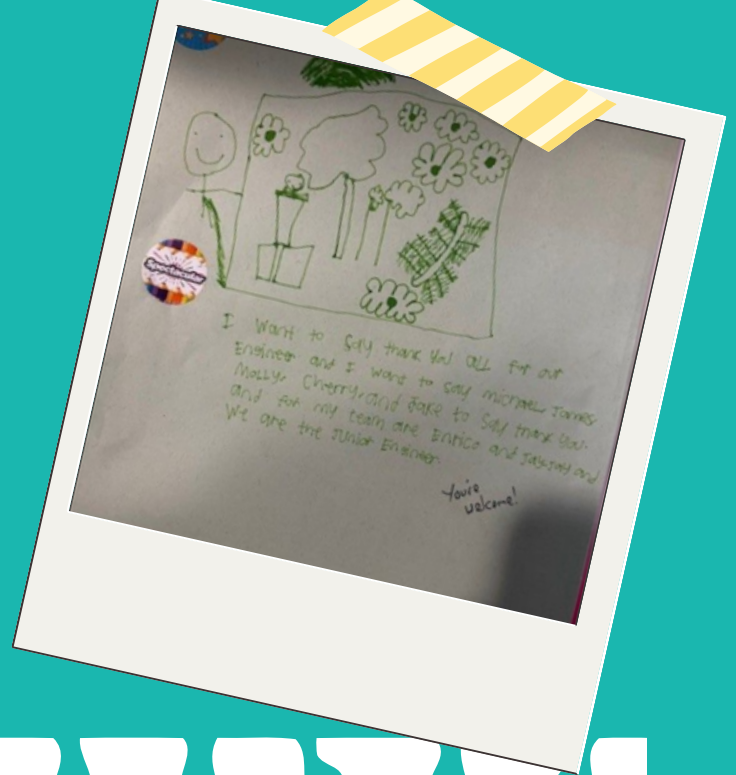
use pictures or written instructions to supplement verbal communication. Getting students to confirm back to you instructions or what they have just learnt may be helpful



An illustration of a man with dark skin, a full black beard, and black hair. He is wearing an orange collared shirt, a black tie, and a black vest with orange trim. On the vest, there is a circular patch with a rainbow background and a white infinity symbol. He is holding a white rectangular sign with his right hand and pointing at it with his left index finger. The background is a solid teal color.

**BOYS ARE FAR MORE
LIKELY TO RECEIVE A
NEURODIVERSITY
DIAGNOSIS. FOR
EVERY GIRL
DIAGNOSED, BETWEEN
2 - 16 BOYS RECEIVE
DIAGNOSIS!**

CASE STUDY: GLEBE



Stanley is a 6th-form student who took part in Dream Network's Playful Engineers project.

Stanley is autistic and took part in this project at his school Glebe in Bromley as well as at the Greener and Cleaner hub at the Glades shopping center.

Within these workshops, Stanley worked with classmates and workshop facilitators to learn more about engineering and design a rain garden for his school.

Through consistent engagement, building connection with the facilitators and encouraging praise, Stanley was able to enthusiastically participate and learn from others around him!

CASE STUDY: RYE OAK



Rye Oak is a mainstream primary school in Peckham, the year 5 class that took part had multiple SEN students.

The class took part in our playful engineers project over the course of 5 weeks.

Children worked creatively and collaboratively to design solar panels for their school.

Working with children with varying access needs, such as neurodiverse and neuro typical students requires a deeper understanding of how students interact . Liaising with teachers or occupational therapist to gain a greater understanding of the children's needs and preferences can really help you curate a more welcoming and engaging environment to design in. It can also help you know what kind of stimulations to avoid and what sensory options to provide.

7 PROVIDE CHOICE

Offer choices within the workshop activities to give participants a sense of control and to cater for different ways of engaging. This could include choices of activities, materials, or how to participate (e.g, individually or in a group). Allowing extra time for different people's accommodations can be helpful.

8 BREAK TASKS INTO MANAGEABLE STEPS

Break down complex tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. Provide guidance and support as needed to help participants complete each step successfully. Offering reassurance can help children understand what part of the session they are focusing on

9 INCORPORATE SPECIAL INTERESTS

Many autistic individuals have strong interests in specific topics. Incorporate these interests into the workshop activities to increase engagement, creativity and motivation.



**I LIKED MAKING MODELS FOR
MY RAIN GARDEN AND
LISTENING TO THE ENGINEERS.
EVERY WEEK BEING MORE
CONFIDENT!**

- Sophie, 16yr old girl with
autism, Glebe school



10

ENCOURAGE SOCIAL INTERACTION

Provide opportunities for social interaction, but also respect the individuals need for space and alone time. Use structured activities that facilitate social skills practice, such as role-playing or group problem-solving tasks.



11

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

Identify and build on the strengths of each participant. Design activities that allow them to showcase their talents and skills. Provide time to for people to engross themselves in what they find interesting. **How can you incorporate skills students already have?**

12

PROVIDE SUPPORTIVE FEEDBACK

Offer positive and constructive feedback that is specific and meaningful. It doesn't matter if you view the achievement as "small" it is worthy of highlighting



**HOW CAN YOU REFLECT AFTER
YOUR FIRST SESSION TO
FURTHER TAILOR YOUR
WORKSHOPS TO THE YOUNG
PEOPLES PREFERENCES AND
NEEDS?**

NEED MORE HELP CO-DESIGNING INCLUSIVELY?



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Consultation!

