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Issue 14
Winter 2012
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Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions

Shhhhhh: It's our 'calm' special

Feet up for four pages on how to keep your tension levels in the low zone.



Pearls of Wisdom

Expert advice on cleaning teeth



Gen Up

Our 2012 guide to ASC events

PLUS

WIN

A Sense of Calm
DVD worth over

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Letter from the Editors



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For more information on any of our services please visit www.cygnethealth.co.uk or call Cygnet Central: 0845 070 4170

For more information contact Amy Stanion, Services Coordinator
Tel: 0161 443 4060 Email: amystanion@cygnethealth.co.uk



Specialist Babysitting, Befriending and Support Services for People with Autism

Specialist babysitting and befriending services for children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Conditions in the North West

Given the special requirements of autistic children it can be difficult to find a babysitter that you feel comfortable with, someone who understands them and has the experience of working with them. This is where Time can introduce you to people who have already been reviewed and who have experience of and an interest in working with autistic children.

Time babysitters and befrienders are all over 21, CRB checked and have experience of working with children and young people with autism. They all complete an insight into autism training.



Tel: 07942815845 Email: tori@timebabysitting.com
Web: www.timebabysitting.com



<Whispery, hypnotic voice> Well hi there. Welcome to our 'calm' special. As you can see, AuKids has gone all mellow for this issue. Our features don't generally extend beyond two pages, but this issue is a bit different. Our 'calm special' is a bumper four-page exploration of how to take care of yourself and face the challenges that autism can bring without raising the temperature of your household.

Whether we're talking about parents, teachers or children, remaining calm is of such vital importance to autistic children that its impact is far-reaching. Calm children experience less behavioural difficulties and calm parents experience less stress.

We found that whenever we were discussing features for the magazine, the issue of calm nearly always came up. Eventually we decided that it shouldn't go under the radar any more. Calm, for Issue 14, is centre stage and is equally relevant to everyone.



Thanks Reggie!

So, whether you're the most laid back person on earth, or whether you regularly have to be scraped from the ceiling, this issue is our New Year's gift to you. Stick on a sandalwood candle, take a long bath, put your feet up and read the most relaxing AuKids ever. Start 2012 as you mean to go on – chilled out!

<Normal voice> Oh, and we've also done a round-up of some of the best speakers we've seen. Plus our panel guides you through the best hints about teeth brushing.

In March, AuKids is bringing out its first one-off 'special' for new readers. This is a 16-page compilation of our greatest hits, if you like, compiled especially for parents who are new to autism. It will be sent free of charge to diagnosis centres and support groups. Don't despair, existing readers will be able to order the special issue online for £5. The special comes out on top of our usual four issues a year.

If you run a support group, apply now for the special issue by writing to auidsmag@gmail.com, stating how many copies you'd like. The special is sponsored by Time Babysitting Ltd, whose director is of course our co-editor, Tori Houghton.

Tori says: 'We felt that despite the impact and success of AuKids, there is still nothing encouraging for people to walk away with after their ADOS test. We want to help parents right at the start of their journey and this is the way to do it. We've cherry-picked the best features we've written that are especially relevant to this group of parents.'

Just before we go, a couple of thank-yous...We were most touched to have received a donation of £250, accompanied by the following note:

"In memory of Reginald Francis Roberts who died earlier this year at the age of 102. He would have been delighted to support such a worthwhile cause."

We used the donation to buy equipment for exhibition and conference stands so that we can bring AuKids to a wider audience this year. A big thanks to Studio North in Manchester for providing the graphics for our very impressive banner stands!

See you in the Spring!

Tori & Debby

COMPETITION WINNERS FROM ISSUE 13:

Mary Johnson, Liz Hamilton, Joanne Shaw, Lyn Anderson, Malcolm McGillivray, Pauline O'Rourke and Jenny McCrindle.

Our front cover star is Rio Harding - see page 12.

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New Mission - Get a Vision!



'Visual support' is the most common aid for children with autism and often recommended to parents by speech and language therapists. But why is it so important?





By Tori Houghton, speech and language therapist specialising in autism.

We all depend on visual information. Daily cues such as road signs, labels and logos are powerful navigation tools. As well as words, we communicate using gestures and body language. If we were to find ourselves in a foreign country, we would highly depend on our visual skills – maybe seeking out the familiar golden arches of McDonalds or someone to point the way to our hotel.

The Science Bit

Information comes to us through our senses. For spoken language, we depend on our auditory skills (our hearing).

This complex process involves:

-  switching our attention to what we are supposed to be listening to
-  filtering out all the background noise
-  picking out important words
-  decoding the words and making sense out of them

For children on the autism spectrum, there is likely to be a 'breakdown' at one or more of those stages.

They may struggle to know what to attend to and have delayed and slower auditory processing skills. It may also take increased effort on their part to filter out irrelevant background 'noise'. Words are totally abstract and their meaning isn't often obvious. Words are also transient - once said, they quickly disappear.

Vision On!

We may be used to our high dependency on words but anyone who's played charades will agree that it's just as easy to get information across visually.

What do we mean by visual support?

'Visual support' simply means using an actual object, photograph, symbol or picture to convey meaning.

Why is it so important?

- **It sticks:** There is more time to look, process and interpret.
- **Supports expressive language:** It can help the child to use a word that they may not already be familiar with.
- **Supports understanding:** It helps children to structure and organise their day.
- **Helps with requests:** Pre-verbal children can use visual support to ask for things.
- **Supports social skills:** Visual support in the form of words, stories, cartoons or drawings can also help to explain social situations. They can help slow down and re-create an event that has taken place quickly.

- **Supports language development:** Children who are able to build simple sentences using symbols tend to 'hit the ground running' when they develop speech.

What type do I use?

Symbolic language ranges from the most tangible, such as an actual object, to more complex visuals such as using the written word to reinforce an idea. What you use depends on your child's needs and ability as well as the situation.

Cartoons are great for a quick chat about a situation that has just happened. Written words are

sometimes better when situations need to be explained in advance.

For a pre-verbal child, support can take the form of simple pictures or symbols.

How does it work?

Real object: "I use Felicity's cup to let her know that I'm offering her a drink."

Objects of reference: "When I show Toby the car keys, he knows that we are going out for a drive."

Photographs: "When we are going out, I show Martin a photo of who we are going to see and he holds this for the journey, which seems to give him comfort."

Symbols: "We use colour symbols to offer Chloe choices in what she wants to drink."

Line Drawings:

"I draw two things that we are going to do and tell Davey – 'First shopping - then McDonalds'".

Sign Language:

"I use Makaton signing with Ella around simple every day routines. She does look at me when I do this even if she is not copying me yet".

Written Word: "When I go out with Jake, we write a list of what we are going to do from getting into the car to getting home again. It reassures him and we have less frequent tantrums."

"I think in pictures. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures."

Temple Grandin, author and adult with autism.

"Sometimes it's hard for me to understand people directly. I sort of 'translate' what they say into charts, diagrams, maps, and timelines, and I view mental subtitles of what they say - reading the subtitles is a lot easier than listening to the words."

Alexptrans (alias) - adult with autism on Wrong Planet.net

Not For You? Yes it is!

Problem: I don't have the complicated symbol package.
Answer: Easy - use photographs or Google images.

Problem: I'm not very good on the computer.
Answer: Use packets from favourite foods or DVD covers.

Problem: I don't want to use different symbols from the ones at school.
Answer: Good thinking - ask school for copies of the symbols they use.

Problem: I don't know any Makaton signs
Answer: You can pick them up from CBeebies' Something Special and in some areas Makaton courses are run free of charge for parents. Ask your speech therapist to find out more.

Problem: It's a bit fiddly and I'm always losing symbols
Answer: Have a key-ring made with common symbols or use blank symbols and a marker pen.

Problem: I don't want them to be doing 'school' things at home, they need to relax.

Answer: You wouldn't remove a ramp for a wheelchair at home because it was more relaxing. Auditory processing difficulties don't just happen at school. Visual support is a requirement wherever you are, if you want your child to be able to communicate and ease their frustration.

Specialist short-break service for children and young people with Autism

Everyone needs a change and time off occasionally, whether it's for an hour, a day or a week. This can be especially true for carers - caring can be exhausting.

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How To Keep (...when all around

Self-Calming Strategies

Centring

Take a slow, deep breath (to the pit of your stomach) through your nose, and count to four. Then hold the breath for the count of four, before exhaling through your mouth, again to the count of four. Repeat several times.

Progressive Muscular Relaxation

Start by clenching your fists tightly, and hold this for ten seconds...then relax them. Repeat several times. Then scrunch your shoulders tightly, and hold this for ten seconds, before relaxing your shoulders. Again, repeat several times. You can do this for all the major muscle groups.

Cognitive Strategies

Keep Note

Keep a positive diary of moments you've handled well. What was your mood? What was the context? What worked?

Pat on Back

Sometimes we just need to tell ourselves that we did a great job, and take a breather, instead of heading once more into the fray with no space for reflection.

EVERYONE benefits from knowing how to keep calm. Parents of autistic kids, however, stand to benefit even more than most. Firstly, you may face greater parenting challenges than others. Secondly, autistic children tend to be more sensitive to high levels of emotion and can react to it more strongly than other children.

Keeping calm is so vital to positive parenting that we've produced this chilled-out special. After reading it, we hope you'll be able to tackle all situations positively, without feeling a slave to pent up emotion. In turn, you should reap the rewards at home.

By *Debby Elley and Tori Houghton*

You can tell the moment you meet someone whether or not they're laid back. Isn't it just the case that some people shout and some don't? Do we honestly think that we can take your life, with all its stresses, and chill you out with a magic wand?

Whilst it's true that a lot is down to genetics, that's by no means the whole story. We've spoken to a range of professionals who have shown us that being calm can actually be learnt. Of all the parenting skills to have at your disposal, this is possibly the most underrated one. That's why we've dedicated four pages to it.

What's so important about staying calm?

Working up to an emotional explosion is easy when a child is playing up. Failing to diffuse situations, however, can lead to a high underlying level of household tension. This tension can cause children distress and behavioural problems. It's an emotional toxin that in time will erode the wellbeing of your entire family.

At AuKids we advise you on how to build a great bond with your child. Take calm out of the equation though, and that valuable help is wasted. The fallout of a family row can be felt by an autistic child for hours, sometimes days.

But whilst we're aware of this, it's sometimes hard to know what to do about it. Professor Tanya Byron, best known for her work as a child therapist on TV shows *Little Angels* and *The House of Tiny Tearaways*, says that the reasons are physiological and have primitive roots.

"When people get anxious the fight or flight response comes in; it's a physiological response to threat," explains Tanya.

"The psychological and physiological changes that happen once adrenalin has been released are changes that are necessary to keep us alive - that's fundamentally how primitive the anxiety response is.

"There's an increase in heart rate. Oxygenated blood pumps round the body faster. There's also muscle tension when we feel stressed and anxious. Muscles become primed to fight or run. There are changes in the blood flow to the brain. Less blood flows to the frontal cortex, so we become more impulsive and more disinhibited and less socially aware. Capacity for logical thought goes out of the window."

Tanya agrees, though, that it's important parents prepare strategies for staying calm.

"If we have children getting agitated and we get anxious and agitated, we become less able to manage their behaviour calmly, coolly and assertively. But managing your anxiety response in the face of managing children with challenging behaviour is really important because if you don't, you basically join child in their anxious stressed world and then whole situation can become very difficult for everybody," she says.

Your child may not have the maturity and insight to deal with their own emotions - and sensory issues may make it physically tough for them to do this. Here's the good news, though: it only takes one of you to diffuse a bomb.

Being Self Aware

People who learn to respond well under pressure have first learnt to understand their own emotions, including the signals that tell them when they're getting stressed.

Graham Salmons, a pilot for 14 years who is now a captain with Flybe, says that in the cockpit it's vital to have personal awareness.

"Personal insight for pilots is a huge issue - and difficult too, especially with predominantly men. We spend a lot of time, especially with First Officers who are attempting a route to command, to examine it," he says.

Recognise the physiological signs

Says Graham: "Firstly, in order to stay calm, you have to know at first if you are calm. So people need to take time to personally reflect and understand what their current state is."

Autistic children thrive on predictability. It stands to reason, then, that consistency in your own behaviour will be reassuring for your child. Identifying your own stress and adopting calming strategies will help you to manage your own behaviour and to stay consistent.

Your Head... (are losing theirs)



But what happens when there's a sudden and unexpected influx of anxiety?

"You must be able to recognize when something is happening that challenges your state and apply the appropriate response," says Graham.

"Most people find this the hardest thing, as they react immediately. It is absolutely drummed into pilots from day one of their training that if anything goes wrong, sit on your hands. Do nothing. Just wait. Don't react. Examine the situation."

**"Do nothing.
Just wait.
Don't react.
Examine the
situation."**

The reason for this, Graham tells us, is that instant reactions are in fact often the wrong ones.

"There are really very few situations that require INSTANT response in order to secure the safety of the aircraft in flight, and those ones are so repeatedly drilled the pilots don't really have to think."

Tuning in to your physiological state helps you to examine whether you're calm, according to Graham.

"For me personally, when something happens that challenges my calm state I recognize what I can only describe as an emotional spike. This is the crucial moment. When this happens to me I say to myself, 'I am going to do nothing, I am going to examine the situation'. I say this quite slowly.

"I have a metronome in my head and it is playing slow time. And these days, with all the experience and practise I find that I go all icy and cool, straight professional. And I'll start to discuss things with the First Officer. I call this process 'detachment' - I am completely emotionally detaching from the situation and seeing it as objectively as possible.

Graham explains that the emotional state of a pilot is key to the safety of everyone. "One

person maintaining the appropriate emotional level at all times sets a benchmark for everyone, that's why captains are so carefully selected and highly trained," he says.

"They know that the slightest deviation from that slow metronomic beat of operation, will raise the general level to all. In a difficult situation, the captain remains the anchor, and so must your parent."

Part of overcoming a state of stress is to expect it, according to Graham. "You should not be surprised. But the emotional energy needs to be channelled into a calm objective response. When it is, the feeling of

empowerment that you managed yourself in this situation is hugely reinforcing."

Preparing to be calm

Knowing yourself and your own emotional state is key to keeping calm, Tanya Byron agrees. She suggests a two-pronged approach, preparing yourself for stressful situations as well as understanding your child's key triggers, looking at a range of factors such as hunger, tiredness and sensory overload.

Once you know the early physiological signs of stress in yourself, you can use your earlier preparation to self-calm before you set off a chain reaction of events. Identify your state as a situation starts to get stressful. How tense are your muscles? Are you clenching your jaw or your fists? Are you pursing your lips in order to force yourself not to shout? If you're in a partnership, you may want to ask your partner to point out when they see you start to get stressed - you do the same and agree not to lose it when they point it out!

Once you've identified warning signs, take a step back. Remove yourself from the situation if you can. Engage Plan B!

Averting the Avalanche!
Strategies for dealing with crisis

Walk Away
Leave the room to let yourself calm down if you feel your anger is getting out of control and it's safe to do so.

Silence is Golden
Remember that if a child is pressing all your buttons, you don't actually have to respond. If a question is asked repeatedly you could write down the answer, or even just give them a visual, like a drawing. Repeated questioning is sometimes a sign of anxiety.

Chain Reaction
If your child has a habit of shouting at you from a distance or doing something else to catch your attention that you don't find acceptable, choose not to react until their behaviour is more appropriate.

Continued...



Calm For Kids

Singalong

Singing a predictable, calm song, can be a great distraction. Calm music with slow beats can help.

Name the Emotion

Show your child that you recognise what they are feeling by saying 'I can see that you're cross.' Stick to the same language to help them to identify their own emotions.

Continued...

Breathe

Teach your child deep breathing by sitting them on your lap and breathing slowly together for ten.

Forgive, Forget

Try not to hold a grudge. A bad morning needn't turn into a bad day.

Laughter Remedy

For silly giggles, try humour and distraction first.

Consequences

Assertively but without anger, spell out the consequences early to avoid both of you in meltdown. E.g. "I need you to switch that off in five, otherwise you will not be allowed to play it later." Follow through.

Debrief

Don't tell a child why their behaviour was bad at the time of a tantrum. Reflect together when everything has cooled down, with visuals or simple drawings to focus you both on the situation.

Is it Worry?

Spot where anger is really a sign of anxiety and give reassurance and cuddles to diffuse.

Whisper

Whispering (not hissing!) is less threatening than a loud voice and you are modelling calm behaviour. If a child cannot hear you well, they've got to calm down to respond. Whispering a 'secret' can be a great distraction.

Heavenly Aroma

Lavender scents can have a great calming effect especially before bedtime. Use lavender baby lotion for a calming massage.

Red Light

Warnings are a great deterrent. Tell your child that what they're doing is going to make you feel angry.

Plan B is being aware of self-calming techniques. These can include some slow, deep breathing. Just taking five minutes before you react to have a cup of tea or be by yourself can help. Go outside, breathe some fresh air or listen to a favourite piece of music. It won't take long to bring those stress levels down to a manageable state.

What's important is that you identify what calms you and you know how to stop your physiological state from escalating to the point where your behaviour impacts your child.

A major part of your own preparation is being aware of perception filters. These are the voice loops in your head that dictate how you perceive a difficult situation, dictating your attitude and behaviour.

Performance coach Simon Houghton, who works with sportsmen and women to improve their game through psychological methods, believes that being aware of your perception filters is key in dealing with potentially stressful situations.

"Whether you realise it or not, you are constantly talking to yourself," says Simon. "Whatever you say will generally be either negative - 'Why is he being so difficult? I don't have TIME to deal with this! Why is life so hard?' - or positive - 'Well done, that was handled well!'

Says Simon: "When we are feeling anxious about a particular situation, we are generally saying negative things to ourselves. Yet in difficult situations, that's when we need to be repeating positive messages."

Simon advises that parents need to be kinder to themselves. "What would your friends say to you if they were standing next to you in this situation? What would you like to be thinking instead of the negative thoughts? That's exactly what you should say to yourself."

If it doesn't come naturally, advises Simon, then practise makes perfect. "It takes a bit of time and effort, and it's best if you pick a couple of short phrases and repeat them regularly to yourself, but you will find it a tremendous help if you know what to say to yourself when a situation arises that challenges you.

"The positive self-talk could also be words or phrases that are more instructional and

calming in nature, such as 'Relax,' or 'Just breathe.' Again, these should be rehearsed, but can be extremely effective."

So, next time your child pulls your strings, give it a go. Choose to think differently, and bat away the negative thoughts. Try 'I'm an expert in staying calm!' 'I will help him to manage his emotions,' or 'This is going to diffuse, because I'm going to do it!'

Positive thinking and visualising success - 'seeing' yourself successfully manage a situation, says Simon, are

techniques used by the world's best sportsmen. Often what sets them apart from the competition isn't ability, but state of mind.

Establishing Calm

In summary, staying calm isn't just about dealing with the moment of crisis, but about handling your overall anxiety levels. Tanya says that parents should set aside time for themselves so that their overall levels of anxiety are reduced. "Looking after yourself as well as you can is going to increase your capacity to manage a difficult situation," she explains.

Part of looking after yourself may involve letting off steam outside the family environment. "Talk to people who understand. It's therapeutic - don't think of it as betraying your child. Sometimes the best way to look after your child is to look after yourself," she says.

As well as diffusing pressure safely, you'll need to invest some time and effort into positive relaxation. How much effort do you spend on your mental wellbeing? Thought so. Take time to recharge. Make some small changes in 2012. Have an hour a day just to yourself, a weekly exercise class outside the house and make time and space for quality relaxation, not just flopping in front of the box. Dedicate time to identifying those things that help you to stay calm and make it your priority.

Surround yourself with sights, sounds and smells that relax you. Declutter your brain and practise a little stillness. The magic won't work overnight, but over time you'll find that your ability to handle stress becomes increased.

And remember - you're only human. Don't beat yourself up about it if you don't handle every situation perfectly. The important bit is to think and reflect on it.

"Looking after yourself as well as you can is going to increase your capacity to manage a difficult situation."



Sensory Serenity

Connor's mum Sabrina found that Sensory Plus's Sensory-in-a-Suitcase Kit helped to keep him calm. She borrowed the suitcase from Cerebra, a charity for children with neurological conditions. Cerebra operates a lending library for specialist toys, books and equipment. Sabrina says: 'He's very sensory-led, so he just loves the sensory toys in the suitcase; they calm him down a treat. He often just falls asleep'. For more details of Sensory-in-a-Suitcase, call 0800 212709 or visit www.sensoryplus.co.uk. For more information on how Cerebra can help, visit www.cerebra.org.uk or call 0800 328 1159.

Cushy Number

Give your child a cushion and tell them to take it out on it as hard as they can for five minutes. Sometimes they end up laughing too!

Count on it

Autistic kids respond to warnings even better than other children. They may just need an extra warning in the form of a countdown, plus you kneeling at their level and eye contact to make sure they've understood the instruction.

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Designer and creative consultant Peter Higgins has created a new DVD that uses animation and music to imitate the effects of a sensory room.

Peter had witnessed the powerful calming effects of a sensory space first hand after his mother was admitted to a dementia unit that was trialling one. Astonished by its positive impact in calming agitated patients, he decided to design something which would be an affordable and practical alternative for carers at home.

A Sense of Calm Is a 60-minute DVD featuring six clips of moving abstract images - all colourful balloon-like shapes - set to gentle music that's designed to filter out sensory overload and help promote relaxation. Peter says: "I used spheres and bubbles because they have no sharp edges and enhance the smooth tempo of

A Sense of Calm

the animation. I also wanted this to be a pure form of relaxation that doesn't rely on memory, or learnt responses."

It's a bit like having a giant lava lamp in your lounge and we think that having it on in the background with calm lighting and soothing smells will definitely promote a very tranquil atmosphere. The AuKids team nearly fell asleep watching it, put it like that.

Whilst you can't entirely recreate a sensory room using a TV monitor, this DVD does give you gentle and soothing visuals that go a long way towards recreating that special atmosphere. Only the lucky few have the cash or space to convert a room into a sensory space so this really is the

next best thing. You could build on the experience by having comforting tactile objects to hand and creating your own temporary 'chill out' room, complete with relaxing smells and soft cushions, when needed. You could also upload this DVD to a tablet to promote calm whilst on the move or in other stressful situations.

The DVD is now a hit in special schools and is supported by the National Autistic Society. Part of every sale price gets donated to a good cause and you can choose to support the NAS at the online checkout.

The DVD is £32.50 and is available from www.asenseofcalm.com or call 01624 840112.

WIN!
A SENSE OF CALM ON DVD

For your chance, just ask your child to help you spot our hidden Buddha somewhere in this issue of AuKids magazine. Then write to us with your answer, name and address no later than February 25th. First name out of the hat wins!

Either email auidkismag@gmail.com or write to PO Box 259 Cheadle Cheshire SK8 9BE.



10% OFF

Everyone's a winner, as all readers can take advantage of a 10% discount off A Sense of Calm DVD when buying it through www.asenseofcalm.com Just enter **AUKIDS** in the promotional code box at the checkout to claim.

Ask the Experts



Chris Barson

Chris is the founder of training company Positive About Autism www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk

Prior to that, he was External Training Manager with the National Autistic Society and still delivers training for the charity. He is a contributing author to *The Autism Spectrum in the 21st Century: Exploring Psychology, Biology and Practice* Jessica Kingsley Press 2010

Stop fighting! Right away. It takes two you know! Sounds glib but I'd say that taking all the pressure off both you and your child will be welcome. As soon as there is any resistance - stop. We are going to go right back to the beginning and build everyone's confidence up bit by bit.

Introduce the toothbrush over a period of time, allow them to touch it and play with it until they are comfortable. Why not do some painting with an old toothbrush?

1. Allow them to lick it and encourage them to put it in their mouth.

Experiment with different flavours of paste. Ask the child to rate/rank them. They have hugely scientific minds and love an experiment.

2. Once familiar with the brush, place in the mouth with little or no brushing at first to reduce anxiety.

3. Now carry out very slow, gentle movements a little at a time. Perhaps start by brushing only a few teeth at first to desensitize them to the feeling. Gradually increase the brushing over time until it is possible to brush the whole mouth.

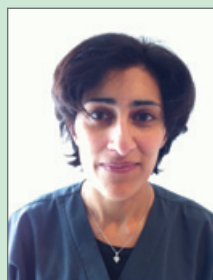
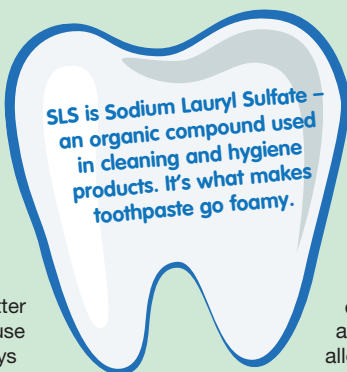
If problems resurface, go back a step. But not today - tomorrow.

These three steps come from a great leaflet produced by NAS/University of Sheffield – see right for details.

Kids with autism really need to know what's going on and how long stuff takes. So anything you can do to *show* what is going to happen and what's involved will help. Try these three stages: Explain-Try-Praise (even if it didn't really get the job done or happen at all). Say: "Thanks for letting me try. You are really brave!"

Kids with autism love being in control. With sensitive things like teeth and gums this is probably even more the case. The more you can do to let your child take control of the process the better.

Prevention is better than cure. Because oral care is always going to be harder for kids with autism, we have got to compensate. Reduce sugar intake, especially in between meals. Check labels for hidden sugars. Don't give sweets as a reward – use alternatives such as a favourite object or activity. Avoid fizzy drinks, juices and squashes and replace with water or milk if possible.



Tehmeena Khan

Dentist at Holmes Chapel Dental Practice and mum to 8 year-old Maryam who has autism.

Most parents find brushing their child's teeth is a battle. With autistic children, sensory issues can make this more challenging.

My own experiences with my eight year-old daughter have shown me that the early twice daily battles have paid off. These days it is helped,

I must admit, by using her increased self-awareness and vanity as leverage: she wants to keep her teeth shiny and bright!

My advice would essentially be to keep at it. Adjustments and allowances have to be made, and we still fall short of the recommended two-minute clean, but we are making progress.

I would encourage parents to assist in brushing their child's teeth, as most children do not have the level of manual dexterity needed to brush effectively. I now allow my daughter to assert her

independence by brushing in the evening, knowing that I have assisted her first thing in the morning, so she has had a thorough clean in the day.

We use an SLS-free paste*, as my daughter does not like the foaming action. It has an acceptable taste - she is not fond of mint. And because she will swallow some paste, I am happy that it does not contain artificial sweeteners and fluoride.

We use a manual brush, as the buzzing of a rotary brush puts her off.

It is always important to choose a soft-bristled brush in order to help clean the gums and tongue as well as the teeth.

Distraction helps, usually in the form of a running commentary of events taking place in the day. I find this generally gives me just enough time to scrub the molars!

Decay will only affect the teeth if the child has frequent sugary snacks. Other dental problems such as tooth wear, can be caused by consuming citrus fruits, for example, so regulation of diet is important, as are regular checks at the dentist to help spot any potential issues sooner rather than later.

As routine is so important for many autistic children, effective daily brushing is one of the most important events to include in a routine, one which will lend itself to overall well-being and good health.

*You can find SLS-free toothpaste and a range of ones with different tastes plus those that are safe if swallowed at www.greenpeople.co.uk Tehmeena used Sarakan available from Holland and Barratt.

If your child is extra sensitive to having their teeth brushed, or just basically hates it, the **Collis Curve Toothbrush** could be the answer. It has a unique design allowing you to clean all teeth surfaces simultaneously just by using simple backwards and forwards brushing. Look up www.colliscurve.co.uk or call 01934 862415 for info.





...Tom's of Maine natural children's toothpaste in silly strawberry flavour. Unlike a lot of other flavoured toothpastes, it's not got a load of rubbish in it and isn't some shocking pink colour. It has no artificial colours or flavours and it actually tastes like real strawberries! Perfect for kids who find mint flavour too strong. Look out for it in Sainsbury's or look up www.tomsofmaine.com for more info.



Sarah Davys-Jones

Occupational Therapist and lecturer.

Occupational Therapy Services Ltd, Welshpool, Powys.

Contact her at sarah@sdavys-jones.orangehome.co.uk

Teeth cleaning can be a physical co-ordination and multi-sensory challenge for some of our children.

Some children may be hyper (over) sensitive to smell, taste, the movement of a brush and volume of bubbles inside their mouth, as well as the sound of tap water or the brush inside their mouth.

Other kids who are hypo (under) responsive to sensory input may find that teeth cleaning can be part of an alerting programme using oral motor activities.

Here's a few tips:

- Consider the time of day and allow plenty of time.

- Don't underestimate fear. Try using play to make teeth brushing less threatening, like cleaning dolly's or teddy's teeth.

- Tell the child how long the teeth brushing will last and use visual supports, especially if they're anxious.

- To get them used to the feel of it, consider playful activities that allow safe use of 'oral motor' toys (such as whistles, straws or musical

instruments), involving blowing and sucking.

- Think about position. If your child is small enough to cradle on your lap, face them away from you looking into a mirror so that they can see what you're doing as you clean their teeth.

- Allow your child as much control as you can. Imposing teeth cleaning on them can be quite intrusive, it's easier if they try with you supporting.

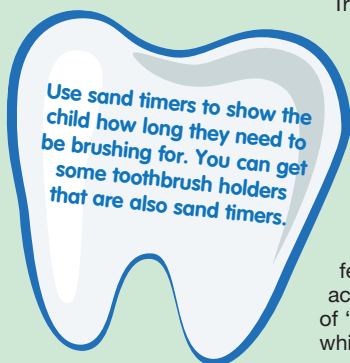
- How about an electric toothbrush? Vibratory sensations may be calming. Only if they're comfortable with the other sensory factors like sound, though.

- Consider taste or odour-free toothpaste. Mint can be a challenge for over sensitive kids.

- Only use a small amount of toothpaste, as lots of bubbles in the mouth can be difficult to manage.

- It can be difficult to keep your head still when you have low muscle tone. Supporting your child's chin will help.

- Remember they may not be able to keep their mouth open, so will need regular breaks.



MEMORIES... "I hated the smell of the dentist when I was little. I didn't like the bright light. I hadn't come across uniform before - they all looked like they were from outer space to me. Also, you couldn't see their mouths when they spoke because of the masks, so that put me off - it looked alien. One new dentist put me at ease because he talked about things I liked, like plants. I remember discussing with him how fast an Amaryllis bulb grew! I'd say to parents - tell the dentist in advance what their child is interested in, then they have a topic to distract them with." **Tim Tuff, adult with autism and Aukids distributor.**

Have You Heard About the Nurd-le?

For real encouragement you can visit 'Nurdle World' at www.aquafresh.co.uk, which has online games for kids featuring 'nurdles' which are little squidges of toothpaste.

Do you have a question for Ask the Experts? E-mail us at aukidsmag@gmail.com

The views reflected in these columns are the panel's personal opinions and may not be relevant to all children with an autism spectrum condition. Parents should embark on intervention programmes only after following the advice of their child's paediatrician and/or occupational therapist.

Stick With It!



A **Miswak** is a twig commonly used for teeth brushing. It is widely used among Muslims after Prophet Mohammed realised its value as a device which he said should be used by his followers to clean their teeth. It's one of a variety of oral hygiene measures that have been performed since the dawn of time.

The best Miswak twigs are obtained from the twigs of the Arak tree (Peelu tree). It kills gum disease, fights plaque and removes bad breath.

The Wrigley company conducted a study on Miswak which was published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry. It found that mints laced with Miswak extract were 20 times more effective in killing bacteria than ordinary mints. In the Journal of Periodontology, a study by Swedish researchers found that suspended Miswak pieces in a Petri dish were able to kill bacteria that cause periodontal disease without being in physical contact with the bacteria. Those are just two of many promising studies on its benefits.

Some dentists warn that misuse of a chewing stick can cause gum recession. But if your child loves to chew, what better way to improve their oral hygiene?

Buy them from for 49p each www.muslimbase.com

Special Services

If your child struggles with attending a dentist, you may want to find out about special needs dental services which are available in most areas.

A specialist dental service can help acclimatize children to dental surgeries, starting with home visits for children who are too nervous to visit the dentist.

They can also visit special schools and start programmes of lunchtime tooth brushing in the school environment.

Ask your GP, health visitor or dentist for a referral.

Helpful Guides

A couple of great toothbrushing and dentist guides are available from both Autism Speaks and the National Autistic Society. Both have handy and practical guidance.



The Dental Booklet

Chris quoted from this leaflet, produced by the NAS/Sheffield University. Go to www.autism.org.uk/living-with-autism/at-home/oral-health-for-children.aspx

Dental Guide

www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/dentalguide.pdf



100% of care services rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted



Options Group
making a difference

"The management and staff of the school provide outstanding support for young people, consistently encouraging them to fully engage with the broad range of opportunities being made available." (Ofsted, 2011)

"I can't put in words how supportive Kinsale has been to my son. They always put his needs first and know exactly the level of support that is needed throughout the day." (Parent, 2011)

Ofsted
Outstanding
2010/2011

ASD Specialist Schools Barton School - North Lincolnshire Kinsale School - Flintshire Hilford School - Shropshire	Transitions Services AALPS North - North Lincolnshire AALPS Midlands - Worcestershire AALPS Cymru - Flintshire	Adult Residential Services The Thicket - West Yorkshire Watermill House - North Lincolnshire
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For more information about the services we offer please call 08442 487 187, email info@optionsgroup.co.uk or visit our website at www.optionsgroup.co.uk.

Our 2011 Speaker Highlights



1. Adult with autism: Ros Blackburn

Where did we see her? Wythenshawe Lifestyle Community Centre, Manchester
Organised by P.O.S.Y. (Parents of Special Youngsters)
www.parents-of-special-youngsters.org

Ros Blackburn may not recognise this, but she's a stand-up comic – an autistic one. With slick, seamless and wickedly insightful delivery, she spoke about what it means to have autism and had the audience hooting all the way.

Ros didn't speak until she was 13, guided by needs rather than a desire to be sociable. Now, she's one of the best speakers we've ever heard, although she needs support in other aspects of her life.

Knowing that she's highly dependent

and yet could have an audience of about 150 in the palm of her hand presented us with one clear message: never make assumptions. Ros, now 42, admitted that she was well into her twenties before she fully mastered putting sheets on her bed: 'There's no such thing as cannot,' she asserted, attributing the saying to her mother. 'There's can – but not yet'.

Through a steady stream of rib-tickling personal anecdotes, she illustrated how behaviour depends on how you 'perceive or receive' it. She turned our perception on its head so that we could recognise the folly of our own often arbitrary 'rules'.

She continued by making light fun of our 'socially obsessive' behaviour, acknowledging it for what it is most of the time – mere acting. She went on to discuss the 'theory of mind', the idea that autistic people have no ability to imagine what another person might be thinking. She took issue with the word 'theory', though. "I have theory of mind," she asserted.

"What I don't have is *instinct* of mind. I have to work out theoretically all the things that you just learned yourselves instinctively."

If your group would like to host Ros, write to 58 Brisbane Road, Ilford Essex IG1 4SL.

Together for autism

Together we work across the spectrum and from birth to adulthood. The Together Trust operates residential homes, short break services (residential and fostering), supported living, Inscape House Schools, a specialist FE college and community support.

We can deliver specialist assessment, consultancy, diagnostic and speech therapy services, as well as training for parents and professionals.



To find out more
email enquiries@togethertrust.org.uk
phone 0161 283 4848
or visit www.togethertrust.org.uk

together
trust

Registered charity number 209782

care • education • support • since 1870



2. Autism lecturer: Dr Luke Beardon of Sheffield Hallam University

Where did we see him? Autistic Intelligence's Christmas conference, The Bar Convent, York
www.autisticintelligence.org

Autistic Intelligence is a new not-for-profit organisation that runs conferences with a bit of a difference: all autism experts who speak at the events have a personal connection with autism.

We loved this conference – it had real 'soul', was funny, warm and informative. It was informal, anti-stuffy and deeply relevant to a parent audience, although plenty of professionals and people with autism attended, too.

We're a fan of Luke's anyway, as he's one of our panellists. He bounded onto stage in sneakers and jeans and during his talk 'Exploding the Myths and Introducing a Positive Perspective', addressed all those giggles close to our hearts at AuKids.

He admitted at the start that his presentation was going to be a 'bit of a rant', but his high-pitched exasperation at the public's misinterpretation of autism was hugely funny

and he packed a real punch through impassioned and lively delivery.

Luke kicked off with a blast at the term 'impairment' in connection with autism, calling it discrimination, used by well-meaning people trying to make those with autism 'less autistic'.

"Where are the social skills groups for non-autistic people?" he asked, pointing out that the reason autistic people are targeted for intervention is simply a numbers game – they are in the minority, so are deemed to need 'correcting'. He continued, fired up, to explain that it was a myth that people with autism are unsociable. "They lack social skills, yes. They lack non-autistic social skills which could easily be held up for scrutiny. To talk drivell, for instance."

Hurrah! By this point we felt like giving Luke a standing ovation, but it was a conference so we contained ourselves.

A little controversially (but we liked it), Luke took issue with the term 'diagnosis'.

"You get diagnosed when you're ill!" he said. "There's this message that something is wrong and you need to get it fixed. I'm not saying we shouldn't be identifying it. But to make out that these people are wrong, imperfect, disordered – this is invalid and incorrect."

Go Luke! We agreed totally – the biggest challenge that faces people with autism is being around people who don't understand them.

See Luke if you appreciate the positive approach – and you don't mind an expletive or three.



3. Autism lecturer and author: Dr Olga Bogdashina

Where did we see her? Autistic Intelligence's Christmas conference, The Bar Convent, York.
www.autisticintelligence.org

Olga has two children on the spectrum, so again her presentations are always full of warmth and empathy. We also love her books, which are clear and easy to understand. Olga's talk was titled

Communication Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome. During the talk, she summarised – again with plenty of humour – how different perception and experiences in autism can lead to alternative ways of using and interpreting language. This in turn can affect overall communication and understanding between those with autism and those without the condition.

Again, Olga's positive approach places the emphasis on us. As non-autistics, we need

to understand how our communication, which is often hugely abstract and woolly, can inhibit an autistic person's understanding. Olga also explored the pre-verbal universe, using quotes from late talkers to describe the experience of life without meaningful verbal language.

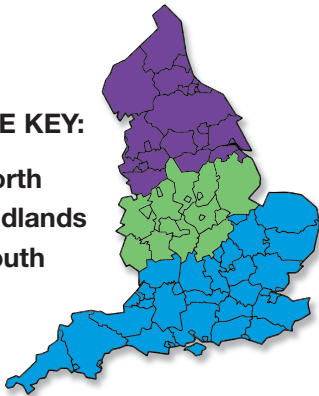
Her talk was rounded off with a number of different techniques for helping people with autism through adapting our own use of language and communication. Thoughtful, practical, and inspiring.

Have you heard an inspiring speaker? Send 200 words on who, where and why to aukidsmag@gmail.com

Your 2012 Highlights: Get the Diary Out!

VENUE KEY:

- North
- Midlands
- South



28th Positive About Sensory hosted by Positive About Autism. Chester Rugby Union Football Club, Hare Lane, Littleton, CH3 7DB.

This course will give you a detailed insight into the sensory world of children, young people and adults with autism. The training is active, visual and fun. "We don't use ten words where two will do. We're positive about autism and that's reflected in the style and content of our workshops and events," says trainer Chris Barson. Watch out for Positive About Autism link-ups with AuKids in 2012. Book online at www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk



12th Language of Emotion workshop presented by Dr Andy Bondy at the Novotel Manchester Centre, 21 Dickinson St, Manchester.

This workshop will review traditional approaches to teaching children with autism to communicate about their emotions. Appropriate for family members as well as professionals. Parent fee: £85. Book online at www.pecsevents.co.uk/workshopdetail.php?id=381

15th Positive about Communication the NSPCC National Training Centre, Leicester.

This course is for everyone who wants to gain a positive introduction to the communication differences in autism. The course will teach you how to use visual strengths in autism to enhance communication; give positive ideas about how to foster communication skills and enhance motivation; train you in a range of tools and techniques that you can put into practice right away. Go to www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk



19th Pioneering academic Tony Attwood holds a workshop at Lincoln University. Look up www.tonyattwood.com.au



1st My Town Tiggers presents the 5th annual conference at the Hilton Hotel, Blackpool. Speakers include Glenys Jones, Carol Povey, Richard Mills, Geoff Evans, Dr Wendy Lawson.

For details look up www.blackpooltiggers.co.uk

14th Kidz South exhibition, Rivermead Leisure Complex, Reading.

Run by www.disabledliving.co.uk, the same as Kidz in the Middle but for a southern audience! Free exhibition with over 100 exhibitors. Free seminars, too – and kids are welcome!

15th Communication: The Key To Success – 6th International Conference, Edge Hill University, Lancashire.

Keynote Speaker: Professor Temple Grandin (arguably the most well known adult with autism in the world)

£75 for parents of kids with ASC, early bird discount of £20 if you book before March. For details e-mail keytosuccess@edgehill.ac.uk or contact Peter Weatherill on 01695 650738. You can also book online at Edge Hill University's website www.edgehill.ac.uk

15-16th The Autism Show ExCel, London.

Massive show dedicated to families living with autism, sponsored by the National Autistic Society and the Hesley Group. It has a sensory and quiet room. Look up www.autismshow.co.uk for details.



23-26th Autscape 2012

Belsey Bridge Conference Centre, Norfolk. The only conference run by people with autism for people with autism and their families. For inquiries contact info@autscape.org. For further information join www.autscape.org/lists/announce/

26th Positive About Autism Devon: Colyton Caterpillars, Colyton, East Devon. Training course run by www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk. Further details TBA.

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There is an argument over the internet about whether Sheffield is North or Midlands. So we put a bit of both!



17th Positive About Autism Sheffield. Training course run by www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk Details TBA.



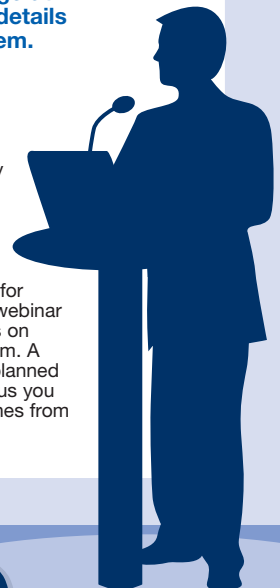
20th The 9th National Conference – Autism A Hands on Approach. Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport. Visit autism_handson at Twitter for details.

29th Kidz Up North exhibition, Reebok Stadium, Bolton. Free exhibition with over 100 exhibitors, run by www.disabledliving.co.uk

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Our list isn't exhaustive, so keep checking our News page at www.aukids.co.uk for details of events as we get them.

Did you know?

The National Autistic Society now hosts webinars, so you don't even have to attend a conference to hear some great advice! Look up www.nas.org.uk and put 'webinars' in the search bar for more information. The next webinar is on sensory considerations on January 26th, 6.30pm-7.30pm. A range of new webinars are planned for February, details TBA. Plus you can watch some previous ones from last year.





The Last Word

By Debby Elley, journalist and mum of twins with autism.



The Constant Gardener

When we came up with the name AuKids...okay, when Tori came up with the name AuKids, the pun on 'Orchid' was very much intentional. We point this out in nearly every issue, after someone asked us whether it was a coincidence.

Orchids, like kids with autism, seem to be fussy plants but if they get the right conditions to grow in, they can flourish, producing beautiful and unusual flowers.

My green fingers are distinctly absent when it comes to caring for indoor plants. Our 'peace' lily, for instance, decided it would rather die a youngster than give me any peace. Our 'umbrella' plant enjoyed impersonating the Leaning Tower of Pisa for some time before keeling over rather dramatically. And then there was the delightful Kalanchoe blossfeldiana 'Debbie', a highly pretentious name given that it's common as you like and really cheap to buy (my name is spelt with a 'y' just before you draw any comparisons). Nevertheless it's a piece of cake to grow, at least I thought so until it developed root rot and died within a matter of weeks.

So when I acquired two orchids - one from Jo, one from Tori, I didn't hold out much hope for either of them. Imagine my surprise when I found that both of my 'difficult to grow' divas seem to *love it here*.

In fact, my two orchids were more like my twin boys than I could ever have expected. With the right environment

and not too much fussy interference, they were looking really impressive.

Then - drama. The first one, which had been doing so well, lost its flowers. It just looked like a load of twigs. Normally I'd have given up at this point, assuming defeat. But I suppose that just as I'd gained confidence as a parent, I'd gained confidence in my ability to nurture orchids. Though distinctly unimpressive by now, it looked happy enough. I just left it, watered it the way it likes (spray only) and waited.

At the same time, Alec had reached a sort of plateau. Nothing much was happening with his development either. Then suddenly, almost out of the blue, Alec started to copy. Within the last six months, his skills have taken off to the extent that he can now join in with his brother in 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes'. The sight of him doing this is so encouraging and implies so many other hidden developments that I'm bursting with excitement.

At the same time, there are changes afoot on our windowsill. New green shoots twist out of the orchid's pot, the 'dead' twigs have started to grow buds and bingo, it's in flower just as before, looking bigger and better.

Maybe orchids really are just like autistic kids. Give them time, relax, don't get discouraged when nothing happens for a while. Underneath the surface, who knows? With a bit of faith, they might surprise you.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Orchids are beautiful plants which, much like kids with autism, require very specific conditions to grow. If they get them, they thrive. That's why we called this magazine AuKids. AU is also the chemical symbol for gold.



Scan the QR Code with your phone to go straight to our website

www.aukids.co.uk



Celebrity SPOTLIGHT



Rio Harding aged 8

I have: Autism Spectrum Condition.

My personality: I am funny, have a good sense of humour and love silly jokes.

My family: I live with my mum, dad and sister.

I love: Playing Lego®, gardening and growing things.

I hate: People who smell funny because they smoke and people who are mean to me because I am sometimes different and this makes me sad.

If I were Prime Minister: I would knock down schools.

My favourite songs: The Lazy song and Rizzel Kicks.

My ambition: When I grow up I want to move to where they make Lego® and be a creator!

Want your little star to appear on our Celebrity Spotlight page? Send your own answers with a jpeg picture of your child in action to: aukidsmag@gmail.com



Think green! Recycle AuKids