

Passive Playgrounds/Lunchtime Clubs

Many schools have introduced Lunchtime Clubs and had great success.

Playgrounds are unstructured, unpredictable places where children with ASD struggle to follow and join in the numerous social interactions surrounding them. Children with ASD frequently return to class from the playground in a high state of anxiety. In addition, their self-esteem frequently takes a battering. Up to 70% of children experience bullying. In our book *Developing Social Skills*, co-author Gay von Ess and I have lots of practical ideas and strategies to support social skills.

10 Top Tips to Support Children in Playground

1. Observe and then teach current playground language to children with ASD. Remember to revisit this every term as games and language changes rapidly in playgrounds.
2. Ensure that children with ASD and their parents are aware of the current playground games and activities. Allocate a staff member to teach the rules to the child with ASD so that he/she only has to concentrate on the social aspects of the game as he/she already knows the rules.
3. Offer supervised activities on the playground; e.g. ball games with a few children, 'What's the Time Mr Wolf?'
4. Give child with ASD a map of in-bounds and out-of-bounds areas. The child could then colour the appropriate areas green and red. If play equipment has set days make sure you write the days on the map.
5. Have games equipment available for loan at break times – the child with ASD can assist in giving this out.
6. Have a basket of books available on the playground for children to read while outside.
7. Create a quiet area (no games, no play, just an escape). Use a portable schedule to create a routine of what activities they will do in the playground and for how long.
8. Create a Playtime Plan. The plan provides children with ASD the structure that they need to organise themselves before going out onto the playground. This can be adapted for weekends and holidays too!
9. Support social skills with Social Stories/Scripts, e.g. "Can I Play Please", "What to do if children say NO". (Great range available in *How to Stop Your Words from Bumping*, and *Developing Social Skills*.)
10. Provide the children with key rings of laminated visuals of activities they can do during recess and lunch-times. Having the visuals (climbing equipment, sand-pit, library, computer, lab, etc) will remind the children of their options.

Excerpt from Developing Social Skills by Sue Larkey and Gay von Ess (Pg 58).

Top Tips for Creating Successful Lunchtime Clubs

1. Use students' current interests and create clubs around these, or skills the students need.
2. Consider setting up for students who are not coping in the playground or constantly having incidents.
3. Name the Club: 'The World of Fun', 'Lunchtime Club', 'DS Club', 'Passive Playground', 'Rest and Relaxation', 'Sensory Room', 'Games Group', 'The Friendship Stop'.
4. Have set open days each week. This can be from 1-5 days.
5. Decide on number of students who can attend.
6. Decide HOW students join the Club i.e. Self-selected, teacher selected, bring a friend, open door or teachers identified on the day who would benefit from the programme.
7. Include a range of activities and provide variety e.g. music, board games, Lego, cards, chess, computer, jigsaws, art, drawing, colouring, craft, Origami, DS games (locked in cupboard before school and collected at end of day), garden group, watering group, relaxation, sensory room, Nintendo Wii, interactive whiteboard, iPads, aviary with seating and trees, exercise bike, mini trampoline, cooking and more.
8. Staffing/Supervision – be clear about supervision by staff. Some schools have peer programmes set up where older students supervise. All the schools who used peer support report a tremendous response from students wanting to be involved in the programme.

As one teacher reported "Anxiety is greatly reduced and he comes back into the classroom so calm and happy".

Passive Playgrounds

Passive Playgrounds are another option to Lunchtime Clubs. Passive Playgrounds are a great way to support students with social skills and social engagement. They are a classroom that is open with table top activities, board games, etc where students can go for quiet socialisation.



I am thrilled to hear how many schools have now got 'Buddy Benches' and being used with great success (read more on my Facebook page).

Top Social Skills Resource for Primary

Developing Social Skills: By Sue Larkey and Gay von Ess

A starting point for teaching and encouraging social interactions and skills for children with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental delays. It is a useful concrete and visual resource which when coupled with videoing, role playing and modelling will help young primary school age children with autism spectrum disorder to better understand the social world around them. This book includes hundreds of ideas, social stories and worksheets. It is a great resource full of time savers for home and school.

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