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Improving numeracy skills

Points to note

- Children with autism usually find it easy to learn by rote, so you may find they are very good at reciting times tables. Times tables are predictable and never change; the child is likely to be reassured by this and may really enjoy learning them. Some children learn timetables by rote but don't really have the comprehension to adapt this to a real life scenario. For example, the student can recite times table but can't answer the question, 'If I had 12 boxes with 8 chocolates in each how many chocolates would I have?'
- Another confusing aspect of numeracy is the perplexing array of words that mean the same thing. For example, when talking about subtracting you may say 'minus', 'less', 'take' and 'take away'. When adding, you might say 'plus', 'and', 'add' etc. Just as it can be difficult for children with autism to learn that some words have more than one meaning, they can be confused to learn that one concept can be described by so many different words. Avoid using just one term, thinking that this will avoid confusion. The child is likely to become 'stuck' and have even greater difficulty later on.
- Some children have difficulty with concepts like more, less, half, double, quarter.
- Some children with autism like the rigidity of maths; working through the same problems over and over and getting the same answer.
- Some children will quickly grasp the concept of a maths exercise after doing a question or two – they won't see the point in doing an entire page of sums and may refuse to do so.

What you can do

- Use the student's special interest and meaningful, real life concepts to help motivate the child to learn mathematics.
- Teach the student to generalise information and think flexibly by making a dictionary of math words that have the same meaning. Put this on the wall or stick a list inside the child's workbook as a visual reminder.
- Computer programs that teach mathematic skills can help with motivation. Many children with autism are very competent using computers; they like the fact that computers present information in a logical, predictable sequence without the confusing social aspect of formal teaching.
- You might reduce the amount of work the child has to complete if you feel he has quickly grasped the concept of the exercise.
- To assist in development of concepts, some students may need to continue to use concrete, manipulative materials such as M.A.B., number cards, bead frames or an abacus to give visual support to written equations.
- Continue to display maths charts that show numerical, geometric and spatial information, eg Maths Manager posters.

