



You notice the small things: what soothes them, what overwhelms them, what feels hard, and what others sometimes miss.

The Autism Toolkit begins there.

Whether your child is in the early years, primary school, or moving towards secondary education, this calm, practical guide helps you make sense of what you are already seeing, so you can respond with greater confidence at home, in the community, and in conversations with school.

With insightful explanations, gentle illustrations, and practical toolkits, it helps you recognise patterns, reduce overwhelm, support regulation, build connection, and create everyday routines that feel calmer and more manageable — without trying to change who your child is. Written for families first, it also offers a shared language for the professionals who support them.

Vicky Carpenter is an autism and inclusion specialist, NASENCo-qualified, with a PGDip in SEND and Inclusion — Autism. She works alongside autistic children, families, Early Years settings, and schools, translating professional understanding into practical, neuro-affirming support.



The Autism Toolkit

Vicky
Carpenter



The Autism Toolkit

A practical companion for
understanding, connection, and
regulation in everyday family life



Vicky Carpenter

Autism Specialist for Schools and Families

TOOLKIT 3.1

Building a Home Sensory Menu

Every child is different. These ideas offer options for getting started – your child will show you what helps.

- Mini trampoline, space hopper or exercise ball.
- Squishing games (e.g. between two pillows).
- Swing, slide, rocking chair.
- Silly putty or play dough.
- Massage (hands, feet, back) if your child enjoys it.
- Climbing frame.
- A favourite video or song.
- Water play area.



Things that seem to help my child feel settled

TOOLKIT 3.2

Out and About: a Sensory 'Go Bag'

A small, familiar set of items can make outings feel safer and more manageable for your child. You don't need everything on this list – choose what helps *your* child feel calm, comfortable, and confident. You may already carry some of these.

- **Comfortable clothing** Soft fabrics, seamless items, slip-on or familiar shoes.
- **Travel choices** If your child enjoys public transport, build on that. If not, choose the travel option that feels most predictable and reassuring for your family – especially for the return journey.
- **Sunglasses, hat, or cap** To reduce glare or visual overload.
- **Moisturiser or hand cream** Helpful for dry skin, hand-rubbing, or calming tactile input.
- **Chewy support** Chewy snack or chewable jewellery.
- **Hand-based regulation** Squeeze ball, favourite fabric, or small familiar toy.
- **Cold water bottle** With a sports cap for sucking (oral regulation).
- **Comfort item** A soft toy or fabric for rubbing or holding.
- **Headphones or ear defenders** For noisy or unpredictable environments.
- **A loose plan for quiet breaks** Knowing where you can step away helps reduce anxiety before it builds.
- **Phone or tablet (if helpful)** For waiting times or eating out – this is regulation, not a 'reward'.

Notice over time

Which items help your child stay regulated for longest when you're out?

What helps when things start to feel too much?

TOOLKIT 3.3

Build a Calm Corner (Home and Classroom)

A Calm Corner is a safe, low-clutter space where children can take a break **before stress builds into overwhelm**.

Think of it as a *safety valve* – a place to pause, reset, and return.

- **Soft seat** Beanbag, small chair, or cushion pile.
- **Dim light** Lamp or fairy lights (avoid harsh overhead lighting).
- **Fidget or sensory item** Stress ball, textured fabric, or chew toy.
- **Firm pressure** Optional – only if your child enjoys it and can stop easily..
- **Visual timer** Sand timer, Time Timer, or app to show ‘break time’.

Even a small, thoughtfully designed space can make a big difference – helping children learn **when and how to pause**, and supporting a return to activity when they’re ready.



TOOLKIT 3.4

Daily Sensory Menu

Use what you learned from your sensory checklist on pp.42–47 to plan small sensory supports across the day. These are **preventative and supportive**, not rewards or consequences. You don’t need to fill in every section. One or two ideas is enough.

Morning – ‘Get Ready for the Day’

_____	(movement / proprioception)
_____	(touch / clothing choices)
_____	(visual support)

After School – ‘Reset and Recharge’

_____	(movement break)
_____	(quiet or low-demand space)
_____	(snack / oral input)

Evening – ‘Wind Down’

_____	(bath / massage)
_____	(deep pressure)
_____	(body check / interoception)

If my child becomes overloaded, we will try:

_____	(e.g. headphones)
_____	(e.g. hug or pressure if chosen)
_____	(e.g. favourite toy, drink)

Notice

What helped today?

What didn't help?

What we might adjust tomorrow?

TOOLKIT 3.5

Lending Your Calm

Use this when your child's body is becoming overwhelmed and things are starting to tip – before, during, or just after a difficult moment.

This isn't a strategy to fix behaviour or push through a task. It's a brief pause where your calm becomes the anchor, helping your child's nervous system settle enough to feel safe again.

You don't need words.

You don't need explanations.

You don't need to get it 'right'.

Often, one calm minute is enough to change the direction of the moment.

1. Pause together.

Stop demands. Stay nearby.

2. Offer one regulating option.

For example: a hand on their back, deep pressure, a drink of water, or brief movement.

(Offer – don't insist.)

3. Wait.

Give the body time to respond.

4. Notice any change – even if it's very small.

Breathing, posture, tone, or eye contact may shift.

Being calm with them is support – even when nothing else happens.

TOOLKIT 3.6

Notice → Name → Nurture

This tool is for moments when things feel hard.

Use it when your child is overwhelmed, upset, or struggling to cope – not when they are calm or ready to engage. Notice → Name → Nurture helps you respond without asking for explanations, compliance, or words. It builds safety first.

Once your child feels steadier, connection and interaction can follow.

1. Notice

Describe what you see, without judgement.

‘You’re covering your ears.’

2. Name

Gently name what might be happening.

‘It sounds loud in here.’

3. Nurture

Offer support, without requiring a response.

Headphones, a quieter space, or a gentle hand squeeze.

You don’t need them to respond.

Being noticed and supported is often what helps things soften.

Chapter 4

Join Me in My World



Connection begins when we find each other's rhythm

Many autistic children find it harder to filter sights, sounds, and feelings than their non-autistic peers. Their attention is already busy managing a crowded world. When we slow down and join their interests, we become easier to notice and connect with.