

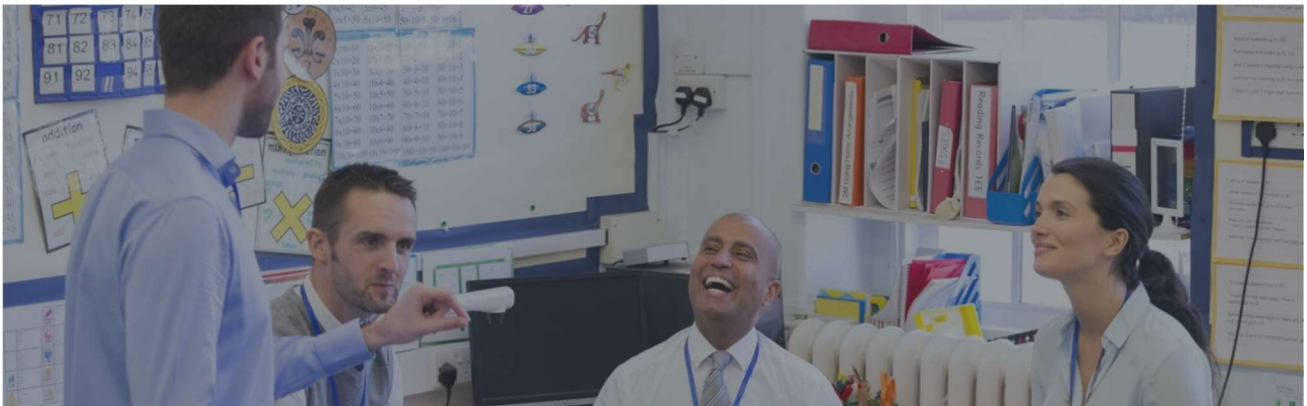


# Autism Progress Framework Guide

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## Introduction

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference that affects how people experience and interact with the world around them. Autism is complex — no two autistic individuals are the same.

As Dr. Stephen Shore famously said, "If you've met one person with autism, you've met one person with autism". Every autistic individual has a unique profile of strengths, needs, and ways of experiencing the world.

Autism can impact communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, flexibility of thought, and how individuals perceive and respond to sensory information.

Autism Progress is about recognising **how an individual's autism presents** and understanding the **strengths and barriers** that shape their everyday life.

It's not about "measuring" autism — it's about building a profile that supports better teaching, better communication, and better life outcomes.

Supporting autistic pupils well is increasingly important in today's education system:

- In 2023, **over 166,000 pupils** in England had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) where **autistic spectrum disorder** was recorded as the primary need — making it the **most common primary need** across all EHCPs.
- **Nearly 3%** of the school population are known to be autistic — and this figure is rising every year as understanding and diagnosis improve.
- Many autistic pupils also experience additional social, emotional, or mental health needs, which can create further barriers to learning, independence, and wellbeing.

Understanding an individual's autism profile is essential.

It helps schools:

- Put in place appropriate **teaching strategies** and **interventions**
- Improve **social participation** and **emotional wellbeing**
- Build **strength-based support plans** that celebrate what individuals can do, not just what they find difficult

Autism touches every part of life, not just learning:

- **Communication** — understanding, expressing, and navigating different forms of communication
- **Social Interaction** — developing and maintaining relationships
- **Flexibility of Thought** — managing changes, solving problems, and adapting to new situations
- **Emotional Regulation** — understanding, expressing, and managing emotions

Autistic individuals often show different strengths and challenges across these areas — and progress isn't always linear. That's why **Autism Progress** profiles skills in each area separately, allowing staff to better tailor support to each individual's needs and build a richer, more holistic understanding.

## Autism Progress is Not a Diagnostic Tool

It is not designed to diagnose autism or to confirm whether a child or young person meets clinical criteria for an autism spectrum condition.

Instead, Autism Progress helps schools, settings, and families to **build a clear, practical profile** of an individual's autistic presentation — whether a diagnosis has been made yet or not.

The framework can be used:

- **Before a diagnosis** – to capture and describe what staff are noticing in a child or young person's communication, social interaction, flexibility of thought, and emotional regulation. This can be particularly useful when gathering evidence to support a referral for assessment, or when trying to explain emerging needs to external professionals.
- **After a diagnosis** – to go beyond the high-level language often found in clinical reports, and create a more detailed, easy-to-understand profile that supports planning, teaching strategies, and everyday interactions.

While diagnostic reports often use technical or generalised language, Autism Progress uses **simple, accessible language** to describe real-world behaviours and skills.

It helps break down the complexity of autism into clear, meaningful areas, making it easier for everyone involved — teachers, support staff, therapists, and families — to understand how an individual's autism affects their daily life and how best to support them.

Autism Progress doesn't label individuals. It creates a **dynamic profile** that can evolve over time, recognising that each person's journey is unique.

## Autism Progress and SCERTS

When we developed **Autism Progress**, we designed it to complement approaches like **SCERTS** (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, and Transactional Support).

SCERTS is a highly respected framework for supporting autistic individuals, but it requires extensive training and a deep understanding of specialist strategies to implement fully.

**Autism Progress** takes the core ideas of SCERTS — particularly the focus on social communication, emotional regulation, and support strategies — and makes them **accessible to all professionals**, without the need for specialist training. It uses **simple, clear language** to help staff profile how an individual's autism presents across four key areas, and offers **practical strategies** at every developmental level to support progress.

The **Transactional Support** element of SCERTS — which is about providing the right support from adults and peers — is built directly into Autism Progress through the extensive bank of strategies provided across all areas and levels. This ensures that teachers, support staff, therapists, and families can all contribute meaningfully to supporting the individual, even if they have not been formally trained in SCERTS.

By using Autism Progress, settings can adopt a **relationship-based, person-centred approach** that focuses on strengths, reduces barriers, and promotes real-world success — while keeping the tools and language easy to understand and use.

## Autism Progress vs AET Progression Framework: Key Differences

Feature	Autism Progress	AET Progression Framework
<b>Purpose</b>	To profile how an individual's autism presents across 4 key areas (Communication, Social Interaction, Flexibility of Thought, Emotional Regulation) and support planning with linked strategies	To support schools in identifying and tracking small steps of progress for autistic pupils across a broad range of developmental skill areas
<b>Approach</b>	Strengths-based, practical, clear language. Focus on understanding <i>how</i> autism affects the individual and reducing barriers to participation and learning	Developmental tracking framework showing broad milestones of skill development after diagnosis. Progress is more linear and milestone-based
<b>Structure</b>	4 key areas, each with <b>17 detailed levels</b> (from birth to early adulthood). Levels are <b>non-linear</b> , allowing individuals to show spiky profiles across areas	Structured across "Early Years", "School Age", and "Post-16" stages, with progression descriptors within each. Fewer levels and less fine-grained detail
<b>Level of Detail</b>	<b>High level of detail.</b> Enables settings to identify very specific strengths and needs, rather than grouping pupils broadly into bands	<b>Lower level of detail.</b> Skills are grouped more generally, which can limit profiling of individuals with spiky or uneven skill profiles
<b>Ease of Use</b>	Designed for all staff — no specialist autism training needed. Built-in practical strategies at every level to guide support (Transactional Support element inspired by SCERTS)	Assumes some specialist knowledge or interpretation skills. AET provides toolkits separately but not integrated into the framework itself
<b>Language</b>	Simple, everyday language accessible to teachers, support staff, families, and external professionals	More technical, professional language targeted towards SENCOs and autism-trained practitioners
<b>Focus on Diagnosis</b>	Can be used <b>before and after diagnosis</b> . Focused on profiling presentation, not tied to a medical label	Primarily intended for <b>use after diagnosis</b> . Tracks progress within the autism profile rather than helping build an initial understanding
<b>Flexibility</b>	Highly flexible — acknowledges that pupils can be working across <b>multiple different levels</b> in different areas	Flexible within phase groups, but less detailed and less designed for truly individualised, non-linear profiles



### In simple terms:

- **Autism Progress** gives a **deeper, more detailed, and individualised profile** across the autism spectrum.
- It recognises **spiky profiles**, supports **planning and teaching** immediately, and uses **clear language** accessible to all.
- **AET Progression Framework** provides **broad tracking** but with **less detail** and can only show a **more linear** path of development.

## Collaboration in Creating Autism Progress

Autism Progress was developed through a collaboration between **B Squared**, **Autism Wessex**, **Scottish Autism**, and the **North East Autism Society**.

The aim was to create a practical, accessible framework that could be used not just in schools, but also in adult care settings — helping staff profile the way autism presents and provide the right support across different stages of life. By working closely with these leading autism organisations, Autism Progress draws on a wide range of expertise, ensuring it is robust, realistic, and truly focused on supporting individuals' real-world needs.

## About Our Partners

### Autism Wessex

Autism Wessex is a regional charity providing specialist services for autistic children, young people, and adults across the Wessex region.

They offer education, residential care, community support, and advice services, helping individuals live more independent, fulfilling lives. Their practical, person-centred approach helped shape the real-world focus of Autism Progress.

### Scottish Autism

Scottish Autism is the largest provider of autism-specific services in Scotland.

They deliver education, care, community outreach, and research to support autistic people and their families at every stage of life. Their deep commitment to understanding and celebrating the diversity of the autistic community heavily influenced the strengths-based design of the framework.

### North East Autism Society

The North East Autism Society (NEAS) provides specialist education, care, employment support, and family services across the North East of England.

They focus on promoting individuality, inclusion, and lifelong learning for autistic people. Their experience supporting transitions from education into adulthood was key to ensuring Autism Progress could be used across both school and adult settings.



## Developmental Range of Autism Progress

**Autism Progress** covers a wide developmental range, from early infancy through to early adolescence. The framework is built across **17 detailed levels**, based on the **developmental milestones typically seen in neurotypical children and young people**.

The levels span:

- **Birth to 1 year** – Levels 1 to 5
- **1 year to 3 years** – Levels 6 to 9
- **3 years to 7 years** – Levels 10 to 13
- **7 years to 14/15 years** – Levels 14 to 17

This structure means that Autism Progress supports profiling from the earliest stages of development through to the skills generally expected by **14 to 15 years old** in neurotypical development.

There are **more levels in the earliest stages**, reflecting the need for greater detail when tracking early developmental progress. At these younger developmental stages, small changes in communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, or flexibility of thought can be critical. The finer detail in these levels helps staff to identify very specific strengths and needs, and to plan targeted support from an early stage.

Because autistic individuals often have **spiky profiles** — with skills developing at very different rates across different areas and even within the same area — Autism Progress allows individuals to be profiled flexibly across the 17 levels.

Rather than expecting uniform progress, the framework captures the unique way each individual develops, helping schools, settings, and families to better understand and support their journey.

By profiling against **typical developmental milestones**, Autism Progress gives a meaningful, structured way to show where a young person is making progress, where they need support, and where they demonstrate particular strengths.



# Autism Progress Areas

## Communication

Communication is a core area within **Autism Progress** because it plays such a vital role in how individuals connect, share ideas, and express their needs.

In Autism Progress, **communication** refers to the ways an individual **understands** and **expresses** meaning — whether through speech, gesture, facial expressions, written words, sign language, symbols, or other methods. Communication is not limited to verbal language. It includes all the ways an individual sends and receives information.

For many autistic individuals, differences in communication can be significant. Some may find it difficult to interpret spoken language or non-verbal signals like body language or tone of voice. Others may use communication in ways that are highly individual, such as repeating phrases (echolalia), using single words, or relying on alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems.

The **Communication** area of Autism Progress profiles skills across a wide range of developmental stages — from early responses to sounds and facial expressions, through to more complex skills like holding a two-way conversation, understanding figurative language, or adjusting communication based on the needs of others.

Because communication development can vary greatly from person to person, Autism Progress recognises that:

- Progress is **not linear** — an individual might show strength in one aspect of communication and need more support in another
- **Different methods** of communication are equally valid — it's the effectiveness of the communication that matters, not whether it is spoken, signed, written, or supported with technology
- Understanding an individual's **current communication strengths** helps staff plan appropriate supports and build on existing skills

At each developmental level, Autism Progress provides clear descriptors of communication abilities, along with **practical strategies** to reduce barriers and encourage positive interactions.

By building a detailed communication profile, staff can better support pupils in connecting with others, expressing themselves confidently, and participating fully in learning and everyday life.

## Social Interaction

Social interaction is the ability to engage with others, build relationships, and participate in shared activities. For autistic individuals, differences in social interaction can present in many ways — from difficulties starting or maintaining conversations, to challenges interpreting social rules, body language, or the emotions of others.

In Autism Progress, **social interaction** refers to both the **initiation** of social contact and the ability to **respond** appropriately during interactions. This includes the desire to interact, the methods used to connect with others, and the understanding of how social exchanges work in different situations.

Development in this area is observed through:

- **Initiating interactions** — for example, approaching someone to share an interest or ask for help
- **Responding to interactions** — such as replying when spoken to, or joining in group activities appropriately
- **Understanding social rules** — like taking turns, respecting personal space, or recognising when others are interested or disengaged

Social interaction skills often develop differently in autistic individuals. Some may prefer solitary activities, others may want to interact but find it difficult to navigate the unspoken social expectations that come with conversations, friendships, or group settings.

Autism Progress recognises that **there is no single "right" way to socialise**. The framework allows for a broad range of social behaviours, reflecting individual preferences, communication styles, and cultural differences. Progress is not about forcing conformity but about supporting each individual to develop the skills they need to **connect with others** in ways that are meaningful and comfortable for them.

By profiling social interaction skills across different developmental stages, Autism Progress helps staff and families plan targeted strategies that support **confidence, belonging, and positive relationships**.

## Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to understand, express, and manage emotions in a way that supports wellbeing, learning, and positive social interactions.

For autistic individuals, differences in emotional regulation can be significant. Some may experience intense emotions that feel overwhelming, find it difficult to recognise or label their feelings, or struggle to use coping strategies to manage emotional responses. Emotions might be expressed through changes in behaviour, withdrawal, repetitive actions, or more visible emotional outbursts.

In Autism Progress, **emotional regulation** refers to:

- **Recognising** emotional states (in oneself and others)
- **Expressing** emotions appropriately
- **Managing** emotional responses to situations, environments, or internal experiences

Development in this area is observed through behaviours such as:

- How an individual responds to stress, frustration, excitement, or change
- How they calm themselves after becoming upset or overwhelmed
- How they use strategies (with or without support) to regulate their feelings over time

Emotional regulation is strongly linked to an individual's wider experiences of sensory input, communication, social understanding, and flexibility of thought. Challenges in these areas can make emotional regulation even harder, especially in busy or unpredictable environments.

Autism Progress recognises that emotional regulation is **not about eliminating emotional reactions** — it's about supporting individuals to **understand and manage** their emotions in ways that are safe, positive, and sustainable for them.

By profiling emotional regulation skills across a wide developmental range, Autism Progress helps settings and families put the right supports in place — reducing anxiety, supporting resilience, and promoting better access to learning and social opportunities.

## Flexibility of Thought

Flexibility of thought refers to the ability to adapt to changes, switch between ideas, cope with uncertainty, and manage new or unexpected situations.

For autistic individuals, difficulties with flexibility of thought can present in many different ways. Some may find it hard to move away from routines or familiar activities, become distressed when plans change, or struggle to see different perspectives. Others may show a strong preference for repetitive actions, particular interests, or highly structured patterns of thinking.

In Autism Progress, **flexibility of thought** covers:

- How individuals **cope with change** and **novelty**
- How they **problem-solve** when things don't go as expected
- How they **adapt thinking** or **shift focus** between activities or ideas

Development in this area is observed through behaviours such as:

- How an individual reacts when routines are disrupted or unexpected events occur
- How they approach new tasks or unfamiliar environments
- How they manage transitions between activities or social settings

It's important to recognise that a preference for routine or predictability is not inherently negative. For many autistic individuals, routines and structured patterns provide a sense of security and make the world feel more manageable.

Autism Progress does not view reduced flexibility of thought as a problem to be “fixed”. Instead, it supports staff and families to understand where flexibility challenges may cause barriers — and to put in place strategies that **reduce anxiety**, **build coping skills**, and **increase resilience** when change is necessary.

By profiling flexibility of thought across different developmental stages, Autism Progress helps ensure that support plans are realistic, respectful, and focused on **empowering individuals to navigate their world successfully**.

## Strategies to Support Autistic Individuals

One of the key strengths of **Autism Progress** is the way it links profiling directly to practical support. At every developmental level across all four areas — Communication, Social Interaction, Flexibility of Thought, and Emotional Regulation — Autism Progress provides a wide range of **strategies** to help staff and families reduce barriers and build on strengths.

Each set of strategies is designed to:

- Reflect the individual's current level of development
- Be realistic and achievable for staff, support teams, and families
- Focus on enabling participation, communication, independence, and emotional wellbeing
- Promote positive interactions and lifelong learning

Rather than simply identifying needs, Autism Progress gives professionals **immediate, practical tools** to respond to those needs in everyday environments — without having to wait for external professionals or specialist services to intervene. Support can begin straight away, helping to close gaps and build resilience at the earliest opportunity.

### The benefits of having strategies built into Autism Progress:

- **Consistency of support:** Everyone working with the pupil — teachers, support staff, therapists, and families — can draw on the same practical guidance, creating a more unified approach.
- **Time-saving:** Staff don't need to search for separate intervention plans. Strategies are built directly into the profiling system, making planning faster and more focused.
- **Targeted interventions:** Strategies are tailored to each developmental level, helping ensure that support is appropriate, realistic, and matched to the individual's profile.
- **Empowering non-specialists:** Staff and families who may not have specialist autism training still have clear, accessible strategies to use straight away.
- **Acting early:** Schools can respond to identified needs immediately, rather than waiting for external referrals, diagnoses, or outside agency input.
- **Supporting dynamic progress:** As individuals grow and change, staff can easily move between levels and adapt the strategies used, keeping support responsive and personalised.
- **Embedding transactional support:** The strategies reflect the "Transactional Support" principles seen in approaches like SCERTS — helping to create environments and interactions that actively support communication, regulation, and learning.

Autism Progress isn't just about profiling. It's about **making a real difference** in the day-to-day experiences of autistic children and young people — providing practical support that empowers them to connect, participate, and thrive.

## Why Autism Progress Makes a Difference

As well as building personalised profiles and providing practical strategies, Autism Progress also brings a number of wider benefits for schools, settings, and families:

- **Smoother transitions:** Clear, structured profiles help new staff or settings quickly understand an individual's strengths, needs, and support strategies — making moves between classes, key stages, or into adulthood more successful.
- **Earlier identification of learning barriers:** By profiling skills and needs across communication, social interaction, flexibility, and emotional regulation, Autism Progress helps staff spot potential difficulties early — before they escalate into bigger barriers.
- **Better communication with external professionals:** Autism Progress provides a shared language and framework that makes it easier to collaborate with therapists, psychologists, and other professionals involved in supporting the pupil.

Autism Progress isn't just about tracking progress — it's about understanding each individual deeply, supporting them consistently, and giving them the best possible chance to succeed at school and beyond.

## Using Evisense with Autism Progress

**Evisense** works seamlessly alongside Autism Progress, helping schools and settings capture, share, and celebrate the progress autistic individuals make — especially the small but meaningful steps that are often harder to track using traditional assessment methods.

Many of the skills and behaviours profiled within Autism Progress are best understood by **seeing them in action** — whether it's a pupil successfully managing a change in routine, initiating a social interaction, using a new communication method, or regulating their emotions during a difficult moment. **Photos, videos, audio clips, and written observations** all help bring these achievements to life.

With Evisense, you can:

- **Capture real-world evidence** of development across all four areas — Communication, Social Interaction, Flexibility of Thought, and Emotional Regulation
- **Record spontaneous moments** that show skills being used naturally, outside of structured tasks or assessments
- **Create a clear, visual story** of a pupil's journey over time, helping staff, parents, and external professionals understand progress
- **Share evidence safely and securely** with families and multidisciplinary teams to support EHCP reviews, annual reviews, or intervention planning
- **Highlight strengths** and successes that might not always be obvious in written reports

Because Evisense allows **unlimited users** at no extra cost, you can involve everyone around the pupil — including teachers, support staff, therapists, and family members — in building a richer, more complete picture of their development.

Capturing evidence is particularly important for autistic individuals, where progress can sometimes be **subtle, non-linear, or situational**. A pupil might demonstrate a new skill in a familiar environment but need more support elsewhere.

Using Evisense allows you to document these nuances, helping everyone involved to better understand where the pupil is thriving and where further support may be needed. In short, Evisense makes Autism Progress even more powerful — turning small moments into visible progress, and ensuring every step forward is recognised and celebrated.



## Using Autism Progress with Our Other Frameworks

Autism Progress is designed to work seamlessly alongside our other assessment frameworks, helping schools build a complete, personalised picture of each individual's development.

Many autistic learners will be working within multiple areas of need — not just Communication and Interaction, but also Cognition and Learning, Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), and life skills. By using Autism Progress alongside frameworks like **Progression Steps**, **Engagement Steps**, **SEMH**, **Communication and Interaction**, or **Steps 4 Life**, schools can create a much **richer, more holistic profile** for each pupil.

Some of the benefits of using Autism Progress with our other frameworks include:

- **Deeper understanding of learning barriers:** Autism Progress helps explain why a pupil might struggle with certain academic or social demands, even when their cognitive abilities are strong.
- **More personalised support planning:** By linking Autism Progress profiles with academic and personal development frameworks, staff can tailor strategies and targets more precisely to each pupil's strengths and needs.
- **Cross-framework skill syncing:** When a skill is achieved in Autism Progress that links to a broader academic or life skill, it can be transferred across frameworks, saving time and avoiding duplication.
- **Clearer EHCP evidence:** Autism Progress provides detailed, real-world profiles of communication, social interaction, flexibility, and emotional regulation — helping to strengthen Annual Review reports, transition planning, and wider multi-agency working.
- **Celebrating the whole child:** Progress is about more than just academic attainment. Autism Progress ensures that key social, emotional, and independence milestones are recognised and celebrated alongside cognitive and curriculum achievements.

Autistic learners often show **spiky profiles**, with strengths and needs that cross multiple domains. Using Autism Progress alongside our other frameworks helps capture that complexity — giving a full, rounded view of each pupil's journey and enabling better outcomes both in school and beyond.

## Framework Structure

The Autism Progress framework is designed to sit alongside the other frameworks your school already uses to assess Cognition and Learning, Communication and Interaction, SEMH, and life skills.

Each of our frameworks has its own levelling structure — some are built around statutory guidance and qualifications frameworks, while others, like Autism Progress, are designed with a structure that best fits the needs of the area being assessed.

Autism Progress uses a unique 17-level structure, based on typical developmental milestones from birth through to early adulthood. The image on the next page shows how Autism Progress compares to our other frameworks, helping you to see where it fits into the broader assessment pathway.

## Framework Comparison Chart

B SQUARED STANDARD SCORE	B SQUARED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORKS								P LEVELS AND NC LEVELS (COMPARISON)
	Early Steps (2022)	Engagement Steps	Progression Steps & Preparing for Adulthood	Primary Steps	Steps 4 Life	Autism Progress	SEMH	Communication & Interaction	
15 - 15.5									NC 7
14 - 15			Progression Step 10				SEMH Step 11	Level 16	
13 - 14					Level 2	Level 17			NC 6
12 - 13			Progression Step 9	Greater Depth & Breadth			SEMH Step 10	Level 15	NC 5
11 - 12									
10 - 11			Progression Step 8	Year 6	Level 1	Level 15	SEMH Step 9	Level 14	NC 4
9 - 10				Year 5					NC 3
8 - 9			Progression Step 7	Year 4	Entry 3	Level 14	SEMH Step 8	Level 13	NC 2a
7 - 8				Year 3					NC 2b
6 - 7			Progression Step 6 (PKS 6)	Year 2	Entry 2	Level 13	SEMH Step 7	Level 12	NC 2c
5 - 6			Progression Step 5 (PKS 5)						NC 1a
			Progression Step 4 (PKS 4)	Year 1	Entry 1	Level 12	SEMH Step 6	Level 11	NC 1b
4 - 5	Early Learning Goals (ELG)		Progression Step 3 (PKS 3)	Primary Step 3	Step 7	Level 11	SEMH Step 5	Level 10	NC 1c
3 - 4	Children in Reception		Progression Step 2 (PKS 2)	Primary Step 2		Level 10	SEMH Step 4	Level 9	P8
2 - 3	3 & 4 year olds								P7
	2½–3 years	Engagement Step 6			Step 6	Level 9	SEMH Step 3	Level 8	P6
	2–2½ years		Progression Step 1 (PKS 1)	Primary Step 1		Level 8		Level 7	P5
1 - 2	18–24 months	Engagement Step 5			Step 5	Level 7	SEMH Step 2	Level 6	P4
	12–18 months					Level 6		Level 5	P3(ii)
0 - 1	9–12 months	Engagement Step 4			Step 4	Level 5	SEMH Step 1	Level 4	P3(i)
	6–9 months					Level 4		Level 3	P2(ii)
	3–6 months	Engagement Step 3			Step 3	Level 3		Level 2	P2(i)
	0–3 months	Engagement Step 2			Step 2	Level 2		Level 1	P1(ii)
		Engagement Step 1			Step 1	Level 1			P1(i)

## Connecting Steps: Simple, Powerful Assessment

All of our frameworks — including Autism Progress — are delivered through **Connecting Steps**, our intuitive online assessment system. Connecting Steps is designed to be **simple to use**, even for staff who are new to assessment or not that tech savvy.

The system uses a clear, user-friendly layout with simple navigation, making it quick to record what a pupil has achieved, and see the next steps.

Teachers, support staff, therapists, and senior leaders can all access the information they need without complex training — Connecting Steps does the hard work behind the scenes, letting you focus on supporting pupils rather than battling software.

### Showing Progress in Different Ways

Connecting Steps doesn't just record a single measure of success — it shows **progress in a variety of ways**, helping you see the bigger picture for each pupil. The system tracks:

- **Small steps of progress** — even where full achievement hasn't yet been reached
- **Depth of learning** — If they are working towards achieving a skill, they may have just encountered it, they need physical support or just prompting. If they have achieved the skill, how confident are they and can they apply those skills in different ways?
- **Lateral progress** — showing where pupils are broadening and strengthening their skills within or across different areas
- **Non-linear progress** — recognising that progress is spikey and uneven. Spikes in development can be celebrated, skills that might otherwise be missed.

Whether you're tracking academic milestones, social development, life skills, or communication needs, Connecting Steps gives you the tools to show how every pupil is growing — even when that growth doesn't fit a straight line.

It ensures that **all progress is visible**, celebrated, and used to inform next steps in a meaningful way.

For more information about Connecting Steps or any of our frameworks, please visit the link below, to book a FREE online meeting at a time that works for you.

[www.bsquared.co.uk/meeting](http://www.bsquared.co.uk/meeting)

## Getting Started and How to Use Autism Progress

Autism Progress is designed to help you build a meaningful, detailed profile of how an individual's autism affects their communication, social interaction, flexibility of thought, and emotional regulation.

When you first start using Autism Progress, it's important to remember:

- **Progress in these areas may be slow.**  
Some of the skills being profiled — like coping with change, managing overwhelming emotions, or accepting when a mistake has been made — are *deep-seated challenges*. These are not things that can be "fixed" quickly or with a short-term intervention. Development in these areas often takes time, repeated experiences, and consistent support. It's perfectly normal for individuals to spend a long period working within the same level or moving gradually between small steps.
- **Work across multiple levels to build the full profile.**  
When you start profiling an individual, you may need to look across **four, five, or even more levels** at once to truly capture the range of their skills. This reflects the reality that autistic individuals often have **spiky profiles**, with different strengths and needs across different areas.
- **It's not lots of ongoing work.**  
Although you might assess across a wide developmental range initially, Autism Progress isn't designed to be updated weekly or even monthly. It's a tool for **deep understanding** — not day-to-day tracking. Profiles are updated **when meaningful changes happen** — for example, when an individual shows that they can manage a particular situation more consistently or independently over time.
- **The value of the profile is huge.**  
The insights gained from Autism Progress are **invaluable** for support planning, EHCP reviews, transition meetings, intervention design, and communicating effectively with families and external professionals. It gives a **rich, personalised understanding** of the individual — far beyond what a simple academic assessment or behaviour log could provide.

By investing time at the start to build a full profile, you create a **living document** that supports more personalised teaching, helps prevent crises, celebrates small successes, and ultimately enables autistic individuals to thrive.

# Appendix I: Communication Descriptors

## Level 1

The individual encounters activities and experiences involving communication.

- They may show minor physiological responses.
- They may be passive or resistant.
- They are fully prompted in any participation.

## Level 2

The individual shows an emerging awareness of experiences involving communication.

- They may have periods when they appear alert and ready to focus their attention on certain people, voices or gesture.
- They may give intermittent reactions.

## Level 3

The individual begins to respond consistently to well-cued communication in familiar situations.

- They react to new activities and experiences.
- They accept and engage in co-active exploration.

## Level 4

The individual demonstrates an awareness of the direction of others' attention and begins to be proactive with their communication.

- They tolerate shared exploration and supported participation.
- They recognise some people and may respond in specific ways to familiar individuals.
- They perform actions by trial and improvement remembering learned responses over short periods of time.
- They communicate consistent preferences and affective responses through vocalisation or gesturing.

## Level 5

The individual begins to communicate intentionally.

- They seek attention through gesture or action and request events or activities.
- They remember learned responses over more extended periods.
- They participate in shared activities with less support and sustain concentration for short periods.
- They observe the results of their own actions with interest, remembering learned responses over more extended periods.
- They explore materials in increasingly complex ways.

## Level 6

The individual uses emerging conventional communication.

- They respond to options and choices with actions or gestures.
- They remember learned responses over increasing periods and may anticipate known events.
- They greet known people and may initiate interactions and activities.
- They apply potential solutions systematically to problems.
- They actively explore objects and events for more extended periods.

## Level 7

The individual repeats, copies and imitates the communication of others and demonstrates an understanding of a wider vocabulary.

- They use single words, signs and symbols for familiar objects and can communicate about events and feelings.
- They respond appropriately to simple requests which contain one key word, sign or symbol in familiar situations.
- They begin to understand that marks and symbols convey meaning.

## Level 8

The individual combines two key ideas or concepts and can respond to questions about familiar or immediate events or experiences.

- They respond to simple questions by vocalising, using gestures, symbols or signing.
- They make attempts to repair misunderstandings without changing the words used.
- They follow requests and instructions containing at least two key words, signs or symbols.
- They develop their expressive vocabulary.
- They combine single words, signs or symbols to communicate meaning to a range of listeners.

## Level 9

The individual initiates and maintains short spontaneous interactions and responds to others in group situations.

- They use prepositions and pronouns correctly.
- They follow requests and instructions with three key words, signs or symbols.
- They ask simple questions to obtain information.

## Level 10

The individual spontaneously communicates phrases with up to three key words, signs or symbols and follows the spontaneous communication of others for short stretches of time.

- They link ideas or add new information beyond what is asked.
- They follow requests and instructions with four key words, signs or symbols.
- They contribute appropriately one-to-one and in small group discussions.
- They communicate ideas about temporal events and experiences, using simple phrases and statements and respond to questions about them.
- They attend to, and respond to, questions from adults and their peers about experiences, events and stories.

## Level 11

The individual spontaneously communicates phrases by linking up to four key words, signs or symbols and responds confidently to others both in groups and one-to-one.

- They use conjunctions that suggest cause.
- They listen attentively and respond appropriately to questions about why or how.
- They follow multi-step instructions.
- They communicate about their own experiences using an extensive vocabulary to convey meaning to the listener.
- They can use possessives.

## Level 12

The individual spontaneously communicates about matters of immediate interest.

- They receive information from others and usually respond appropriately.
- They convey simple meanings clearly to a range of listeners and begin to extend their ideas or accounts by providing some detail.

## Level 13

The individual begins to show confidence when producing and responding to spontaneous communication particularly where the topics interest them.

- They usually attend to others carefully and respond with increasing appropriateness to what others say.
- They show awareness that a more formal vocabulary and tone of voice are used in some situations.
- They communicate clearly with a growing vocabulary showing awareness of the needs of the listener by including relevant detail to develop and explain their ideas.

## Level 14

The individual confidently produces spontaneous communication and responds to others when exploring and communicating ideas.

- They begin to adapt what they say to the needs of the listener, varying the use of vocabulary and the level of detail.
- They attend to the spontaneous communication of others carefully and show understanding of the main points through relevant comments and questions.

## Level 15

The individual produces and responds to spontaneous communication with confidence in an increasing range of contexts.

- They attend carefully to the communication of others, making contributions and asking questions that are responsive to others' ideas and views.
- They adapt their spontaneous communication to its purpose by developing ideas thoughtfully, describing events and conveying their opinions clearly.

## Level 16

The individual produces and responds to spontaneous communication in a range of formal and informal contexts.

- They pay close attention to what others say, ask questions to develop ideas and make contributions that take account of others' views.
- They follow Standard English rules in formal situations.
- They engage the interest of the 'listener' by occasionally varying their expression and vocabulary.

## Level 17

The individual spontaneously adapts their communication to the demands of different contexts with increasing confidence.

- They take an active part in discussions, taking different roles and showing understanding of ideas and sensitivity to others.
- They engage the interest of the listener through the variety and liveliness of both their vocabulary and expression.
- They demonstrate their knowledge of language variety and usage effectively and use Standard English fluently in formal situations.
- They naturally adapt elements of their speech or actions to keep an audience from losing interest.



## APPENDIX II: SOCIAL INTERACTION DESCRIPTORS

### Level 1

The individual encounters activities and experiences involving other people.

- They may show minor physiological responses.
- They may be passive or resistant.
- They are fully prompted in any participation.

### Level 2

The individual shows an emerging awareness of other people.

- They may have periods when they appear alert and ready to focus their attention on people and events.
- They begin to tolerate some social interactions more than others.

### Level 3

The individual begins to respond consistently to familiar people.

- They react to new activities and experiences.
- They can be motivated by interacting with familiar people, events and objects.
- They accept and engage in co-active exploration.

### Level 4

The individual demonstrates an awareness of the direction of others' attention and begins to be proactive with their interactions.

- They tolerate shared exploration and supported participation.
- They seek interaction to meet their basic needs.
- They perform actions by trial and improvement remembering learned responses over short periods of time.
- They communicate consistent preferences and affective responses through vocalisation or gesturing.
- They begin to recognise people, actions and objects by name.

### Level 5

The individual begins to interact intentionally, engaging others through gesture or action.

- They request events or activities through gesture or action.
- They remember learned responses over more extended periods.
- They participate in shared activities with less support and sustain concentration for short periods.
- They observe the results of their own actions with interest, remembering learned responses over more extended periods.
- They explore their immediate environment in increasingly complex ways.

### Level 6

The individual greets known people and may initiate interactions and activities.

- They remember learned responses over increasing periods and may anticipate known events.
- They may respond to options and choices with actions or gestures.
- They actively explore objects and events for more extended periods.

## Level 7

The individual is becoming aware of appropriate social behaviours: they are able to express their response through single elements of communication.

- They show an understanding of “Yes.” and “No.” showing assertiveness and responding to animated praise.
- They engage in parallel activity with several others.
- They engage in familiar care routines, tasks or activities with support.

## Level 8

The individual will interact with two or three others in work and play situations.

- They seek help when needed.
- They maintain interactions for short periods of time and are becoming aware of turn-taking in small groups with support.
- They become aware of social routines and responsibilities.

## Level 9

The individual responds to others in group situations, playing or working in small groups co-operatively.

- They use some social conventions when greeting people.
- They use facial expression or intonation to enhance meanings.
- They carry out routine activities in a familiar context and with some independence, though may need a staff presence.

## Level 10

The individual contributes in one-to-one and small group situations, listening to others and sharing feelings.

- They start to accept the constraints of social actions.
- They show an awareness of the consequences of their actions and show some consideration of the needs and feelings of other living things.
- They make purposeful relationships with others in group activities and attempt to compromise with them in a variety of situations.
- They begin to understand the concept of public and private and know how to use the toilet independently.

## Level 11

The individual selects, initiates and follows through with a range of activities in one-to-one situations and in small or large groups.

- They use appropriate language to ask for the toilet.
- They understand the need for rules in games showing awareness of how to join in with different situations.
- They understand some agreed codes of behaviour, state basic rules and identify right and wrong in familiar situations.
- They treat living things and their environment with care and concern.
- They can be sensitive to the feelings of others and show respect for them.

## Level 12

The individual communicates about the experiences and feelings of others, what they might find interesting or puzzling and what might be of value and concern to them.

- They recognise some similarities and differences between people and are aware that people have an effect on the world around them.
- They identify some of the groups that they belong to and identify rules that differ between these groups.
- They begin to recognise that all people have needs and wants, showing some theory of mind.

## Level 13

The individual asks, questions about others' experiences and feelings.

- They recognise the values of others in matters of right and wrong.
- They recognise that some questions cause people to wonder and are difficult to answer.
- They discuss what is fair and unfair in different situations and identify the difference between people's needs and wants.

## Level 14

The individual identifies how their actions affect the world around them, making links between aspects of their own and others' experiences.

- They make links between national or global values and their own attitudes and behaviour.
- They know how to make friends, including how to repair damaged relationships.

## Level 15

The individual raises questions of other people's identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments.

- They make assumptions about how others may feel in complex and unfamiliar situations.
- They identify why specific laws are needed and can debate moral issues, taking a balanced point of view.
- They describe what may inspire and influence others.

## Level 16

The individual asks and suggests answers to, questions of identity, belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, values and commitments, relating them to their own and others' lives.

- They explain how their actions can inspire or influence others to improve their own lives.
- They discuss things that they should take responsibility for and the effect this might have on them, their intimate relationships, their close groups and the world.

## Level 17

The individual is increasingly confident and accepting of their own identity, beliefs and purpose.

- They understand and welcome a wide range of the beliefs, values and intentions of others.
- They evaluate the motivations of their own actions after an emotional situation and can rationalise the behaviour of others.
- They are able to integrate themselves in a variety of roles/situations.

## APPENDIX III: FLEXIBILITY OF THOUGHT

### DESCRIPTORS

#### Level 1

The individual encounters a range of activities and experiences.

- They may show minor physiological responses.
- They may be passive or resistant.
- They are fully prompted in any participation.

#### Level 2

The individual shows an emerging awareness of routine activities.

- They may have periods when they appear alert and ready to focus their attention on certain events, objects or parts of objects.
- They may give intermittent reactions.

#### Level 3

The individual begins to respond consistently to familiar events and situations.

- They react to new activities and experiences.
- They begin to show interest in activities, events and objects.
- They accept and engage in co-active exploration.

#### Level 4

The individual demonstrates an awareness of the direction of others' attention and begins to be proactive in their actions.

- They tolerate shared exploration and supported participation.
- They recognise familiar activities, events and objects.
- They perform actions by trial and improvement remembering learned responses over short periods of time.
- They communicate consistent preferences and affective responses through vocalisation or gesturing.

#### Level 5

The individual's interest can be engaged through joint attention and they begin to make intentional responses.

- They request events or activities through gesture or action.
- They participate in shared activities with less support and sustain concentration for short periods and explore materials in increasingly complex ways.
- They observe the results of their own actions with interest, remembering learned responses over more extended periods.
- They demonstrating the beginning of object permanence.

## Level 6

The individual uses emerging conventional communication to initiate interactions and familiar activities.

- They respond to options and choices with actions or gestures.
- They remember learned responses over increasing periods and may anticipate known events.
- They apply potential solutions systematically to problems.
- They actively explore objects and events for more extended periods.

## Level 7

The individual demonstrates a developing awareness of more complex cause and effect, predicting and prompting particular responses.

- They follow familiar routines are aware of starting and stopping a process and accept some changes to planned activity when supported by familiar strategies.
- They can be motivated to participate in tasks when offered items they persistently favour.
- They anticipate, follow and join in familiar activities when given a contextual clue.

## Level 8

The individual begins to make connections between regular events and the actions that follow.

- They sort or match objects and pictures by recognising similarities.
- They solve simple problems practically.
- They show preferences for specific activities and begins to carry out simple decision making processes.
- They accept alternatives to current activities or items when they are provided by a member of staff.

## Level 9

The individual shows an awareness of other people's intentions or goals making links between visual and auditory clues and consequent events.

- They will undertake short tasks independently for a known reward.
- They watch others using a basic tool, copy the actions and show an intention to create.
- They carry out routine activities in a familiar context and show an awareness of the results of their own actions.
- They begin to generalise and make predictions from prior knowledge.

## Level 10

The individual shows temporal awareness by communicating about yesterday and tomorrow and basing their decisions on the consequences of previous actions.

- They follow repetitive patterns, making predictions about next steps.
- They compare differences between similar objects or events.
- They can be incentivised to follow a longer structure of activities and accept some forewarned changes to their routine.
- They attempt to negotiate with others to achieve positive results.

## Level 11

The individual acknowledges other people's opinions; adding to others' ideas but accepting that these may differ from their own.

- They understand how certain things can seem silly in the wrong situation and are developing a sense of humour.
- They modify their communication to clear up misunderstandings.

- They identify the differences between sections of a day and begin to regulate their own routines with some prompting from members of staff.
- They begin to reduce repetitive physical behaviours.

## Level 12

The individual shows theory of mind by demonstrating that they understand that all people have different needs and wants.

- They structure their own routine with some prompting from members of staff.
- They sequence a few events, showing an understanding of the concept of past and future events.
- They communicate about matters of immediate interest, justifying their opinion when questioned.
- They approach problems differently and begin to adapt their thinking.

## Level 13

The individual considers a variety of approaches, generates ideas based on their own investigations and identifies what they need to do to achieve their goals.

- They vary skills, actions, ideas and their deployment in different situations.
- They relate their own experience to the world around them allowing them to describe how others might be feeling and to make predictions about future events.
- They plan what to do next, demonstrating an ability to organise their work.
- They learn by trial and error and make decisions based on their experiences.

## Level 14

The individual begins to accept that some things in life are imperfect, that people get things wrong, that mistake help us learn and that events do not always follow previously understood patterns.

- They manage their own timings and schedules with little to no support.
- They break problems into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- They begin to recognise risks with help.
- They begin to read between the lines and can infer meaning implied within text or speech.

## Level 15

The individual identifies some causes of difference between people and can engage in discussions about the feelings of others with some sensitivity.

- They use implied information as well explicit information to make predictions about future events.
- They initiate creative processes and can consider the needs of the viewer, reader or user whilst developing their work.
- They evaluate sources of information and other people's viewpoints to help form their own opinion.
- They comprehend aspects of figurative language, common colloquialisms and irony.

## Level 16

The individual is able to make judgements.

- They understand that feelings, including their own, can change quickly and can consider how to help others manage their expectations.
- They distinguish between tangible and abstract concepts in real life and fiction.
- They can identify aspects which make some sources more reliable than others.
- They account for differences in perspective and understand that different people have different versions of events.

## Level 17

The individual can help others to make judgements about what is acceptable and unacceptable.

- They understand the necessity of using a range of sources and present information taking into account their usefulness/reliability.
- They review their own processes and set themselves challenging goals for improvement.
- They react in an adaptable manner to a range of changes of plan.
- They automatically identify mistakes they make and attempt to correct them.
- They are flexible with their approach to problem-solving.



## APPENDIX IV: EMOTIONAL REGULATION

### DESCRIPTORS

#### Level 1

The individual encounters a range of new and familiar experiences.

- They may show minor physiological responses.
- They may be emotionally passive or resistant .

#### Level 2

The individual shows an emerging awareness of new or pleasurable experiences.

- They may have periods when they appear to show heightened expressive responses to specific sensations.
- They may give intermittent reactions.

#### Level 3

The individual begins to respond consistently to favoured events and objects.

- They react to new activities and experiences.
- They demonstrate emotive responses to new activities and experiences.
- They begin to show emotional reactions to specific people, events and objects.
- They accept and engage in co-active exploration.

#### Level 4

The individual demonstrates an awareness of the direction of others' attention and begins to be proactive in their demands/requests.

- They tolerate shared exploration and supported participation.
- They perform actions by trial and improvement remembering learned responses over short periods of time.
- They express their immediate needs and feelings.
- They communicate consistent preferences and affective responses through vocalisation or gesturing.

#### Level 5

The individual begins to indicate their needs and intentions.

- They seek stimulation and interaction through gesture or action and request desired events or activities.
- They remember learned responses over more extended periods.
- They participate in shared activities with more confidence.
- They observe the results of their own actions with interest, remembering learned responses over more extended periods.

#### Level 6

The individual may initiate interactions.

- They respond to options and choices with actions or gestures.
- They remember learned responses over increasing periods and may anticipate known events.
- They apply potential solutions systematically to problems.
- They actively explore objects and events for more extended periods.

## Level 7

The individual can express their feelings, needs and preferences using single elements of communication.

- They engage in parallel activity with several others.
- They begin to react to the feelings of others.
- They begin to accept “No!” in some situations and respond positively to animated praise.
- They accept and follow some simple activity/reward structures with support.

## Level 8

The individual is able to tolerate interacting with two or three peers during work and play situations.

- They show pride in their accomplishments.
- They enjoy playful interactions for short periods of time.
- They begin to accept turn-taking in small groups with support.
- They ask for help to overcome frustrating tasks.

## Level 9

The individual reacts to working with others.

- They show concern or sympathy for others in distress and subsequently might attempt to offer them comfort or consolation.
- They return to a task after a brief interruption.
- They can be encouraged to try new or unfamiliar tasks.
- The individual demonstrates an emotional response to working co-operatively with peers.

## Level 10

The individual communicates their thoughts and feelings in simple phrases.

- They sometimes seek out familiar peers to interact with.
- They show some consideration of the needs and feelings of other people and other living things.
- They have an emerging sense of what is right or wrong based on their sense of what is fair and unfair and the consequences they have previously experienced.
- They accept that their feelings and expectations may not always be met when working with others.

## Level 11

The individual wishes to join in a wide range of one-to-one, small and large group activities.

- They sometimes express upsetting emotions in a productive manner.
- They moderate their behaviour in unfamiliar situations.
- They choose to initiate and then follow through with new tasks and activities for prolonged periods of time.
- They are aware of their needs and feelings and show respect for themselves.

## Level 12

The individual communicates about their own experiences and feelings, what they find interesting or puzzling and what is of value or concern to them.

- They understand the purpose of an apology.
- They remember and describe how certain events made them feel.
- They identify things which make them special.
- They begin to identify ways to calm down.

## Level 13

The individual calmly responds to questions about their own experiences and feelings.

- They recognise their own values.
- They identify what they can do to make a situation better.
- They identify how some similar situation may make them feel differently.
- They are assertive with their opinions in matters of right and wrong.

## Level 14

The individual identifies how the world around them affects their feelings, making links between aspects of their own and others' experiences.

- They take steps to avoid conflict.
- They make connections between their own attitudes, behaviour and their values and commitments.
- They cope with disagreements and can consider alternative points of view.

## Level 15

The individual raises questions of their own identity, belonging, meaning, purpose, truth, values and commitments.

- They make predictions about how complex and unfamiliar situations might affect them.
- They identify some of their responsibilities and some consequence that could affect others if they fail to meet them.
- They describe what inspires and influences them.

## Level 16

The individual asks and suggests answers to, questions of identity, belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, values and commitments, relating them to their own and others' lives.

- They explain what inspires them and how it influences them to improve themselves.
- They communicate about how political, religious, economic and environmental decisions can affect themselves, their intimate relationships, their close groups and the world around them.

## Level 17

The individual is increasingly confident and accepting of their own identity, beliefs and purpose.

- They understand and welcome a wide range of the beliefs, values and intentions of others.
- They evaluate the motivations of their own actions after an emotional situation and can rationalise the behaviour of others.