Practical Support Pack:

Making Sense of Neurodivergence in Schools

A collection of practical tools, templates, top tips, checklists and strategies for busy professionals to use to support neurodivergent children.

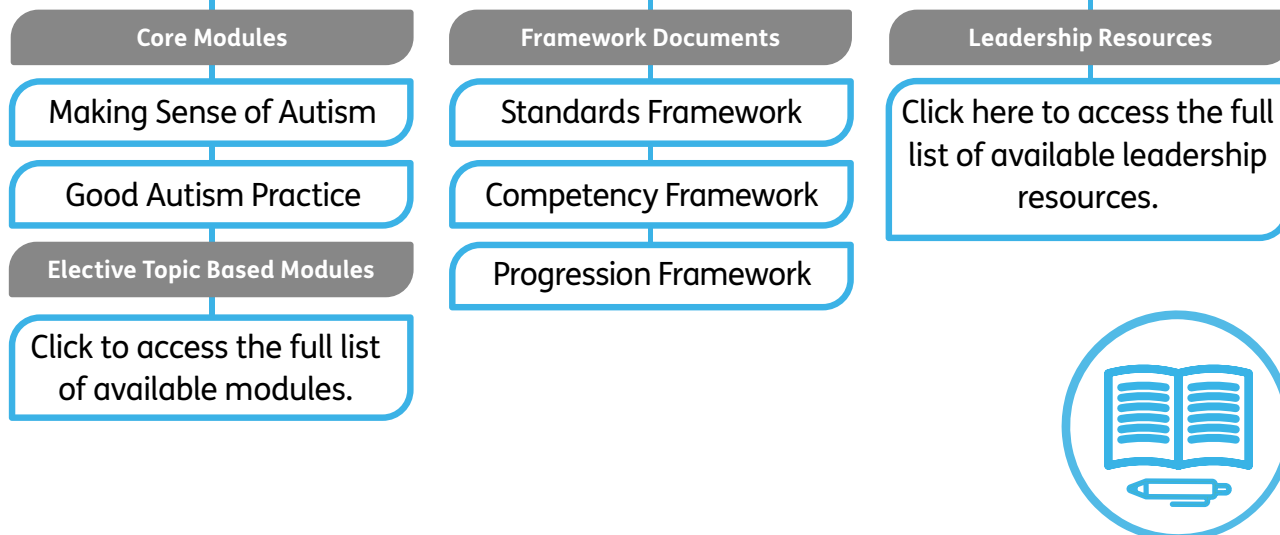**Assistive technology enabled document**

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Autistic Young Experts

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AET Schools Professional Development Programme

Schools

Core Modules
Making Sense of Autism
Good Autism Practice

Elective Topic Based Modules
Click to access the full list of available modules.

Framework Documents
Standards Framework
Competency Framework
Progression Framework

Leadership Resources
Click here to access the full list of available leadership resources.

Policy expectations

The AET Schools Professional Development Programme (PDP) enables practitioners to enhance and embed good practice and provision for neurodivergent pupils in a way that complies with statutory framework, Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2015), legal requirements and equality duties whilst also complying with the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (2019). For more information about the Schools PDP visit the AET website here: https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/schools-professional-development-programme
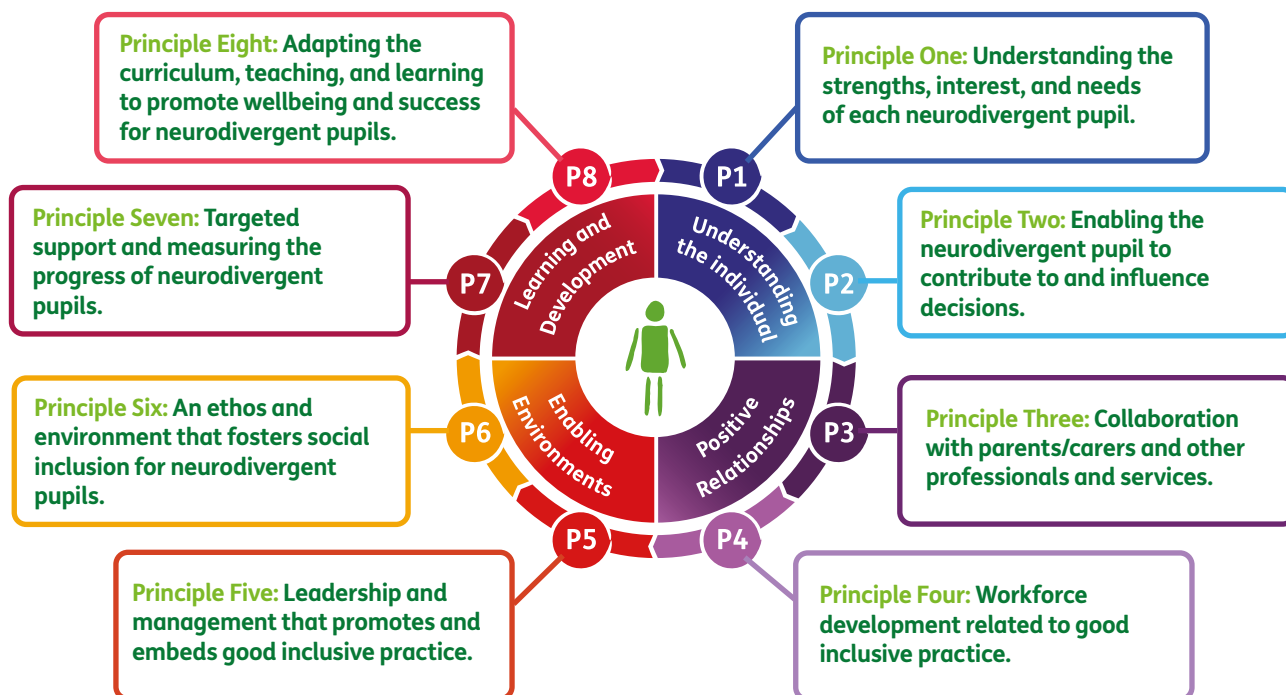
The AET professional development resources are structured around four themes:

- Understanding the individual
- Positive relationships
- Learning and development
- Enabling environments

Within the framework of those four themes, eight principles guide the development of good inclusive practice when working with neurodivergent children and their families. These eight principles emerged from an examination of the current evidence from research and practice, as well as key policies, and the perspectives and insights of autistic individuals (Guldberg et al., 2019). The reports outlining this work are available on the Autism Education Trust website. They consist of two reports: Good Autism Practice: Full Report, and the Good Autism Practice Practitioner Guide.

The AET Eight GAP Principles

This is how the Eight Principles of Good Autism Practice are embedded in the four themes. Although the Eight Principles were originally written in relation to autism, they can be applied to and support the inclusion of all neurodivergent individuals.

Principle Eight: Adapting the curriculum, teaching, and learning to promote wellbeing and success for neurodivergent pupils.

Principle One: Understanding the strengths, interest, and needs of each neurodivergent pupil.

Principle Seven: Targeted support and measuring the progress of neurodivergent pupils.

Principle Two: Enabling the neurodivergent pupil to contribute to and influence decisions.

Principle Six: An ethos and environment that fosters social inclusion for neurodivergent pupils.

Principle Three: Collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals and services.

Principle Five: Leadership and management that promotes and embeds good inclusive practice.

Principle Four: Workforce development related to good inclusive practice.

P8 · P1 · P2 · P3 · P4 · P5 · P6 · P7

Learning and Development · Understanding the individual · Positive Relationships · Enabling Environments

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The AET Eight GAP Principles

The eight GAP principles are also distilled into eight Inclusion Promises developed by the Autistic Young Experts panel. The panel created these promises so that the GAP principles were more accessible for autistic pupils. As with the Eight Principles, these promises can also apply to and support the inclusion of other neurodivergent pupils.

We promise to:

1 Understand what you are good at, what you like doing, and when you might need help.

2 Listen to and act upon your ideas about how we can help you if you need it.

3 Listen to and work with the people who know you best and who you trust.

4 Make sure we are always progressing towards your goals and aspirations.

5 Make sure all staff know the best way to support you, both in and out of lessons.

6 Help you to get involved and be included in the activities you wish to participate in.

7 Work together to set achievable goals that are important to you, and that help you see how well you are doing.

8 Help you to feel safe, secure, empowered, and able to learn.

AET Autistic Young Experts, Panel Members

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How is this Practical Support Pack intended to be used?

The Practical Support Pack contains an overview describing each tool, when it might be used and how it might be used.

The Tools are situated in the back of the Practical Support Pack.

Each tool is also provided separately, meaning it can. be used more easily and flexibly by busy professionals.

Trainers will need to share this Practical Support Pack, Tools and the Additional Activities Documents before the training session with delegates.

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Making Sense of Neurodivergence Tools

Tool 1 - One-Page Profile

One way of recording information about the child is to create a One-Page Profile (OPP). The profile has a number of headings to help identify key information about the pupil. It is important that this information is shared with all who work and support the pupil in the setting as, by understanding the needs of the pupil, they can best support their participation and development.

Tool 2 - Examples of Visual Strategies

Neurodivergent people are often visual learners and so visual strategies are often very helpful. Such strategies allow pupils to 'see' a task and promote independence as they can return to the visual cue as many times as needed.

This tool gives a number of examples of visual strategies and explains what they can be used for.

Tool 3 - Making Your Communication Clear Checklist

Social Understanding and Communication is a key area of difference for neurodivergent pupils. As such, we need to be mindful of our communication and ensure that we make necessary reasonable adjustments.

This tool offers a checklist of good practice in relation to a clear communication style. It also allows you to note any adjustments that you are making or will in future.

Tool 4 - Top Tips for Working with Parents and Carers

This information sheet provides key tips for working alongside parents and carers. Getting this relationship working well is crucial to supporting the pupil to make progress. Problem solving and planning together, good communication and providing a consistency of approach will best meet the pupil's support needs.

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Tool 5 - Environmental Checklist

It is estimated that up to 95% of autistic pupils experience sensory processing differences with between 5% to 16.5% of the general population having sensory processing differences. Our sensory processing and integration forms the foundations for our learning and development and underpins how we understand and respond to the world.

This tool offers a checklist of good practice in relation to the classroom environment, including the staff within it, and allows for the identification of areas for development.

Tool 6 - Sensory Differences Examples and Strategies

This resource outlines each of the sensory systems and provides examples of behaviours that could suggest hyper and hypo sensitivity. It also offers delegates some suggestions of strategies that can be helpful in supporting pupils.

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One-Page Profile

Neurodivergent pupils may have differences in:

- Social understanding and communication
- Information processing, flexibility and understanding
- Sensory processing and integration

A pupil's strengths and differences will vary from individual to individual. In order to meet the needs of neurodivergent pupils, it is vital to get to know them as an individual.

All staff who work with the pupil should understand both their strengths and differences and know how to support participation and learning. It is therefore useful to build a profile and ensure it is shared with relevant staff, including supply staff and any new staff.

? What is it?

The profile should summarise the key information that staff need to know in order to work with and support the pupil. It should be based on a detailed and robust assessment completed over time, and signpost any additional information staff need to be aware of. It should highlight what the pupil is good at and also any areas where they may need additional support as well as letting staff and others know what their preferred means of communication is.

🕐 When should it be used?

To encourage staff to listen to the pupil's voice through observation and discussion with those who know the pupil well.

When a new pupil starts at the setting, the key worker should begin to gather information for the profile through assessment, observation and consultation with the pupil and their parents/carers.

Profiles should be updated regularly to reflect progress and changes in support needs.

The profile should be updated ahead of any transitions to new settings so it can be shared with any new staff members who will be working with the pupil.

✓ How to use it?

You may find this profile template useful. It should be adapted to reflect the pupil, and not all headings may be relevant.

Complete with at least two members of staff who know the pupil well. Also ask parents/carers for input - they are best placed to explain their child or young person's interests, strengths, differences and support needs. Circulate to staff as appropriate.

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Examples of Visual Strategies

❓ What is it?

Visual strategies are a way of supplementing information which is supplied verbally with visual information. They can be used to accomplish a range of goals. You may use something visual to help a pupil to understand a situation, or to provide a visual prompt so a pupil can accomplish a task more independently.

Visual strategies may take a range of formats including signs, symbols, objects of reference, photographs and writing, or a combination of the above. The support needs and strengths of the individual should determine the size, format, quantity and complexity of the information being communicated.

🕐 When should it be used?

You can use visual strategies to help facilitate learning and independence in a range of ways:

- Enabling the pupil to "see" the task. The visual provided will not disappear from them as spoken instructions do.
- Giving additional time for processing information.
- Allowing pupils to process the information in their own time.
- Promoting independence by providing a visual tool to refer to in order to identify and carry out a task or stages of a task.

✅ How to use it?

Decide what support the individual pupil needs to facilitate learning and independence. Use some of the examples given in different scenarios and find out which ones work best for the pupil.

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Making Your Communication Clear Checklist

One area of difference that is explored in the Making Sense of Neurodivergence module is social understanding and communication. This impacts on how a pupil communicates and how they process and interpret what another person is trying to communicate to them, using speech, body language, tone of voice etc.

⑦ What is it?

This tool is a checklist of Good Autism Practice when communicating with a neurodivergent pupil. It is also a tool that can be used to identify any reasonable adjustments that need to be made by the adult to improve their support for the pupil. Although this tool is a checklist of Good Autism Practice, aspects of it may be useful when supporting pupils with other types of neurodivergence. Some elements will be more relevant to some pupils than others.

🕐 When should it be used?

This tool should be used by staff members working with a neurodivergent pupil to remind them of key principles when communicating with them. It can also be used by professionals as a tool to reflect and modify their practice.

⊘ How to use it?

Use this tool as a simple checklist and reflection tool. It can be used to support discussion with all staff members to make sure that there is consistency for the neurodivergent pupil.

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Top Tips for Working with Parents and Carers

⑦ What is it?

Working and building a relationship with the parents or carers of children and young people is vital to providing effective and appropriate support. For the parents or carers of a neurodivergent child or young person, it can be an unsettling time as they learn more about their child's strengths and differences and the most effective ways for them to offer support.

This tool is a summary of key points to consider when supporting parents or carers of a neurodivergent child or young person.

⏱ When should it be used?

This tool should be used as preparation for any discussion with the parent/carer of a neurodivergent child as a reminder of Good Practice to develop a relationship that will best support the child.

✓ How to use it?

This tool should be used before meeting a parent/carer of a neurodivergent child. It is also a document that sets out Good Practice when working with all parents/ carers.

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Environmental Checklist

⑦ What is it?

This tool is a checklist of questions/prompts that staff can consider in relation to the environment in which they work as well as the presentation of the staff themselves. It relates to the sensory processing and integration of the pupils they support.

🕐 When should it be used?

This tool can be used regularly by staff (termly/half termly) to audit the school environment and staff practice in consideration of the sensory processing and integration needs of the pupils they support. If a neurodivergent pupil has expressed that they are experiencing sensory differences or if this has been identified by staff supporting them, the checklist could be completed to help identify possible reasonable adjustments that might help.

⊘ How to use it?

Staff/ curriculum teams can complete the checklist by moving around the school environment or the part of it in which they are based. They can tick the statements/ questions as appropriate and identify areas for development once completed. Senior Leadership Teams could also consider completing this tool during Learning Walks of the school environment.

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Examples of Sensory Differences

? What is it?

This factsheet provides examples of hyper and hypo sensitivities that a neurodivergent child or young person may be experiencing and suggestions of strategies that can be used to them.

⧖ When should it be used?

This tool should be used to gather information about the child or young person's sensory processing needs from observation, the parents/carers and any other professionals involved. Information from this tool could be included in the One-Page Profile and used as a basis for discussing strategies that can be put into place to support the child.

⊘ How to use it?

This factsheet can be used to identify key ares of sensory differences for the child or young person and to consider strategies and support that can be put in place to minimise their distress and maximise learning opportunities.

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Take your knowledge to the next level. Explore our training modules, framework documents and resources:

- Extend your knowledge of autism with the AET Good Autism Practice training module: **www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/training-content/schools-good-autism-practice**

- Use our free competency and standards frameworks to evaluate and improve your practice: **www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/framework-documents**

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