



Autisme Espoir Vers l'École

www.autisme-espoir.org

The Triple 'I' Programme

Intensive - Individualised - Interactive

1. A programme developed by A.E.V.E.

- A.E.V.E. is a not-for-profits organisation (legally protected in France under the *Loi de 1901*) that was created in 2005 with a view to helping children diagnosed with autism to communicate, enabling them to be given a normal academic and social life through the use of a specially adapted educational programme. The use of an intensive, individualised and interactive learning scheme, which is based around playing games and known as the Triple 'I' Programme, enables the intended goal to be reached after an average of two years' stimulation, depending on the type of autistic characteristics that need to be dealt with. This programme is based on the latest scientific findings and tried and tested educational schemes. Compared with other programmes, it offers innovative features which come from practical experience and have been convincingly borne out by results.
- Doctors, psychologists, child psychiatrists, psychotherapists, speech and language therapists and recreation therapists have acknowledged the effectiveness of the Triple 'I' Programme. Its support team brings together representatives from medical, paramedical, scientific, academic and educational backgrounds alongside parents and voluntary assistants.
- A.E.V.E is run solely by volunteers. A group of professional psychologists and occupational therapists support the programme, helping families to follow it, periodically assessing children and overseeing the team of volunteers.

2. Where the programme comes from

- The work of two grandmothers who succeeded in enabling their grandson, who was severely autistic at two-and-a-half years old, to lead a normal social and academic life as a result of eighteen months of educational therapy inspired by tried and tested techniques from America¹, which were adapted through observation and assessment.
- The experiences and findings of parents who have successfully used this type of play-based individualised programme with their children².
- Autobiographies written by people with autism³, with their conclusions supporting the Triple 'I' Programme.
- Recent scientific discoveries⁴ which have, since 2004, seen autism classed as a neurobiological disorder which is likely to have a genetic element. Neuronal dysfunction in the brain leads to disorders that vary a great deal in type and intensity, mainly affecting perception, communication, self-image, motility and behaviour. Through intensive stimulation, however, the brain's plasticity means that missing connections or connections that were not in place in children with autism can be restored or regenerated. This is precisely the aim of the Triple 'I' Programme: the intensive play-based stimulation of a child's brain.

¹ Greenspan, Floortime, Son Rise, A.B.A, Growing Minds, etc.

² Barbara Donville ('Vaincre l'autisme' ['Overcoming Autism']), Tamara Morar ('Ma victoire sur l'autisme' ['My Victory Over Autism']), Will Clavien (founder of the Swiss organisation 'L'enjeu')

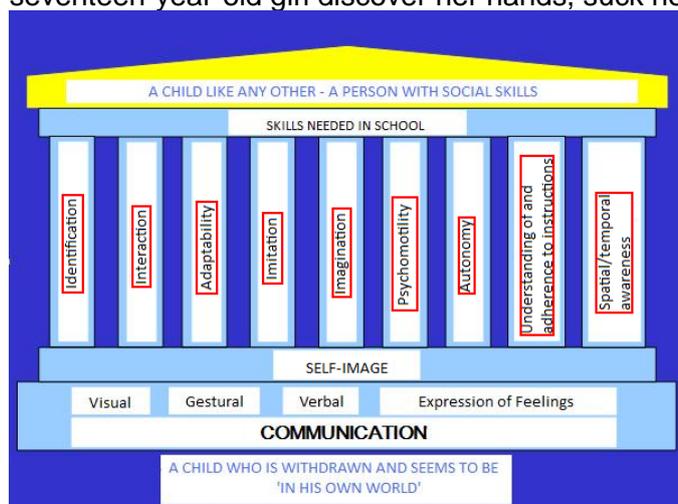
³ In particular: Temple Grandin, Gunilla Gerland, Judith and Sean Barron and Daniel Tammet. For more information, refer to the 'L'autiste par lui-même' ['Autistic People's Experiences In Their Own Words'] booklet

⁴ Particularly the work of Professors Gilbert Lelord and Catherine Barthélémy (from the Tours branch of INSERM [France's National Institute of Health and Medical Research], working on social exchange and development therapy), N. Boddaert and Monica Zilbovicius (working on cerebral imaging within the CEA [France's Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission]) and Thomas Bourgeron (Institut Pasteur – Genetics Department).

3. The principles behind and characteristics of the Triple 'I' Programme

a. A developmental programme

The programme aims to ensure that children go back through the development stages of early childhood. Assessments of all the young people monitored by A.E.V.E. confirm that poor neuronal connections between different parts of their brains that have, therefore developed independently, form an unimpaired cognition – with no intellectual disability – but with a baby's capacity for communication, self-awareness, sensory perception and, occasionally, motility. Using play-based activities to provide stimulation and surrounding children with the affection of volunteers, the Triple 'I' Programme seeks to enable people with autism, whatever their age at their development stage, to go back through all the development stages that they have missed. As a result, we have seen a child of nine ask to be bottle-fed, a twelve-year-old girl lick a mirror and play with puppets and a seventeen-year-old girl discover her hands, suck her feet and produce vocalisations.



This temple image explains the triple 'I' concept. It treats the basis of communication and self-awareness as a vital stage on which the columns – a range of life skills that children on the programme acquire naturally and without specific lessons – stand. These skills will enable children to go back to school.

The programme thus aims to rebuild a person's basic development.

b. An intensive programme

Parents establish and run an intensive programme, lasting forty hours per week (including weekends and holidays), with the assistance of around thirty volunteers. A.E.V.E. provides constant support and monitoring. The intense nature of the programme satisfies two main criteria:

- It quickly rebuilds poor neuronal connections.
- It enables children to leave their 'inner world' and stop stereotypes.

The programme's success is directly dependent on how many hours are invested in it. There are no short-cuts to achieving this.

c. An individualised programme

This learning scheme is based on the personal relationship created between a voluntary assistant and a child in one-to-one sessions, where volunteers take turns to play with an individual child in a relaxed and emotionally supportive environment. Children with autism find group situations very uncomfortable and escape from them by turning in on themselves and developing stereotypies.

d. An interactive programme

Communication and social exchange are the main goals of each play session, more so than direct learning or building up knowledge and skills that the child concerned cannot acquire at that time. For example: the aim of playing with play dough is not to teach a child how to create objects but to relax him, get his eye contact or talk about. We initially aim to enter the child's world in order to then bring him towards our own.

e. A non-directive approach: individual children lead the way

In order to stimulate the child's interest, helping him to interact as much as possible, we avoid obstacles that create an impasse. We need to ensure that the child is relaxed and can then go to the significant effort of communicating. As a result, we do not impose any limitations; we do not say 'no'. We do not instruct the child to observe any social conventions. We may let him lie down for a

whole session and copy him: this could turn into an opportunity for social exchange. We join the child in the things that interest him and his stereotypies, copying them so that they are transformed into a game, thus enabling them to be gradually eliminated and, little by little, stimulating the child's interest in the world around him.

f. A changing programme

Thus the desired aims change and grow as the programme continues, in line with the child's progress. Through each game, the assistant has a set goal that is adapted to fit the child's level and changes as he progresses.

A.E.V.E. Progress Chart		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
COMMUNICATION	Visual				
	Gestural				
	Verbal				
	Expression of feelings				
Self-image					
Identification					
Capacity for interaction and social exchange					
Adaptability					
Imitation					
Expression of feelings					
Understanding of and adherence to instructions					
Imagination and role play					
Psychomotility					
Temporal/spatial awareness					
Autonomy					
Knowledge and skills needed in school					

Progress is continually monitored and the learning scheme adapted on the basis of feedback from volunteers, who work closely with parents. A feedback session for all volunteers takes place every month.

The progress chart opposite enables the child's development to be monitored.

g. An effective and demanding programme

that remains intuitive and can be followed by anyone

- Every child progresses at his own pace, with targets that are set frequently by all assistants, under parents' supervision and with the support of A.E.V.E. All children monitored by A.E.V.E. make highly significant – sometimes extraordinary – progress. Every piece of parental feedback confirms this⁵. At present, no A.E.V.E. evidence suggests otherwise.
- The speed with which a child develops also depends on the way in which the Triple 'I' Programme is put into place and also on a family environment being maintained around the child. The programme is therefore effective if parents have faith in it and remain committed to it despite the regressive phases that it necessarily entails and provided that they do not use it alongside other programmes that contrast with or are different from it. These can agitate the child and always slow his progress.
- The programme is neither expensive nor miraculous. However it is demanding in its intensity, rigour and implication of parents and all the volunteers and professional figures involved in it as a team. A minimum of between eighteen months and two years is needed to build the foundations of the temple – restoring communication and self-image.

As a result, there are four requirements = the four absolutes:

absolutely no school, absolutely no other programmes, absolutely no forcing, absolutely no formal learning

- This programme is easy to learn. It requires no specialist training for assistants, is intuitive and natural. It is based on a thorough understanding of people with autism⁶. It can be followed by anyone who enjoys playing with children.

h. A programme with features that distinguish it from other learning schemes

- It is different from specialist programmes that focus on one area and not overall development⁷. These predominantly target language and communication, using replacement signs or pictures.

⁵ A DVD of feedback, recorded on 8th June 2006, is available on the A.E.V.E. website (www.autisme-espoir.org)

⁶ See the 'L'autiste par lui-même' ['Autistic People's Experiences In Their Own Words'] booklet.

⁷ Makaton or PECS, for example.

- It is different from behavioural programmes⁸ that use repetition or rewards for good behaviour and that make children progress mainly by the know-how.
- It is different from other, similar developmental programmes⁹ that are significantly less intensive (only a few hours each week). These are carried out in a less suitable setting than the play room and involve qualified professional figures, although the games used are more limited than those played by the volunteers, who have no expectations regarding each child.

In sum, if we reflect on the etymological meaning of autism as being synonymous with imprisonment, the Triple 'I' Programme brings with it the hope that **it is possible to overcome autism**. The programme aims to bring ALL children out of their autistic isolation, regardless of their initial level or the form of autism that they have.

4. Learning aids

a. Playing

Playing is vital to all children's development and education. Transforming the effort requested into a game is the best way of enabling a person with autism to naturally find stimulation and relieve his cerebral resources. 'Playing is learning'. Playing enables defective functions to develop. A play-based environment allows for contact with a child and interaction.

However, a child with autism cannot participate in social playing: he is upset by the intrusion of another person into his game and cannot play with someone else. People with autism use toys in stereotyped actions, rather than as playthings. They have a calming effect or stimulate one of their senses. People with autism play games that are always repetitive, simple and restricted: for example, pushing a car along in the same way for hours on end, as would a very young child of between four and nine months old. People with autism, who do not look at other people and do not understand their surroundings, do not participate in games involving copying, role play or imaginary or symbolic scenarios (putting oneself in another's place or in a different situation), whereas other children above the age of two do. They thus have to be encouraged to participate in play-based interaction by becoming relaxed.

Within the approach used in the Triple 'I' Programme, everything should be a game. Everything should be turned into a game, which means that there can be no formal learning or school. Playing enables a child to:

- develop a relationship with another person – this is vital to making the game positive.
- relax, thereby reducing the sensory distress that underpins his phobias.
- reduce and control his fear of other people, enabling communication and social exchange to take place as a result.
- learn a maximum amount, because he can achieve a great deal when relaxed.
- be able to express his emotions and feelings – joy, fear, sadness.

We thus initially place an emphasis on relaxing rather than educational games. The latter will intimidate the child even more. Relaxation is fundamental, as people with autism are upset by a fear of doing wrong and of being judged.

b. A small development room

This aims to ensure that sessions are effective, creating a secure environment in which the child can concentrate better, always able to recognise his surroundings.

- The development room should be small (between 7 and 12 m²), because large spaces cause people with autism to panic.
- All sources of distraction are removed from the room
 - Visual distractions: walls are neutral and bare, apart from a mirror and timetable, with an indirect source of electric light and opaque windows for filtering the light that attracts the child with autism.

⁸ TEACCH or A.B.A., for example.

⁹ Floortime, Social Exchange and Development Therapy (at Tours Hospital) and Brain Training, for example.

- Aural distractions: this is because the majority of people with autism are highly sensitive to sound – piercing noises, crowds and loud voices disturb them. As a result, the room is a calm area, away from noises made by family members or televisions. The floor is carpeted and covered in linoleum in order to reduce the echo made by footsteps or objects falling on the ground.
- In order for the child to be able to point – communicating through gestures – no game continually remains within his reach, apart from floor-based games (trampoline, slide etc.). All games are placed in full view on shelves with little on them. Once finished with, a game should immediately be tidied away.
- In order for the child to be as relaxed as possible, the room is fitted with games that encourage movement, increasing the child's pleasure (swinging, hopping and skipping), such as a trampoline, slide, swing or gym ball. These are key tools in unlocking communication. *Swings are VITAL in developing visual communication.*
- In order for the child to discover his own body – which he is scared of – and others' faces, a large mirror is attached to one wall.
- In order for the child to learn things that he cannot learn by himself, the games are varied, from psychomotility to logic games, role play to music.

Far from being a prison, the playroom (development room) becomes a nest to which the child becomes increasingly attached, enabling him to be born again within it. Inside this nest, the volunteers come to free him from his inner prison...

c. Help from voluntary assistants



For every child, the programme requires the help of around thirty volunteers who have prior training in the scheme, each taking turns to play with an individual child for an hour and a half per week. Neither baby-sitters nor teachers, they are loving and enthusiastic. All of them agree to follow the same programme. The unique nature of the programme is a key feature in its effectiveness and success. The assistants are vital – both for the children and their parents. This is because:

- The wide range of their talents and skills (manual, artistic, athletic, musical, imaginative, etc.) offer each child **a great variety of sources of stimulation** without being disruptive, with each day ultimately as varied as at school. This diversity ensures the programme's success.
- Exposed to a variety of assistants' faces in a calm, relaxed and emotionally positive environment, the child learns to be less scared of other people, establishing **relationships with different people** as a result. He becomes attached to his volunteers as he fully appreciates that, through the love and attention that they give him, each enables him to be born again, leaving his prison to be more like other people. They help him to learn things that he cannot learn by himself. The number of assistants never upsets him. Quite the opposite – he develops such strong emotional connections with them that if a volunteer is not present one week, the child may avoid him at the next session.
The volunteers, meanwhile, do not find this tiring: one and a half hours per week is not too heavy a burden. The sessions, always relaxed, do not wear anyone out. The assistants have no expectations other than to entertain and relax the child, who fully appreciates this.
- The assistants provide significant **moral and financial support to parents** who are faced with the challenge of a child with autism. In part, they take turns to relieve parents of the exhilarating but tiring duty of providing intensive stimulation for forty hours every week, enabling them to devote more time to themselves and their families. The first people to see the child's progress, they provide the moral support of an entire team. In addition, they ensure that the financial burden of intensive stimulation can be borne by parents, in a way that would not be possible if paid professional staff were employed.
- A.E.V.E. is responsible for **training the assistants**, through a short but comprehensive three-

hour session. This training is completed during the first two monthly feedback meetings, with continual monitoring for the duration of the programme. The programme can be followed by anyone who enjoys playing with children: **playing, love and joy are the key concepts behind it.**

- The teams of voluntary assistants can be complemented by professional figures (psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists etc.) who are trained in the programme or who observe the principles behind it.

d. A necessary educational and social break

This means limiting – as much as is possible – a child’s sources of distress and opportunities for him to return to an isolated existence. Outside the home, and particularly at school, a child with autism is scared of the world, in the same way that he is scared of faces; he is visually and aurally agitated as a result of his sensory, communicative and emotional deficiencies and, as a result, he becomes withdrawn and redoubles his repetitive and ritualised behaviour.

- Implementing the Triple ‘I’ Programme thus requires an educational break – the child is temporarily removed from school in order for him to successfully return on a gradual basis, once he is able to communicate and has reached the same level as children of his age (using home schooling where necessary, as required by the state’s education legislation). The aim is always to ensure that the child, like all other young people, is ready to benefit from the key educational and social environment that school represents as soon as possible.
- At the same time, trips outside the home are temporarily limited, except where these are strictly necessary, as they are a source of emotional distress that can disturb the child’s stability and focus. Trips to public areas and family events are consequently avoided. As long as the programme continues, the child is separated from others, in his ‘nest’ – he enjoys this because he feels safe there. The nest is neither stressful nor frustrating for him, nor does it cause him to regress. Instead, he accepts it because he is happier and can progress within it. A short daily outside visit can be scheduled in order for the child to get fresh air once he begins to be more engaged with his surroundings. A weekly or twice-weekly ‘educational’ trip outside, with just one other person and in keeping with the child’s development, can also be scheduled, but only when the child begins to leave his bubble. These trips will be of a set duration.

5. Features¹⁰

a. Let the child guide you

The child should feel comfortable, safe and not forced to participate in an interactive exchange. Behave as you would with an under twelve-month-old child: the volunteer is not seeking to teach him something but to **enjoy playing with him in order to develop a relationship with him** and keep him relaxed. The child leads the way.

The child himself chooses an activity by pointing to the game that he wants: relaxation games (swing, trampoline etc.) or a game from the shelves. If the child does not do this, the assistant will need to find out what he wants to do, offering a choice between two games. If he does not choose anything, the assistant should tactfully and enthusiastically introduce an activity that he or she enjoys or that the child enjoys, leaving the child free to participate or not. The child will probably ask for it again in a later session. Initially, he has few main interests beyond ritualised games that he is

¹⁰ A booklet on this topic, ‘Organiser le jeu’ [‘Structuring Play’], is available to parents and voluntary assistants and provides a more detailed description of the ways in which to play with a child within the Triple ‘I’ Programme.

obsessed by; use this as a starting point from which to gradually transform the ritual and develop it further¹¹. The child is sensitive to sensory stimuli (smell, touch, music, etc.).

The programme does not use any sort of learning scheme or specific plan for each session. Instead, the assistant will establish small goals during each game, always with a main aim of the child acquiring the two topics found on the 'temple steps': communication and self-image. This approach is based on working alongside the child rather than against him, avoiding creating a source of stress in forcing the child to play a game or learn particular information, or in making demands that he does not understand and which he is scared of.

As a result, 'no' is not used, the sessions are not guided in any way and no limitations or punishments are imposed. Instead, encouraging and congratulatory comments are increased. Communication demands a lot of effort for someone with autism. Roles will remain reversed until the child communicates enough for him to accept sessions that are more guided and for these to be effective.

b. Acceptance, understanding and entering the child's world

Autistic children cannot express their own feelings. As a result, we must make an effort to continually analyse and interpret any sign or expression that a child with autism produces. Everything has a meaning of some sort.

We therefore need to meet the child in his world in order to make him a partner who can gradually follow us into our own. We must be a bridge or a mediator between his world and ours.

Why? People with autism need to be safe. They each live in their own small world, made up of unconnected objects that they need to see or touch once they become uncomfortable or bored. They do not understand our world at all, seeing it as chaotic, incoherent and disturbing. They do not perceive the same sensory stimuli as we do and their poor neuronal connections do not enable them to link objects, people and events. They routinely take refuge in their own world as soon as they become scared or stressed, if they are troubled by too much noise or simply tired. They laugh alone and express themselves through repetitive gestures that are reassuring and beneficial. For a person with autism, these are reference points between his world and ours.

- **Copy all the child's repetitive actions** (stereotypes) rather than attempting to keep him from doing them. Watch him throughout, not breaking eye contact and gradually trying to turn them into a game. When someone with autism displays a stereotypy, he is in his own world. A trigger is therefore needed in order for him to 'reconnect' with reality. It is necessary to surprise him and become his partner in order to have him leave his world and enter our own.
- **Position yourself in front of the child** – take the same object that he does. For example, if he repeatedly flicks through a book without looking at any pages or pictures, take an identical book and do the same thing while watching him, verbalising your actions and transforming them into a 'game' (turning the pages increasingly quickly or, alternatively, more slowly).
- **Gain the child's attention by ignoring him:** let him perform his stereotypies without paying attention to him. After a certain amount of time, he will realise that he has been left by himself and this will gain his attention. As a result, he will return to our world to show you that he is engaged and that he wants you to pay attention to him. This is exactly the same reaction as a small child: he wants you all to himself.
- **Use his main interests – whatever they are – as a starting point**
The main interests of a child with autism are often ritualised, obsessing him. Rather than paying them no attention and saying 'What you're doing isn't good or isn't worth doing', you should use them as a starting point, accentuating them by positively acknowledging them, transforming them into a game or developing them further, subtly changing them. His main interests will gradually become broader and will, because the child is relaxed, lead to effective communication as you become his partner. If you attempt to stop his rituals and obsessive behaviour abruptly, he will go

¹¹ For example: John climbs onto the table. The assistant uses this situation as a starting point for a game – learning the distinction between 'top' and 'bottom' – and then taking the child to the slide, encouraging him to sit down, curl up, hide, look, etc.

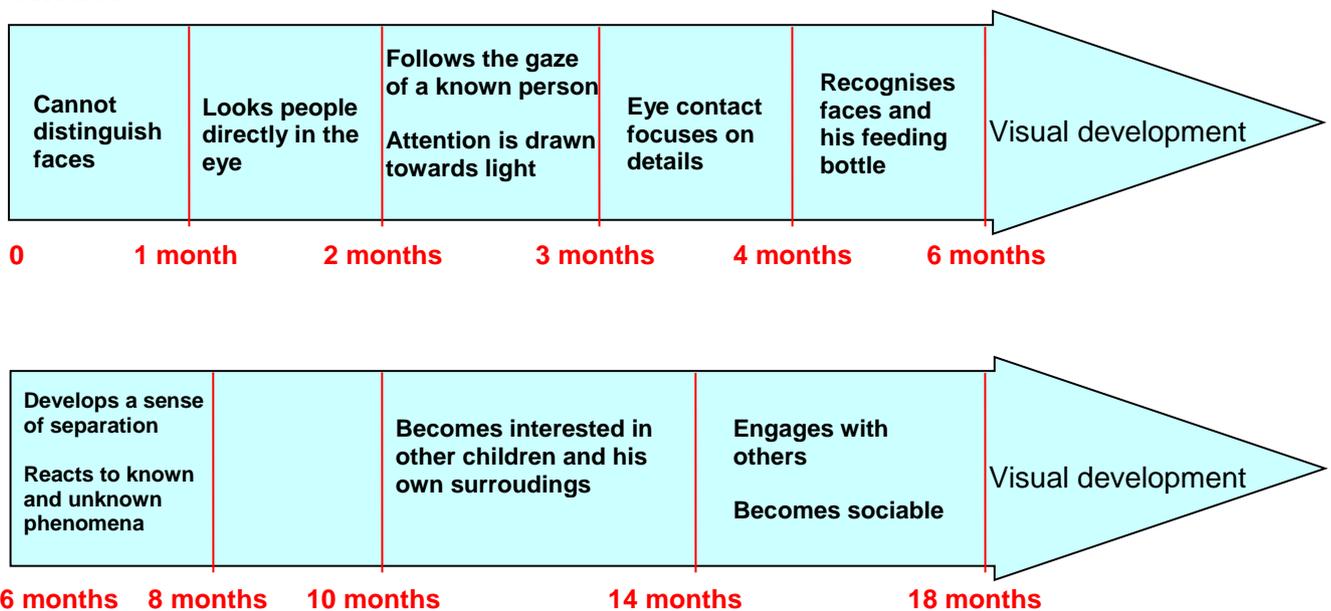
back to them even more. This can be a starting point when beginning a session or when the child has a tantrum or is tired.

- **Once social exchange starts to occur, move the child on**, developing the game. Think of variations that lead to a better game. Change the game's rules so that it does not become ritualised or an obsession. Enthusiastically show him a new game at each session. If the child does not seem to take an interest in it, suggest the game on a regular basis. One day, he will probably become interested in it.

c. Place an emphasis on all interactive games

You should make an effort to develop and maintain interaction and social exchange in any game or activity. All games are good when they generate this interaction. Avoid solitary activities such as puzzles or board games, in which the child is bound by unbreakable rules. Regularly play games like hide and seek, hunt the thimble, ball swapping, 'to me, to you', etc.

6 The aim is to go back over disrupted early years development, initially by establishing the 'base level' of the tem a. Communicating through eye contact



Eye contact and smiling represent the first form of communication for infants. They are the primary goal of the initial weeks of the programme, enabling the child to look at another person.

- **Always position yourself at the child's eye level.** This means that you need to move a lot, lying down or crouching at times. If you lose eye contact, say 'Look at me, look at my nose'. Look the child full in his face, which may require you to adopt unusual positions or move if he looks away.
- **Give the child engrossing things to do**, things that he finds interesting and enjoys. These should create a rocking or bouncing effect and be things that give the child great pleasure: a swing, slide or trampoline. He will be less scared to look at you. Do not lose eye contact throughout any of these relaxation activities.
- **Copy the child's stereotypes** by looking at him and turning them into a game; he will look at you. Rather than reinforcing his repeated actions, this lessens them, gradually making them disappear. The child then treats you as a partner within his world, and is no longer scared of looking at you. He is gradually brought into our world through eye contact (one second, then ten, then sixty...).

As soon as the child watches you, he can copy an action, then others.

- **Let the child see the mirror:** place the trampoline, gym ball or table in front of the mirror. Do not give him the impression that you want him to look. Pull faces, gesture and make noises. Place the child on your knees in front of the mirror. Put on hats.
- Place an object that the child wants at his eye level. When he takes the object, your gaze will meet his. Place a book at his eye level and act out the story.
- **Learn to clarify facial expressions** that the child with autism cannot recognise by himself, doing so as soon as he begins to look at himself and another person: smiling, laughter, joy, sadness, anger, fear, etc. You could use a mirror or play 'face bingo'; use reading material, explaining what the characters feel or what they have to say.

b. Communicating through gestures



Work out precisely what the child wants to express through his gestures. Gestures that indicate opposition (hitting, biting, pinching, etc.) show that the child is in pain or upset, although he cannot say so. Copy him unthreateningly, saying out loud that you have understood his message and that you love him. Find another activity, sing or do something else, not paying him any attention.

- **Pointing** with a finger is the first communicative gesture of a young child. It is to stimulate his interest that the games are all placed on high shelves, and never accessible directly. From the first session onwards, offer the child a choice between two games that you know that he enjoys. Always offer an alternative, limiting the selection to two or three games. Either he will refuse, which is already a form of communication, or will have to point to one. Here, you teach him to point by taking his arm and then his hand. If he resists this, start again in each session, gently touching him to gradually extend his arm. Avoid picking the child up, unless it is so that he can see the games better – never let him take them himself.
- When people with autism want something, **taking someone's hand** is a common gesture, as they cannot or are scared to ask for it. When the child takes your hand, ask him to explain what he wants.
- Encourage the child to **discover his own hands** and feet. He will use them to copy actions. Have him say goodbye, play with puppets, or play 'give and take'.
- **Gestures indicating opposition:** destroying things or knocking objects over are the first refusal gestures that people with autism use to communicate their feelings, as they cannot express themselves otherwise. As a result, these are positive signs. You should thus encourage the child

to be relaxed by using affectionate gestures and cuddles, enabling him to participate in the game by suggesting a game that he likes and that keeps him calm. Copy gestures that he makes which indicate opposition, turning them into an interactive game, laughing as you do so. For example, play a game of knocking blocks and other things over.

- Use actions alongside nursery rhymes and songs, facing the child and occasionally helping him. Pretend to be different people or in different situations.

c. Communicating through language



Language is 'the icing on the cake'.

A child usually speaks only after twelve months. As a result, you should not look for language immediately. It is often the last feature to appear.

For people with autism, language exists in the brain, behind their inner door. Language escapes only when the child reaches the fifteen-to-eighteen month stage of development and when he is relaxed. Language cannot appear when the child is stressed or upset or while he is scared of his own voice.

- **You should show that you have no expectations in this area**, no more than you would have with a child who is 6-8 months old.

Language development in people with autism goes through all the stages that a young child between nought and two years old goes through. These are shown in the chart above: babbling, understanding language heard, vocalisations with different tones used, initial word use, full words, possible quiet period followed by two words with an initial sentence structure, full sentences, questions, asking why, etc. As a result, you should avoid appearing impatient in encouraging the child to speak. RELAXATION, RELAXATION. Do not force the child to repeat words; instead, repeat his vocalisations or babbling as you would with a very young child. A certain level of maturity is needed, and the child must go through each stage.

- **Slowly verbalise everything: no silence during sessions.**

Enunciate sounds and words clearly. Speak slowly, happily and animatedly. Speak with a range of tones, use a sing-song voice rather than a monotone: 'Ahh', like an animal; 'Ooo', like water. Repeat the child's babbling and words.

- **Sing songs with simple words or say nursery rhymes.** The child will initially start to hum tunes and sing before speaking. Use picture books or bingo images once he can concentrate on a picture and has stopped repeatedly flicking through books: one picture = one word. Put the word

into another context by showing the child the actual object. Describe large pictures to him; tell him short stories about different parts of the picture.

- **Tell stories**, read books and then ask the child to tell the story himself, once he is able to do so.

d. The child's discovery and acceptance of his own body

- **Help the child to gradually discover his own face and body**

People with autism are scared of what they look like and their own faces and bodies, which they see as disordered. First, you should help the child to discover his hands and feet, as you would with a baby. Like a baby, he will also discover his face, then the faces of other people, by touch. Massaging the child will help him to feel parts of his own body that he cannot initially feel. Eventually, he will understand who he is and will recognise other people. At this point, he will be able to draw stick men or make human figures from play dough. **Drawing a stick man is a sign that the child has emerged from his bubble and recognises other people!**

- **Use the mirror**

The child will be initially scared of the mirror, will then start to lick it, touch it and look through it before agreeing to look at himself in it. This will be a gradual process. Most important is to let him recognise himself initially. Play lots of silly games, pulling faces or doing unusual things with your mouth in front of the mirror. Use funny costumes and make-up. Play games in front of the mirror (trampoline, gym ball, etc.) as well as miming things.

- **Frequently use actions alongside music, nursery rhymes and songs**

Perform actions with different parts of your body: hands, fingers, clapping your hands, etc.

- **Describe facial features and the human body using books, dolls, etc.**

7. Develop and reinforce the skills that emerge from the base level:

These skills can be developed once the child reaches the right development level and not before¹². He is neither forced to do things, nor taught.

a. Copying

Every child learns by watching other people. People with autism cannot do this if they have not recognised themselves on their own and if they do not look at other people.

Once the child develops eye contact, self-awareness and an awareness of other people, start performing a simple action that he can copy and congratulate him if he does so. Say lots of nursery rhymes, using actions that he can copy. Organise small psychomotility games, with an initial instruction that the assistant first performs an action and then the child. When he is able to do so, he will copy this. Recognise when the child performs actions from beforehand and congratulate him on this.

b. Role play

When the child is able to do so, encourage him to participate in role plays, but do not force him – this will occur at a particular point in his development. Start with a tea party or by pretending to be a doctor, mummy or daddy, a baby (with a doll at all times – even for boys!), a pilot or a fireman. Use costumes, toys, etc.

c. Imagination games

Start by imagining yourself as an animal that the child likes and have him play with the animal in his imagination. Then use someone the child knows (mummy or daddy), then other people; use costumes and mime. Take objects and give them other functions: a pencil becomes a rocket or a fence.

¹² For example, children play with their hands only after seven to nine months.

As soon as the child can understand them, read books; tell stories and fairy tales. Start telling a story and ask the child to finish it.

d. Fine motor skills

Practice stacking, pinching, pouring, painting, colouring in, drawing with chalk and using play dough before using a pencil, which the child will initially hold in the same way that a baby does. Follow his progress without forcing him to do things. One day, like every child, he will develop manual dexterity.

People with autism can learn to write in a repetitive manner but this serves no purpose: no-one gives a six-month-old baby a pencil! The child will soon grow tired and will lose confidence after exerting himself. If he stops, it is because he is tired, because it is too difficult or because he is scared of doing it on his own. It has nothing to do with laziness. As a result, you should help him at all times, holding his hand, congratulating him. Carry out relaxing activities based on a story. Do not let him see it as learning; play with him instead.

e. Gross motor and movement skills

Physical exercises are an excellent way of enabling children to relax. For the first few months of sessions, then, the majority of children want to play solely on the swing, trampoline, slide or gym ball, or perform somersaults. You should follow whatever the child chooses. Do not worry about this: using these physical games as a starting point, you can develop the child's communication and improve his self-image (for example, playing on the trampoline in front of the mirror, or playing on the swing face-to-face in order to ensure eye contact). The child will gradually be more willing to join you at the table for educational games.

While some people with autism can be very physical and relatively well coordinated, most are particularly poorly coordinated. They find kicking, bouncing, throwing and stopping a moving ball, in particular, very difficult. A number of people with autism have not gone through certain stages of motor development that a young child goes through, such as crawling. As a result, they will need to go through these stages in order to move on to other areas that make up gross motor skills. You should thus recognise the child's level of motor development as you would with a baby, offering him something to do without forcing him and return to it calmly.

Once the child is able to do so, arrange small motor control courses, using coloured track markers including balls, skittles, posts and hoops. Begin by going through the course with the child, letting him hold your hand. Use a tambourine or maracas to provide a rhythm.

f. Adapting to change

Over the course of each session, try to introduce small variations into each game or vary the games. In each case, alert the child in advance as to any change in the game, changes in the timetable or to the arrangement of the room. You must never lie to the child, as confidence is key throughout his development. Explain as you would to a very young child what will happen, even if you think that he does not understand.

Once the child has emerged slightly from his world and is engaged with his environment, arrange one-off outside trips with established aims, explaining beforehand what you are going to do and for how long. Reassure him and never take him by surprise.

g. The relationship with other children

Once the child communicates and understands his surroundings, it is good to teach him how to play with another child, preferably one who is slightly older than him and always one who understands what is happening. Initially, it is best to provide support, for example in interactive games for three people.

h. Teaching can gradually begin taking place outside, as well as at school

Once the child emerges from his bubble, having reached level four (base level and columns), he can gradually be allowed back to school, initially on a part-time basis, then for half-days, then full days. Sessions should continue for as long as necessary, however, gradually becoming fewer.

Never abruptly stop the sessions: the child will need the individual relationship from them even if he is going to school, playing sport or participating in group activities.

A good solution for children over six years old once they are able to do so is to ensure that they obtain formal education through one-to-one tuition at home (home schooling or distance learning) and then let them go back to school, straight into the right class for their age. Wait for as long as is necessary before placing the child back into a normal school with small class sizes and a welcoming atmosphere. BE PATIENT!

Requirements for a child to be able to go back to school

- **Language has been acquired**
- **Instructions are understood**
- **Listens and focuses**
- **Able to learn by himself and by copying**
- **Able to participate in group activities**
- **Has developed fine motor skills: can hold a pencil**

Benoit – back in school.



Characteristics and approach needed for a successful session

1. Be dynamic, funny and enthusiastic

Forget about any problems: avoid unhappiness and depression.

Be very expressive: keep your face, body and voice animated (change your intonation, do not use a monotone).

Move a lot, varying your actions.

2. Give praise at all times

Any progress requires a great deal of effort from someone with autism. If the child makes any progress whatsoever, clap, compliment or hug him or give him a cuddle. Do not be reluctant to exaggerate a compliment.

3. Always be affectionate

Maintain your self-control; do not get annoyed by anything. Do not tell the child off; do not impose restrictions or give out punishments; certainly never hit the child. Stay calm. Offer him the words that express what he wants to say when he has a tantrum. Change tack, moving on to something else to attract little by little his attention.

Never get upset or emotional (which is difficult) when dealing with behavioural problems, repetitive actions, shouts, screams, etc.

- **When the child performs actions** that we do not like – stereotypes or silly actions (which are always a way for the child to say something that he cannot express, such as 'I'm tired, it's too difficult, I want to stop') – slowly verbalise what he wanted to say and tell him to say it the next time. Quickly finish the activity yourself, or suggest a time limit: 'Another two minutes and we'll stop'. Offer him the opportunity to lie down, sing or rest.
- **If the child shouts or cries**, this is his only way of saying what is upsetting him. Stay calm, then, neither hugging him nor offering consolation: if he gets what he wants by crying, he will continue to shed tears rather than speaking. In a calm and easy-going manner, verbalise the reason why you think that he is crying. If he does not calm down, sit down somewhere comfortable and start playing a game that he enjoys, playing it in front of him and explaining it aloud. Alternatively, sit at the table and do something that you want to do, ignoring the child and verbalising what you are doing: 'Look, I'm writing a letter'. Another option is to suggest a time limit: 'Another five minutes and we'll open the door – keep watching the clock'.

4. Have no expectations for the session

Do not assess what you are doing during a session, even if nothing seems to be going well. Think about the progress that the child has already made. Do not have a set plan to start off with: the child will enjoy games that you like, because you will then be relaxed, and he will always choose whichever game or activity that you enjoy. Never impose anything on him, however. Tactfully and enthusiastically suggest things to the child, or use his ritualised actions and main interests as a starting point. **Any game is good once it enables communication to occur.** Turn games for one person into games for two players. A good session is one in which the child has participated in social exchanges and communicated.

5. Continually verbalise things

Speak clearly, softly, plainly and, most importantly, slowly, without using too many words, keeping the language simple. Use words to explain – out loud – what he is telling you through a tantrum, action, sign or look. For example, if he takes your hand to welcome you or to do something, tell him: 'I understand, you want to go to your play room. Tomorrow, you can say COME WITH ME'.

6. ple