Here are some examples of responses to this week’s scenarios using the ‘what if’ skill:

Scenario A

Using the water bottle solution for this scenario may have the following consequences –

- What if he relies on the water bottle in other situations - it could become a distraction
- What if the teacher forgets to provide him with a water bottle - he may become distressed and more upset
- What if he drinks it - he may then become distressed and angry and need the bottle filling
- What if he throws it at someone - and he gets into trouble for hurting others
- What if he tips it up on someone - and he gets into trouble for getting someone wet
- What if one of his fellow students is frightened of water, - and it has the opposite effect on them to Jeremy
- The water bottle is likely a solution for a period of time, and may well need to be developed/worked on with his teacher and care team.

I agree with the what ifs so far listed but there are few things that jumped out at me straight away.

What if they make it to the playground safe and the water bottle breaks or gets left behind lost at the playground how does Jeremy get back safely to class.

Being Autistic that will then be expected as part of the routine of going to the playground What if the bottle was forgotten one day.

What if at the end of the day if Jeremy walked to and from the playground without sidetracking to the water park they let him have water play before going home ie play under sprinklers or water balloons especially at it appears his special interest seems to be in the water not looking at it

There are lots of ways we could build on his interest with water for integration opportunities & we could perhaps work towards focusing it like water pistols for target practise (targets or things like knocking ping pong off golf tees). I haven’t gone through all the possible what ifs. We could also look at something his classmates could add for him like sipping drinks or blowing bubbles. We could look at ways he might teach others something to do with the wave pool or water. We could look at first & then scenarios.

My boys - especially our 6 year old non verbal lad, have always had a passion for water. When we can extend special interests it allows them many more opportunities. Water has been great - from a tool like a nice, calming bath to coloured glitter water tornado bottles that their peers love. Of course, they like to find less desirable ways to play with peers & water - like seeing how far they can spit water from the bubblers with friends lol - which needs redirecting - but water is always an invitation to play :)
Scenario B

It sounds as if Peta gains pleasure visually by looking at the shelves in this particular store.

The 'what if's' of distracting with food or the iPad: what if Peta isn't hungry?; what if the iPad battery is flat?; what if the parents have forgotten to take the iPad with them?: what if she becomes distressed prior to the distraction being offered, will it still help?

Wow, when I was reading this scenario, I remembered back when my son (now 4), was 2yo and first diagnosed. He behaved exactly like Peta when visiting Woolies! I agree the situation is far too stimulating for her; the lights, sounds, rush of busy people. Standing and staring at the items directly ahead of her on the shelf may be what she needs to feel calm in this situation. She may walk into people and push them out the way, simply because they are interfering in her achieving her goal. I could never understand why my son, who is terrified of getting lost, would so easily walk away from me at the shops. He actually seemed quite delighted at the thought of taking off on me. I now understand he was craving the freedom of satisfying his own needs, which overtook his anxiety of getting lost. There was no way he would allow himself to be confined in the trolley or his stroller. It was usually toward the end of the shop, when my arms were full of items! I agree, noise cancelling headphones and social stories are beneficial to both reduce the stimulation and show a more socially acceptable way of behaving. The timer, and use of a visual schedule may also assist in Peta learning when the shopping trip is coming to an end.

A couple of things I did to help my son avoid meltdowns in this situation are:

I started ordering the shopping online, and got it delivered, thus temporarily avoiding the situation until it was more under control. It also allowed me to be able to bring him there to address his own needs, not my need to buy the groceries!

At the same time, began using a social story about why we go to Woolies. We searched the weekly catalogues and make charts of the types of foods he likes to eat at Woolies. (He also has sensory issues with food, so it served both purposes.)

I let him choose any three items that he could buy, that I could help him to find. We went to Woolies for the next year only for these three items, then gradually built up to a few more (of the items I actually needed to buy when there). He could eat one of the items in the car on the way home, if he helped me find them. (Not if he avoided a meltdown, as the purpose of the trip was to find the food he wanted, not to go there and behave.)

We only visited Woolies early in the morning, when it was not as busy.

He learnt what was in each aisle and he would have to find the aisle numbers. Then we got more specific to what side of the aisle, whereabouts on the shelf were the items, etc. This took the focus off his surroundings to a large degree, as he knew the reason why he was there.

It has now expanded into looking at the way food is packaged, alternative brands, etc. Going to the shops is now an activity he enjoys immensely!
Sharing your experience

My eldest son has always been interested in animals, all animals, fish, dinosaurs, birds, reptiles you name it.

To encourage his speech we used his love of animals right from the very basic things like "what makes the moo sound?" and got him using words.

We progressed to using animals to get him counting, sorting, learning the alphabet, enjoying books, as motivation for completing difficult tasks.

His special interest was the key to his world, he became happier, he began to talk (in sentences!), we even got him eating happily.

One day he borrowed a book from the public library and it was all about animals that had become extinct,

What erupted next was heartbreaking..... he couldn't stop crying, he was having a complete meltdown, he was having bad dreams. The thought of animals becoming extinct was literally crippling him.

To counter act this new "phobia" I introduced my son to the world of Steve Irwin and David Attenborough.

Both men very knowledgeable in their field, both very big players in the world of conservation and both had DVD’s that my son could watch.

We explained how he could use his love of animals to help, That one person can do big things and gave the example of Steve Irwin and the wild life warriors campaign.

My son became a Joey Ambassador for the wildlife warriors at age 4, he introduced the concept of conservation to his preschool class.

Standing up and talking to the whole class about it's importance and even helping to raise money for the program.

Now my son is almost 7yrs old, his interests have given him so many skills, he has found other children who like animals (he has friends), he is sociable, his differences and quirks have faded into the background as children and adults began to love him for his passion in animals and accept his quirks.

I am beyond proud of him, the work he put's in and the amazing adventures he has already had.

Last year he got to meet Sir David Attenborough and chat about their favorite animals, this year he will be going to Australia zoo and the Great Barrier Reef.

I know that finding that "special interest" was/is the the key