




RUNNING COMMENTARY AND SOCIAL COACHING

Who for?



This can be a helpful strategy for children and young people with **social** and **emotional needs** who might find it hard to:



- **Stay calm and emotionally available in social situations** – they might become easily upset, anxious and/or withdraw
- **Manage interactions** with their peers and/or adults – there might be **lots of breakdowns** in communication that they **struggle to repair**  
- **'Read'** people:
 - to **interpret** how someone is **feeling** through their **facial expression** or **body language** 
 - to **predict** someone's **intentions**- what they are **going to do** in a **situation/interaction**
 - to **predict** someone's **expectations** of them- what they might be **expected to do in a situation**

When we find it hard to do these things it often causes **anxiety** and other **big feelings** which can make it hard for us to **communicate** and **manage those feelings**.


- Understand **non-literal language**, e.g., "you're driving me up the wall", "you've let the cat out of the bag"
It may be helpful for children and young people with **social communication needs**, sometimes they might have a diagnosis such as **Autism Spectrum Disorder**, children who have experienced **developmental trauma** who might often be emotionally dysregulated and children who have **language disorder**.



What is 'Running Commentary'?



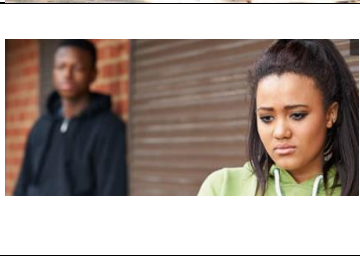
- We often use something called 'self-talk' which is like 'running commentary' to **talk ourselves** through situations in our **heads**: 
 - When someone is acting **unpredictably**, we might talk ourselves through what they are doing and try to **interpret their intentions** by running through different reasons why they might be doing something
 - When something is causing us **anxiety, frustration or upset**- we might **label** how we feel, think about **why** and talk ourselves through what we could do to **manage the feeling** and **situation** in a **socially appropriate way**
- Running commentary is **talking alongside an interaction** to help a child or young person to **read a situation/person**. It is like being the **voice inside their head**. It can be a way of **verbalising** what a person's peers are **thinking/feeling/expecting...** 
- It is a strategy that we often use with very young children who are only just getting to grips with **social rules** such as sharing, turn taking, understanding others, for example:

How do we use running commentary?

<p>A little boy approaches a little girl in a sandpit...</p>	<p>The girl's caregiver might interpret the boy's actions/intentions which may help to reassure the girl:</p>
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div data-bbox="550 1780 1077 1973" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 30%;"> <p>This little boy has come to watch us play in the sand</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1093 1780 1412 1973" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 30%;"> <p>Look, he likes digging too!</p> </div> </div>



For older children with social and emotional needs, they might even find a situation with familiar peers hard to manage:


<p>A peer joins a boy whilst he is drawing</p>	<p>The caregiver or teacher might interpret the boy's actions/intentions which may help to reassure the boy that his peer isn't about to take his pen etc:</p>
	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 40%;"> <p>James has come to see what you are doing...</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 40%;"> <p>He's really interested! Look how he's smiling- I think he's enjoying watching you drawing!</p> </div> </div>
<p>A teacher/adult might help a young person to understand these situations...:</p>	<p>...By interpreting someone's body language/facial expression and predicting how they might be feeling:</p>
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 80%; margin: auto;"> <p>Jenny isn't sitting with the group; I wonder if she's feeling a bit fed up or left out...</p> </div>
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; width: 80%; margin: auto;"> <p>Megan's looking pretty sad. Her shoulders are all hunched up – she looks like she's keeping her back to Jamal. Maybe they've had an argument</p> </div>

What is 'Social Coaching'?

- Social coaching is supporting children and young people in **how to manage social situations**, to **predict** what to do or say by not only interpreting people's communication but by **modelling** and providing examples, or **scripts** of things to say or do.

X NB: This is **not** an approach to **teach social skills**, it is a way to **support** children and young people to be able to **predict what might happen in an interaction** and how to **manage it in a way** that can **prevent** them from becoming anxious, upset, and dysregulated. It is a way of **scaffolding** an interaction.

How do we use social coaching?

<p>The boy's actions/intentions are interpreted:</p>	<p>If the girl shows an interest in the interaction, her caregiver could model and provide scripts of things to say and model ways to keep the interaction going:</p>
	<p>"shall we say, 'hi?', 'hi!'"</p> <p>"we could find out his name and say "what's your name?"</p> <p>If she shows interest in the interaction, her caregiver could coach her to extend the interaction...:</p> <p>"shall we show him how we can pat the sand?",</p> <p>...and continue interpreting the boy's intentions and body language:</p> <p>"Oo he's looking at your spade, I wonder if he'd like a turn"</p> <p>"shall we see if he wants to play, we could say "want a turn?"</p>

<p>The boy's actions/intentions are interpreted:</p>	<p>If the boy shows an interest in the interaction, the adult could provide scripts of things to say and model ways to keep interaction going. This can include supporting the child to manage their emotions:</p>
	<p>"maybe he hasn't used a pen like this before, we could ask him if he has and say "have you used this before?""</p> <p>The adult could prepare him for a transition/the activity pausing <i>if appropriate</i>:</p> <p>"He's said he'd like a turn; I wonder if you're ready to share?"</p> <p>The adult could interpret the boy's actions for the peer:</p> <p>"It's tricky to finish something when you're enjoying it. Tom isn't quite ready yet. That's ok Tom, you can finish your drawing and then it will be James' turn"</p> <p>...and support him to manage his feelings:</p> <p>"It can feel hard to share. But we always take turns in this class. Let's think of something else we can do whilst we wait for it to be your turn again"</p>
<p>The girl's body language has been interpreted and feelings predicted</p>	<p>The adult might support the young person to predict how to manage the situation to avoid a breakdown in communication:</p>
	<p>...by coaching the young person in what might not be appropriate:</p> <p>"now might not be a good time to see if she wants to go to the shops"</p> <p>...and why:</p> <p>"she might just want to be on her own."</p> <p>The adult could suggest or model a script if the young person is interested in communicating with the girl:</p> <p>"You could check in and see if she wants to talk, you could say "are you ok?""</p> <p>And then if the communication is at risk of breaking down, the adult may interpret the girl's action for the young person and problem solve:</p> <p>"It's a bit upsetting when someone blanks you, but we know she's having a hard time. Why don't you give her some time and check in with her later"</p>

 **Top tips**

- When the child or young person you are supporting with running commentary and social coaching uses 'good communication', such as making attempts to **prevent/repair breakdowns** in communication, try to **highlight** this, e.g., "it was great when you noticed that Y hadn't heard you. You made sure you got his attention rather than getting cross".
- For **older children and young people**, running commentary and social coaching may feel **less natural**; by being as **informal** as possible and not highlighting it as a strategy that is specifically aimed at them, they may be more able to find the approach useful. You could do this by:
 - Ensuring that you use the approach with **all young people**, not just those with social-emotional differences
 - **Teaming up** with another adult so that the running commentary is done between you in a way that young people can hear, e.g., "sir, did you notice how X seemed a bit upset? Her head was down, and I thought she looked really sad. I wonder whether anyone has asked her if she's ok..."
- This strategy could also be used to **prepare** a child or young person for a particular situation, e.g., going to the dentist, meeting a new person, going to a new place.

Considerations

- Consider a child or young person's **language ability**- make sure you don't make the running commentary too long or complicated if they have language difficulties

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