

# A child with Autism tolerating sitting in group lessons

## Tram House 4

**ABSTRACT:** This case study focused on increasing a pupil's time in group lessons with other pupils. Group lessons enable students to tolerate and establish relationships with peers. This is important as children with autism can lack peer interaction. This involves building tolerance of other pupils sitting close by, as well as tolerating their sounds and movements. Additionally, group lessons improve tolerance to demands placed by the teacher. Such improvements in tolerance would have a knock-on effect in reducing behaviours that challenge (BTC). Group lessons also support pupils to focus for a longer period, which a lot of children with autism find difficult to do. Group lessons also promote appropriate social skills where shared attention is needed e.g., being quiet, eyes looking etc. These social skills can be generalised to certain community settings where shared attention is needed, such as the cinema and attending shows.

The study involved a 15-year-old female pupil with a diagnosis of autism, who is an advanced learner. However, she had a lot of barriers blocking her learning, involving initially not tolerating others near her, the refusal to come off the computer or iPad, and the refusal to transition around school. These antecedents could evoke high intensity BTC. Reasons for BTC involved not wanting time away from the iPad/computer, or interrupting time on iPad/computer. They would also sign for people who come near her to 'go' as she is conscious of other student's behaviour that may challenge. She also did not want other tutors to interrupt her time on the iPad. Her main form of communication is Makaton Sign Language due to being non-vocal, yet she knows how to spell, and her signing is quickly expanding. It was clear that the pupil would benefit from group lessons due to being an advanced learner, therefore, the aim was for the pupil to sit in groups, despite clear barriers to her learning and peer interaction.

In Autumn term 2021, the pupil tolerated some transitions around school and was able to sit 1:1 with a teacher for up to 1 minute. In the Summer term 2022, she is now able to sit in group among peers for up to 23 minutes, following instructions placed by the teacher.

### Literature Review

Previous research has shown pairing is needed for a teacher to successfully place demands (instructions) on children with autism. Esposito et al. (2021) found positive reinforcers such as specific preferred toys to be associated to free play time and feelings of fun.

### Method

The pupil's favourite toy was used (pink stuffed flamingo) by the teacher to build a

relationship. The flamingo was also used in the teacher's classroom for her to also be paired with the classroom environment. Sitting with the teacher 1:1 was started at 30 seconds.

The time sitting with a teacher increased to 1 minute after 3 successful consecutive trials of sitting with the teacher for 30 seconds. The time then increased minute by minute, while fading in demands, after every 3 successful consecutive trials. After 5 minutes was achieved of teaching 1:1, she started to sit in a lesson with peers for 4 minutes. This time sitting with peers was then gradually increased minute by minute until she was able to sit for the whole group time length.

A timer was used for the pupil to look at during the lesson before she could leave. If she wanted to leave earlier than the timer, the teacher would point and remind her the time left before she could leave. The timer would also get paused if she was non-compliant to the teacher's instructions. However, after 10 minutes was achieved sitting in group, the timer was removed, for her to start focusing more on the lesson and not the timer.

### Results

The pupil had the initial target of 1:1 attendance with Teacher A and then to remain in the group lesson for 30 seconds. After mastering this target, the mastery criteria were increased in increments of 2 and 3 minutes. The target of attending the group lesson for 10 minutes then attending the full group session became mastered. Implementation of using the most preferred reinforcing item to build the pupil-teacher relationship, as well as pairing with the classroom environment, was effective.

Pairing with Teacher A was more effective than with Teacher B. The pupil's 2 current targets have been differentiated to improve on targeted skills as her focus is varied between the 2 classrooms/teachers. Please look at figure 1 for reference.

Initially increasing the duration of the group target correlated with an increase in the frequency of daily BTC episodes and daily BTC durations, both generally and under the 'demand away' antecedent. The frequency and duration of BTC episodes had then generally decreased. This can be seen in figure 3. However, as seen in figure 2, the student's BTC episodes decreased greatly in the summer term.

### Discussion and conclusion

What have we learnt?

The technique of 'pairing' to an environment and to a person is essential for an autistic pupil to overcome behavioural barriers. It is important for a child with autism to establish a good relationship with their teacher/ tutor to allow instructional control. An initial positive experience in a certain environment can increase the likelihood that a child with autism will feel more comfortable in a different environment.

It was also learnt that the timer was starting to become aversive to the pupil due to being associated with work. The student was also becoming obsessive over the timer as she would stare at the timer instead of the teacher and smartboard. Therefore, removing the timer allowed her to focus on group to be more successful.

*Where should we go next to improve outcomes/ make progress?*

This pupil has made immense progress, yet she still struggles in group. There are instances of her asking to 'go' a couple of times towards the end of a session. She can still become disengaged at times, needing a little bit of motivation to follow demands, especially in going up to the board. Therefore, this pupil is currently working on improving her latency time where she responds to the teacher's instruction quicker. Another target focusses on keeping her head up with Teacher B, tackling non- engagement a bit more due to being less paired. However, non-engagement has been an ongoing barrier and the pupil has come a long way tackling this barrier.

*Anything outstanding to highlight?*

It is outstanding to see this pupil to be sitting close and interacting with her peers, helping peers to answer questions.

*What does this progress mean for the learner?*

Such progress would allow the pupil to be more confident in her social skills with others she may not be extremely paired with. This progress is also a start in the student learning appropriate behaviour where shared attention is needed in the community e.g. the cinema. The decrease in BTC also mean she can access the community more frequently, allowing her more opportunities to discover what she likes.

| Target Skill  | Date Mastered |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1 minute      | 25.05.21      |
| 5 minutes     | 20.01.22      |
| 8 minutes     | 03.03.22      |
| 10minutes     | 25.03.22      |
| Matt's group  | 09.05.22      |
| Amber's group | 09.05.22      |

Figure 1. Table of time achieved sitting in group

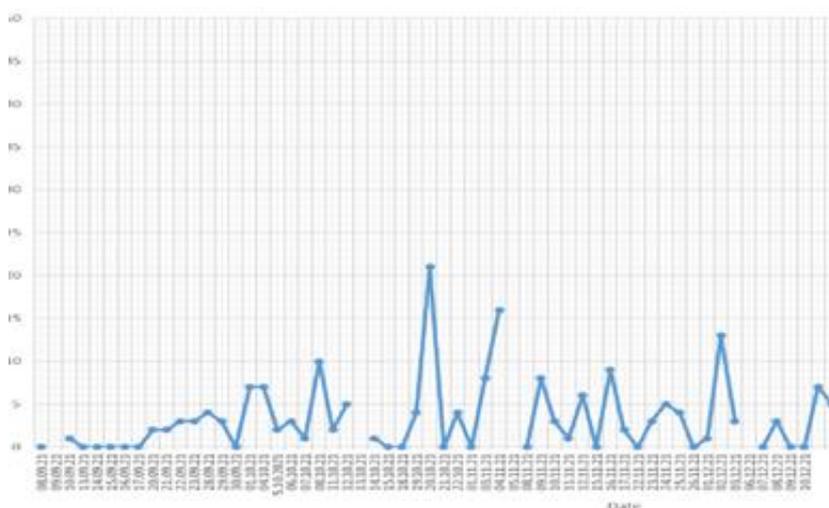


Figure 2. Line graph of total duration of problem behaviour per day from 08.09.21 to 10.12.21 (Autumn term 2021)

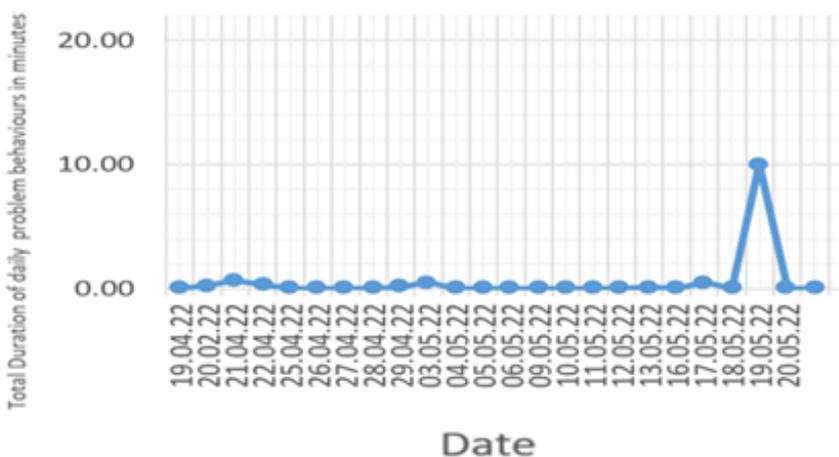


Figure 3. Line graph of total duration of problem behaviour per day from 19.04.22 to 20.05.22 (Summer term 2022)