

Letter from the Editors

Debby Tori



Hesley Enhancing Lives Programme. 40 years in the making.

We're celebrating our 40th year. And we've learnt a lot along the way. Today, much of our experience and in house expertise is channelled to deliver our innovative Hesley Enhancing Lives Programme (HELP).

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Established in 1975, the Hesley Group provides specialist support through its schools, colleges and adult residential services with a highly experienced and expert multidisciplinary educational, care and therapeutic staff resource, in high quality purpose built settings. We're focused on positive outcomes and progress towards sustainable independence.

Welcome to our
first issue of
2015!

We hope this year brings you fun and happiness in a big way.

We've been busy since the last time we wrote. We were delighted to talk at the NAS Communication conference in Reading last November.

Also in November, Toys 'R' Us held its first national autism-friendly shopping morning. Brilliant news all round, but this was down to the hard work and dedication of just one mum and a store manager with vision – check out our Readers' page for the full story. Just goes to show what a bit of parent power can do!

It looks like 2015 is going to be busier still, with AuKids magazine one of the media partners for the Autism Show. This year it takes place in Birmingham as well as London and Manchester – check out our diary pages for more information. The AuKids team will be talking at both Birmingham and Manchester, plus we'll have a stand at those shows, so come and say hello!

Since our last issue, we have gathered up a large number of your Facebook comments about hand dryers and how distressing autistic children find the sudden, loud and unexpected noise from them. We passed those comments onto the Cerebra Innovations team who in turn had a chat with friends at Dyson. All we can say at this stage is watch this space – but early signs are promising and the Dyson team seems keen on action. If you'd like to share any of your views or experiences regarding hand dryers with us, we will pass them on. Write to us at aukidsmag@gmail.com

AuKids is expanding our social network with a greater presence on Twitter this year, thanks to the efforts of Rose Walters who has been undertaking some project work with us. We hope to be bringing you the long-awaited YouTube channel shortly, so that you can watch a bit of AuKids TV! If you'd like to see any of our features brought to life, just let us know! Follow us on Twitter and help spread the word. Despite appearances we are still a small magazine and we do rely on word of mouth so that more parents can benefit from our positive advice.

Finally, super breaking news that renowned autism researcher, speaker and author Olga Bogdashina, herself a parent of two young people on the autism spectrum, will be writing for us later this year. We are big fans of Olga's work and we can't wait to share her knowledge with you.

Happy reading!

Tori & Debby

e-mail: aukidsmag@gmail.com

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The AuKids clothing range carries a selection of slogans dreamt up by the magazine team and designed to inspire tolerance and positivity! Quality clothing at fantastic prices made by our friends at www.finsdesignandprint.co.uk. Order online. Kids' t-shirts for £8 and kids' hoodies for £14. Adult sizes also available.



www.finsdesignandprint.co.uk

COMPETITION WINNERS FROM ISSUE 25:

- The answer to the Cineworld competition was Despicable Me 2. Winners were Nicola Naylor, Warwickshire; Joanne Dorasamy, Biggleswade; Mandy Potts, Berkshire.
- Book winners: Amanda Ayres, Weaverham; Jo-Anna Dem, Reading; Rachel Kaye, Manchester; Heather Bradley, Notts; Dawn Parkinson, Billington and Georgina Gannon, Swanscombe.

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AuKids magazine, Winter 2015

Toys R Us

Holds First Autism Friendly Shopping Morning



TOYS 'R' GREAT: Natasha Eliyet admires the selection in peace and quiet!

Autism Friendly UK is a new Facebook group created by one mum in response to the struggles she faced when out and about with her autistic son Joe, who is 3. Victoria Holdsworth decided to do something about it – for her and everyone else in the same position! “Busy places and lots of sensory stimuli can be too much for our children with autism and reasonable adjustments can and should be made to help our children enjoy experiences as any other child can!” she said.

She spoke to store manager Geoff Robinson at the Birstall Toys R Us store in Leeds. “He was delighted to support my ideas and helped me to approach head office in making it a national event,” she told us.

“It was supposed to be just trialed in Leeds but the huge response prompted a quick change! I simply explained to Geoff what a difference this event could make to people and how happy families would be to have this opportunity! Toys R Us really seemed to recognise the benefits of the event for children and wanted to help”.

Toys R Us held its first nationwide autism-friendly shopping morning on November 30th last year. It was hailed a great success by shoppers of all special needs kids, who enjoyed the lower levels of lighting and a non-judgemental, quiet atmosphere. The store was given symbols to put up and staff underwent parent-led training.

The company seems keen to repeat the initiative. Meanwhile, Victoria sets her sights on other stores... watch this space!

Netbuddy Has a New Buddy

Earlier this year, social networking site **Netbuddy** merged with the UK disability charity **Scope** to create a new online community for parents of children with a wide range of disabilities.

The new community offers much of the content that made Netbuddy so popular, including hundreds of practical tips offered by parents, for parents, on everything from bedwetting to behaviour. Plus there are lots of new, improved features. Community

Cover Stars



COVER STARS: Charles and George feature in our twins' article – see Page 15



Sock It to Them, Steph!

Mum Stephanie Roberts decided to give up work to look after her son, who has suspected autism and global development delay. She turned her hobby into a business and now runs Crafty Cuddles, a small handmade gifts company. She says:

“ I look after my son in the day whilst talking to customers and taking custom orders. I make all my handmade items from scratch when my children go to sleep and I absolutely love it! I've been very fortunate that I could turn my hobby into a business and I've since expanded my product range. I make sock animals, framed paper cuts, paper art and other gifts for all occasions at affordable prices. ”

Stephanie's handmade products all come personalised. You can find her on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ohsocraftycuddles

members can now tag tips and topics of discussion, Tweet and share information they've found useful - plus thank others using a special 'Thanks' button, similar to Facebook's 'Like' feature.

To find out more visit www.scope.org.uk/community



Celebrity SPOTLIGHT



Luke Ayres

Diagnosis: Autism & Learning Disability

Where he lives: Weaverham, Cheshire

Luke's mum Amanda says: “Luke is the happiest and most smiley boy I know! He has an award-winning smile and a cheeky glint in his eyes which he uses to win everyone over!

“He has a very limited vocab but is doing really well with expanding this and communicates by hand leading - he is an absolute superstar in his own right and I love it when he invites me into his world :) His passion is washing machines - he loves them! His favourite places in the world are laundrettes and his dream is to work/help out in one when he is older.

“He dislikes loud unpredictable noises and negative tones such as sighing and tutting”.

Send your celebrity details to aukidsmag@gmail.com

I love: Washing machines
I hate: Unpredictable noises

Autism Sundae Goes On Tour!

You may remember AuKids' popular Autism Sundae Dessert featured in Issue 20, which we now use to explain the key elements of autism. Reader Jill Fitzpatrick liked it so much that she decided to demonstrate it to the Willaston Hey W.I., based on the Wirral. She asked the ladies to make their own – and raised cash for AuKids in the process!

She told us: “I've been subscribing to AuKids for about a year and my sister has been getting the magazine for a few years. My nephew Matthew has 'severe' ASC. I love him to tiny pieces, through both the hilarious and challenging times.

“I'm training to become an educational psychologist and I would love to open my own school. I have so many stories of friends' children who have been let down by the schools they have ended up in. I'm waiting for my Lottery win!

“I wanted a new idea for my talk because I was chatting to my friend about it and she said 'Whatever you do, don't do the triad of bloody impairments!’”



SUNDAE SCHOOL: Jill explains autism the AuKids way

“I'd read your sundae article and loved it. I thought: 'Let's make some ice cream!’

“The ladies were intrigued by the ice cream idea and loved taking part. I'd also taken a few photos of some of my friends' kids so they could try and guess if they could spot the ones with autism (just to help quash the 'autistic look' myths). They were fascinated by the stories about each child and many had their own stories to share, too.”

The talk was so popular that Jill has been booked into Liverpool W.I. this year.

Well done from AuKids!

“P.S. The 'triad of impairments' definition of autism was ground breaking at the time and still influential, but these days parents often feel that it sounds rather negative and doesn't take into account some of the more positive aspects of autism.”

WIN A SENSORY TOY BAG!

AUKIDS reader Lyndsay Sweeney has started up her own online shop to help other parents find great value sensory products. Pheebsters (www.pheebsters.com) sells fidget and sensory toys, some of it presented in handy 'grab and go' travel bags. Phoebe, the gorgeous cover girl for AuKids' spring 2013 issue, is now five and provided the inspiration for the store. Lyndsay says: "It makes me very proud to sell the toys she loves!"

We have large sensory toy bags from Pheebsters, worth £14.99 each, to give away to THREE lucky winners. Runners-up will each win a chew pendant worth £5.99 (winners can choose either light blue, dark blue, purple or red). Just answer this question:

Q: You can buy toys at Pheebsters for all price ranges but what is the lowest amount that toys are available for?
A) £2.99 B) £1.99 or C) £0.99

E-mail your answer A, B or C to aukidsmag@gmail.com no later than February 28th, stating 'Pheebsters' in the subject header (or you can write to us at the usual address). Winners will be selected at random.



Chew pendant

Reviews and Prizes



BOOK **What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety**

By Dawn Huebner
 Published by Magination Press
 £15.50 • ISBN 978-1591473145

This book isn't new but I liked it so much I thought I'd share it with you. Any verbal child aged 6 and up would benefit from it.

A need for routine and dislike of uncertainty can make people on the spectrum buckle under the weight of anxiety. As a parent, I spend a lot of my time in 'reassurance mode' and I expect you do, too.

Giving kids strategies to tackle negative feelings is a great investment. Unfortunately autistic kids don't grow out of worry, which makes it an important issue to address early. This beautifully illustrated book shows them how to cope using simple explanations and great little analogies.

Worries are compared to a tomato plant, (which keeps growing the more you tend to it) and to little lying monsters that demand to be heard (we learn to shout back at them). Plenty of strategies help kids to minimise the time they spend worrying, to 'switch channels' when worries take over, to question the worries themselves and to deal with their negative effects.

I really like the way that Dawn addresses the needs of kids whose worries are general and seem causeless, as well as those who worry about something specific. Parents, who can unintentionally feed worries, can learn a lot from her imaginative advice, too. Read it first so that you can put Dawn's 'worry box' suggestion in place.

This is the ideal partner to another of Dawn's fab books – *What to Do When Your Temper Flares*. Both have really helped my own son to understand his feelings and deal with them in a positive way.

Debby Elley
 Co-editor



BOOKS

What's Happening to Tom ISBN 9781849055239

Tom Needs to Go ISBN 9781849055215

Things Tom Likes ISBN 9781849055222

All by Kate Reynolds. Illustrated by Jonathon Powell
 Published by Jessica Kingsley • £8.99 each

Full marks to author and mum Kate Reynolds and illustrator Jonathon Powell for tackling a tricky subject with such style and humour. Their set of three books – **What's Happening to Tom? Tom Needs to Go** and **Things Tom Likes** are aimed specifically at young boys with autism to help them understand their developing sexuality and to behave in ways that are socially appropriate and will keep them safe.

If your child is just about to hit puberty and can understand simple stories, you really couldn't ask for better. These short hardback books have bold, friendly information on each page with a full colour illustration opposite. This honest, straightforward approach is exactly what autistic boys growing up need – no waffle, just blatant, black and white advice.

Tom looks a bit like a Japanese cartoon hero – big eyes, floppy hair and snappy clothes. In **What's Happening to Tom?** he experiences all the signs of puberty and learns why they happen and what to do about them. In **Tom Needs to Go**, he's shopping with his mother when he needs to visit the public loos. The book acts as a visual guide, showing the reader exactly what Tom does that's appropriate, and what sort of things he avoids that would land him in bother.

In **Things Tom Likes**, Tom shows his young audience that he knows how to control his urges. You bet the illustrations are blatant – but that's the point. Asking autistic kids to read between the lines is a very risky strategy. An honest approach like this will help them to learn quickly and to ask you questions without any sense of shame or embarrassment.

Debby Elley
 Co-editor

He's Not Naughty!



BOOK

He's Not Naughty: A Children's Guide to Autism

By Deborah Brownson
 Published by Bodhi Book Press
 £10.00 • ISBN 9780993082306
 Available via the Amazon Kindle Bookstore and www.hesnotnaughty.co.uk

He's Not Naughty has been written by a parent of children with autism. It provides concise information that she wished she had been given when her children were diagnosed.

The book has been written from the perspective of a young girl, whose friend Jake has autism. The story is told in a light-hearted, engaging way which means the book is suitable for parents to read to children, or older children to read by themselves.

The accompanying illustrations are engaging, colourful and lively and were drawn by an artist with Asperger's.

It contains a range of information about autism, including Sensory Processing Disorder, processing speed, touch, hearing, smell, sight and taste, plus advice on routines. It summarises how Jake struggles to communicate and understand nuances of language, a subject which leads into education, bullying and friendships.

This book is not just about the negative aspects of the condition but also touches on the positives and successes of people on the spectrum.

Cheryl Cotton
 AuKids magazine readers' panel

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 by going to our
 Home page at
www.aukids.co.uk

WIN a Set of Keyring Cards!

Cartoonist Hannah Ensor runs Stickman Communications, a fab little UK company that produces humorous little keyring cards (and other products) to help autistic people of all ages to communicate feelings that may be difficult to explain.

Her ASC starter pack of eight cards for £16 went to school with Debby's son Bobby who was happy to endorse them. "They're really helpful at school, they are so cool and they definitely work!" His teaching assistant agreed! Each high quality card is laminated and can be

bought separately, so you can tailor-make your own set. These are a really clever way for kids to communicate when they want to be alone, or feel overwhelmed, a great way to relieve anxiety. Take a look at www.stickmancommunications.co.uk



We have 3 sets of ASC keyring starter packs. Just pop 'stickman' in the subject header and write to us with your name and address at aukidsmag@gmail.com by February 28th. Winners selected at random.

CONFERENCE

**NAS Conference:
Women and Girls on
the Autism Spectrum**
October 2014, London



I met a group of almost twenty women this afternoon - most with degrees, including two psychiatrists, a finance manager and an ex-BBC reporter. We varied in age from our 20s to 70s, from employed to self-employed to unemployed - some mothers, some not. The thread we all shared in common was that we are autistic.

I heard story after story of lives lived in a state of anxiety and confusion, of scars both physical and psychological and of breakdowns and burnout.

It struck me as incredibly sad that these intelligent, clearly articulate women, had lived most of their lives believing they were not just inadequate, but abject failures.

Time and again these women had been told how they were rude, obnoxious, had the 'wrong' tone of voice and the 'wrong' attitude, were promiscuous, stuck up, attention-seeking fakers, to name but a few of the things mentioned today.

Imagine for a minute that you are a woman who does not know she is autistic, and you are told all these things about yourself day in and day out. Outside, your behaviour appears quite different from how you feel on the inside. But you don't know that - you trust other people's judgements and not your own, because you've been wrong so many times in the past.

You believe other people when they tell you you're ignorant - and you try and change. You observe (even more), you go over and over it in your head, you exhaust yourself and you try again. And then again, the same thing happens, and you don't understand why. Finally, you come to the conclusion that you must just be a failure.

Almost every autistic woman I've met has had some degree of depression. I don't believe this stems from autism itself, but the attitudes of other people.

Because these women were bright, it was assumed that they must have known how to behave, and must

therefore must have been doing it for attention. Yet most autistic women try incredibly hard to behave like 'typical' women, masking their true selves and emulating the people around them in an attempt to fit in.

A high IQ doesn't mean that your emotional age matches that, or that you can do your own shopping and remember to pay the gas bill.

For women, even more so than men, societal pressure to conform is intense. Women on the spectrum, far from being aloof and unconcerned, are often acutely aware of this pressure, bend over backwards and tie themselves in knots in an attempt to conform.

I just imagine a little autistic girl being told the things those women, myself included, were told. I imagine the non-verbal four-year-old who I help to look after being told that because she does not speak, she has nothing to say. I imagine the hilarious 11 year-old I know, whose words are so hard-won and so uniquely her own, being talked over as though she didn't understand. I imagine the six-year-old being sent to the headteacher almost every day because she's difficult and defiant.

It breaks my heart to think that these kinds of things happen and that these autistic people won't see themselves for the brilliant, beautiful people they really are.

There's a growing group of autistic women who are willing to speak out on behalf of autistic girls, so that they might hear us and be saved from the pain so many of us went through.

An autistic child needs autistic women role models, to grow up with acceptance of themselves. A little autistic girl needs to know that she is seen for who she is. She needs to know that she is loved, autism and all.

Amanda Haydock has autism and is a support worker for Time Specialist Support in Manchester.

WIN AN iPad FRAME!



Check out this fatframe, a new child-friendly iPad case. Boy, is it tough! fatframe founder Alison Nicholson was inspired to create it by her own two special needs children - seven year-old Hazel and six year-old Guy. She was delighted with their educational progress using apps, until the iPad started going everywhere and getting broken! Researching the market for protective products and not being able to get what the family really needed (a lightweight and bouncy design with handles to hold and easy to access ports), Alison set about designing her own.

Fatframe is soft and spongy, hard-wearing but bouncy, lightweight, chewable and easy to wipe clean. It's made from a high quality EVA, a durable material which is non toxic, BPA, lead, latex and PVC free. We've tried one with Alec (alias 'The Wrecking Ball') and it's held up superbly.

Fatframe is suitable for iPads 2, 3 and 4 and the company has just launched a fatframe air and a fatframe mini - all available in coral or blue. The fatframe is available from www.fatframe.co.uk and Amazon. The website has a demo to watch under 'News' and a video on how to put your iPad in the frame. You can buy a compatible stand for £14.99.

We have THREE fatframe prizes to give away - a fatframe worth £25.99, the new fatframe air, worth £25.99 and the new fatframe mini, worth £23.99.



Simply find this fatframe logo hiding in the magazine. Write to us with your answer by February 28th. Enter by emailing auidsmag@gmail.com with 'fatframe' in the subject header and indicating which prize you'd prefer if you won. Or you can send your answer to AuKids, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE. Don't forget to tell us the colour you'd like.

Winners will be selected at random.

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Voyage of Discovery

CONVERSATION SERIES PART 3



Finally, we're nearing the end of our boat journey, and it's time to write a piece for parents whose children have developed language and need a helping hand with how they use it.

The subject is so big that we could write a book on it. We know you don't have much time, though, so we've given you some ideas and added some good books to the reading list.

By Tori Houghton & Debby Elley

Imagine trying to row a boat with someone without actually being aware of them. You're not watching their oar, so you're likely to miss all steering signals.

It's the same for a person with autism. They miss – and misinterpret – communication signals.

Successful social interaction relies on reading body language including facial expressions. This tells us how our information is being received and whether or not to continue talking.

The ability to read facial expressions is part of 'social imagination' or '3D thinking' – the sort of imagination that's very hard for autistic people.

Add to that a difficulty in understanding and communicating your own emotions and it's not very surprising that the amount of information your child offers you about themselves can be fairly limited.

Here, you've got a person who is far more likely to stick to where they're happiest – relaying factual information. Like twenty thousand things you never knew about their latest special interest.

Four things to bear in mind before we begin:

1. Stream of Consciousness

Firstly, when an autistic person talks to themselves, they don't always keep it inside their head. We all talk to ourselves constantly, but we tend to keep it inside. A lot of autistic people talk to themselves without expecting anyone to join in. It's comforting, familiar and self-affirming. Sometimes it takes the form of echolalia – repeating dialogue from games, books, films or TV. Echolalia does serve an important purpose and shouldn't be discouraged (See *Ask the Experts, Issue 11 on our online archive*).

2. Spotting the Undercurrents

Secondly, the sort of 'inner dialogue' that other people have is sometimes lacking in autistic people. Recognising and reflecting on what someone has said based on their emotional signals and body language is an extremely tricky business and so someone else's comments might be taken at face value and quite literally. This makes autistic people refreshing, as they lack agendas and don't tend to have the means to double-cross or back stab. It can also make them quite vulnerable.

3. Sink or Swim?

Thirdly, their social skills – and therefore their ability to communicate effectively – will vary hugely depending on the environment, and this is the case

however high-functioning they may be. You shouldn't be worried by this. Until the world adapts to suit people with autism, you're always going to get the best out of them when they're in comfortable, familiar situations.

4. Like a Waterfall...

Doing something that doesn't come naturally can be extremely draining, and even downright scary. So whilst a waterfall ahead in our river might seem exciting to us, autistic kids may only see the drop. You can teach people social skills, but don't necessarily expect them to enjoy socialising – and don't be worried if they'd rather spend time on their own. They need it to recharge.

With all this in mind, here are some pointers:

Social Steering

It's wonderful when an autistic kid starts speaking. That oar wasn't being used at all, now they're rowing so fast with it! It's so great, that for a time we really don't care that it's an endless stream of their own interests. We want them full speed ahead and for a while we let them row at their own pace.

Once confidence is built, it's time to steer those social skills a little.

Repeating back what they say, rephrasing it, or adding extra bits of language to what they're telling you can be a gentle way of developing language. You don't need to question them (in fact that may put them off) but commenting on what they've just said and prompting more often works.

Little one: "The party great!"

Instead of "Why? What did you do?" (instant panic) you could say:

"Wow! The party was great because..."

"Played statues!"

"You played musical statues! Fantastic! And..."

"...and parcel."

"...and pass the parcel! And the

person who won pass the parcel was..."

"George!"

"Wow! So the party was great and you played musical statues and pass the parcel, and George won pass the parcel. That's great!"

Strong Currents

Autistic kids often see conversation as an extension of the dialogue they have with themselves. A strong current pushes the conversation forward in one direction only, and the other rower is in danger of being sucked under without getting time to draw breath! We call this 'topic dominance'.

Throw them a lifebelt and help the conversation river along with these techniques:

Listening Patience

One gentle way of pointing out the rule of 'topic dominance' (i.e. hogging a conversation) is to explain it in terms of 'listening patience'.

When we're talking about a subject we like, the other person has about two minutes' worth of listening patience. When time is up, if they don't also get a turn, they get bored. A concrete rule of thumb such as this is really helpful. You could even use a sand timer to show them whose turn it is.

Turns in the River

Have you noticed that your child seems to rudely ignore you when you ask a question? It could be that they're so focused on what they're doing that they've tuned you out. It could be that the inflection of your voice was too subtle for them to pick up that a question was being asked. And it could be a bit of both.

So, flag up that you're about to ask something. E.g. 'Ruby: Question.' You can show a query mark symbol to help.

Flags in the Water

In your boat, a series of red flags popping out of the water will guide the little rower along the river.

For children who are moving nicely, you can use 'red flags' in your own conversation to help



Further Info



DVDs – **The Transporters** – www.thetransporters.com and **The Space Place** – spaceplace.tv – are animations dedicated to helping children recognise facial expressions (our own graphic designer Jo was among the team working on them).

YOUR TURN



guide them towards an answer that isn't just 'yes' or 'no'.

Show them that you want information from them by telling them outright. 'There's something I'm really curious to know' or 'I would really like to know what you think about...'. This shows them that they have to supply an answer and to think about it in terms of more than just a 'yes' or 'no'.

Two Oars are Better than One

As conversation develops, you can start to develop your child's awareness of their rowing partner and help them to develop 'theory of mind' – the awareness that what's in their head isn't the same as what's in yours.

When Debby's son Bobby was seven, she asked him to try and chat about something new. He explained that he couldn't, because his thoughts were 'tummy bubbles'. His special interests, he said, were stored in his tummy and took turns in floating up to his head. He only had a certain amount of tummy bubbles.

We used this to teach Bobby 'Theory of Mind'.

He drew his own poster illustrating his 'tummy bubbles' and we asked him to find out whether his tummy bubbles were the same or different to those of his friends. Then we asked his friends to do self-portraits showing their own 'tummy bubbles' (once we'd explained what the heck they were) and we pinned them up by Bobby's bed. It became his challenge to find out people's 'tummy bubbles'. In this way we showed him that every person has their own interests and experiences.

Turn Taking

A decent journey with fewer stops and starts will begin to happen with your encouragement. All the while, however, you will need to

remind your child that to move swiftly forward you need to take turns in rowing.

There are plenty of specialist games on the market to encourage this. A physical reminder is always helpful, such as passing a toy – or even a microphone – between you.

Listening

A conversation river is one that flows easily, and it can only do that if both partners are listening and adapting to the last thing that was said. That requires speedy processing and is quite hard.

Listening to what someone else is saying also means that you have to be interested in their opinion. Some great ways of encouraging a child to listen to your opinion is to arouse their curiosity. So instead of just speaking, introduce what you're going to say: "Well, I have an idea about that..."

"Would you like to know what I think?"

"Well I know something about that which you may not already know!"

The curious little person will be encouraged to ask for your views and be motivated to listen to them.

You may have to ask them to stop and think about what you just said, encouraging them to slow down whilst they process your answer.

Wrong Way!

In the Conversation Train book (see right), conversation is compared to a train ride, and if you change topic mid-way through one, it's described as de-railing. Very clever!

Once again, it's a question of pointing something out directly. 'Ooh, off topic!' – you can make it into a silly game and do it with humour. Maybe they can point it out to you, too!

Rowing into the Distance

It's important in general to recognise that learning social skills is a part of every day life. Don't let thoughts and feelings swim unseen underneath the river. Take the guesswork out of it and spell out what body language means and how they need to respond to different feelings.

If you know how they're feeling, point it out – this helps them to identify their own emotions. If you're feeling upset, don't just show it on your face, tell them.

Label Emotions

Build up their catalogue of information by pausing a favourite cartoon, observing simple facial expressions and telling them how you can tell from a person's face how they are feeling. Build it into every day chat with your child – be their translator. With practise, they will get better – but remember that waterfall – it's hard work for them!

IF YOU MISSED PARTS 1 AND 2, CATCH UP ONLINE



Talk to Me: Conversation Strategies for Parents of Children on the Autism Spectrum or with Speech and Language Impairments
by Heather Jones,
Published by JKP • £12.99
ISBN 9781849054287

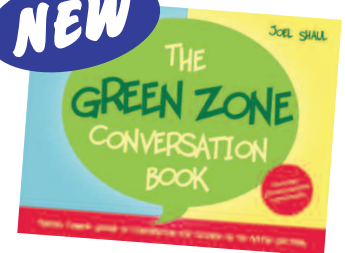


Heather is a parent who over the last decade has developed many different strategies to help her son Jamie (now 19) to learn the art of conversation. Her knowledge of her son and her ability to share with him the important elements of a conversation has led to some fantastic progress in her son's communication.

AuKids Has a Copy of Talk to Me to Give Away.

Simply send your name and address to aukidsmag@gmail.com with 'Talk to Me' in the subject header. Winners will be chosen at random after the closing date of February 25th.

NEW



The Green Zone Conversation Book: Finding Common Ground in Conversation for Children on the Autism Spectrum by Joel Shaul Published by JKP, £18.99.

Fantastic hardback showing how two people's interests exist inside separate 'yellow' and 'blue' circles and that they need to be talking about combined interests i.e. be in the 'green zone', in order to have a successful conversation.

We Have a Copy to Give Away
Just pop 'Green Zone' into the subject headers and email us before February 25th. Don't forget your name and address.

2015 Highlights

Get the Diary Out!



VENUE KEY:

- Scotland
- North
- Midlands
- South
- Wales

JANUARY

Monday 26th & Tuesday 27th: The Big Autism Play Day, Chancellors Hotel, Fallowfield, **Manchester**.

Thursday 29th & Friday 30th: The Big Autism Play Day, NCVO, 8 All Saints St, **London**

DETAILS: The Big Autism Play Day, (www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk), focuses on supporting children aged roughly 2 to 7 years (all abilities) and might be helpful for parents, foster carers, teachers, learning support assistants, early years practitioners/nursery nurses, play workers, respite/short breaks providers, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and other autism professionals. 9am-3.45pm, prices available for one or two days. £245 plus VAT per day. £450 plus VAT both days. Trainers are:

- Richard Hirstwood has extensive experience in special education – giving him the insight into what works, and more importantly, what doesn't, in multi-sensory practice.
- Chris Barson founded Positive About Autism in January 2009 and has a long involvement with disability and autism.
- Issy Gammer is a specialist in early intervention with children with autism.

- Greg Pasco is a speech and language therapist passionate about communication-focused intervention for children with autism.
- Judy Denzilo is a specialist in developing sensory play opportunities for children and adults – bringing a treasure trove of fabulous resources to explore
- Joanna Grace is a special educational needs and disabilities consultant with a gift for fantastic story telling.

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 11th: The Autism Networks Winter Conference 2015, Crewe Alexander Football Stadium, 9.30am-5pm. Main speakers: Dr. Luke Beardon, Dr Catherine Aldred, Dr Rohit Shankar and Alex Lowery. Workshops and a trade area with all the latest information, technology and support services from local and regional suppliers. Look up www.cheshireautismconference.org.uk for details.

MARCH

Monday 2nd: Autistic Intelligence presents its spring conference at the Beardmore Hotel, Clydebank, Glasgow, with renowned presenters **Dr Olga Bogdashina, Dr Jacqui Jackson, Dr Luke Beardon and Elaine Nicholson MA (Autism)**.

Tuesday 3rd-Wednesday 4th: National Autistic Society's professional conference, Harrogate International Centre, Harrogate, North Yorkshire. Look up www.nas.org.uk for details.

Saturday 7th: North Lancashire Directions Group FREE fun and information day for families with children with additional needs. 11am-3pm Salt Ayre Sports

centre, **Lancaster**, LA1 5JS. Includes huge amount to do for kids with SEN (including swimming) and lots of exhibitors. Go to www.nldg2015.eventbrite.com to pre-register or look up www.northlancsdirectionsgroup.com

Thursday 19th: Kidz in the Middle, 9.30am-4.30pm, Jaguar Exhibition Hall, Ricoh Arena, **Coventry**, CV6 6GE. Free entry, free parking, fully accessible! One of the largest, FREE UK exhibitions dedicated to children and young adults with disabilities and special needs, their families and the professionals who work with them. Over 120 exhibitors. www.kidzexhibitions.co.uk

w/c 30th March: NAS Conference on Transitions for Children and Young People with Autism, in **Manchester or Leeds** – *date and location TBA*. Look up www.autism.org.uk for further info.

MAY

Date TBA: Research Autism Presents Autism and the Impact on Family Life, London, for details contact **Anoushka Pattenden**, events@researchautism.net or call 020 3490 3091.

Friday 8th: Autistic Intelligence conference, **Portsmouth**, details TBA. www.autisticintelligence.org.uk

Monday 11th: Autistic Intelligence conference, **Cardiff**, details TBA.

Thursday 14th-Friday 15th: Training for Autism Trainers, Farncombe Conference Centre, **Cotswolds** WR12 7LJ, run by Positive About Autism (www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk)

DETAILS: Exciting two-day course aims to provide a solid platform of training skills and training ideas for new or existing trainers to enable them to deliver autism training that is engaging, imaginative, positive,

good adult learning and evidence based.

w/c 18th: NAS conference – Understanding and Supporting Challenging Behaviour in People with Autism – **London**. *Date and venue TBA*. www.autism.org.uk for details.

Monday 11th: Making Sense of Sensory Learning, **Manchester** (venue TBA) www.hirstwood.com

Tuesday 12th: Making Sense of Sensory Learning, **Birmingham** (venue TBA) www.hirstwood.com

Friday 15th: Making Sense of Sensory Learning, **London** (venue TBA) www.hirstwood.com

DETAILS: Who should come to this? Teachers, teaching assistants or therapists in special schools, special units for pupils with autism, specialist colleges or inclusive pre-
five provision.

Three dynamic sessions will explore how to expand your repertoire of multi-sensory activities in a variety of teaching and learning environments. 9am-3.30pm.

Speakers include:

Richard Hirstwood has extensive experience in special education – giving him the insight into what works, and more importantly, what doesn't, in multi-sensory practice. His innovative approach to everything is refreshing and inspiring!

Clive Smith has extensive experience in working with children with challenging behaviour, those on the autistic spectrum and/or with profound multiple and learning disabilities. As a specialist advisory teacher within a Behaviour Support Team previously, he is skilled at advising/ supporting staff to meet the diverse needs of this group.

Naomi Rosenberg has been a specialist Teacher of the Deaf for pupils with complex needs, with twenty years' experience. During

If you would like your events to appear in this calendar in January 2016, please contact us at aukidsmag@gmail.com

Our list isn't exhaustive, so keep checking our News page at www.aukids.co.uk or our Facebook page for details of events as we get them, plus news on where the AuKids team is appearing.

this time, she has created and adapted a massive wealth of activities to bring music and communication to life. A lively and imaginative presenter, she is a Sensory Consultant and initiator of 'Dance Massage.'

JUNE

Thursday 4th: Kidz South exhibition, 9.30am-4.30pm, Rivermead Leisure Complex, Richfield Avenue, Reading, RG1 8EQ. Go to www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz for details. Free entry.

Friday 12th-Saturday 13th: The Autism Show, ExCel, London. Huge show dedicated to families living with autism. Has a sensory and quiet room. Look up www.autismshow.co.uk for details.

Friday 19th-Saturday 20th June: The Autism Show, NEC, Birmingham. www.autismshow.co.uk - the show comes to Birmingham for the first time this year.



Friday 26th-Saturday 27th: The Autism Show, Event City, Manchester. www.autismshow.co.uk



JULY

Date and details TBA: Research Autism presents the Autism and Employment Conference, London. Contact Anoushka Pattenden, events@researchautism.net or call 020 3490 3091 for details.

AUGUST

DATE and venue TBA: Autscope conference, www.autscope.org. Conference organised by and for autistic people. Non-autistic people are also welcome, but the environment and content are centred on autistic people's needs, interests and sensitivities. Autscope includes workshops, leisure activities, social

opportunities, and more. Look up www.autscope.org

SEPTEMBER

Thursday 17th: Kidz Scotland, Highland Hall, Royal Highland Exhibition Centre, Edinburgh EH28 8NB. Free disability event - its second year running in Scotland. Go to www.disabledliving.co.uk/kidz for details or for tickets e-mail info@disabledliving.co.uk

OCTOBER

October/November 2015, TBA: Research Autism presents 10 Years of Research Autism: how the research landscape has developed and a tribute to Dr Lorna Wing, London, for details contact Anoushka Pattenden, events@researchautism.net or call 020 3490 3091.

Tuesday 13th: Autism Central exhibition, 10am-3pm, FREE entry, Trinity Lounge, Aston Villa Football Club, Birmingham, B6 6HE. Exhibition plus programme of seminars and workshops for individuals, professionals and families. Opportunities for stadium tours, too! Visit www.qac.ac.uk/autism-central, e-mail autismcentral@qac.ac.uk or call Karen Easthope on: 0121 428 5041.

NOVEMBER

Monday 9th: Multi-sensory Ideas, Recipes and Resources course, The Willowbank Hotel, 340 Wilmslow Rd, Manchester.

Wednesday 11th: Multi-sensory Ideas, Recipes and Resources, The Eaton Hotel, 279 Hagley Rd, Birmingham.

Friday 13th: Multi-sensory Ideas, Recipes and Resources, London NCVO, 8 All Saints St, London (near St Pancras Station)

DETAILS: This will be a day where Richard Hirstwood will focus on ideas and techniques to build your repertoire as a multi-sensory practitioner. £195 plus VAT. Run by

Hirstwood Training Ltd - www.hirstwood.com to book.

Thursday 19th: Kidz up North free exhibition, EventCity, Barton Dock Road, Manchester, M17 8AS. Another freebie run by www.disabledliving.co.uk, the largest they do.

Tuesday 24th: National Autism Hands-on Approach conference, Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport, Cheshire. Follow on @autism_handson (Twitter) or contact Tanya Farley 0966 399709. Top flight professionals give talks and host workshops.

Monday 23rd: Sensory Communication - Promoting Interaction, Engagement and Communication course, The Willowbank Hotel, 340 Wilmslow Rd, Manchester.

Tuesday 24th: Sensory Communication - Promoting Interaction, Engagement and Communication course, The Eaton Hotel, 279 Hagley Rd, Birmingham.

Friday 27th: Sensory Communication - Promoting Interaction, Engagement and Communication course, London NCVO, 8 All Saints St, London (near St Pancras Station) DETAILS: Run by Hirstwood Training Ltd. Presented by sensory consultant Naomi Rosenberg, a

specialist Teacher of the Deaf for pupils with complex needs, with twenty years' experience. £195 plus VAT. including lunch and refreshments. Aimed at teachers, teaching assistants or therapists in special schools or special units for pupils with autism, specialist colleges or those in inclusive pre-5 provision. Go to www.hirstwood.com for details.

For Autism Oxford events, which take place throughout the year, go to www.autismoxford.org.uk/index.php/events. If you would like one of their events to take place in your area, email your details and location to: info@autismoxford.org.uk

Autistic Intelligence also hosts events throughout the year; their first took place before AuKids went to press. Go to www.autisticintelligence.org/1/conferences

For details of NAS training events, go to www.autism.org.uk/our-services/training-and-consultancy.aspx

THE NATIONAL EVENT FOR AUTISM IS RETURNING TO MANCHESTER

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Help to connect the local autism community by inviting others affected by the condition.

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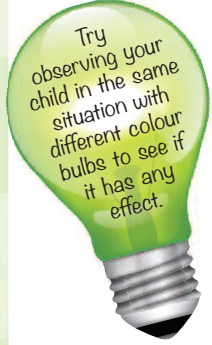
Have you heard an inspiring speaker? Send us a review on who, where and why to aukidsmag@gmail.com. No more than 300 words please.

Visual Distortion

How to Help

Everyday Tips

- ▶ Give your child extra time for processing their environment.
- ▶ Providing a safe and predictable home environment and routine serves to reduce stress and therefore sensory distress.
- ▶ Use familiar 'objects of reference' to allow your child to understand a message through touch – for instance you could give the child an empty cup to feel before you give them a drink.
- ▶ For light sensitivity, you can help by turning off any unnecessary lighting (especially, fluorescent lighting), having matt surfaces on walls (less bouncing of light) and lamps rather than overhead lights, plus low wattage light bulbs.
- ▶ Don't force eye contact.
- ▶ Remember, a child who isn't looking at you (or a book) may be trying to listen instead. If you want them to look at something and they're easily overloaded, reduce the amount of words you use.
- ▶ As some individuals with autism see everything in pieces, they need time to adjust to different surroundings.



Other interventions

Coloured Overlays:

According to the charity Research Autism (www.researchautism.net), there is some limited research evidence that coloured overlays could be useful for some autistic people who experience reading difficulties not associated with intellectual impairment. Coloured overlays are clear plastic sheets that can be placed on top of reading materials, such as books or newspapers.

Coloured Filters: These are tinted, non-optical lenses that can be put into ordinary specs frames and are designed to help people who suffer from visual stress. People with this condition are especially sensitive to lights, glare, patterns, colours, and contrast.

Coloured filters are designed to block the specific wavelengths of light to which an individual is sensitive. So, for example, your child might be especially sensitive to blue light and therefore use a blue filter to reduce its effects. Irlen lenses are the most well-known of these types of filters and their tints are incredibly subtle - there's a massive variety of them, too..

On the plus side, some individuals have reported life-changing positive effects from these lenses. On the down side, the assessment methods used by Irlen are not yet designed for pre-verbal kids on the autism spectrum and therefore it's hard to assess their effect. Children who are able to reliably report what they're experiencing will be more likely to benefit from them.

Ambient Prism Lenses: These are also known as conjugate prisms, yoked prisms or performance lenses, transitional lenses or Kaplan lenses. They are used to help improve 'ambient vision' – the system related to spatial organisation. Some people believe that they improve posture and co-ordination in children with autism.



Seeing the World in a Different Light

The traditional definition of autism is changing. Sensory perceptual difficulties, once referred to as if they were a side order with autism, are now being recognized as part of the main dish. If you're processing the world in a different way, it has a massive impact on behaviour and a knock-on effect on communication, so the more we understand about these 'sensory' differences, the more we can help.

The trouble is, we can't walk around inside our children's heads. Visual perceptual difficulties are particularly tough to identify. According to Olga Bogdashina, celebrated author of many books and papers on the subject, visual distortions are varied, unpredictable and constantly changing.

In her paper, **Possible Visual Experiences in Autism**, Olga identifies many types of visual distortion. We have shortened and simplified each of her explanations, but the paper is still available to read online if you'd like more detail.

Here are the main types that she identifies:

Intensity

In the state of 'hyper', a person's vision is too acute. For example, as a child, author Donna Williams 'the air was full of spots'. Later she learnt that they were air particles, but her vision was so hypersensitive that they often became a hypnotic background with the rest of the

world fading away. 'Intensity', can refer to too little as well as too much – a person experiencing 'hypo' sensitivity is under-sensitive to visual sensory input.

Inconsistent Perception

Visual stimuli may appear very bright on one occasion and very dim on another. For Donna Williams, sensory hypersensitivity is a fluctuating condition and depends on information overload.

Fragmented Vision

Sometimes people with autism cannot perceive objects, people or surroundings as a whole. The perception of parts instead of wholes and using only a very limited part of the available information is known as 'stimulus overselectivity'. Because of this, autistic people often react to parts of objects as being complete entities. This explains difficulties understanding facial expressions and body language. Once familiar objects can be strikingly unfamiliar if changed only slightly. This explains why some autistic children can get very anxious about changes that are seemingly small to us.

Prosopagnosia ('face blindness')

Some autistic people have trouble recognizing people's faces. This condition makes them blind to all but the most familiar ones. To compensate, they work out their own recognition system – often recognizing people by their hair, clothing or movement.

Light Sensitivity

Bright lights and sunshine can be disturbing and often cause distortions. Fluorescent lighting seems to be particularly problematic for autistic people.

Fascination for Coloured and Shining Objects

This is also caused by hypersensitivity. Sometimes people with autism, when they've given up fighting for meaning in an incomprehensible world, transport themselves from overload with an entertaining, secure and hypnotic level of 'hyper': watching the reflection of every element of light and colour, or tracing every patterned shape and vibration of noise as it bounces off the walls.

Peripheral Vision

One of the characteristics of autism is avoidance of eye contact. There are people with autism who see better when they use their peripheral vision.

One theory suggests that people with autism see peripheral vision because their central vision is 'hypo' (under-sensitive) while their peripheral vision is 'hyper' (over-sensitive). Personal accounts can differ, though - showing that often they do not use direct perception because 'it hurts' (which suggests it's hyper).

Intolerance of another person's eye movement can also cause lack of eye contact. Also, some autistic people can only work in 'mono', processing just one sensory channel at a time. So they may not be able to listen to you and look at you at the same time.

Inability to Distinguish Between Foreground and Background

This is caused by problems filtering out irrelevant visual information. It may account for some people's 'superability' to see two pictures simultaneously and not be fooled by optical illusions.

Poor/Distorted Depth and Space Perception

This is caused by light hypersensitivity. As well as distorted depth and space perception, some people experience the world in 2D, have 'double vision', or have distortions of shape, size, and movement. Small rooms might look as if they are even smaller to some, whilst to others the space seems to be expanded and a single room might look as big as a whole house. Distortions are reported to become worse if the person's experiencing information overload.

Delayed Processing

By the time they decode some of the sensations they experience, a few minutes may have passed - a day or even a week.

Meaning-Blindness

When visual hypersensitivity is so high that any interpretation is impossible, we call it Meaning Blindness. In this case, an autistic person might act as if they were really blind, and use other sensory systems to compensate - they 'see' for instance by using their ears, nose, tongue or hand.

Efferent Copying

In 1994, the researcher J. Russell explained how in normal development, the nervous system controls movements of the head and eyes to scan the environment and keep track of moving objects. It can distinguish whether it's the person who's moving, or the environment around them.

In some cases of autism, a disturbance at the stage of 'efferent copying' prevents the person having a sense of themselves. So, a child may not get dizzy in the normal way from spinning and might even seek out these kinds of movement sensations for stimulation.

Synesthesia ('cross-sensory perception')

In synesthesia, the stimulation of one sensory channel triggers a perception in one or more

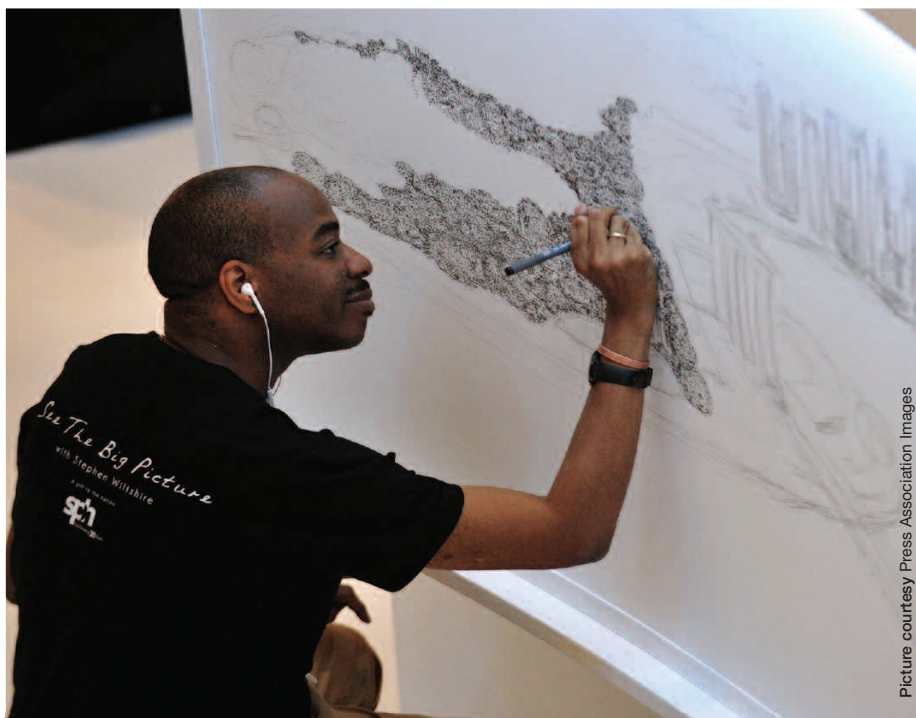
different senses. For instance, a sound triggers the perception of a colour. A word can trigger the perception of a taste. There are many other examples.

Photographic Memory

Many autistic people have a very good perceptual memory, especially a visual memory for details. Some autistic people can spell excellently thanks to their visual memory. Stephen Wiltshire, below, is an autistic savant whose drawings of architectural buildings contain the smallest details such as style and size of windows. All this despite him only seeing the original buildings once for a few minutes. He can draw entire cityscapes from memory.

Visual Thinking

One of the characteristics of autism is the remarkable ability of most autistic people to excel at visual-spatial skills while performing very poorly at verbal skills. For those who have visual thinking, words are like a second language. Their thought processes are different from language-based thinkers. Recent research findings show that verbal thought and visual thinking are processed in different brain regions. Not all people with autism are highly visual thinkers, though.



Picture courtesy Press Association Images

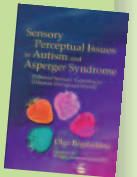
QUICK ON THE DRAW: Autistic artist Stephen Wiltshire draws on the first day of his appearance in Singapore's Paragon Shopping Centre on July 16th 2014. Singapore Press Holdings invited him to draw a panorama of Singapore.

Further Info

► **Colour coding for Learners with Autism**, by Adele Devine, Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishing.



► **Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism** by Olga Bogdashina, published by JKP, has a questionnaire at the back to help you find out whether your child's behaviour relates to sensory distortions and if so, which type.



► To find your nearest Irlen Centre, visit www.irlenuk.com

► Some opticians have vision therapy departments and others do colourimetry testing.

► Cheap coloured glasses can be found at www.happyeye.co.uk There's a small visual stress test on the site for readers.



► Cheap overlays and coloured paper are available from the British Dyslexia Association at www.bdastore.org.uk

► FX Software at www.fx-software.co.uk has a variety of assistive software to download for free to help with computer work.

► **LED Colour Changing Light Bulb.** Control the colour of a light bulb with your phone! Available on ebay for £29.99.





“My child won't sit and focus when it's time to be quiet at assembly or carpet time.”

Neurotypical people can also struggle with sitting quietly for long periods of time.



Picture courtesy Press Association Images



Heather MacKenzie

Speech and Language Pathologist and Founder of the SPARK* programme (Self Regulation Program of Awareness and Resilience in Kids)

Firstly, is this behaviour really a problem? A behaviour is a problem when it interferes with learning (for the child himself and/or others) and/or is unsafe. We really need careful self-reflection as adults to figure out if it's our issue or the child's.

If the behaviour is a problem, then how is the setting being prepared for the child to help ensure his success? Our children need to know exactly where their bodies should be. That means that they need to have clear physical, visible indicators about where to sit or stand. It can be a chair, a carpet square, hula hoop, or a taped out area. Many of our children with autism don't like having others in too close a proximity, so give other children

physical indicators about where they should stand/sit also.

If we want our children to self-regulate, sit still and focus, we have to make sure they are Calm, Alert and Nourished (that is, they CAN).

Children can be helped to be **Calm** by ensuring predictability: printed schedules of what is going to happen, when, where and for how long. Give the child specific information about how long he's going to be in the assembly or circle time. You may want to start with just five minutes before he can get up and move around and then progressively increase the time span.

An **Alert** child is better able to self-regulate. If he is tired or not feeling well, he can't be expected to calm and centre himself.

Giving the child some purpose and meaning to the assembly and carpet time can make a large difference in his alertness and ability to attend. You may wish to provide him with a list of specific things to look and listen for during the time period.

Nourishment is critical to a child's ability to self-regulate. If he hasn't eaten within the past two hours, don't press him to self-regulate. See The Eating Game™* for an effective system for children to learn dietary self-regulation.

* theeatinggame.ca



Breanne Black

Specialist Paediatric Occupational Therapist
Cool For Kids Occupational Therapy
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E-mail: yazaboo@hotmail.co.uk

An important issue that must be considered is how alert someone is. In Occupational Therapy-speak an 'optimum level of arousal' is one that allows you to feel calm yet alert.

This allows for increased sensory tolerance, focus, concentration and attention.

We all climb up and down an alertness ladder throughout the day. During times of excitement, stress and anxiety, our level of arousal may be high. Most of us have acquired our own strategies to ensure we remain at this optimum level.

Spinning movement can increase our level of arousal while side to side movement,

such as rocking, can calm us down.

If your little boy is struggling to sit still, it'd be good to know what level of alertness he is at.

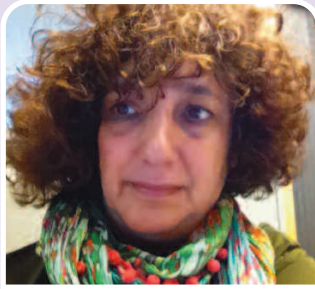
Is he moving about to lower his level of arousal and calm himself? If he's feeling anxious this could be the case. Sensitivity to noise might have the same effect. He may have just come from a challenging sensory situation such as play time and is trying to calm down to try and focus.

The opposite could also be the case – that his movement shows he's trying to increase his level of arousal in order to help him listen. In any case – it serves a purpose! Poor body awareness can also play a part.

Try activities beforehand to address his level of alertness. Occupational therapists can advise a 'sensory diet' to help. Fidget toys can allow for movement whilst he's seated and weighted lap toys are good for calming. You can use a special cushion that allows for movement whilst he's sitting. Ear defenders can help if sensitivity to noise is an issue.

Allow him to sit on the edge of the circle if he doesn't like the closeness of others and use a visual timer.

Finally, sitting still for lengthy periods is tricky for adults let alone kids, so keep your expectations realistic!



Dianne Sandler

Specialist Teacher, Inclusion Planning and Accountability Team Hackney Learning Trust

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www.learningtrust.co.uk

As I walk into reception classes all over the borough where I work as a specialist teacher every September this is often the first question I am asked.

And these are the questions I ask:

'What is the class doing on the carpet?'

'How long does the carpet session last?'

'Is it useful/interesting to your child?'

Carpet sessions in mainstream schools are language rich and involve a lot of listening and understanding. Some visuals are used but they can be hard to see and focus on with 29 other children around you.

There is a big preoccupation in schools that children should follow the class routine regardless of whether it is contributing to their learning. And you can see that this lack of cooperation and engagement poses problems for the teacher and support staff as it is the expected routine of the class and it can make it difficult for the other children to focus.

Here are some tips that have worked for me:

- Use visuals like Now and Next to help your child understand this is not going to last forever and it is just for taking the register or doing a quick phonics session for example and then they can do something else. I have given a child their own register with small photos of each child to match

with their name at the same time as the teacher.

- If you are working towards sitting, use a timer and allow them to go to another activity after a minute, gradually increasing the time spent on the carpet as appropriate.
- The alternative to carpet time has to be a purposeful activity but on the adult's agenda. So sitting on the carpet might become the preferred option!
- The time when the children are on the carpet can be a nice quiet calm time to do some 1-1 work. This needs to be planned and ready.
- In a few classrooms, story time has become more interactive and animated and this has helped engage a child with autism. Using props and rhythm for example helps all children to pay attention.
- I have seen carpet sessions start with a YouTube clip of a song or the class singing an action song/rhyme and this has helped to engage a child with autism for longer and made them more aware of their peers.
- Some children find sitting and listening too hard. Their focus is all on the sitting so they cannot take anything else in. Sometimes a trampoline or therapy ball can help with a child's ability to focus.
- There are pros and cons to having a fidget toy on the carpet. **Pros** - it can help concentration, lots of us fiddle with our hair, our nails, a keyring or necklace (unconsciously) to help us concentrate. **Cons** - it is too distracting for other children, it can become something to throw to gain a reaction and can lose its attraction quite quickly.
- The most successful carpet sessions have involved the teacher and the support staff working together to ensure visuals are ready to support a child with autism access the lesson. For example, they have their own copy of a story/activity and the key words printed out, the supporting adult and the child has a white board and pen so that the child has an example of what is expected right beside him/her and the child is in a good position on the carpet to see and hear the teacher.

- Fiddly toys we like can be found at - www.sensetoys.com and www.sensorytoywarehouse.com

- **Cushion** - Disc O Sit Jr. Disco Sit Jr Junior Kids Relax Sit Still - £18.95, www.amazon.co.uk



- **Movin Sit Cushion** £29.99 www.starpacks.co.uk

- **Ear defenders** - Baratec Yellow Cushioned And Adjustable Headband Ear Defenders Ear Muffs - SNR 25 db - £5.95 - www.amazon.co.uk

- **30-minute Sand Timer** £12.49, Sense Toys (www.sensetoys.com)



Adele Devine

Founder of I.T. games company SEN Assist and special needs teacher

At home, choose a quiet time. Show him a picture of children at carpet time or assembly. Talk about what you see - "The children are doing good sitting." Pause... "The teacher is talking." He may not know sitting is an issue. He may reveal what is.

A child once told me that her teacher spoke 'too complicatey' and would 'sometimes shout'. With that in mind, the first thing that may help is simplifying teacher talk and ensuring consistent, considerate volume. Adding visuals and Makaton™ signs will help with focus.

His teacher should state

behaviour expectations at the start: "I'm looking for good looking, good listening and good sitting." They could use a poster as a visual reminder and reward children who follow these 'rules' with praise. This provides role models to copy.

A session broken down into distinct parts is easier to follow. Use a Time Timer so he sees time elapse. Be aware of his processing time and provide visual structure for questions.

He may have difficulty keeping to his own space or knowing how to sit (carpet squares may help). What about a different way of sitting if there's a sensory issue? (My class do circle time on beanbags - *Kidz Reading Pod at www.edenlearningspaces.co.uk*). Noise, harsh lighting or different smells can all cause discomfort - be aware.

Rewards help. Could he have a 10-minute reward time 'break' afterwards to bounce, fiddle, twiddle, read or zone out? School could use a token reward board.

When the session ends, the teacher should praise the things he got right. "Harry. You did good sitting when I read my story. That makes me happy! Good boy!"



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Further Information

- **Sensory Audit for Schools and Classrooms** www.positiveaboutautism.co.uk/resources/Module-6a-Sensory-audit-tool-for-school.pdf (under the same resource list there's Answers to Questions Teachers Ask About Sensory Integration).

- **Weighted toys** - Louis the Ladybird Lap Weight and Calvin the Caterpillar Shoulder weight, £28.95, www.specialdirect.com



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DOUBLE TROUBLE or TWICE AS NICE

What's it like living with twins on the spectrum?

SAMUEL & ELLIOT

Neville and Sarah Bailey are parents to non-identical twins Samuel and Elliot who are 7. They live in Nottingham. Elliot was diagnosed in 2011, Samuel in 2013. Both have autism including sensory processing difficulties and can be challenging. Samuel is awaiting diagnosis of possible ADHD.

Sarah says: "We realised there were issues with Elliot when he was two as he used to bite and appeared not to listen. He was diagnosed, then Samuel displayed behaviour but we thought he was copying Elliot. As time went on and their behaviours became very different, we realised Samuel may also have an autism spectrum condition and went through the diagnosis process with him. I found it really hard to discover they both had autism. I work as a learning disability nurse, so I knew in my mind they had autism, but it was hard to hear.

"Samuel finds life a daily challenge. He likes being on his own and hates socialising and he needs routine and consistency. He spends time pacing. He finds being out and about most difficult. He becomes frustrated quickly and will hit out at others if they are within his personal space.

"He loves watching TV, playing his Innotab and listening to stories. He listens to music and enjoys bowling and the cinema. He hates getting wet and busy places.

"Elliot craves routine and consistency - he needs to be in control to feel safe. He has very high levels of anxiety. He is more sociable than his twin (on his own terms). He likes to pace and spin. If things are not done in the right order, he has to start the process again. He has obsessions (such as germs) and

frequently washes his hands. He also has a stammer and body ticks. Elliot loves Innotabs, bowling, music and playing his Wii. He hates busy environments and is a fussy eater.

"They don't seem to have empathy for each other, but they have some lovely moments when they will sit together playing an Innotab game.

"Having twins with autism has turned our lives upside down.

Nev had to give up work two years ago to look after them. We sleep three to four hours a night, so tiredness is a challenge. You can't take the boys out on your own, which can make you feel very isolated.

"It has also changed our outlook on life. We try and find the positive in everything. We have learnt to adapt our lifestyle to suit the boys. You also find out who your true friends are. You learn to stay strong, stick together as a family and fight for everything the boys need.

"The twins are two amazing gorgeous little boys. They have turned our world upside down, but have made our lives amazing at the same time".

They don't seem to have empathy for each other, but they have some lovely moments when they will sit together playing an Innotab game.



Samuel

Elliot

CHARLIE & ARCHIE

Lindsey and Sean Guymer are parents to five-year old identical twins Charlie and Archie and live in Dereham, Norfolk.



Archie

Charlie

Both twins were diagnosed at the age of 2 with the same diagnosis of autism and global developmental delay.

Lindsey says: "I'm not sure if it's made it more difficult or easier that they both have autism, but the fact they do not take notice of each other I guess might be easier on them - as if one was aware of the other and didn't ever receive a response it would be hard to watch.

"The boys are both non-verbal and lack communication skills, although Archie is sometimes using picture cards to indicate when he wants food.

"Both boys are extremely loving on their terms. The main difference is Archie is a lot more upset by routine changes and will throw himself on the floor a lot during a day when he is being taken places. He especially hates the doctors and shopping of any kind!

"The boys both love watching the new Fireman Sam and playing outside - if they are in a safe enclosed outdoor space they love it.

"Having twins with autism has taught us as a family to

enjoy all the little things. The boys have older brothers - Jack is 13 and Josh is 8 and it's hard for them not getting recognition from their little brothers, but then if the boys put their arms up to be lifted or give a cuddle or smile, even this means the world to them and us.

"I'd be lying if I didn't say the day we received diagnosis wasn't a difficult one...it was even though we expected it. There are still those down days but we wouldn't want it any other way and feel blessed beyond belief to have these amazing little boys in our lives.

"The most challenging thing is going out and about with the boys, seeing as they both have no danger awareness whatsoever and will just run if they get a chance. I tend not to attempt trips away from the house on my own unless absolutely necessary.

"The best thing is the unconditional love the boys give - a smile and a hug from them is priceless".

There are still those down days but we wouldn't want it any other way and feel blessed beyond belief to have these amazing little boys in our lives.

GEORGE & CHARLES

George and Charles Fidler are six year-old non-identical twins. George has autism and Charles doesn't. They live with their parents on a smallholding in Stockport, Cheshire.

Diane says: "From the time they could sit unaided, my partner Pete and I began to notice a difference in their behaviour and development. George would rock back and forth in his infant carrier and bouncy chair, moving them from one side of the room to the other.

"We expressed concerns over his development and he was then referred to a consultant paediatrician. By the age of two, George was supported by occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and Portage services. He was also referred to the Children's Community Learning Disability Team and began to attend their play development group. George had an ADOS test and was diagnosed with autism at three years old.

"George was given an early resourced placement in a resourced nursery class when he was two and Charles joined him in the same class the following year. They are now in Year 2 of Brookside Primary in Stockport, a resourced primary school. Charles has a mainstream place and George has a resourced place with full-time support.

"The twins love school and enjoy being with their friends. Both are doing well and George continues to amaze everybody with his mathematical ability and his excellent memory. Although George can be very challenging, he wins people over with his gorgeous smile and his sense of humour.

"Charles loves cycling and scooting and helping his dad to mow the field, feed the chickens and chop logs. George is very active and agile. He is fearless and loves climbing but has no awareness of danger to himself or others. He climbs trees and onto the stable roof, duck house roof and car roof! The twins also love playing on their tablets although they now have to share one as George dropped his into the toilet!



George

Charles

Although George can be very challenging, he wins people over with his gorgeous smile and his sense of humour.

"I've always been open to Charles about George's autism and Charles is happy to tell everybody. From 3 years-old when George wasn't talking, Charles would introduce him by saying 'This is my brother George, he's autistic'.

"Charles looks after George but he also gets angry with him for breaking his toys (George has got through a large box of Nerf darts as he uses them for stimming) and often feels he isn't getting the same amount of attention.

"George finds it difficult to play games with Charles, although they do role play together - George likes to line up chairs, put a soft toy on each chair and pretend he is a train driver, although Charles usually gets his own way and takes over as the driver!

"They go to most places together, but Charles has recently started going to sessions and activities run by Stockport Signpost for Young Carers.

"I struggle to take them to public places because of George's behaviour, but I have been taking them to the local children's centre run by Independent Options for four years as it is safe, secure and friendly. I also send them to CADS (a local able bodied and disabled club run by the Seashell Trust) in the school holidays where George has one-to-one support. They attend weekly inclusive swimming lessons together at the Seashell Trust (Cheshire), too".



SONNY & PATRICK

Paula and Mark Denny are parents to twin sons Sonny and Patrick. They live in Droylsden, Manchester and the boys turned six on the 4th and 5th of December.

"At first the paediatrician thought Patrick was copying Sonny. Patrick had many words and would give lovely eye contact. He would play and interact like most two year-olds, too. But I knew there was more to it than Patrick just copying some of Sonny's behaviours, so this is why we had a genetic test which revealed that they were identical. By the age of three, Patrick had lost all of his words, had become very aggressive and was in a different world.

"Sonny can be the most loving at times with his big hugs and the way he holds my face right up to his - his smile and his laugh make him glow. But it was not always like this. As a baby he would cry for hours and never sleep, everything has always been on Sonny's own terms. Eye contact, play, being held - everything.

"It took a while for Sonny to let me in. But when he does, it's wonderful and beautiful. Sonny loves to climb and run and is the world's best spinner. He can bounce a ball or a balloon with such skill and patience.

It took a while for Sonny to let me in. But when he does, it's wonderful and beautiful.

"From day one, his Daddy has been his best friend. He can hold him so tight - Sonny loves it. He can throw him so high in the air that Sonny must feel like he's flying and is sometimes nearly sick with laughing. So far, we have only heard him say a few words.

"Both my boys tip-toe walk and neither of them sleep. For 5 years they only slept 4 hours a night.

"Patrick is like my little shadow. When he was very little we would play for hours and he would have me doing the same thing over and over,

saying 'Again!' Because he was communicating, I would do it - a song over and over, or a daft dance over and over, or the same book over and over again.

"Whereas Sonny's an outdoor person, Patrick is an indoor kind of guy. Patrick was always the dominant twin, hitting, biting and pushing poor little Sonny. No one was too big or off limits to Patrick. My boys have not had a great

Patrick has calmed down and now there are rare occasions where we are able to play tickle games.



Sonny

Patrick

relationship with each other in the past as Patrick would hurt Sonny through jealousy, frustration, Sonny being too close or making a noise Patrick could not copy.

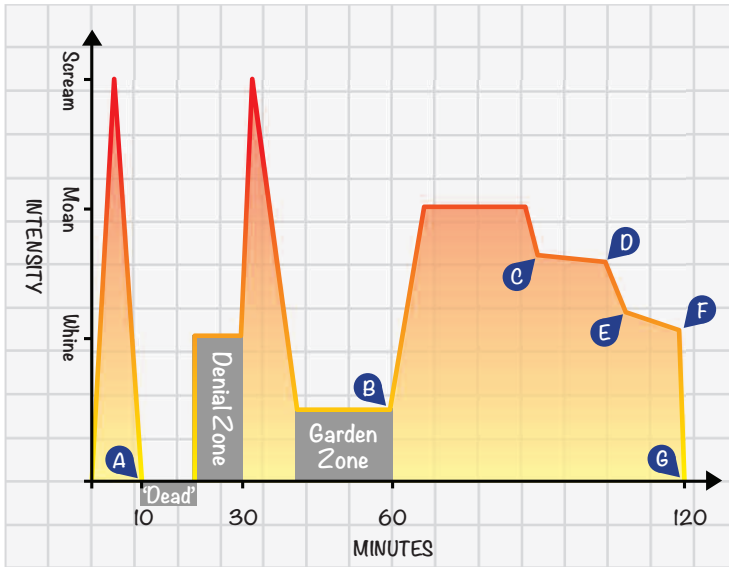
"But over the years, Patrick has calmed down and now there are rare occasions where we are able to play tickle games with the boys tickling each other (hand over hand) and making each other laugh.

"My husband Mark went from full time work to part time as we threw ourselves into the Son-Rise programme. We work as a team, it's the only way. You need to think on your feet and be more practical. They make us so proud, though, with all the things they have to deal with and process. The majority of the time they are very happy boys".



The Last Word

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



My Highly Scientific Tantrum Analysis

This little diagram, based on the experiences of a sample of, er... one...is not exactly going to make it into The Lancet. However it's the simplest way of describing how Bobby's meltdowns work in comparison to your average tantrum. I may give it to his secondary school once I'm certain that they're taking him and can't back out.

Here's the explanation:

A Your average neurotypical tantrum is explosive but tails off to a whine pretty quickly. At this point, Bobby's just warming up. When he can't deal with the unwelcome news any longer, he lies down on the floor to play dead for a while. If you hadn't noticed him unobtrusively lying in the middle of the hallway, he'll announce: "I'm dead. Goodbye." Tongue out to the side for effect. This lasts about ten minutes and is quite nice for us.

DENIAL ZONE: When he 'awakens', he reckons that you may still change your mind as long as he whines a lot. Especially if the whining is full of frankly doubtful promises such as "I'll never ever ever be naughty again."

SECOND PEAK: Once he's sure you aren't budging, there's another explosion. This bit's like watching a car being steered in the wrong direction and then over-compensating, as he veers to the opposite extreme. "I hate computers! I am going to ban all screens! I am never playing the computer EVER again!!!" At this point, I'm usually starting to wonder whether I should just let him grow up all by himself.

GARDEN ZONE: There follows some stamping around and a few threats to belong to a different family coupled with the announcement that he's leaving home, and a tentative opening of the front door. Once he realises he's bitten off more than he can chew, he heads for the back door instead and potters round the garden grumbling to himself until he realises it's a bit cold actually and comes back in.

B Enter stage left a complete stranger who looks like my son but speaks in a weird voice. This new person ('Joey' in the last instance) doesn't like computers and has never heard of that particular banned website. If he has heard of it (which he hasn't by the way) he doesn't even LIKE it.

C Parental nervous breakdown.

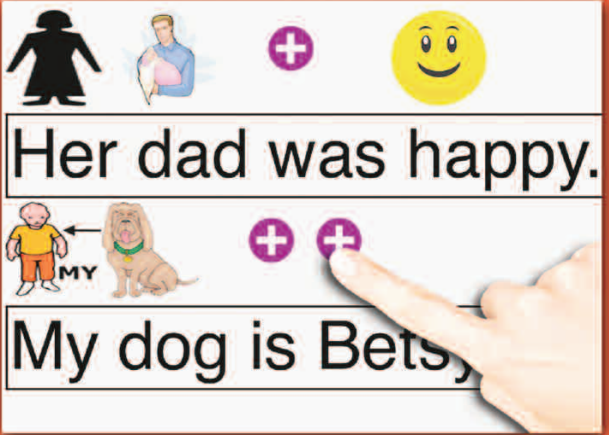
D Parental bribery about all the nice things he can have instead of banned website.

E Emergency phone call to my mum for words of wisdom plus a side order of chicken soup. The last time this happened, Bobby shouted to me whilst I was on the phone: "I feel better now!"

F Requests for me to turn into a comedian to cheer him up now he's all better. I am feeling about as funny as a hedgehog that's just been run over by an Eddie Stobbart lorry.

G It's like it never happened! (Except it did). Hugs and apologies and later on a small question and answer session about how mummy and Bobby could deal with this better next time. "Well, you could let me do what I want..."

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