



**The Grove**  
**FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT STATEMENT**

Circulated for Consultation		
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## INTRODUCTION

This document is a statement of approaches to address Flexibility of Thought when working with students on the autistic spectrum. This should be read in conjunction with the Teaching and Learning Policy, The Curriculum Policy, Assessment Policy and Behaviour Policy. It identifies our aims, objectives and strategies used.

***RATIONALE Flexibility of thought..... “allows us to understand and predict other people's behaviour, make sense of abstract ideas, and to imagine situations outside our immediate daily routine” (N.A.S. 2008).***

We recognise that autistic students have difficulty with flexibility of thought. This fundamental component of the DSM-5 diagnostic assessment or, as Wing (1996) refers to as “Triad of Impairment” implies that students with autism have difficulty in their development of play and social imagination. Often they do not easily grasp that other people have thoughts and emotions of their own or understand these.

Difficulties with flexibility of thought can manifest itself in obsessive, repetitive routines and behaviours. People with autism 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 that person’s daily life, safety or education. We would seek to modify the behaviours necessary to the individual.

Autistic students may have an impaired 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 may become impaired.

Difficulties with flexibility of thought mean that autistic students may find it hard to:

- Understand and interpret other people's thoughts, emotions and actions
- Predict what will happen next, or what could happen next
- Plan for outcomes and consequences
- Recognise the impact of actions, immediate or in the future
- Understand the concept of danger
- Engage in imaginative play and activities: people 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-task
- Make informed decisions 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 ( lining up objects, pacing, repetitive questioning or activities etc)
- An inability to regulate empathy 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
- Reliance on routines and familiarity
- Resistant to change (desire to preserve sameness)
- Poor self and organisational skills
- Difficulties managing unstructured times and transitions
- Limited imitation skills
- Lack of imagination and original thought.
- Rigid perspective on events
- Poor negotiation skills
- Poor self-esteem

Change is a contributing factor to causing anxiety. A person with autism can find any kind of change difficult however significant or insignificant it appears to others. This is often because they do not understand the change or they are unable to predict the outcome of that change. subsequently, this causes fear or anxiety.

There are many changes that require 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 transitions (moving within a small space such as classroom)
- Macro transitions (moving from one place to another such as bus to the classroom)
- Crisis management,
- Environmental changes,
- Change to structure and routine
- Community outings
- Changing boundaries and expectation from others
- Changing behaviours of others

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

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 exclusive list and we will always seek new and other ways to meet individual needs.

## **DAILY PRACTICE**

- Alternative and augmentative communication systems
- Daily timetables and schedules
- Individual schedules
- Choice making boards / choosing time
- First and then boards
- Offering limited choices (this or that)
- Sabotaging events (to encourage problem solving and seeking / accepting alternatives)
- Teaching across different settings to encourage generalisation skills

- Teaching to “ask for help” (Help cards)
- Teaching to “request a break”, identifying time out, promoting self regulatory behaviour
- Teaching to a “surprise” on the timetable (pre planned changes)
- individualised behaviour techniques and management strategies (see behaviour policy)
- Opportunities to negotiate throughout the day (let’s make a deal / token boards)
- Building sensory activities into the daily routine to reduce anxiety (e.g. exercise and circuits)
- Teaching Finished . (Effective transitions between activities is embedded into daily routines so that unexpected change can be managed)
- Social stories (where relevant)
- Social skills teaching and groups (We are using Alex Kelly’s talkabout series)
- Setting clear and consistent boundaries for the behaviour (limiting frequency of objects / time or place)
- Exploring alternative, more appropriate activities that have the same function as the repetitive behaviour.
- Using ‘special interests’ 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 our autistic learners. 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 a reward or socially). The idea is around helping our learners recognise they can engage in something that is enjoyable and satisfying and that someone else may share an interest in too.

## **PLANNING AND RECORDING**

- Annual review and person centered review targets
- PLP targets may address the difficulty with flexibility of thought.
- Planning includes acknowledgement of learning of flexible thinking
- Transition plans for students during admissions or class changes
- Pen portraits

- Positive Behaviour Support Plans
- Sensory Activities
- Assessment within SCERTS framework will address flexible thinking
- Thinking and problem solving curriculum
- Lego Therapy, Verve Therapy, smiLE Therapy and other named therapies

## **RESOURCES**

Staff should consider the age appropriateness and socially acceptable use of resources which reflect the environment the student is working in. For example: a student using a large schedule board at school may work towards using a key ring sized schedule for when they begin college.

## **MONITORING**

We ensure that opportunities for developing flexible thinking, choice making and problem solving are pursued and evaluated. This is done through;

- Annual reviews
- Pupil Progress Meetings
- Classroom Observations
- Monitoring and assessment (particularly within the life skills framework)
- Monitoring Communication Systems
- Quality Assurance Processes
- Social Skills Groups
- Liaison with Multidisciplinary Teams
- Liaison with Parents, Carers and Pastoral team

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

It is the responsibility of ALL staff members to take account of every student's flexible thinking and adapt the strategies, environment and transactional supports to ensure the learning and learning experiences are accessible to the student at all time. Staff should NEVER make assumptions about what they "think" a student should understand, or 'hoe' they should respond, rather they should always ensure the information is presented to the student in a meaningful way which helps them make sense and have independent choice and decision making.

Flexible thinking may manifest in socially inappropriate behaviour, anxiety or challenging behaviours and this should be reflected on a student's positive behaviour support plan. As part of daily practice and whole school approach to flexible thinking, staff should constantly reflect and ask themselves questions such as;

- What do I need to put in place to support flexible thinking?
- How can I put something in place to support flexible thinking?
- Why do I need to put something in place to support flexible thinking?
- Do I need to seek advice from a colleague or the SaLT to support flexible thinking?

## **LINKS**

Flexibility of thought links to all areas of learning across all areas of the curriculum and supports policies such as;

- Behaviour and Physical Intervention Policy
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- PSHE Policy & Sensory Statement
- Transition policy
- Autism Handbook

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

In all areas of learning, staff are committed to promoting equal opportunities and access to all our students irrespective of their difficulties, cultures, backgrounds, ethnicity, gender or difference. In every aspect we seek to ensure our students are supported through appropriate strategies and resources to access a broad and balanced curriculum and learning experiences relative to their needs and aspirations

