

Drumbeat Outreach Flexibility of Thinking Policy

Introduction

Flexibility of thought is one of the areas of difficulty defined in the diagnostic criteria (DSM-V) for ASD. It relates to highly restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviours, interests and activities, including sensory processing behaviours. This impairment in flexible thinking can often lead to: a resistance to change; desire for sameness; focus on detail; adherence to routines; ritualised behaviours; difficulties with imagination and prediction and increasing levels of anxiety.

In young children this can often be seen in a style of play that tends to be repetitive, lacking in imaginative and solitary, often leading to social isolation which can in turn impact on learning and development because of the lack of experiential learning and resilience building in context. In older children and young people this inflexibility can manifest in an inability to reflect on past experiences to plan, prepare, adapt and problem solve in new situations. The consequence of this difficulty is often high anxiety levels in the young person and a desire to withdraw from new or unfamiliar situations or an overwhelming need to control them.

Aims and Objectives

Drumbeat Outreach Service aims to work with children, families and professionals in educational settings to support the needs and enhance the strengths of children and young people with flexibility of thinking difficulties.

Strategies to support flexibility of thinking

- Intensive interaction
- Parallel play

- Strategies to support transition (see transition policy and strategies)
- Visual strategies to teach play and games and support social interaction such as *waiting* and *turn taking*
- Using visual supports such as schedules, timetables (TEACCH™ style strategies) and social stories™ to support children to cope with change and unexpected events
- Using TEACCH™ strategies to create structure and meaning in environments
- Social thinking and doing activities and resources
- Visual support strategies such as Social Stories™ and social mapping to explain social context and give alternative perspectives
- CBT type strategies to develop flexible thinking and reduce the problems that arise from black and white thinking
- CBT strategies to reduce anxiety
- Develop skills that will help to understand other people's thoughts, feelings, intentions and behaviours.
- Training about communication and difficulties in ASD relating to flexible thinking e.g. tell the person what to do rather than what not to do
- Training for staff teams to recognise signs of anxiety and alleviate it with appropriate strategies for children and young people with ASD

