

# The Same Chance Playbook:

**Inclusive Activities for Autistic People with  
Down Syndrome**



# Foreword

## *Embracing Same Chance: A Collaborative Resource*

This resource embodies the united vision of AslAm and Down Syndrome Ireland, aiming to cultivate a more inclusive and empowering environment for each Autistic person with Down syndrome, or a dual identity. It stands as a testament to the combined dedication of these organisations in advocating for the rights, strengths, and unique contributions of the people who enhance our communities.

## *Practical Guidance for Engagement*

This guide was co-created to offer actionable strategies and insights for designing accessible and engaging activities that respect the distinct sensory, communication, and developmental needs of participants. By adopting a person-centred, neuroaffirmative approach, this resource aspires to motivate facilitators, educators, caregivers, and community leaders to craft programmes that promote connection, inclusion, and personal growth.

## *Our Shared Purpose*

AslAm and Down Syndrome Ireland share a commitment to:

- Champion inclusivity by designing environments where each person feels valued and empowered.
- Promote understanding by educating communities about the strengths and needs of Autistic people with Down syndrome.
- Challenge barriers that prevent full participation and engagement.
- Support families, caregivers, and professionals by providing resources that enhance their ability to create accessible spaces.

## *Acknowledgments*

The guide acknowledges contributions from the Autistic and Down syndrome communities, emphasising a commitment to diversity, Same Chance and meaningful change.

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# Introduction



Autistic people, including those with dual identity of Autism and Down syndrome enrich our community with their unique talents, perspectives, and diversity. When we design programmes or activities that respect and celebrate their distinct needs and strengths, the impact can be truly transformative.

This guide provides practical strategies for planning, setting up, and facilitating engaging and accessible activities. Our goal is to uplift and empower participants, rather than attempting to "fix" or "manage" them. By adopting a strengths-based, person-centered approach, we can create environments where everyone can flourish.

The tips and techniques shared here are meant to help you adapt activities to be inclusive of those identifying as both Autistic and having Down syndrome. However, these principles can also be applied more broadly to benefit the entire community.

The aim is to create activities that are sensory-friendly and tailored to each person's preferences and abilities, while promoting self-determination. Self-determination empowers people to make choices based on their own wants and needs. However, for Autistic people with Down syndrome, barriers such as communication challenges, overprotection, and low societal expectations can make it harder for them to exercise autonomy. This might include offering options for communication, visual aids, and sensory supports for example, providing fidget toys, setting up quiet areas for relaxation, or creating safe spaces to help regulate their nervous system. It is vital to place the individual at the heart of these experiences by actively listening to their input and allowing them to guide their participation.



# A Note About Language



AsI Am and Down Syndrome Ireland recognise that language can be a powerful and evocative way of describing ourselves and that Autistic people and people with Down Syndrome will have many different reasons for why they prefer to use one term over another.

## **Identity-First or Person First? It's Complicated!**

For example:

### **Identity first:**

- Autistic person. Down syndrome person.
- Jane is Autistic. Jane is Down syndrome.

### **Person first:**

- Person with autism, person with Down syndrome.
- Jane has autism. Jane has Down syndrome.

Many Autistic persons prefer identity-first language, such as "Autistic person," viewing their Autism as a core part of their identity. They may perceive it as a difference, a disability, or both, influenced by concepts like Neurodiversity and the Social Model of Disability. These perspectives highlight how societal structures create barriers that can hinder the inclusion and participation of Disabled persons, including those who are Autistic.

Many people with Down syndrome have a preference for person-first language such as "a person with Down syndrome". Having a very visible difference linked with a disability can lead to attitudes which focus on the disability, rather than meeting the person as a person, with their own rights, strengths, needs and preferences.

Please note that Language and what is considered best practice with regard to language will evolve over time. No matter what language you use, the most important thing is to accept a person as they are and to be open and willing to learn from a diversity of perspectives

**When addressing someone with this dual identity (e.g., Down syndrome and autism), the most neuroaffirmative approach is to:**

1. Ask the person (or their caregivers, if necessary) how they prefer to be identified.

**Personal preference should always come first.**

2. Respect both communities' preferences while blending person-first and identity-first language.

**For example:**

"A person with Down syndrome who is Autistic."

"An Autistic person with Down syndrome."

"They are an Autistic person with Down syndrome who communicates in their own unique way."



This approach acknowledges both identities in a balanced and respectful way, affirming the value of personal choice and community preferences. It's also helpful to remain flexible and open to adapting your language based on feedback.

# Understanding Autism

## What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability or difference that impacts how a person communicates, interacts with others, and experiences the world around them. It is important to understand that autism is not an illness or something to be "cured" it is a natural variation in human neurodiversity. Autistic people have unique perspectives, strengths, and challenges, and their needs may vary widely from person to person.

## Recognising Support Needs

Autism exists on a spectrum, meaning every Autistic person is unique, with diverse strengths, challenges, and support needs. Around 3.3% of the Irish population are Autistic. Many Autistic people also experience co-occurring conditions such as ADHD, anxiety, epilepsy, or intellectual disabilities, which can influence their overall profile and the kind of support they may require.

Support needs may include assistance with communication, sensory regulation, or daily living skills. Some Autistic people may need higher levels of support to navigate the environment and complete everyday tasks, while others may be more independent but still benefit from accommodations that respect their unique needs.

**Help understanding  
instructions or routines**

**Providing communication  
tools or aids.**

**Managing sensory differences or  
regulating emotions**

**Support with  
Personal Care**



"An Autistic person has a diverse profile of strengths and differences, each person's unique life journey, including challenges, successes, and relationships, further contributes to their profile of support"



## Communication Styles

Autistic people communicate in diverse ways, and it's important to respect their preferences. Some are non-speaking, while others use gestalt communication (memorised phrases or scripts). Many prefer Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools, such as Lámh, text-to-speech apps, or assistive technologies, while some favour written communication. Asking about and validating their preferred communication method is key.

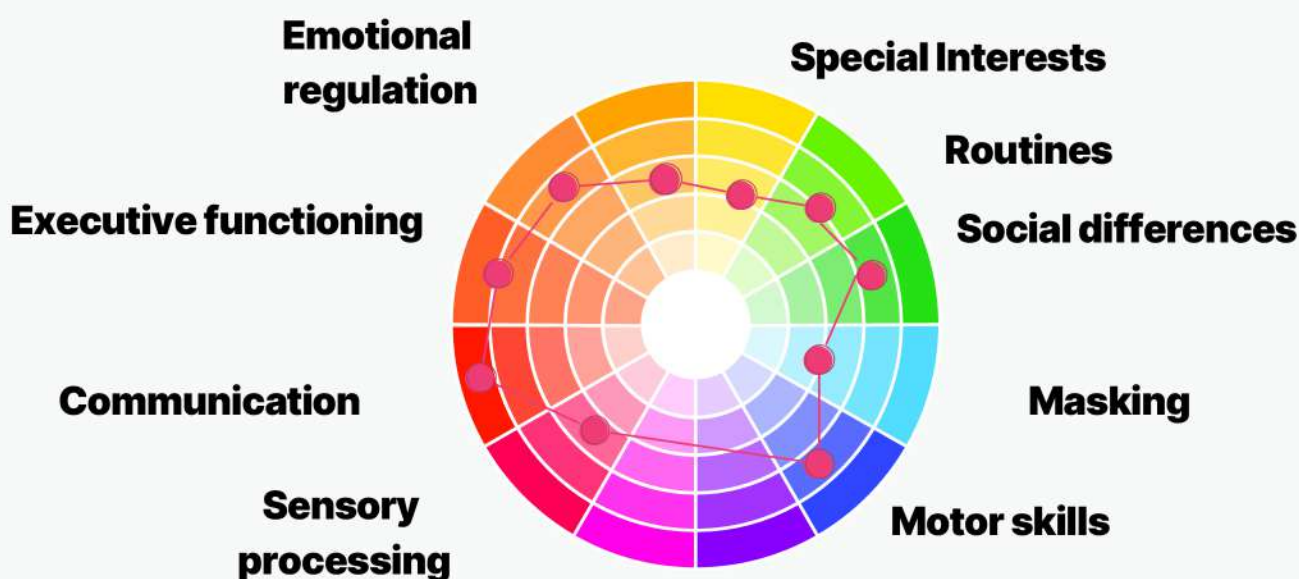
## Sensory Processing Differences

Autistic people may experience heightened or reduced sensitivity to sensory input like sounds, lights, or textures, which can impact how they engage with their environment. Creating sensory-friendly spaces, such as quiet areas or providing sensory tools, and respecting their self-regulation needs are essential to neuroaffirmative support.

## Strengths and Challenges

Autistic people bring strengths like creativity, problem-solving, and deep focus but may face challenges with social interactions, routine changes, or sensory regulation. Recognising their strengths while supporting their challenges fosters inclusion and understanding.

## Unique Profile of Strengths and Needs





# Understanding Down Syndrome

## What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome occurs following a genetic difference in the very early stages of pregnancy. People with Down syndrome have an extra copy of chromosome 21 in some or all of the cells in their bodies. For this reason, Down syndrome is a lifelong difference.

Down syndrome is a lifelong difference which increases the risk of certain health issues.

Down syndrome is associated with increased likelihood of certain health issues.

Common health issues include heart problems, arthritis, low muscle tone, sleep apnoea, vision and hearing difficulties.

People with Down syndrome have characteristic facial features and tend to be shorter in height than those without Down syndrome.

Down syndrome is also associated with intellectual disability (ID) also known as a general learning disability.

If a person has an intellectual disability, it may take them longer to learn new things. There is a broad range of abilities that fall under the term intellectual disability. Some people will need full help with every aspect of their care while others are able to complete tasks independently, particularly if familiar with them, such as travelling by bus, self-care, performing familiar duties at work.

Due to the presence of intellectual disability, language learning is also affected. There is an impact both on the person's ability to understand what is said to them and follow instructions, as well as the person's ability to use spoken language. A person with Down syndrome may often have more speech, language and communication challenges than another person with the same intellectual ability, but not Down syndrome.



People with Down syndrome will typically best understand and use 'everyday' words and be less familiar with technical terms, medical jargon and more formal language. People with Down syndrome tend to benefit from additional processing time, and visual supports to allow them to better understand what has been said and to prepare their response.

Some people with Down syndrome communicate using a combination of spoken words and Lámh (a type of sign language). Voice output communication devices are also becoming more common.

Lámh and communication devices can help both with expressing words as well as to support clarity of speech.

Be aware that the combination of health and communication challenges experienced by a person with Down syndrome, can lead to physical and mental tiredness.



# Dual Identities of Autism and Down Syndrome

Understanding shared characteristics to celebrate diversity

## Unique Social Styles

- Preference for familiar people or routines
- Creative ways of engaging socially
- Personal approaches to connection



## Communication Strengths & Needs

- Diverse methods of communication (e.g., gestures, visuals)
- Rich nonverbal expression
- Focus on meaningful interactions



## Patterned Thinking & Sensory Experiences

- Appreciation for structured routines
- Heightened sensory awareness
- Focus on specific interests or activities



# Support Strategies

When planning activities, keep in mind members who may have a dual identity. Think about how to create an environment where everyone can flourish by embracing personal strengths and preferences.



**Sensory space** - Having a vibrant, high-stimulation space can be a great support, it provides an energising environment with sensory input to engage focus and thrive when seeking stimulation.



**Quiet space** - Having a calm, low-stimulation area is a game-changer for many Autistic and neurodivergent folks. It allows space to recharge and regulate when feeling overwhelmed.



**Visual guides** - Providing photos and info in advance helps prepare us for changes and new environments. Visual supports are so helpful!



**Clear visual cues** - Knowing where the important spaces are makes a big difference. It reduces anxiety and allows us to feel in control.



**Adult support** - Having caring adults who can offer 1-on-1 assistance if needed is crucial. We may need to step away at times.



**Staggered arrivals** - Allowing us to come early and get settled makes a big difference. The world can be so overstimulating.



**Gradual sensory input** - Slowly building up sounds, lights, etc. gives our nervous systems time to adjust. Easing into things is key.



**Advance visits** - Getting to preview the space and meet the staff ahead of time is hugely beneficial. It reduces uncertainty.



**Flexibility & breaks** - Honouring our needs for rest, sensory regulation, and pacing is so important. We thrive when we can go at our own rhythm.



# Person Centred Approach

Treat each person as unique.

What works for one person may not work for another.

Build trust by getting to know people and their preferences, barriers, and comfort zones.




## Questions to Ask:

What helps when the person is feeling overwhelmed?

Do they prefer verbal instructions, visual aids, or gestures? What activities do they enjoy?

## Goals

To create an inclusive and supportive play environment for an Autistic person with Down syndrome that respects their unique needs, promotes emotional regulation, and encourages engagement through neuroaffirmative practices and a low arousal approach

<b>Emotional and Social Support</b>  	<b>Foster Positive Relationships</b> Low-pressure group activities that focus on collaboration and shared interests.	<b>Promote Emotional Awareness</b> Help people recognise and express their emotions, fostering a sense of community and understanding among peers.
<b>Flexibility</b>  	<b>Personalised Play Support</b> Align with their strengths and interests, allowing for greater ownership of their play.	<b>Multiple means of engagement</b> Provide multiple opportunities for person to demonstrate their understanding through creative means, such as art, music, or storytelling, rather than relying solely on verbal communication.
<b>Routine and Predictability</b>  	<b>Implement clear and predictable routines</b> to help person feel secure and prepared for transitions throughout their engagement in an activity.	<b>Visual Supports:</b> Use visual schedules and cues to communicate expectations and transitions, helping person navigate their play environment more comfortably.
<b>Trained Staff</b>  	<b>Understanding and insight</b> into the Autistic person's strengths, emotional regulation strategies.	How to implement a low arousal approach
<b>Environmental Design</b>  	<b>Create Calming Spaces</b> Create designated quiet areas within the play space where person can retreat when feeling overwhelmed.	<b>Minimise Sensory Overload</b> soft lighting, reduce noise levels, and keep the play space organised to create a calming atmosphere conducive to learning.

# Communication

Communication is an important topic for support staff working with Autistic people with Down syndrome; effective communication forms the foundation of providing respectful, inclusive, and empowering support.

**Always respect a persons communication style, all communication is valid and meaningful.**

## Different Ways of Communicating



## What is Communication?

One person  
shares a  
message

Shared  
understanding

One person  
receives a  
message



## Communication Strategies

Rate and Tone



Media



Body Proximity



Echolalia



GIF's/Memes



# Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC)

## Augmentative

a strategy or tool that supports or adds to speech (such as a voice amplifier to make a person's speech louder, or the use of gestures or signs alongside speech)

## Alternative

a strategy or tool that is used instead of speech (such as a speech generating device)

## Communication

a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through systems of symbols, signs, speaking, or other alternative mediums.

## Why is AAC important?

- Communication is a fundamental human right.
- AAC supports the individual's autonomy and self-expression.
- Early use of AAC supports long-term success.
- AAC tools grow with the child and can adapt to their changing needs.
- Increases receptive and expressive language skills
- Increase in spoken words
- Augments spoken words
- Reduces frustration
- Increases independence
- Enhances social interaction and connection
- Facilitates inclusion and participation

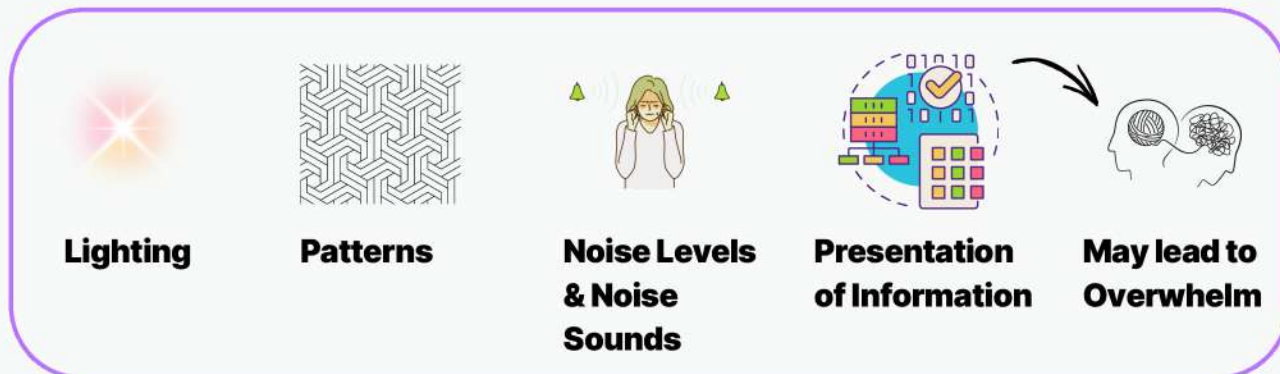


## AAC Tips

- Read your person's 'All About me' profile or communication passport.
- Make the device **easily accessible**.
- Start with **single words**.
- Get **familiar** with the device.
- Use the device **throughout the activity**.
- Think about **language functions**.



# Sensory Environment Considerations



## Potential Environmental Barriers to Accessibility



## Sensory Environment Tips

Safety cues > Danger cues = Connect

Safety cues < Danger cues = Protect



# Sensory and Communication Checklist

## 1. Sensory Support Checklist

### Environment

- Minimise background noise (e.g., turn off unnecessary devices, use sound-absorbing materials).
- Provide access to sensory-friendly spaces (e.g., quiet corners or low-stimulation rooms).
- Adjust lighting as needed (e.g., dim lights, use natural light, avoid fluorescent lighting).
- Offer sensory tools (e.g., weighted blankets, fidget toys, noise-cancelling headphones).

### Sensory Input

- Allow movement breaks to self-regulate (e.g., walking, jumping, stretching).
- Provide calming sensory activities (e.g., sensory trays, water play, textured objects).
- Recognise and address sensory aversions (e.g., certain textures, smells, or sounds).
- Provide access to preferred sensory input (e.g., rocking, swinging, or deep pressure).

### Transitions

- Use visual timers or countdowns to prepare for transitions.
- Provide clear warnings before changes in activity or environment (e.g., "In 5 minutes, we'll tidy up").
- Allow extra time to adjust to transitions.

## 2. Communication Support Checklist

### Communication Methods

- Identify and use the person's preferred communication method(s):

**Spoken words**

**Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device**

**Gestures or signed communication (e.g., Lámh)**

**Writing or drawing**

**Always Provide access to communication tools (e.g., AAC device, picture cards).**

**Encourage and validate all forms of communication (e.g., pointing, vocalisations, facial expressions).**



AAC Devices



Sign



Vocalisation



Gesture

# Practical Tips for Daily Activities

## Preparation

- Familiarise yourself with the activity schedule.
- Have activities prepared and set up in advance.
- Have communication visuals changed for exact activity.
- Familiarise yourself with 'All About Me' guide.

## During

Managing transitions effectively is crucial. Use visual cues to prepare the person, and provide a countdown before the transition occurs if required. This allows time to process the change and, if needed, to explore and become familiar with the environment before starting an activity. Encourage independent play by offering appropriate support. Parallel play can be a useful strategy to model interaction and foster engagement.

Take time to understand the person's unique communication style and adjust your approach as needed to ensure effective support.

## Instructions and Interaction

- Use clear and straightforward language.
- Break tasks into small, manageable steps.
- Combine verbal instructions with visual aids (e.g., pictures, written prompts, or demonstrations).
- Provide plenty of time for the person to process and respond after giving instructions or asking questions.
- Avoid using abstract phrases, idioms, or metaphors (e.g., say "start your homework" instead of "hit the books").

Recognise that everyone has the right to control their own body. This includes the right to consent to or refuse physical assistance. Hand-over-hand assistance often disregards the person's autonomy and can be perceived as intrusive. It should not be the default method of support.

### **Instead of automatically resorting to hand-over-hand techniques, staff should:**



**Determine if the person needs assistance** and, if so, explore alternative methods that respect their autonomy (e.g., verbal prompts, visual aids).



**Offer Choices:** Present options for engagement, allowing the person to choose how they would like to participate, which could involve varying levels of physical assistance.



**Be Flexible:** If an activity seems to cause distress or discomfort, be prepared to adapt or change course. Encourage staff to regularly check in with participants to gauge their comfort levels.



**Encourage Open Communication:** Create an environment where participants feel safe to communicate their feelings regarding support methods without fear of judgment.



**Consistency and Familiarity:** Strive to maintain consistency in staff members working with the person to build rapport. Familiar staff can better understand and respect individual preferences.



**Prioritising Well-Being Over Activity Goals:** Frame activities in a way that emphasises enjoyment and comfort.



# Sensory-Friendly Play Activities

An Autistic person with Down syndrome will often have a different way of perceiving and interpreting the world, sometimes their play will also look different and that is ok.

*There is no right or wrong way to play!*

## Sensory Exploration

This can be supported by opportunities to use materials and activities such as play dough, goop, or rice and experience different textures based on a person's sensory preferences.

Other examples include:

Water play, shadows, lighting and anything that explores our sensory environment.

## Creative Play

There are many benefits to creative play for example art activities can be soothing and regulating for sensory systems. Finger painting feels good. Collecting stickers by themes like trains or flags for example. Adding a dash of a special interest can provide engagement, predictability and safety cues from a play environment.

## Musical Experimentation

Music can help to regulate emotions for some people. Opportunities to try an instrument at their own pace i.e., shaking rhythm instruments or dancing to favourite songs burns extra energy or has a calming effect and supports regulating the nervous system.

## Outdoors

Outdoor activities refresh sensory systems. Opportunities to play with equipment such as swings, trampolines, climbing frames and engaging in gross motor play are beneficial. Walks to explore nature are a great source of regulation depending on the sensory profile of the children or adults partaking.

## Constructive Play

Building with blocks and loose parts encourages problem solving, creativity, tactile and visual exploration as children stack, sort and construct. LEGO has lots of options for special interest themes too.

## Pretend Play

Allows children and adults role play real life scenarios to practice social communication, understanding turn taking and pace of communication. Many children especially like themes from their special interests like small world characters, vehicles, animals or other preferred objects.



# Creating a Visual Guide

The AslAm visual guide is a preparatory visual tool created and shared in advance of an activity, event, group or meeting.

The aim of the AslAm visual guide is to support and empower Autistic stability by providing information and context wherever possible about an activity, event, group or meeting.

Providing information and context in a visual and text format is strengths focused, neuro-affirmative and helps to provide certainty and predictability wherever possible.

Information included in an AslAm visual guide will describe the physical, sensory and social environment in text and display it in a visual format.

It will also provide concrete, factual, literal information about what will happen in the situation, removing as much ambiguity as is possible.

The AslAm visual guide aims to acknowledge and answer **“W” questions** that an Autistic person may have about an activity, event, group or meeting.

## **“W” Questions could include:**

- When is the activity on?
- Where is the location of the event?
- Who will be at the group?
- What may I expect to happen at the meeting?
- What should I bring with me to the activity?
- What it will it be like at the event?
- What if I need a break?
- Where can I go if I need to take a break?
- Will there be a toilet available?
- Will I be able to use fidgets when I am there?



**Providing for and answering "W" questions** can help to reduce Autistic anxiety in the run up to AND during an activity, event, group or meeting.

By providing for and answering "W" questions we can also support an Autistic person's organisation and executive functioning in preparing for an activity, event, group or meeting.

Each AsIAM visual guide is unique to the particular activity, event, group or meeting it refers to and therefore **will require some customisation** whilst also staying true to the advised template and formatting.



Each page of the visual guide is a message that is answering a "W" question. Where possible and appropriate, ensure you only provide for only one or two "W" questions per page.

**Who do you contact if you need help?**

**If You Need Help**



**What way can you contact the person?**



If you get lost or need assistance - you can contact  
Lisa 087 xxx xxxx



# Club Rules

In Our Club, Everyone Belongs!



## **Be Kind and Respectful.**

Treat everyone with kindness. Use kind words and actions.



## **Everyone Communicates in Different Ways!**

Speak, sign, write, or use your device, everyone's way of communicating is welcome!



## **Ask Before Touching:**

Always ask before giving a hug, high five, or sharing someone else's things.



## **Take Breaks When You Need To.**

If you feel tired or overwhelmed, it's okay to take a break. There's a quiet or sensory space just for you!



## **Celebrate Differences.**

Everyone is unique, and that's great! Let's learn from and support each other.



## **Have Fun Together!**

Enjoy games, activities, and time with friends. Let's make this club a happy place for all!



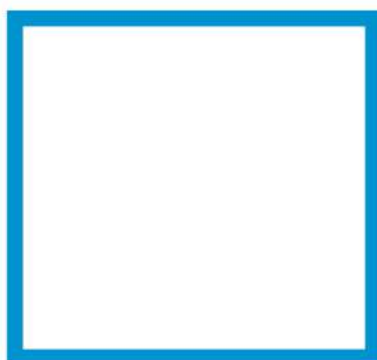
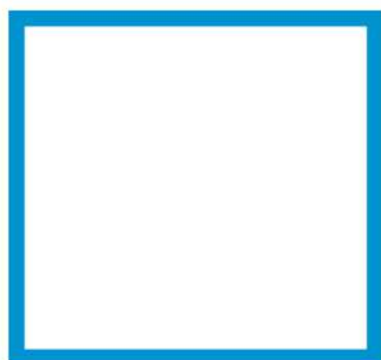
# First



# Next



# My Choices



# What are fidgets?

Fidgets can provide an easy and accessible way to help self-regulate or concentrate by providing auditory, visual and/or tactile input.

Fidget tools are employed for various reasons, including reducing anxiety, enhancing concentration, and addressing sensory needs. It's important to note that while some people find fidget tools beneficial, person preferences vary, and not everyone may benefit from or enjoy using them.

Fidget tools come in various forms and serve different purposes, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of users. Here are some common types of fidget tools:

- **Fidget Spinners**

Small, handheld devices with a central bearing that allows them to spin. Fidget spinners gained popularity for their smooth rotation and are often used as a calming tool.

- **Stress Balls**

Soft, squeezable balls designed to be repeatedly compressed and released. Stress balls can help persons release tension and promote relaxation.

- **Tactile Rings or Bands**

Wearable bands or rings that persons can manipulate with their fingers, providing a discreet way to engage in tactile stimulation.

- **Tangle Toys**

Interconnected, twistable segments that can be manipulated into various shapes. Tangle toys are often used for promoting fine motor skills and sensory stimulation.



Springs



Boinks



Sensory Stix



Koosh



Porcupine



Tangle



# Easy Setup Guide:

## Sensory Break Space



Creating a Sensory Break Space can transform your environment into a more inclusive and supportive place for people with sensory processing differences, such as Autistic people or those with Down syndrome. Here's a step-by-step guide to setting up and maintaining a sensory-friendly Break Space.

### Step 1: Choose the Right Location

- A space close to main environment
- Low traffic

### Step 2: Signage and Directions

- Place signs with simple text and symbols (e.g., a quiet/senses icons) throughout the environment to guide people to the space
- Label the room clearly
- Flip Sign: Use a two-sided door sign (e.g., "In Use" / "Available") to indicate availability.

### Step 3: Design the Space for Calm

- Movement: A rocking chair or swing chair for soothing motion. An exercise ball for bouncing on.
- Lighting: Adjustable Lighting: Use dimmer switches or blackout blinds to allow control over brightness. Add calming light sources like fairy lights.
- Tactile Comfort: Add soft, cosy items for tactile regulation. Pillows and cushions, beanbags. Sensory Toys: Provide a small selection of stimulating or sensory toys (e.g., fidget spinners, textured stress balls).
- Sound: Minimise noise and provide sound control options. Ear defenders or noise-cancelling headphones

### Step 4: Set Up Boundaries and Rules


- Respectful Use: Let users know this is a shared space and encourage them to keep it clean and calm for others
- Limit Disruptions: Ensure the area is free from interruptions by staff or other visitors unless assistance is needed.

The Space is a judgment-free zone where people can regulate, relax, and recharge. Flexibility is key: each person has unique sensory needs, so allow them to use the space in the way that works best for them.

# ALL About Me


Find out more information here <https://asiam.ie/library/all-about-me>

What is it? The 'All About Me' AsI Am document is designed to share information about an Autistic child's strengths, needs, preferences and accommodations. It may be used in education settings, childcare, community activities, or indeed, any setting where you will find it helpful. This document is not a 'behaviour support plan'.



**ALL About Me**

**Name** Jim Byrne  
**Age** 14  
**Example**  
**My favourite things are:** Swing outside  
Country western music, Doritos and Club Orange  
**I am really good at:** Swinging really high.  
Dancing, picking songs to listen to, communicating



**As I Am**  
IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

<p>✓ <b>I communicate by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AAC Device</li> <li>• Gesture</li> <li>• Movement</li> <li>• Sound (Ky Ky Ky)</li> </ul>	<p>✓ <b>For me to trust you, it helps if you..</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use positive language</li> <li>• Ensure I have access to swing</li> <li>• Ensure you don't try and hug me</li> <li>• Always be consistent with your language</li> <li>• Use clear concise language</li> </ul>	<p>✓ <b>To Learn, I need:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To know what exactly you want me to do</li> <li>• To be given time to process your instructions</li> <li>• Visual schedule of tasks</li> <li>• Ensure I have access to my speech device at all times and you use it to model language for me</li> </ul>
<p>✓ <b>If I am feeling comfortable, you will know because I will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit/stand beside you</li> <li>• Giggle and smile</li> <li>• I will hand you my AAC device for you to communicate with me</li> </ul> <p>✓ <b>If I am feeling overwhelmed, you will know because I will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say 'ky ky ky'</li> <li>• Move back and forth on my feet</li> </ul>	<p>✓ <b>If I am feeling overwhelmed, you need to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer me a break</li> <li>• Reduce your volume</li> <li>• Let me leave the space I am in</li> <li>• Ensure I have access to my music choices</li> </ul>	<p>✓ <b>If I am feeling overwhelmed, you will make it worse if you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to hug me</li> <li>• Try to sit with me</li> <li>• Talk very fast and are impatient</li> <li>• Try to tell me jokes</li> <li>• Touch me</li> </ul>

**Hi I'm**

Name:

Age:

My favourite things are:

I am really good at:-

**Photo**

✓ I communicate by...

✓ For me to trust you, it helps if you..

✓ To learn, I need:

✓ If I am feeling comfortable:

✓ If I am feeling overwhelmed, you need to:

✓ If I am feeling overwhelmed, you will make it worse if you:

If I am feeling overwhelmed,

Important Information



# Play Partner Observation

**Person's name:**

**Date:**

**Play Partners Name:**



## Highlights of the Day

- What activities did the person enjoy:



## Strengths Observed

- What did the person do well today?



## Communication

- How did the person express themselves (gestures, sounds, AAC)?



## Sensory Needs

- What sensory experiences did the person like or avoid?



## Play and Interaction

- How did the person play or interact with others?



## Special Moments

- What was a happy or proud moment today?



## Challenges and Solutions

- What was hard for the person, and how was it supported?



## Plan for Tomorrow:

- 

**Additional notes:**

# Tips for Completing a Play Partner Report

## 1. Write the Child's Name and Date

At the top of the template, write:

The child's name.

The date of the observation.

Your name (as the play partner).



## 2. What Did the Child Enjoy?

Write down activities the child liked the most.

Think about:

What made them happy or excited?

What did they choose to play with?

Example:

"Loved playing with blocks and smiled while stacking them."

"Enjoyed running outside during outdoor play."



## 3. How Did the Child Communicate?

Watch how the child shares feelings or needs.

Think about:

Did they use words, gestures, or sounds?

Did they point, show, or use a device (like AAC)?

Example:

"Pointed to the snack they wanted."

"Used a thumbs-up to show they liked the game."



## 4. What Did the Child Like or Dislike (Sensory)?

Write about what the child enjoyed or avoided with their senses.

Think about:

Sounds (e.g., music, noise).

Textures (e.g., sand, water).

Visuals (e.g., bright lights, colors).

Example:

"Liked feeling the soft playdough."

"Covered ears when it got loud."



## 5. How Did the Child Play with Others?

Write about how the child interacted with you or other kids.

Think about:

Did they play together or alone?

How did they show interest in others?

Example:

"Gave a toy to another child to share."

"Watched the group from a distance but didn't join."



## 6. Were There Any Challenges?

Write about anything the child found hard.

Think about:

Did they have trouble with transitions (e.g., moving to a new activity)?

Did they need help to calm down?

Example:

"Cried when it was time to clean up but calmed down after using a sensory toy."

"Needed extra time to leave the sandbox."

## 7. Plan for Tomorrow

Write down ideas for the next day.

Think about:

What activities can you repeat?

What can you change or support?

Example:

"Bring extra sensory toys for transitions."

"Include more outdoor play since they loved running."



### Tips for Writing Observations

Be clear: Write exactly what you saw or heard.

Stay positive: Focus on the child's strengths and successes.

Be specific: Include examples (e.g., "The child smiled and clapped" instead of "They were happy").

Keep it short: Use simple sentences or bullet points.



# Resources

## AsI Am Ireland's Autism Charity

AsI Am and Down Syndrome Ireland were proud to co-produce this resource, to access resources developed independently by AsI Am see:

<http://AsI Am.ie>

### Let's Play



### All About Me Document and Guidance



### Empowering Parents to Advocate for Supporting PDA in Schools Webinar

### Language Do's and Don'ts



### Autism and Communication Webinar

### Talking About Autism



### Gestalt Language Processing Webinar



# Resources

## Down Syndrome Ireland

AslAm and Down Syndrome Ireland were proud to co-produce this resource, to access resources developed independently by Down Syndrome Ireland see:



### **Website**

[www.downsyndrome.ie](http://www.downsyndrome.ie)

### **What is Down Syndrome?**

[downsyndrome.ie/about/what-is-down-syndrome/](http://downsyndrome.ie/about/what-is-down-syndrome/)

### **Additional Resources**



Down Syndrome Ireland  
Resource & Easy Read Library  
[downsyndrome.ie/resources/](http://downsyndrome.ie/resources/)



**support@asiam.ie**



IRELAND'S AUTISM CHARITY

**info@downsyndrome.ie**

