



## Introduction

Welcome to the next issue in our 'keyworker series', where each month we focus on one of the eight domains of quality of life (QoL) and how you can support your key child through your weekly keyworker sessions.

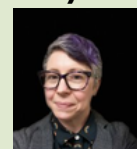
This issue focuses on social inclusion!

Social inclusion is about belonging, connection, and being valued as part of a community. For autistic young people, meaningful inclusion is not about "fitting in" to predefined norms but about having opportunities to participate in ways that respect identity, preferences, and autonomy.

## Research Summary - McMaughan et al (2024) & Pellicano et al (2022)

**McMaughan et al. (2024)** are working directly with autistic adolescents and young adults to define meaningful social inclusion in their own words. They emphasise that inclusion is most effective when self-defined, choice-led, and built on a sense of belonging rather than pressure to conform. They highlight that autistic young people often value a mix of community engagement and trusted, smaller social circles.

**Pellicano et al. (2022)** found that autistic children, young people and adults stressed the importance of safe, accepting spaces where they could be themselves without fear of judgement. They also found that being given genuine choice about social participation increased both comfort and long-term engagement.



**McMaughan**



**Liz Pellicano**

## The Reality

### 1. Co-define Inclusion

Use discussion, drawing, or mind-mapping to explore what 'feeling included' means for the young person.



### 2. Support Community Connection

Identify interest-based clubs/groups, or communities where they can connect with others who share their passions.



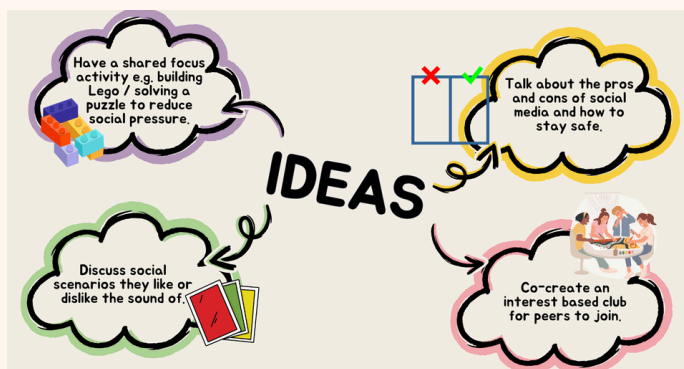
### 3. Build Confidence in Varied Settings

Gradually support experiences in different settings, practicing navigating new environments, in line with their aspirations.



### 4. Foster Safe Online/Offline Balance

Talk about benefits and limits of online, and explore ways to blend online friendships with in-person opportunities, supporting safe online communication and digital literacy.



## Further Reading & Links

[Meaningful Social Inclusion and Mental Well-Being Among Autistic Adolescents and Emerging Adults](#)

[A capabilities approach to understanding and supporting autistic adulthood](#)

[LAT Liberty Quality of Life Home](#)