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Autism lens: understanding the actions of pupils on the autism spectrum

(Written by Val Jones and modified by Damian Milton)

What the pupil on the autism spectrum did	Some possible reasons for their actions which could be explored.
<p>During playtime, Ebony wanders around the periphery of the playground touching the fence panels, collecting twigs and leaves, and placing her ear to the ground.</p>	<p>Sensory seeking behaviours. Safe routine of wandering around the periphery. Her 'down time' after a stressful session in class. Special interest in nature and collects items related to this interest. Difficulty engaging with peers.</p>
<p>Sally struggles to sit still on her chair and is forever wiggling about, rocking and fiddling with whatever she can get her hands on.</p>	<p>Uncomfortable on the chair. Sensory seeking by wiggling and rocking to increase her awareness of where she is in space. Comfort or habitual behaviours. High activity levels and lack of interest in the activity. May be highly stressed about what is happening in the lesson.</p>
<p>Whenever the class changes from one lesson or topic to another, Elle runs off and hides in the corner under a table.</p>	<p>Lack of clarity over transition times from when one lesson finishes to when another is due to start. Noisy, unpredictable and busy classroom during the changeover period. Safe place to go to when the environment feels unsafe.</p>
<p>Whenever possible, and within lessons, Razi will go into a monologue about birds.</p>	<p>His special area of interest. A safe monologue that he goes into when he is having difficulty understanding the lesson or does not feel listened to. Difficulty knowing what to do instead when he should stop.</p>
<p>Caleb is usually happy and easy-going, but when he goes on work experience, he becomes uncooperative and unhappy.</p>	<p>Change of routine. Lack of or limited preparation for all the changes work experience entails. Work colleague misunderstand him. Misunderstanding the job or tasks he is meant to be carrying out. Worries about the timing of the transport to and from work experience.</p>
<p>Tom rarely does his homework and often gets in trouble for this. When he does attempt it, his work makes little sense to the teacher.</p>	<p>Instructions for homework not clear to him. Task not differentiated to suit his learning style or skills. Compartmentalisation of school is school and home is home. Wants to relax after the stressful school day and to do the things he likes doing at home. Lack of clear homework routine to follow.</p>

What the pupil on the autism spectrum did	Some possible reasons for their actions which could be explored.
<p>On some days, Hannah will climb up to the top of the climbing frame and does not want to come down.</p>	<p>She may not be clear on what she will be doing next. Avoidance of an activity she worries about. She enjoys the physical sensation and does not want this to stop.</p>
<p>After an incident, Harry runs out of school and across the road.</p>	<p>High level of distress and anxiety when things go wrong. Escape from situation. Seeking a place to be alone. Wants to get away from people who are causing him distress.</p>
<p>Kian likes going swimming. He is usually happy and giggling on the bus ride there. On one day his giggles suddenly turn to hysterical screams.</p>	<p>He hears a dog barking. The bus to swimming took a different route. Sudden onset of pain, such as stomach ache. Difficulties with communication means that he struggles to communicate his distress in other ways.</p>
<p>Sam made a good start at his secondary school, but has started to refuse to attend in the Spring Term, after the Year 7 pupils have been placed in sets.</p>	<p>The change of timetable, routine, teachers and classmates has caused him significant distress. Lack of or limited preparation for these changes. Unhappy with the sets he has been placed in. Feeling the work he now has is either too easy or too hard.</p>
<p>Whenever Alex has a supply teacher, he becomes verbally rude and is sent out of class.</p>	<p>Anxiety due to change in the usual routine. Unpredictability within the lesson of the structure created by a different teacher, or of the way this teacher might respond. He has learned that unacceptable behaviour will get him sent out to an environment that he is familiar with and feels safe in.</p>