

Models for Working with Autistic Children (Linked to Oscar's needs)

What Is the SCERTS Model?

The **SCERTS model** is a **research-based, child-centred**, and **multidisciplinary framework** designed to support autistic children and their families.

It focuses on three core areas:

- **S – Social Communication**
- **ER – Emotional Regulation**
- **TS – Transactional Support**

The model was developed by **Dr Barry Prizant, Dr Amy Wetherby, Emily Rubin, and Amy Laurent** after more than **25 years of research and clinical practice**.

SCERTS is used across **home, school, and community** settings and is applicable from **early years through adulthood**



SC — Social Communication

This part focuses on helping the child become a **confident, spontaneous communicator**.

Key goals include:

- Encouraging **spontaneous and functional communication**
- Supporting **emotional expression**
- Building **trusting relationships** with adults and peers
- Developing the ability to use both **verbal and non-verbal** communication

This reflects SCERTS' emphasis on communication as a foundation for learning and relationships.

ER — Emotional Regulation (ER)

Emotional Regulation helps the child:

- Stay calm and regulated
- Cope with stress and sensory challenges
- Maintain attention for learning
- Use strategies to manage emotions (both **self-regulation** and **mutual regulation**)

A well-regulated child is **more available for interaction, communication, and learning**.

TS — Transactional Support (TS)

Transactional Support is **what adults do** to help the child succeed.

This includes:

- Adapting the environment (e.g., reducing sensory overload)
- Using **visual supports** (pictures, schedules, symbols)
- Adjusting language to match the child's needs
- Supporting families emotionally and practically
- Ensuring all professionals use **consistent approaches**
- Creating predictable routines
- Offering sensory tools

TS recognises that challenges do **not lie solely within the child** — support must also come from adults and the environment.

What SCERTS Aims to Achieve

- Better communication skills
- More positive emotional experiences
- Greater independence
- Reduced frustration and behaviours arising from unmet needs
- Stronger relationships
- Consistent support across home, school, and community

SCERTS emphasises **meaningful, real-world progress**, not rote learning.

Why SCERTS Stands Out

According to its developers:

- It is **neurodiversity-affirming** and recognises individual differences
- It integrates **multiple evidence-based practices** (e.g., ABA, Floortime, TEACCH) within a flexible, child-centred framework
- It provides a **coordinated plan** for families and professionals

Research shows improvements in **positive affect** and **communication frequency**.

HOW THIS MODEL MIGHT BE USED WITH OSCAR

1. Social Communication (SC) for Oscar

SCERTS emphasises building spontaneous, functional communication and secure relationships.

✓ Focus Areas for Oscar

1. Using his interests (farm vehicles, cows, sheep) for communication

- initiating conversations (“What tractor is that?”)
- descriptive language
- making choices
- turn-taking in interactions

2. Supporting understanding and expression

This might include:

- modelling simple phrases
- visually supported choices
- emotion vocabulary (“I feel...” / “I need...”)

3. Building social relationships at school

Because SCERTS promotes trusting relationships, adults and peers would:

- follow Oscar's lead during activities
- join in his interests (e.g., watching farm videos together)
- use predictable interaction routines

4. Expanding non-verbal communication

If needed:

- pointing, gesture, visual referencing
- using photos of farm items as communication tools

2. Emotional Regulation (ER) for Oscar

SCERTS prioritises helping children stay well-regulated so they can learn, socialise, and cope with challenges. [[hes-extrao...dinary.com](https://www.extraordinary.com)]

✓ Strategies for Oscar

1. Understanding his sensory profile

ER includes supporting children through sensory challenges. Oscar may benefit from:

- noise-reduction headphones
- predictable and timed sensory breaks
- access to calming activities (e.g., quiet reading or animal-themed videos)

2. Self-regulation tools

SCERTS emphasises helping children develop strategies to manage stress.

For Oscar, this might include:

- a "calm box" with preferred small vehicles
- breathing prompts
- emotion cards
- a 5-point scale with animal or tractor symbols

3. Mutual regulation (adult support)

Adults would:

- step in early when Oscar shows signs of overwhelm
- use supportive language:
"Let's take a tractor break."
- co-regulate (sit with him, use a soothing tone, help him navigate emotions)

4. Preparing for transitions

SCERTS highlights the importance of consistent support throughout the day.

Oscar might benefit from:

- countdowns (5–3–1 minutes)
- visual timers

- a structured daily plan with pictures of familiar farm items for each step

3. Transactional Support (TS) for Oscar

TS refers to changing **the environment, communication style,** and **supports** to help adults meet the child's needs. It includes adapting settings, using visual supports, and coordinating team support.

✓ Supports for Oscar

1. Visual Supports

SCERTS recommends using tools like picture schedules and written supports. For Oscar, this might include:

- a farm-themed daily schedule
- visual rules (e.g., “quiet voice”, “line up”, “ask for help”)
- choice boards with animals/vehicles

2. Adapting the classroom and home environment

Examples:

- a predictable workspace
- reduced sensory distractions
- preferred items accessible for regulation

3. Consistent communication between adults

TS requires strong teamwork across school and home.

Oscar's team (teachers, speech-language therapist, parents) would share:

- updates on triggers
- successful strategies
- progress in communication and self-regulation

4. Instructional support embedded in routines

Because SCERTS emphasises teaching within natural routines, adults would:

- embed communication opportunities in lessons
- use interest-based learning activities (e.g., a maths task with tractors) See Working with Oscar page.

What This Means for Oscar Day-to-Day

Oscar's day might include:

- A **visual schedule** that uses farm images
- **Staff checking in regularly with supportive emotional language**
- Opportunities to talk about his favourite interests

- **Structured play with predictable patterns**
- Calm spaces and sensory breaks
- Peers guided to join him in shared activities
- Adults modelling communication during his preferred tasks
- A consistent, supportive team approach

This aligns directly with SCERTS' aim of supporting communication, emotional well-being, and independence through individual strengths and tailored interests.

What Is the TEACCH Model?

The **TEACCH® Autism Program** (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication-Handicapped Children) was developed at the **University of North Carolina** by Dr Eric Schopler and Dr Robert Reichler in the 1960s. It has become a widely adopted educational framework used across the world. [autismspeaks.org], [isps.spcollege.edu]

TEACCH is best known for **Structured TEACCHing** — a highly visual, predictable, and organised approach that supports autistic learners by building on their strengths and reducing barriers such as difficulties with communication, attention, and executive functioning.

It focuses on:

- Structuring the **environment**
- Structuring **time**
- Highly structuring **activities**
- Using **visual information** to support understanding
- Promoting **independence** across settings

It is used in classrooms, homes, and community environments, and **emphasises partnering with families.**

Key Principles of TEACCH

TEACCH is built around **Structured Teaching**, which includes several components:

1. Physical Structure

How the room or environment is organised:

- clear physical boundaries
- low-distraction spaces
- defined areas for work, play, and relaxation
This helps give meaning and predictability.

2. Visual Schedules

A clear visual plan showing **where Oscar should be, what he is doing, how long it will last, and what comes next.**

Visual input aligns with autistic strengths.

3. Work/Activity Systems

A structured way of showing:

- what work needs to be done
- how much there is
- how to know it is finished
- what happens next

This encourages independence and reduces anxiety. [autismspeaks.org]

4. Visual Structure of Tasks

Tasks are designed visually so the child can understand the steps without relying on language. Examples include colour-coded materials, left-to-right layouts, or trays showing task sequence.

5. Predictable Routines

TEACCH stresses routines that are consistent yet allow gentle flexibility. Predictability reduces stress and supports independence.

TEACCH works well alongside other autism approaches and is widely used due to strong evidence of educational benefit.

Applying the TEACCH Model to Oscar (Age 9, Autistic)

Below is how TEACCH could support Oscar specifically, using what we know about him (age 9, autistic, enjoys farm vehicles and animals, benefits from structure, and may have sensory or regulation needs).

1. Physical Structure for Oscar

TEACCH recommends clear, organised spaces to help autistic learners understand expectations.

✓ What this means for Oscar:

- A clearly defined **work area** (e.g., table with tractor symbol)
- + A **quiet corner/ room with support** for regulation
- Distinct zones for **learning, play, and breaks**

- Reduced visual clutter
- A predictable route (one way in, one way out) to avoid overwhelm

This physical clarity reduces anxiety and improves focus.

2. Visual Schedules for Oscar

Visual schedules are a core TEACCH strategy. They support understanding and independence.

✓ For Oscar:

- A **farm-themed daily schedule** (tractor = work time, sheep = break, cow = reading)
- A **“now and next” board for transitions**
- Clear symbols for tasks, lessons, and timed **sensory/movement breaks**
- A timetable that shows how long tasks last and what **reward comes after**

This helps Oscar predict his day and reduces stress during transitions.

A **reward book for stickers to collect for prizes.**

3. Work Systems for Oscar

Work systems promote independence by showing exactly what is expected. [autismspeaks.org]

✓ Oscar’s work system could show:

- **What** he needs to do (e.g., three worksheets in trays)
- **How much** he must complete
- **How to know he’s finished** (e.g., finished box)
- **What comes next** (reward activity with farm toys or a quiet break)

This matches Oscar’s need for structure and supports task completion.

4. Visual Structure of Tasks for Oscar

Structured TEACCHing uses visual cues to clarify tasks. [readingrockets.org]

✓ For Oscar:

- Maths problems laminated with tractor icons for steps
- **Reading tasks with colour-coded sections**
- Matching activities using farm animals
- Clear left-to-right task layouts

These adjustments reduce reliance on verbal instructions — aligning with autistic strengths.

5. Routines & Predictability for Oscar

Predictable routines are central to TEACCH.

✓ Oscar would benefit from:

- A consistent daily routine
- Familiar start-of-day sequence
- Predictable signals for transitions (timers, countdowns)
- **Scheduled sensory and pre-timed breaks**

This supports emotional regulation and reduces anxiety.

How TEACCH Helps Oscar Day-to-Day

With TEACCH in place, Oscar would experience:

- Reduced stress due to clear expectations
- Better engagement because tasks use his strengths
- Greater independence through structured systems
- Fewer meltdowns from unexpected changes
- Increased confidence
- A calmer learning environment

This aligns with TEACCH's goal of creating meaningful engagement and supporting flexibility and independence. [autismspeaks.org]

How ABA Works

✓ 1. Assessment by a BCBA

A Board Certified Behaviour Analyst assesses the child's strengths, challenges, triggers, and motivators before creating a personalised plan.

✓ 2. Goal setting

Goals may focus on communication, emotional skills, daily life skills, reducing distressing behaviour, or academic readiness.

✓ 3. Teaching strategies

ABA uses a variety of methods including:

- **Positive reinforcement** (praise, preferred activities, tokens)
- **Prompting and fading**
- **Discrete Trial Training (DTT)** for step-by-step learning
- **Naturalistic interventions** (teaching within play and routine activities)

✓ 4. Data collection and adjustment

Behaviour and progress are measured continuously; teaching strategies change based on what works.

Applying ABA to Oscar (Age 9, Autistic)

Below is how ABA can support Oscar specifically, based on his interests, strengths, and needs.

1. Using Oscar's Interests to Increase Communication

ABA emphasises reinforcement — so **Oscar's love of farm vehicles, cows, and sheep** becomes a powerful tool.

ABA examples for Oscar:

- Asking for a **tractor toy** increases communication
- Completing a reading task earns **time to watch a farm video**
- Practising conversation during a **farm-themed activity**

Positive reinforcement strengthens social communication and expressive language.

2. Improving Emotional and Self-Regulation

ABA can help Oscar learn strategies to cope with frustration, transitions, or sensory stress.

Strategies might include:

- Teaching Oscar to request a **break** or **quiet space**
- Using **visual cues** (e.g., "I need help" card)
- **Using and teaching Zones of Regulation**
- **Reinforcing calm behaviour with preferred rewards**
- Using ABC analysis to identify triggers
(e.g., noise → overwhelmed → behaviour → adult support)

ABA helps reduce challenging behaviours and teaches alternative responses.

3. Building Independence

ABA focuses on functional daily-living skills.

Oscar could be taught to:

- Follow multi-step routines
- Organise school materials
- Complete independent work using visual task systems
- Improve self-care tasks (dressing, packing bag)

These skills are taught in pre-planned small steps with reinforcement for progress.

4. Supporting Learning and Attention

ABA can help Oscar increase focus, persistence, and academic engagement.

Examples:

- Reinforcement for staying on task
- Breaking lessons into short, achievable steps
- Teaching Oscar how to ask for clarification
- Using timers and structured work cycles
- Pairing less preferred tasks with motivating farm-themed reinforcers

ABA is shown to improve attention and academic behaviours.

5. Naturalistic ABA for Oscar

Modern ABA often blends structured and play-based teaching. This is ideal for Oscar at age 9.

Approaches may include:

- **PRT (Pivotal Response Treatment)**, which uses child interests (farm vehicles) to encourage communication and social engagement
- **Natural Environment Teaching**, where skills are practised during everyday routines (lunchtime, playtime, PE)

This makes learning more meaningful and reduces stress.

What ABA Might Look Like in Oscar's Day

A morning routine reinforced with visuals and clear expectations

- **Reward charts using farm vehicle icons**
- Breaks earned for completing steps of a work task
- Practising social skills with peers using farm-related games
- Teaching flexible thinking with structured puzzles or choosing alternative tractors
- Reinforcing calm behaviour during noise with headphones + reward time

ABA's focus on reinforcement, skill building, and structured supports aligns well with Oscar's need for routine, clarity, and motivating themes.

What Floortime Looks Like in Practice

According to Autism Speaks and ICDL, Floortime involves:

- Getting down to the child's level
- Following the child's lead
- Joining their play
- Expanding the interaction gradually
- Encouraging back-and-forth "circles of communication"

For example:

If a child is tapping a toy truck, the adult may tap a car in the same way, then add a small twist to

encourage interaction.

Sessions are warm, playful, and emotionally engaging — not reward-chart-based.

What Floortime Might Look Like for Oscar (Age 9)

Oscar loves **farm vehicles, cows, sheep**, and enjoys predictable, engaging interactions. Floortime can use these interests to build communication, emotional thinking, social connection, and flexible play.

1. Following Oscar's Lead Through His Interests

Floortime begins by joining Oscar in what *he* chooses.

Possible scenarios:

- If Oscar lines up tractors, you sit beside him and line up cows or sheep.
- If he pushes a tractor in circles, you join in with another vehicle and mirror his movement.
- If he is focused on a farm video or toy, you join that theme.

The aim is to create a shared moment of connection, not to change his behaviour.

This is where the emotional engagement starts.

2. Expanding Circles of Communication

Once Oscar is comfortable, the adult gently introduces a reason for him to respond.

Examples:

- You block the tractor's path gently → Oscar looks at you → you smile and move it → circle complete
- You make the cow "moo" at his tractor → Oscar responds with a sound or move
- You introduce a small "problem," like a broken fence, encouraging shared problem-solving

These small expansions build the foundation for more complex communication.

3. Supporting Oscar's Emotional Development

Floortime works on deep emotional skills, including:

- Self-regulation
- Shared attention
- Engagement
- Understanding emotions
- Flexible thinking

For Oscar this might look like:

- Helping him stay regulated during a tricky moment by staying attuned and calm
- Introducing simple emotion language during play (“This cow looks worried—what happened?”)
- Encouraging him to solve small social-emotional problems through play (fixing fences, sharing resources)

4. Respecting Oscar's Sensory and Individual Differences

DIR stresses honouring the child's sensory profile.

For Oscar this could mean:

- Using farm animals with different textures
- Letting him move around during play if he needs sensory input
- Offering deep pressure with a weighted animal if calming is needed
- Keeping interactions predictable but playful

5. Building Higher-Level Thinking and Social Skills

Floortime develops symbolic and logical thinking through pretend play.

Examples for Oscar:

- Creating a story about a tractor race or farm emergency
- Encouraging him to explain what characters feel
- Moving from simple play to problem-solving (“The sheep escaped—how do we get them back?”)
- Linking ideas (“If it rains, what happens to the crops?”)

These help Oscar with flexible thinking, inference, emotional reasoning, and communication.

How Floortime Supports Oscar Overall

Floortime helps Oscar by:

- Strengthening emotional connections
- Encouraging spontaneous communication
- Supporting sensory needs
- Deepening attention and engagement
- Encouraging flexible thinking
- Building social understanding
- Using his interests to motivate and empower him

Floortime meets Oscar where he *is*, rather than expecting him to fit a predetermined programme.