

PUBERTY SUPPORT TOOLKIT

Practical, adaptable tools for supporting autistic girls

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Five tools. One guiding idea: the tool should fit the learner—not the learner the tool.

Tool	Use it to...
1 Clothing & Comfort	Identify clothing features, contexts, preferences, and sensory needs.
2 Menstrual Care	Prepare routines, communication, products, privacy, and needed assistance.
3 Sensory-Friendly Hygiene	Assess current participation and plan individualized hygiene teaching.
4 Communication & Regulation	Connect body/emotional states with accessible communication and useful supports.
5 Five-Minute Support Plan	Turn observations into one practical next step for a student and team.

Use these as starting points. Change the words, pictures, sequence, products, response format, AAC symbols, and level of assistance to fit the individual learner. Behavior provides information; investigate patterns rather than assuming a single meaning.

Across all five tools, protect: privacy • dignity • meaningful choice • assent • participation • accessible communication

1. Clothing & Comfort Tool

Use to identify what feels comfortable, what does not, and what changes may make clothing more accessible.

Clothing feature	What to notice	Possible adaptations / choices
Fabric	Softness • breathability • stretch • texture • tags/seams	Offer real fabric/clothing options; consider soft, breathable, tagless choices.
Fit	Waist • arms • chest • pressure as the body changes	Try alternate sizes, looser fits, or preferred silhouettes.
Layers	Temperature • pressure • multiple garments	Allow flexible layering and easy removal/addition when possible.
Fasteners	Zippers • buttons • hooks • elastic • motor demands	Consider pullovers, elastic waists, hook-and-loop, or easier fasteners.
Shoes / socks	Seams • tightness • heat • pressure	Offer alternate socks/footwear when feasible, especially during high-demand activities.

Student comfort & choice

Context / activity	Options offered	Student response / choice	Comfort: ✓ works △ unsure ✕ doesn't work	What we learned / family-school notes

How does the student communicate clothing comfort or discomfort?

☐ Speech ☐ AAC ☐ Gesture / pointing ☐ Reaches / moves away ☐ Behavior pattern ☐ Other:

Adapt first. Do not require a student to tolerate unnecessary discomfort simply because adults prefer a particular garment. If a change is genuinely necessary, introduce it gradually, with meaningful choice and attention to assent.

2. Menstrual Care Checklist

Prepare before menstruation becomes urgent. Individualize the routine, products, communication, privacy, and assistance.

Step	Plan / teach	Student participation or communication	Sensory / privacy / support notes
1. Anticipate	Track cycle with a calendar, app, or visual cue.	How can she know what may be coming?	Cycles may be irregular, especially at first.
2. Choose	Select preferred product(s): pad, period underwear, or another appropriate option.	How does she indicate preference / 'different one'?	Consider adhesive, thickness, moisture, pressure, texture, scent.
3. Prepare	Pack supplies in a discreet, easy-to-find location.	Can she locate or request supplies?	Consider spare underwear/clothing and preferred wipes if used.
4. Request privacy / help	Plan bathroom access and who can assist.	Bathroom • privacy • help • stop • pain • uncomfortable	Use AAC, card, gesture, speech, or another reliable response.
5. Change / participate	Break the changing routine into the smallest useful teachable steps.	Which steps can she do? Which require prompting or assistance?	Use visuals/modeling; keep assistance minimally intrusive.
6. Dispose / clean up	Dispose/store product and wash hands.	Can she complete or participate in each step?	Use visual steps; adapt water/soap/sink environment if needed.

Communication to have available before it is needed

Body / need	Action / choice
☐ period ☐ blood ☐ pain ☐ uncomfortable ☐ body not okay	☐ bathroom ☐ help ☐ privacy ☐ stop ☐ change ☐ different one

Individualize the teaching plan

Next useful step to teach	Prompt / visual / model	Who will support it?	Where will it be practiced?

Independence is not the only measure of success. Understanding, communication, choice, participation, comfort, and the ability to request assistance are meaningful outcomes.

3. Sensory-Friendly Hygiene Checklist

Use first as an assessment of current participation, then as a teaching planner. Frequency and routines should be individualized.

Routine	Current participation	Preferred products / sensory considerations	Next teaching step / support
Brush teeth	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	Taste • scent • bristles • water • location	
Wash face / skin care	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	Temperature • texture • scent • touch	
Apply deodorant	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	Roll-on • stick • cream • fragrance-free • pressure	
Shower / bathe	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	Water temp • spray • lighting • sound • soap/shampoo	
Hair care	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	Brush • detangler • wet hair • dryer • accessories	
Change clothes	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	See Clothing & Comfort Tool	
Menstrual care	☐ independent ☐ cue/visual ☐ assistance ☐ not yet taught	See Menstrual Care Checklist	

Task-analysis builder — use for any routine that needs explicit teaching

Step	What the student does	Support / visual	Sensory, privacy, or choice consideration
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

How can the student communicate during this routine?

☐ yes / no ☐ stop ☐ help ☐ break ☐ uncomfortable ☐ different one ☐ finished ☐ other:

Teach only what is useful for this learner. Use the least intrusive effective support. Preserve privacy, choice, and participation when physical assistance is necessary.

4. Communication & Regulation Tool

Connect what the student may be experiencing with a reliable way to communicate and an individualized response.

What I may be experiencing	How I can communicate it	What may help me
☐ calm / okay	☐ body okay ☐ continue ☐ yes	Continue activity • preferred activity • ordinary routine
☐ sad / low	☐ sad ☐ help ☐ person	Trusted person • music • quiet activity • break
☐ frustrated / tense	☐ stop ☐ break ☐ help	Movement • fidget • reduced demand • space
☐ overwhelmed / too much	☐ too much ☐ quiet ☐ break	Quiet space • headphones • movement • fewer demands
☐ worried / anxious	☐ worried ☐ help ☐ what's next?	Visual schedule • trusted person • predictability • comfort item
☐ pain / body not okay	☐ pain ☐ body not okay ☐ bathroom ☐ help	Adult support • bathroom • rest • family/health follow-up as appropriate
☐ uncomfortable	☐ uncomfortable ☐ different one ☐ stop	Change clothing/product/environment • privacy • break

Make this student's tool

Student's actual words / AAC symbols / gestures	Reliable signs or patterns adults may notice	Strategies the student prefers	Strategies to avoid

Do not require conventional emotion labels if they are not useful to the student. Concrete communication such as 'pain,' 'body not okay,' 'stop,' 'help,' 'quiet,' or 'too much' may be more accessible. A regulation strategy should help the student—not simply make the student look calmer to adults.

5. Five-Minute Puberty Support Plan

Choose one student and one current concern. Keep the plan small enough to use tomorrow.

1 NOTICE — What changed?

Body • cycle • clothing • product • bathroom • schedule • staffing • peers • sleep • environment • other:

What are we seeing?

2 INTERPRET — What might the student be communicating?

☐ sensory discomfort ☐ pain / medical concern ☐ communication barrier ☐ task difficulty ☐ uncertainty / predictability ☐ privacy ☐ other

Keep more than one possibility open. What information would help us narrow it down?

3 ASK / OFFER — How can the student tell us what she needs?

☐ pain ☐ stop ☐ help ☐ bathroom ☐ privacy ☐ uncomfortable ☐ different one ☐ break
☐ too much ☐ other: _____

Response mode: ☐ speech ☐ AAC ☐ picture/object ☐ gesture ☐ yes/no ☐ behavior pattern ☐ other: _____

4 TEACH — What is the smallest useful next skill?

Next step:

Support: ☐ visual ☐ model ☐ rehearsal ☐ prompt ☐ environmental adaptation ☐ choice ☐ other:

5 ALIGN — Where would consistency help?

☐ words / AAC ☐ visuals ☐ products ☐ sequence ☐ prompts ☐ privacy plan ☐ response to pain/distress ☐ home-school communication

One thing we will make more consistent:

Success is broader than completing a whole routine independently. Look for greater understanding, communication, participation, comfort, autonomy, and access.

QUICK REFERENCE • ADAPT, DON'T STANDARDIZE

Questions to carry across routines

Ask	Why it matters
What changed?	Puberty-related difficulty may first appear as a change from the student's usual pattern.
What might this behavior be communicating?	Behavior provides information, but its meaning should be investigated rather than assumed.
Can she communicate pain, discomfort, refusal, preference, help, and privacy?	Communication access is foundational to participation and self-advocacy.
What can we adapt before asking her to tolerate something?	Sensory and environmental access should be considered before compliance.
What is the smallest useful skill to teach next?	Complex routines become more accessible when broken into meaningful steps.
How can she participate even if she needs assistance?	Participation and autonomy are not all-or-nothing.
What needs to be consistent across people or settings?	Shared language, visuals, and routines can reduce unnecessary complexity.

Source & adaptation note

Tools 1–4 are adapted and consolidated from Tables 1–6 in Hart Barnett (2025). Tool 5 was developed for conference use as a synthesis/application tool based on the same article and presentation content. The packet intentionally combines overlapping tables so participants have a smaller set of modifiable tools.

Reference

Hart Barnett, J. E. (2025). Practical strategies for supporting autistic girls through puberty: A guide for educators and families. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 60(4), 448–462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21541647251399499>

For conference use: Modify wording, visuals, AAC symbols, products, sequences, and response formats for the individual learner and setting.