



Aukids®

Issue 38
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Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions



Atta-boy!

Why is Tony Attwood our autism hero?



Storm Troopers

Getting through a meltdown



Chalk Up Success

Top tips for mainstream classrooms



WIN Messy Play Paint Sticks from Little Brian

Letter from the Editors



Welcome to our first issue of 2018!

Pictured here, you can see us happily rounding off 2017 at an evening reception during which Vernon Building Society in Stockport handed over our Jubilee Fund grant of £968. AuKids was one of 16 other good causes that benefited from the cash thanks to your votes. We had a wonderful evening – other like-minded people also commit their hearts and souls to causes they are passionate about, and it was humbling for the AuKids team to hear about their work.



Spot the AuKids plug!

The big news for 2018 is that co-editor Debby Elley is publishing a book with Jessica Kingsley Publishers, called *15 Things They Forgot to Tell You About Autism: The Stuff That Transformed My Life as an Autism Parent*. Launched this April, it will be jam-packed with the kind of advice that Debby

wished someone had given her ten years ago, and is aimed at readers looking for friendly and candid advice, free of jargon. If you enjoy the magazine, you'll no doubt love the book, too, which we will be previewing in the next issue.

To celebrate the launch of the book, Debby is presenting her talk *Bobby and Alec Are in the Building* to autism groups in order to raise funds for AuKids magazine. Write to us if you're interested in booking her at editors@aukids.co.uk

covered in the same talk and we hope it will be popular.

AuKids is a social enterprise and our talks support the costs of publishing the magazine.

Finally, we'd like to take this opportunity to wish huge congratulations to one of our readers Deborah Brownson, who was awarded an MBE in the New Year's honours list. Deborah has been campaigning tirelessly (is there any other sort of campaigning?!) for autism to be included in teacher training and her book *He's Not Naughty!* - told from a child's viewpoint - has become a school guide for teachers and fellow pupils alike. Look up Deborah's full story at www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-42504883 Well done Deborah!

COMPETITION WINNERS FROM ISSUE 36:

Claudine Ahmad from Lancashire won the POD competition with this tie-breaker:

**Plug in, pop up and play,
My autistic son would say,
'great idea to get away,
Leave the world behind,
No noise in my mind,
lights, colours and unconfined,
To a beautiful space in time'.**

Well done Claudine!

- **Design and Drill competition:** Mariann Foster-Watt, Lancashire.
- **Signed My Son's Not Rainman books:** Ally Sommers, Cheshire; Paula Greco, Uruguay and Damian Welland, Exeter.

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All readers are invited to Debby's book launch at Waterstones in Deansgate, Manchester, which takes place on April 24th at 6.30pm-7.30pm. Come and get your copy signed and meet other families.

As well as undertaking some training this year, the AuKids gang will also be presenting a new talk titled *Autism All Angles*. This combines the perspective of co-editor Tori (a speech and language therapist), Debby (a parent of twins with autism) and Tim (an adult with autism). We think it's the first time that all three perspectives have been

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Last November, comedian John Williams presented his last ever performance of his one-man show *My Son's Not Rainman*. It took place at Stockport Plaza in aid of AuKids magazine and nearly 400 parents and professionals turned up to see it. After the show, we received this lovely letter.

Hello there,

My son is five with autism and to be quite honest, we don't have an awful lot to laugh about. We manage his challenging behaviour on a day to day basis, juggle his many appointments, spend lots of time trying to engage with school to support him whilst actually trying to get him there in the first place, all the while working and caring for his three year-old brother (who also might be on the spectrum).

So, I thought, a comedy about autism, this should be interesting. How on earth can autism be funny?

My husband and I booked the only person we can trust to babysit and we planned a well-deserved and long overdue "Date Night" at the theatre.

Well, John nailed it last night! We had a fabulous night at the Stockport Plaza with friends who we met on our most recent autism parenting course. We belly laughed, we cried (the girls did anyway) and we enjoyed the whole experience. It was so refreshing to hear "our life" being shared in a room with others and to normalise the behaviours we live with. It was therapy for me and well worth missing *The A Word* for.

Thank you Aukids for hosting the event. I would be grateful if you could pass this on to John to make him aware of how much it meant to us all.

Sarah Windram, Sale, Cheshire

If you missed the show and would like to buy John's witty, candid and heart-warming book of the same title, you can order it from Amazon for £7.99



AuKids Addresses New Data Protection Laws

In line with new Data Protection laws which come into effect in May, AuKids is providing our readership with transparency regarding the data held on them.

The information that you give to us when you apply for a subscription is held on a secure server that's administered by our website designers, Webguild Media in Gatley. All data is password protected and can be accessed by Webguild should there be a technical problem and by Debby Elley, co-editor of AuKids magazine, for updates to subscriptions. The only personal information we hold on you is what you give us at the time of subscribing – namely name and contact details, plus your children's names and dates of birth if you've decided to provide them. This is to give us an idea of the age range of our

readership's children.

Obviously, we need your data in order to send out your magazine. It also remains on the system for 360 days after the subscription's expiry. This is so that you can still renew easily if you miss a few magazines and it allows us to send you reminders during the months after expiry.

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Cover Star

Aurora Reeder

★ ★ Age: 6 ★ ★

Diagnosis: Autism

Lives: London

Loves: Halloween, spiders and sharks!

Hates: Vegetables!

Personality in 3 words:

Funny, caring, inquisitive

If she were Prime Minister:

She would make school optional!



I love: Spiders & sharks
I dislike: Vegetables!

Simon Says...

Simon is a little boy who has autism. Sometimes he has to think quite hard about what to say or do next. Use our Simon cartoons as talking points with your autistic child.

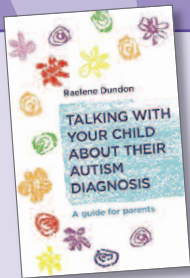


Simon has been given a piece of homework. He has to hand it in tomorrow, but he has a new game on the X-Box that he wants to play. What can Simon do?



Co-Editor's Book Announced

Co-editor Debby Elley's new book is titled *15 Things They Forgot To Tell You About Autism*. It will be available from Jessica Kingsley Publishers from April 19th and a preview will be printed in the next issue.



BOOK

Talking with Your Child about Their Autism Diagnosis

By Raelene Dundon

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

£12.99 • ISBN 9781785922770

I am so glad this book has been written. We often get asked by parents how they should talk to their child about an autism diagnosis. This book not only covers that topic, but a whole lot more.

The fact that you can read it virtually in one sitting is a good bet for busy parents. It's also written in a straight-forward, simple way, without being patronising.

It addresses the key issues around talking with your child, firstly asking you to assess whether you're ready for the conversation and how much you understand about autism before you embark on it. Just to make sure your information is up to speed, there's a mini guide to autism with a list of fact and fiction points. The author addresses the reasons for telling a child about their autism before talking about the right time and how you broach the subject. Raelene has been very careful to adapt the book for different audiences, for parents of children at different levels of understanding.

In the section titled 'Autism Talk' the author gives some great examples of how autism talks have played out between parents and their children in real life.

A troubleshooting section includes the slightly amusing question 'What do I do if my child uses autism as an excuse?' bringing to mind the time that Bobby attended a Tae Kwon Do party and as the instructor was about to practice with him, Bob piped up "You can't hit me, I'm autistic!"

Part 2 incorporates telling other people about the autism. It investigates the reasons for telling people and how you tell them – leaving important personal decisions open to the reader's discretion. It addresses the very important questions of misunderstandings from the wider family as well as getting support from friends.

Finally, I love the downloadable worksheets at the end. They include a sheet your child can use to list things they do well and things they need help with, showing how they can use their strengths to compensate for weaknesses. It also has some lovely analogies to help explain autism as a difference rather than a disability – such as comparing different types of train engines and computer operating systems.

I agree with every sensible word in this book, eloquently written. A really helpful tool for anyone coming to grips with how to chat about an emotive subject.

By Debby Elley,
co-editor

WIN!

We have 2 copies of *Talking with your Child About Their Autism Diagnosis* to give away. Just send your name and address to competitions@aukids.co.uk with the word 'Diagnosis' in the subject header, or send a postcard to Aukids, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE.

Winners will be chosen at random after the closing date of March 1st 2018.

Reviews & Prizes



CONFERENCE

Autism: A Hands On Approach

Stepping Hill Hospital,
Stockport.
November 14th 2017

Stockport's *Hands On Conference* in November last year drew together both personal experiences and scientific knowledge in a useful, digestible day-long event. Author Charlotte Moore kicked things off with a brief update on her sons George and Sam. Originally the subject of Charlotte's brilliant book *George and Sam* (published by Penguin) and now in their mid-twenties, her boys' progress has been the subject of Charlotte's talks since the *Hands On Conference* first began 13 years ago. Both are living at home with a full programme of events and care, but Charlotte pointed out that she is keenly aware of the amount of decision-making that's still down to her. As George and Sam get older, she raised several issues surrounding this.

Ageing and autism was another theme raised by Saskia Baron in her talk *Autism Unpacked*. Saskia's brother Timothy, now 61, was one of the first children to be diagnosed with autism in this country. Saskia's father was a founder member of the National Autistic Society and instrumental in securing the right to an education (rather than institutionalisation) for autistic children. Saskia, a journalist and film-maker, gave a fascinating history of her brother's experiences and the changes in autism provision that her family has witnessed over Timothy's lifespan. Her talk incorporated glimpses into the lives of Timothy's peers, too, all diagnosed in the early Sixties.

Saskia packed the biggest punch with her key messages concerning ageing and autism. She reflected that most autism research is conducted on young children. "People fear that the door on autistic learning closes, but it really doesn't shut," she said, illustrating with real-life examples. She also called for more research focusing on non-verbal people with autism. She drew attention to the very high incidence of premature mortality in these adults, linking it in part to under-reporting of medical conditions caused by poor communication and 'hypo' (under) sensitivity. Finally, she underlined the need to address problems in social care and decision making for older people who don't have families to represent them.

Mark Wetherell, Associate Professor of Psychobiology at Northumbria University, gave a fascinating talk based on his research into the psychological and physical effects of caring. His research showing that carers demonstrate marked

increases in stress symptoms was perhaps unsurprising, but more concerning was the long-term physical effects of this stress. In one study it was shown that caregivers had twice the amount of C-Reactive protein in their blood than a control group, part of an array of inflammatory markers that show an increased likelihood of heart disease.

The second half of his talk focused on measures that could protect carers from these adverse effects. They included a high level of social support and there is ongoing research into the positive effects of 'benefit finding' – encouraging parents to reframe their thinking by writing about emotionally positive aspects of their lives.

In the *Baby Boomer's Tale*, John Gorham gave a poetic account of recognising he was on the spectrum late in life. He had some profound messages about how an 'innate knowledge of their social deficits' could affect the confidence of those on the spectrum, also pointing out that someone with a high cognitive ability could learn to make up for social deficits. 'In other words, hard intelligence makes up for lack of soft intelligence'. Managing stress has been key for him and some of his descriptions, like 'my engine idles at anxiety' were fantastic in their immediacy. Best of all, I thought the description of a successful phase of his career at a bank summed up what every workplace should offer autistic employees: 'They nurtured my strengths and tolerated my foibles'.

After a series of workshops, Prof David Skuse's afternoon lecture *The Nature of Routines, Rituals and Obsessive Interests*, focused on the challenges underpinning the newest diagnostic criteria. The speaker's clarity on this subject was very welcome and his engaging talk made real sense of recent changes to diagnosis. In particular, he drew attention to the under-diagnosis of girls, pointing out how obsessive interests may look very different in females. The ratio of autistic females to men, he feels, is more likely 1:2 rather than the often quoted 1:4.

Researcher and author Olga Bogdashina rounded off the day with her talk *Sensory perceptual differences in autism: Autism as the Intense World Syndrome*. Olga's talks delve deeply into a subject that is at the heart of understanding autistic behaviour. If you don't have a chance to see her, we'd highly recommend Olga's book *Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome* (Second Edition), one of the best books on the subject in our view.

Next year's conference will be held at the same venue on November 13th. E-mail: autism.ahandsonapproach@gmail.com for details.

By Debby Elley, co-editor

Preview



BOOK How to Best Help an Autism Mum

By Sharon King
Published by Austin Macauley
£8.99
ISBN 9781787105072

Within a window of four years, all three of Sharon King's children were diagnosed with forms of autism. In her new book 'How to Best Help an Autism Mum,' Sharon reflects on the diagnosis days, and on the process of accepting her children's conditions. Here, she gives AuKids a preview of the book.

My middle daughter Daisy was born in the year 2000. It was evident within a few hours that professionals suspected that something was amiss. Her muscle tone was very low; her beautiful blue eyes were almond shaped, and her hands and feet turned inwards. Although I fell in love with her unusual features straight away, the doctors weren't quite so romantic about her differences.

This baby has some kind of a syndrome' I was told abruptly by a junior registrar, before he left the room. And so began my journey into the world of special needs parenting. Daisy's formal diagnosis of Kabuki Syndrome, with autistic traits, came a year later, when I was already pregnant with my son Lenny. My chatty, quirky toddler Rosie was a welcome distraction; she was wise beyond her years and offered much advice and

comfort. The months slid by in a blur of hospital visits, referrals, assessments, and before I could get my breath from the shock of Daisy's diagnosis my three year-old son was diagnosed with classic autism. A double whammy – how could it be? Was I culpable in some way? I armed myself with knowledge, quickly amassing a library of 'autism' books. I learned that people with autism were not all like my son, non-verbal, very sensory, seeming to lack 'Theory of Mind'. I learned that some people with autism could be very intellectual, very academic. The more I learned the more connections I drew, and at the age of nine, Rosie was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.

I knew no other family like mine – I was very much on virgin territory, feeling my way along, making mistakes, missing out on swathes of happy family time because of depression and numbness. Things changed when I finally let go of what I had expected of family life, and began to celebrate the children that I had been blessed with.

In my new book *How To Best Help an Autism Mum* I share my journey, as well as providing my best tips for helping that special person in your life whose child has recently been diagnosed with autism.

The most valuable lessons in life are often the ones involving the most pain. I can honestly say that I would change nothing about my journey so far, and that I would certainly change nothing about my children. The changes I am interested in are how we as a society accommodate and embrace people with autism.

behavioural therapy (CBT), this book explains OCD in a simple and ingenious way and uses analogies that will help kids understand why the strategies she suggests will work. The way she hooks her ideas onto a child's existing experiences in a colourful and imaginative way is brilliant.

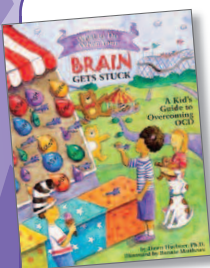
My son Bobby, 14, read it and said: "This book has things to help you calm down your OCD, so if you have a very severe case and just can't get rid of it, read this book it has lots of useful strategies.

"I thought it was helpful and it helped my OCD calm down a bit. I liked the bit about why kids get OCD because I finally realised I'm not the only one who has it".

By Debby Elley, co-editor

BOOK What to do When your Brain Gets Stuck

By Dawn Huebner, illustrated by Bonnie Matthews
Published by Magination Press • £12.50
ISBN 9781591478058



This book is part of a fantastic series of *What to do When...* that have been my go-to guides since my autistic twins were little. Dawn is a clinical psychologist based in New Hampshire and all of her books are engaging, interactive and witty.

Aimed at 6-12 year-olds and designed to be used either alone or in tandem with cognitive

Messy Play Minus the Mess!

The team behind new North West toy company Little Brian is celebrating after Toys R Us began stocking its Paint Sticks products at the end of last year. The major retailer's confidence in such a young company was no doubt boosted by Little Brian's four gongs during its first year of trading in 2016, including the Gold award in the Arts and Crafts category of the Bizziebaby Awards, judged by parents.

Paint Sticks are a clean and convenient way to paint without the need for brushes or water or the usual mess that comes with it. The solid Paint Sticks twist up and down like a glue stick, and allow vivid colours to be transferred directly onto a range of different surfaces

like canvas, wood, paper, card and even glass.

You can buy the Classic range of Paint Sticks for £4.99 for the six pack and £7.99 for the 12 pack. The 24 Assorted Pack is £14.99 and includes 12 Classic Paint Sticks along with six Metallic and six Day Glow colours.

We loved the idea of painting without the pain, so AuKids has the 12-pack Paint Sticks to give away to three lucky readers.

All you have to do is to answer this tie-breaker in less than 50 words. 'The worst messy play clear up I ever faced was...' Make us laugh and you could be in with a chance!

E-mail your reply no later than February 28th to competitions@aukids.co.uk or write to PO Box 259 Cheadle Cheshire SK8 9BE. Don't forget to include your name and address. Good luck!



BOOK What to do When Mistakes Make you Quake: A Kid's Guide to Accepting Imperfection

By Clare A.B. Freeland and Jacqueline Toner
Illustrated by Janet McDonnell
Published by Magination Press
£15.95 • ISBN 9781433819308

The two authors of this book are American clinical psychologists with over 30 years each in private practice working with children and parents.

Boy, do autism parents need this book! That 'all or nothing' approach to learning has got our family into some stressful situations in the past. This book cleverly likens life to an exploration, where not everything will be discovered first time around. It delves into the sorts of thoughts and feelings that those who can't

accept their mistakes might experience. It teaches kids to challenge thoughts and talks about catastrophizing, showing how negative thoughts can spiral out of control.

In the interactive way typical of this series, it engages children (ages 6-12) in strategies to reduce rigid thinking and talks about how to accept failure and learn perspective.

I see this book as a great defence against anxious thoughts and a resource that will help children build emotional resilience in the long-term.

My son Bobby, 14, said: "In this book is how you can accept mistakes and move on from them instead of getting all stressed out about it. It helped me understand that there's no harm in any mistake. I like that the book gives the positive aspects to mistakes even if they feel like a sort of failure. It made me feel like I could carry on after my mistakes".

By Debby Elley, co-editor



“My daughter bit her Teaching Assistant the other day and I was mortified. She doesn't show the slightest remorse when she hurts people. What can I do?”



Phoebe Caldwell

Phoebe is an expert practitioner in Intensive Interaction and trains professionals, therapists, managers and carers in the approach. Among her new resources is a set of free short films: *Responsive Communication: tuning in to people with autism* which you can view on the Caldwell Autism Foundation's website at thecaldwellautismfoundation.org.uk

This is a problem with many layers. It is not just that the child bit her TA but also about how the non-autistic world fails to understand what the world is like for the child.

A useful German word, 'umwelt', describes the world as we perceive it through our senses. We all of us see the world slightly differently but if we are on the autistic spectrum, our 'umwelts' may be completely different, since our sensory perception is wired up differently. What the non-autistic world experiences as benign may be extremely painful for your child.

For example, a person wearing a black and white T-shirt, or with a hard sharp voice, can set off extremely painful sensations in the body. The trouble starts when we, non-autistics, make judgements and design strategies which are based on our 'umwelt' and not that of the child.

So they take refuge in repetitive behaviours that they can focus on, (stimming) in order to exclude painful sensory stimuli. If these are taken from them,

the child is exposed to a reaction from their sympathetic nervous system that triggers their body's self defence system, telling them they are in mortal danger. They feel as if they are being attacked and respond as if this is so – in this case by trying to remove themselves from the cause of their distress by what we experience as an aggressive act.

However, this is not the whole of the problem, since we need to ask ourselves what it is that is causing the sensory overload with its accompanying rise in levels of pain, confusion and heat? Why is it that the child needs to retreat into stimming in the first place?

To begin with, schools are a very hard place for children on the spectrum since they are grossly over-stimulating. With the best will in the world, there is too much visual stimulus, noise, overlapping speech, physical contact, attentional demand and the child seeks refuge in stimming.

Our job is to try and reduce the sensory demands which they experience as pain so that they can make sense of what is going on around them. We can do this by paying attention to sensory hypersensitivities, reducing the noise, making sure they are not bombarded with too many bright colours, patterns and intense light (particularly strip lights as these can be agonising). Do they suffer from Irlen syndrome which underlies painful visual distortions? Find them a quiet place. Do not interfere with stimming but rather use it as a starting point for interaction by joining in the activity and developing emotional engagement (Intensive Interaction).

Staff, particularly those in mainstream schools, whose training has not necessarily included autism awareness, do need information and specialist guidance as to the nature of sensory deficits and how to address these.



Breanne Black

Breanne is a Specialist Paediatric Occupational Therapist at Cool For Kids Occupational Therapy. www.coolforkidsoccupationaltherapy.co.uk

E-mail: yazaboo@hotmail.co.uk

Your mouth is your most powerful sensory system, so is often the first choice when someone is seeking out extra sensory information.

Someone seeking out extra touch feedback might place objects into their mouth. Or, they may gnaw on parts of their body, such as biting fingernails. As well as providing extra touch stimulation, this also gives deep pressure input which can help with body awareness. Extra sensory input through the mouth can help to increase awareness, for example chewing a crunchy breadstick may help to 'wake up' the mouth area in order to help a person to chew their lunch.

2. To calm

Some sensory systems are unable to cope with too much incoming sensory information. Their environment might be too bright (vision) too loud (sound) or too itchy (touch). The deep pressure sensation from biting and chewing can help them to manage this overload. It's a tool sometimes used to manage sensory stressors.

They may not just bite objects or themselves, but also other people. This calm-seeking behaviour is a clue that they're in a state of sensory overload. Biting others could indicate that someone is being overloaded by sensory information to the point that a 'fight or flight' reaction (action fuelled by adrenaline) becomes evident.

How can we help?

The power of the mouth as a sensory organ should never be overlooked.

If someone seeks out what we call 'oral motor input' (sensory input through the mouth) this should be implemented into their daily sensory routine. An Occupational Therapist can help to assess sensory needs and make a daily timetable based on them.

The sorts of input we're talking about include drinking through straws, chewing crunchy snacks and being given access to safe chewy items (available at most sensory toy stores).

*Proprioception allows for the subconscious awareness of our body's position in space. So, we have a 'sense' of where our limbs are without looking at them.

There may be many reasons why a child may bite and in order to answer the question, it's important to consider the environment and the context in which the biting occurs.

Common reasons why a child may bite include communication, to obtain attention or to meet a sensory need.

As an Occupational Therapist, I am going to focus on the sensory side of biting, but if the reason isn't sensory, your approach will depend on the reason for biting.

It is widely appreciated that autistic people have difficulty processing sensory information accurately. Our sensory systems include movement, touch, proprioception*, hearing, vision, smell and taste.

Inaccurate processing of sensory information from any of these systems may result in a young person biting.

There are two main sensory reasons that a young person may bite:

1. To increase alertness/awareness

Imagine a car with a large fuel tank. If there isn't enough fuel in the tank, the car won't go. Some people require extra levels of sensory input or sensory information in order to make sense of their environment. Kids who require extra levels of sensory information may obtain it by using their mouth.



Adele Devine

Adele is a special needs teacher at a school for young people with severe learning difficulties and autism. She has over a decade of experience teaching children on the autism spectrum. In 2010, she co-founded the multi-award winning SEN Assist autism software with her husband.

Arrange a time when you can talk to the teacher and Teaching Assistant because it is important to work out why the bite happened.

ASK!

My top ten questions.

- 1) Is this the first time my daughter has bitten at school?
- 2) Who else has been bitten?
- 3) Were there any possible triggers?
- 4) Was it a different day to the usual schedule?
- 5) Was there a different teacher or staff?
- 6) Had anything just happened?
- 7) Where did the biting happen?
- 8) What time of day was it?
- 9) What was the immediate response?
- 10) How did the Teaching Assistant and child react?

This discussion will help throw so much light onto the issue and is the starting point to unpicking the incident, supporting your daughter and reducing the likelihood of the biting happening again.

Anxiety: There is a common myth that autistic people lack empathy, but my experience is that children with autism often have a sort of hyper-empathy. They may not process verbal language, but they pick up on and sometimes even mirror other people's feelings. A change in

atmosphere that is not noticeable to most people could have a massive impact on your daughter. It could be a different teacher, a different lesson to the usual, a classroom assistant who has rushed to school and got there feeling flustered, hearing another child get told off, forgetting something, an argument...

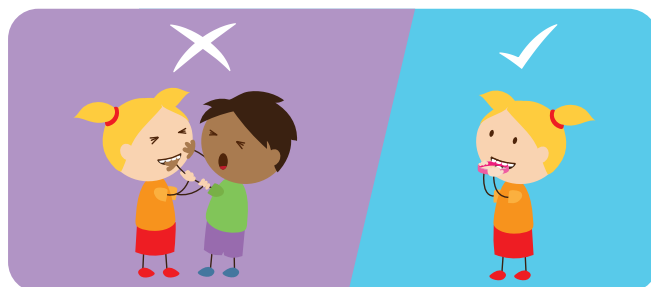
Support: Ideally the teacher would arrange a time the next day for a 1:1 tutorial and follow the Carol Gray Comic Strip Conversation format, drawing a stick figure representing your daughter and setting the scene. Your daughter would probably recognise the setting and hopefully fill in the words for what her stick figure was thinking at the time just before she bit. When the thought process is understood it is possible to work out support strategies. These might be Social Stories™ or access to time out. The child needs a way to communicate when she is anxious. She must know that biting is not ever okay, but these things *are* okay...

If the biting was more sensory, see Breanne's advice on the opposite page and have different strengths of sensory chews available.

Knowledge: All behaviour is communication. It's important to really know the child and the individual circumstances. I recall an incident when a Teaching Assistant was bitten during our morning circle time. The bite happened suddenly and seemed completely out of the blue. The child acted as though nothing had happened. What was the reason? The child was pre-verbal so would not be able to explain, but I knew from long talks with Mum that he had anxieties about visitors and people coming and going.

Just before this bite happened, another teacher had entered the room with a message and then left. We introduced a 'visitor' visual and all staff carried them at all times. I put a polite note to visitors on our class door and alerted all school staff. When there were visitors I ensured the child had 1:1 support. I created a Social Story™ showing pictures of people and explaining why they had to come and go.

The child had a hard chewy to bite when he felt that need and we added some crunchy options to our snack times. The biting stopped because we knew the individual child and we were aware of the things that made him anxious.



Further Information

Social Stories™ are a type of visual 'what to do' guide for different social situations that might be confusing for an autistic child. They are trademarked because they were originally dreamt up by Carol Gray and work to a definite structure designed to engage the child and gently direct them without being overtly 'directive'. If you'd like to know more about Social Stories, see **AuKids Issue 15** in our online archive, which has a guide about how to write them. Good books on the subject include:

My Social Stories Book, Edited by Carol Gray and Abbie Leigh White, illustrated by Sean



McAndrew, published by Jessica Kingsley.

Successful Social Stories™ for Young Children with Autism by Dr Siobhan Timmins. Foreword by Carol Gray published by Jessica Kingsley.

Social Situation Stories by Alison Harris published by Special Direct. Not the same format as Social Stories™ but very helpful.

Other useful reading

The Anger Box by Phoebe Caldwell, published by Pavilion Publishing

Dinosaurs Don't Bite: The Adventures of Liam and Luke: Volume 1 (Brotherly Adventures of Liam and Luke) by McKenzie Irvin, published by Createspace and available on Amazon.

Living with autism isn't easy. But finding out all about it should be.

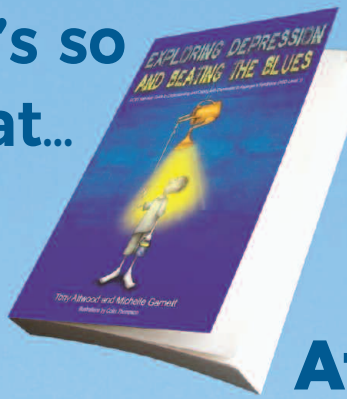
Everything you need to know in one place
www.autismlinks.co.uk



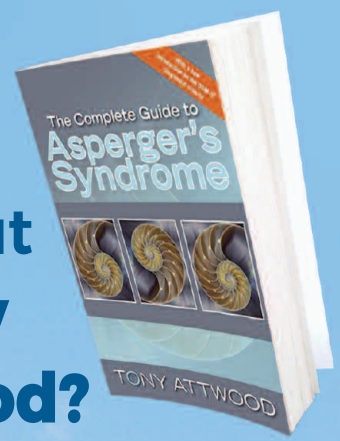
 **autismlinks**



What's so great...



...about Tony Attwood?



When it comes to autism, clinical psychologist Tony Attwood is a household name. His best-selling 'The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome', first published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers in 2008, has to date sold 157,000 copies worldwide in paperback and e-book and been translated into 28 languages.

So what makes Tony so popular? We trotted along to his 'Tony Talks Autism' day in Manchester earlier this month to find out. The event was hosted by Medica Cpd Ltd.

By Debby Elley

One of the first names I heard in the world of autism was Tony Attwood's and yet despite a decade working on AuKids, I've never heard him speak live before.

Why is he so revered? I was curious. And pretty soon, it became quite clear.

Forty years' experience as a clinical psychologist working with children on the spectrum doesn't get you nowhere, and what it's done for Tony is to give him the ability to conceptualize what it feels to be autistic. He has a natural gift for working out what makes autistic people 'tick' and an equally powerful talent for communicating that to his audiences. Hence his talks aren't claggy theory but instead bursting with anecdotes, showing how autistic people respond in given situations, the reasons for those responses and a series of possible solutions.

What really resonates is the guy's ability to sum up autism as a difference rather than a disability, a logical way of thinking for a brain that is wired up differently.

I can't sum up every solution Tony proposed in this small space, but I can draw out some gems for you.

I wasn't expecting the first golden nugget to twinkle within a minute of him starting, though. "ASD," he announced, "describes someone in life who has found something more interesting than socializing".

In his explanation of autism as a different way of thinking, Tony later uses this analogy: imagine the brain has many saplings and as they develop, one sapling – the 'social' brain – grows at the expense of all the others. In autistic brains, this doesn't happen. Without other functions being inhibited, they will flourish, but at the expense of social skills. It's an incredibly vivid way of showing that the autistic brain isn't lacking, but takes an alternative route in its development.

Tony's comprehensive talk later covered the

way that autistic children learn best. "We teach language through conversation and social interaction," he explained. Yet for autistic youngsters, it is not this type of learning that's effective, but a visual and solitary approach that allows processing time, which is why autistic kids tend to love computers. "They learn through their eyes, not their ears," he emphasised. "When you talk, it adds to the confusion".

Suggesting that an autistic child's auditory memory is often poor ("Why can't you remember your homework? They just gave it to you!") his recommendation was that when issuing instructions, you tell a child to 'stare at the floor and create in your mind a You Tube video of what you are going to do'. Accessing the visual memory, he suggested, will help them to recall more accurately.

During the 'managing feelings' section of Tony's talk, he compared rigid thinking to a 'train on a track' rather than a four-wheel drive. Hit a problem on a train track and you can't divert. In the absence of a solution, you'll hit the panic button. In a four-wheel drive, you can move around a problem. Explaining that anxiety can increase cognitive rigidity, he talked about reducing anxiety to help with flexibility.

Rigidity is also evident in an autistic child's feelings of pain at making mistakes. Valuing their intelligence (which is a source of self-esteem in the absence of social success) means that making mistakes can feel very threatening. Amongst Tony's suggestions was the sublime phrase: 'Teach them that mistakes are not a disaster, they're data – it's information'.

When covering personal interests, Tony referred to computer screens as 'thought blockers' – coping mechanisms to prevent overload. Instead of thinking that my son uses computers too often, I started to realise why he feels it so necessary. But it also gave me the strongest motivation yet to tackle his anxieties so that the 'thought blocker' isn't the only coping strategy at his disposal.

One of Tony's final analogies referred to tackling meltdowns. He joked about the aftermath of taking a wrong turning in the car with his wife, with the ensuing squabbles. In contrast, he said, the car's navigation system doesn't tell you what you did wrong, it just calmly redirects you. You have to be a GPS system to handle a meltdown. Loved that!

Overall, Tony's understanding and ideas made this an incredibly helpful day, but more to the point it convinced me that I should recommend his books to our readers. There's no question why this writer has become a best-seller.

What they said about Tony

Tony's passion for his subject is unsurpassed and his distinctive approach, combining clinical expertise with genuine care and compassion, makes his writing readable, practical and life-changing for the families he helps. He has done more to increase awareness and understanding of autism and Asperger's in recent years than anyone else I can think of. **Jessica Kingsley - Jessica Kingsley Publishers.**

I have a great affection for Attwood's book Why Does Chris Do That? originally published back in 1993 and now available through AAPC books. I think it is still a fantastic first book for new parents or teachers new to the at times complex world of the autism spectrum. **Chris Barson of Positive About Autism**

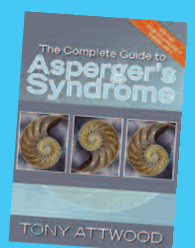
It is a joy to hear someone talking about autism when they really understand how autism is a part of daily life for some. How the confusions and misunderstandings arise, not out of stupidity or malign intent, but as a result of a mismatch in interpretation and mistakes. What a relief - for with such vision we can move forward. **Gina Davies of The Gina Davies Autism Centre.**

Tony is highly respected within the autistic community. His enthusiasm for the subject of autism is infectious and makes him a spell-binding presenter. He also has a great sense of curiosity, with a willingness to listen and reflect, and was one of the first professionals to acknowledge that autism presents differently in women. But what I personally love most about Tony's work is that he celebrates the positives as well as the challenges, and makes a genuine effort to view the world from an autistic perspective. **Spectrum Women's writer Maura Campbell.**

He makes a great cup of coffee really he does.... **Barb Cook, Editor in Chief of Spectrum Women's magazine.**

WIN A COPY!

We have one of three copies of The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome (Autism Spectrum Disorder), published by Jessica Kingsley, to give away. Just write to us at competitions@aukids.co.uk with **TONY** in your subject header, giving your name and address, no later than March 1st 2018. Winners will be chosen at random.



Those three little words



Maura Campbell is a feature writer for Spectrum Women, an international online magazine for and by autistic women. She was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome in 2011 when she was 44 years old. Like many adults on the spectrum, she sought the diagnosis after learning that her son had autism. Maura is a senior manager in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and lives in County Down, Northern Ireland with her husband Stephen, her son Darragh, Ash the assistance dog and Baz the cat (who is no help at all).

I was ready to do an interview for a local radio station. The interviewer had gone out of her way to prepare me for it, arranging a familiarisation visit to the station and agreeing with me in advance what we would be covering. I'd asked her to let me know beforehand the exact wording of her first question, since I knew that if I got off to a good start I would probably be fine, which she duly did. Great.

Except it wasn't her first question. At the start of the interview, the very first thing she asked me was "How are you?" I stared at her with my mouth open. I had no idea what to say to her. She moved on after a few seconds of dead air and I mumbled my way through the rest of the interview. It wasn't her fault – how could she possibly have known that such a common pleasantry would knock me sideways?

"How are you?" is a pretty innocent question, you might think. But at times it can leave me completely flummoxed. I might reply with something that makes no sense – like "Yes" or "Thanks" – or repeat the question to the person asking before I can manage to get my brain in gear. Awkward.

As a child, I would experience selective mutism when asked "How are you?" by someone I perceived to be an authority figure. A school friend once told me her dad thought I was rude because I didn't reply whenever he asked me how I was, which only made things worse.

I'm not rendered speechless as easily now but it can still happen in times of social stress. I think it may be my brain's way of cutting me off when I'm feeling out of my depth in a social situation.

So why is answering such a simple question so difficult?

For starters, it's an open question. There is no 'right' answer. You do not immediately know what the other person is expecting from you.

You have to work out how much information to provide, which may mean suppressing a natural inclination to give a very detailed, precise and factually correct run-down of everything that has happened to you that day, how you slept last night, your state of

physical, mental and emotional health, your hopes and dreams....

You have to decide what is or is not appropriate to the situation. (I eventually realised that most people do not need to know when you have cramps.)

"There is a big difference between enjoying social interaction and enduring forced socialisation."

What I wish I had known as a child is that:

- it is usually perfectly adequate to reply with "I'm fine";
- how much information to give depends both on the situation and on your relationship to the person you're talking to (e.g. what you should say at a doctor's appointment is different from how you should respond to a shop assistant); and
- it helps to have a few stock answers to draw from, even if those seem trite or meaningless to you, since the other person is usually just making polite conversation rather than a genuine enquiry into your state of well-being.

Advance preparation for social encounters might be useful for some kids. This might involve anticipating who they will be interacting with, thinking about how well they know them and coming up with some ideas for how they might respond to them.

Something else for parents and care-givers to bear in mind is that being a social butterfly may not be top of their child's agenda. Many adult autistics are perfectly content with their own company, or indeed prefer it. I know many people who have happily chosen a lifestyle based on minimising social demands. Your role is to facilitate them in achieving their

own social goals, not dictating what those goals should be. There is a big difference between enjoying social interaction and enduring forced socialisation.

Another really important point is to ensure the child or young person is allowed to have as much recovery time as they need after social demands have been placed upon them, engaging in whatever activities work best for them for this purpose. Look on it as them needing to recharge their social battery after some of the energy has been drained from it; if they don't, they will soon end up with a flat battery.

And how *am* I, I hear you ask? I'm fine, thanks. Well, apart from the dull ache in my arthritic hip, which is making me feel very middle-aged. And I'm still getting over that bout of shingles, which is making me feel very middle-aged. Plus I'm pretty sleep deprived thanks to hot flushes and night sweats.

I'm basically just an arthritic, shingly, hormone-ravaged menopausal husk of a woman, thanks for asking.



Maura is one of 17 writers contributing to a new book from Jessica Kingsley Publishers next year – we'll keep you posted. Go to this link to see Maura's appearance on the show 'Tales of the Misunderstood' on August 25th 2017 organised by BBC Ouch as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05d6w3k

The Autism Friendly Classroom

Teachers in mainstream schools may sometimes receive autism training, but it doesn't always include practical methods for helping autistic pupils. The great news is it doesn't take money or a lot of knowledge to keep pupils on the spectrum happy. A few teaching tweaks can work wonders. Here's some top tips you can pass on to your school...courtesy of AuKids and Lynn McCann of Reachout ASC.

TOP TIP

1

Think about your seating plan

An autistic student needs to see the board clearly. They may need to be near the door, at the back, at the front or next to someone they are friends with. Ask them. Take into account sensory distractions – sitting in the middle of a classroom means they can be bombarded with visual distractions, noise and interruptions whilst being vulnerable to being disturbed or disturbing others around them. Some students become very distressed when seating plans are changed, so be aware of this.

TOP TIP

3

Summarise the main points and instructions

You can write main points on the board. Ask the pupil: "Tell me what you have to do" rather than "Do you understand?" Check understanding in smaller chunks rather than all at the end of the class. Get the pupil into the habit of ticking off each part of the task on their list. Add a reward for completing a task if you're able to.

TOP TIP

5

Use visual support and active learning wherever possible

Autistic students are much more visual learners and will be more engaged in lessons with visuals. Help the pupil build a visual memory of the subject matter. Use charts, mind maps, diagrams and pictures and consider visual ways of recording instead of writing all the time. Use I.T. - it is often a strength of autistic students.

TOP TIP

4

Don't get into verbal 'combat'

Students who challenge or refuse are often highly anxious. Shouting and arguing only makes them more anxious and challenging.

In a calm voice remind them of the structure and rules and try to give them choices - 'This or that?' - so they know what the consequences are of each choice. Try to let them make their own choices over their own work where possible, which reduces anxiety.

TOP TIP

6

Keep it Short and Simple (KISS) when giving instructions

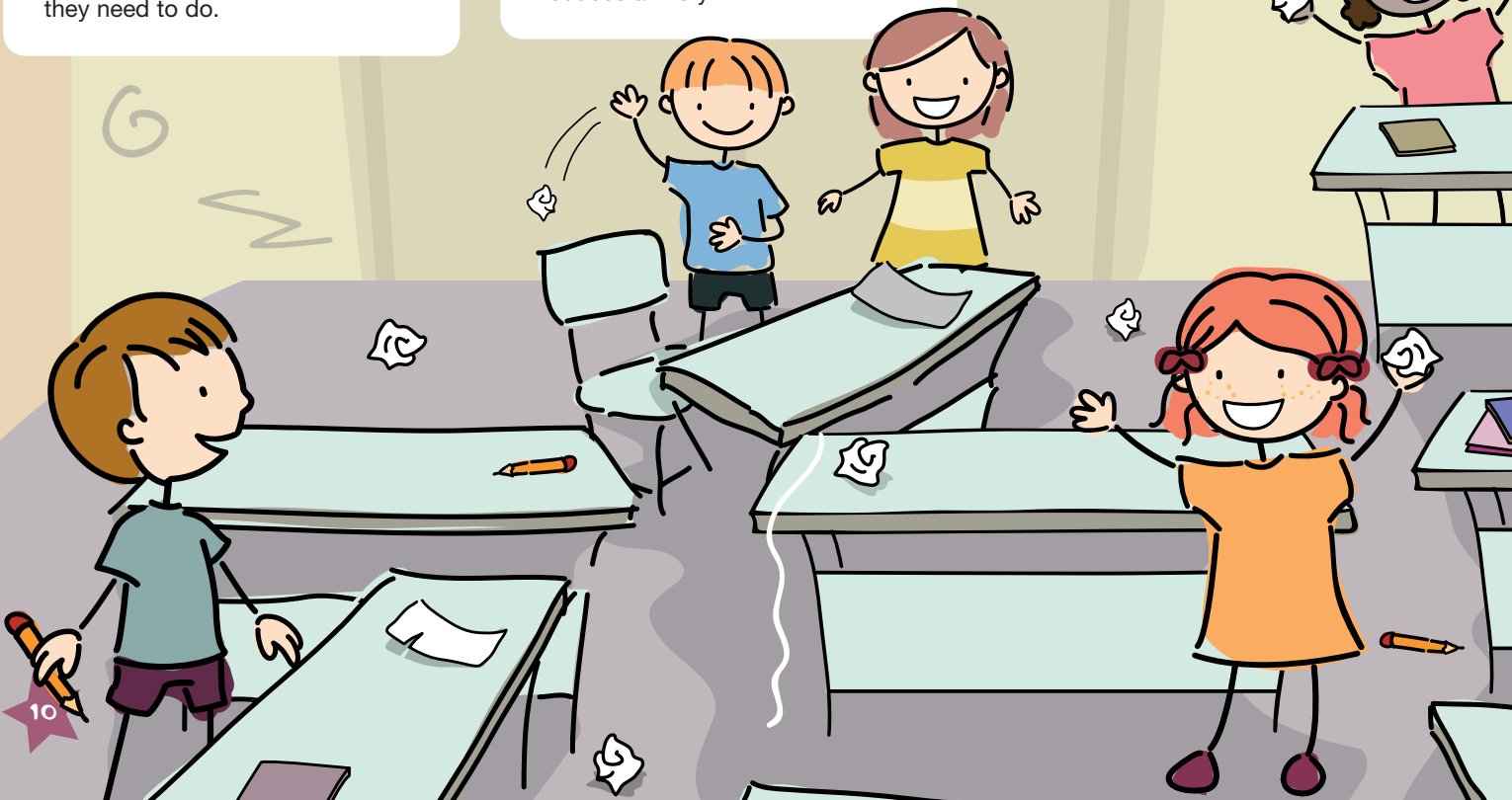
Say what you want rather than what you don't want. Make it direct and literal. Autistic people will get distracted by analogies and find it difficult to pick up on inferences. Be specific about what you want. Don't use sarcasm or expect them to get humour unless you know they will.

TOP TIP

2

Cue the student into the lesson

Use their name and tell them it is time to listen. Be specific about what you are going to do by using 'First', 'Then', 'Next' and 'Last'. Autistic students can miss a lot of the verbal instructions you give, so back them up with lists and check they have understood by asking them to write their own list of what they need to do.



TOP TIP
7

Teach how to engage in class discussions

Use factual questions rather than asking for broad opinions or abstract ideas. Warn them what you will be asking about and when. Provide a short written list of the questions you may ask. Teach all your students how to debate, speak publicly and do this little and often to build up their confidence.

TOP TIP
8

Teach how to work in a group

Start with a pair of pupils and make it highly structured, with clear roles and outcomes. Do not put an autistic student under stress by putting them in unstructured, open-ended tasks in a group, especially when students are allowed to choose their group.

Play to their strengths – an autistic pupil may not want to take part in a role play, but could take part in some other way, such as planning, directing or filming.



TOP TIP
9

Tasks and homework that work best have a clearly identified outcome

Use familiar, repetitive and highly-structured tasks wherever possible. Autistic students will need supporting to plan out more open-ended or imaginative tasks. Let them do homework related to their special interests whenever possible. Let them use I.T. and encourage typewritten work for longer pieces.

TOP TIP
10

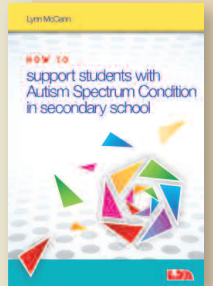
Give the pupil a break!

Understand that they are not 'doing it on purpose' – autism is a difference in the way the brain works and processing can take much longer and the way they learn may not be in the same way as other students. Let the autistic student take a break if they are stressed. They can be very susceptible to sensory overload. You may see defiant or disruptive behaviour first, but understand that this means the student doesn't understand, or is stressed with sensory overload or social demands.

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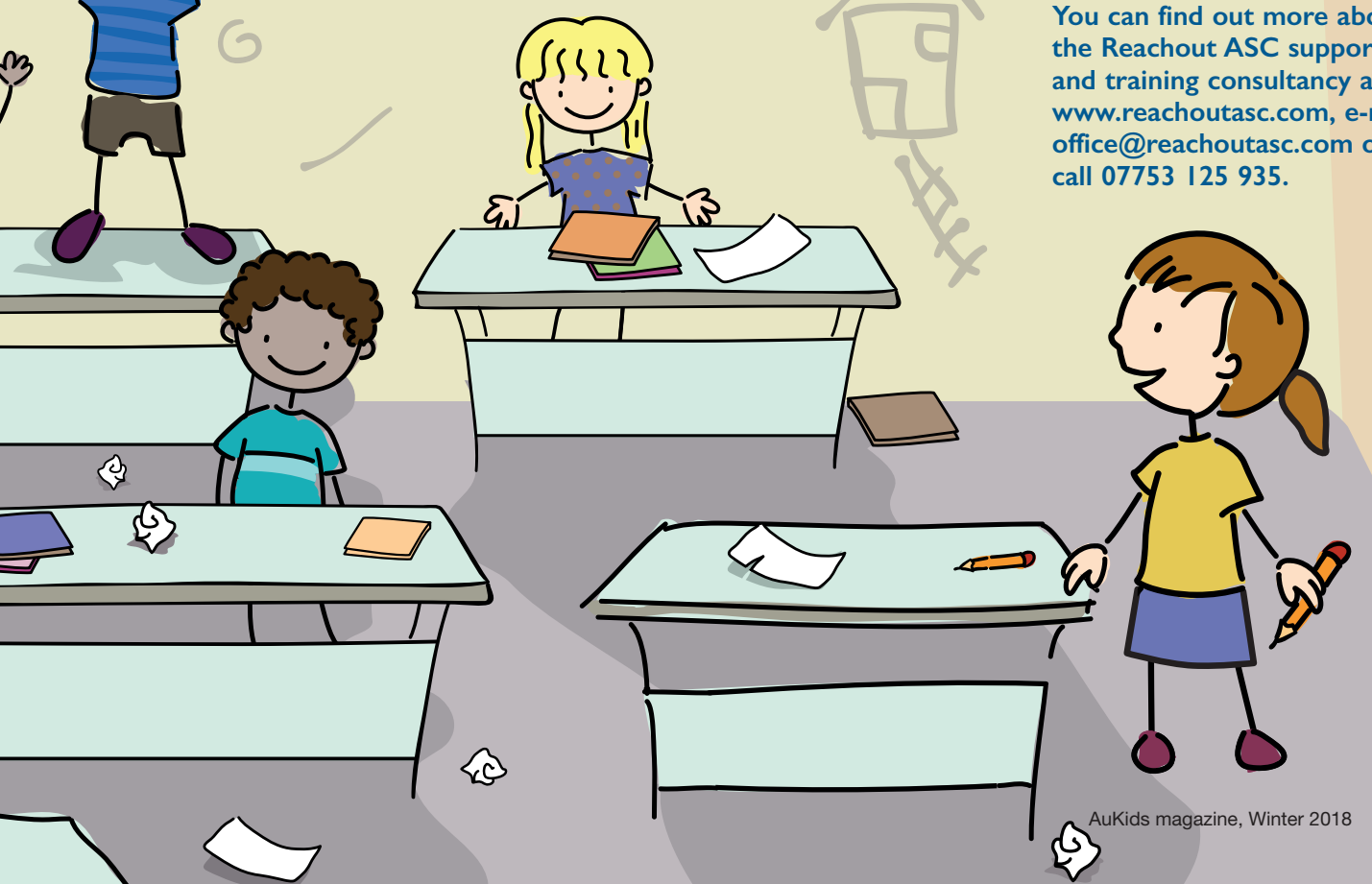
Lynn McCann is the author of *How to support children with ASC in Primary School* and *How to Support Students with ASC in Secondary School* published by LDA in 2017 (buy it for £17.99 at www.ldalearning.com).



She also writes regularly for the TES blog, and has published articles in SENCO Magazine, NASEN Connect and Optimus SEND magazine.

Lynn was one of the founders of Reachout ASC, a centre of excellence for supporting pupils with Autism Spectrum Conditions. Lynn and fellow founder Emma Turver are highly experienced in identifying and meeting the needs of children and equipping staff to provide the right learning environment.

You can find out more about the Reachout ASC support and training consultancy at www.reachoutasc.com, e-mail office@reachoutasc.com or call 07753 125 935.



AFTER THE STORM

A lot of what's written about autism focuses (rightly) on what causes meltdowns and how to prevent them. We also felt that it was time to focus on the impact of these emotional emergencies on YOU, the carer. It won't surprise you to learn that research has shown the physiological symptoms of stress in special needs carers are far higher than in the average population. Not only do our daily stresses have short-term effects, they carry long-term psychological and physical health risks, too. So what can we do, given the stresses we face? We asked clinical psychologist Carla Innes for her advice.

In the Eye of a Storm

If your child's having a meltdown in public, you're going to feel tense. Often, when we're struggling, our thoughts can be negative. "Everyone's judging me – they think I'm a bad parent" "Why can't I control him?" "This could get even worse – then what?" or "I don't want them to think he's weird".

It's generally accepted in cognitive psychology that our thoughts about a given situation directly influence our feelings, which in turn affect how we respond. So, when we have a flurry of negative thoughts, we tend to feel overwhelmed, anxious, hopeless, frustrated – quite a combination but all understandable given what's just been going through our minds.

Things might then become more difficult as we try to manage the situation. Imagine trying to convince a totally overwhelmed child that they are safe and they can manage, when you don't feel it yourself. This can make the behaviour crisis worse which in turn brings more negative thoughts about what's happening.

If you're in the middle of the storm, now is not the time to examine your thoughts in detail. Right now, use some positive self-statements, like: "I'm doing my best right now" or "This will be over eventually". Try not to engage thoughts that are not helping; they may not be accurate or reliable. Find that inner voice that tells you you're going to get through

this. Take a few seconds and breathe deeply.

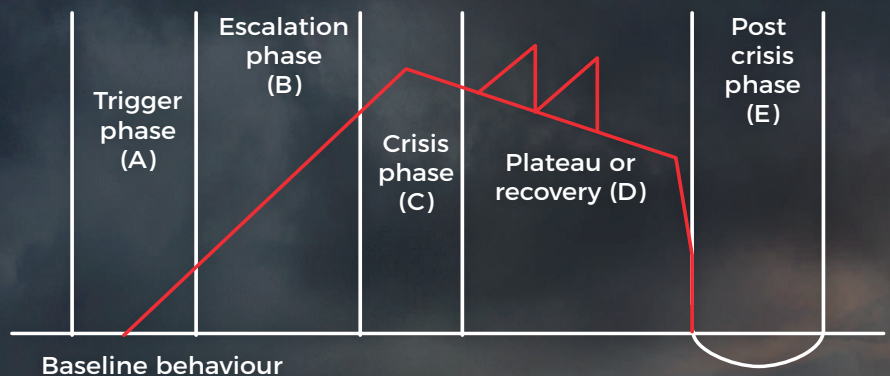
Later, when the crisis is over, it is often helpful to consider the thoughts you experienced in more detail. Knowing that there might be a different way to look at what happened can help you to manage and feel more in control next time. Ask yourself, 'Did my worst fears come true? Do I know for sure what other people were thinking about us? Do I have unrealistic expectations of how well I should cope? We're never going to decide 'actually that was easy', but giving our automatic thoughts a reality check can make a big difference.

What just happened?

escalations on the arousal curve during this phase (you might find you are a little jumpy at this time as your brain starts to recognise that the threat is over). To help you as you work through this 'recovery phase', it's important to take the time you really need for this if you can.

When in this post-incident phase, try to keep things as low key as possible for yourself and your child. If you were just about to go on an outing or do a big chore, is this the right time? Can the next thing to do wait for a while? Avoid thinking things through too much just yet and focus on what you need right now – don't make any big decisions! Think about what you really need right now – what would you tell a friend to do if this had just happened to them?

The Arousal Curve (Hut et al 1964)



During an incident, this arousal curve shows what happens to the physiological arousal of the young person as their behaviour escalates. As this happens, the person managing the behaviour goes through a very similar process.

This is not about 'staying calm' but about our body's automatic physiological responses to danger – we can't help it. So, when managing extreme behaviour and/or distress, you may notice that your heart beats faster, you have more energy or that you don't feel physical pain until afterwards.

This is all part of our physiological design to help our bodies to manage emergencies. All this comes at a cost however, when post crisis (E), we need to recover physically and psychologically. This causes a 'dip' which can make us feel physically tired and emotionally overwhelmed.

We are also vulnerable to repeated

It's not your fault

We can be so hard on ourselves when things go wrong. We tell ourselves all sorts of things about how we should have handled things better, or how we might be to blame for the behaviour in the first place. Research shows that people who attack themselves in this way tend to be more distressed in



general and are more at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties.

Whatever the reason for criticising yourself, it can leave you feeling hopeless about tackling difficult behaviour next time. Blaming yourself might stop you from exploring what really happened and what the child might need when they are in that type of situation again. For instance, was the environment right for them? Did they have a different understanding about what was going to happen?

Try to stay 'in the moment' rather than getting lost in thoughts about the past or worries about the future.

We all feel like there are things we could do better. Instead of focusing on what you think you did wrong, it's important to remember that it's not your fault that your child struggles with parts of life because of their disability. This means that the times when they can't understand or regulate their feelings aren't your fault either. You didn't choose for things to be this way.

Of course, it's your job to help them through it, and there are ways of doing this that will work better than others. You are more likely to achieve this when you are not blaming yourself. It's also important to recognise, and I mean really recognise, just how hard it is to watch a child in an emotional or behavioural crisis.

Research has found that compassion for ourselves is linked to increased self-esteem and reduced levels of depression and anxiety (Neff, 2003); just the things you need when caring for a child with difficulties and managing challenging behaviour. Think about how you can bring compassion into your life by doing three key things for yourself every day.

Compassion is NOT about indulging yourself or letting your responsibilities go but giving yourself what you really need to get through our difficult and hectic lives. The parents I work with can find it really difficult to do this because of the pressures of our busy schedules, but tell me it makes a huge difference once they make a start. So, have a bath in the evening, remember times when people have shown you kindness and how it felt, take a few moments to take some soothing breathing just for yourself before rushing on to the next thing. Try to stay 'in the moment' rather than getting lost in thoughts about the past or worries about the future.

Understand Yourself

Once we are motivated to be kind to ourselves, we are more likely to explore our own reactions and emotions in a positive and constructive way. Asking some key questions around what happened can really help us to understand the effect it had on us. How do I feel about what happened? Are these feelings particularly difficult for me and why? Am I finding it hard to process or to let go of something?

There is no right or wrong way to feel about coping with a behaviour crisis. What's important is that you give yourself permission to feel that way. Lots of parents talk to me about feeling angry, frustrated, helpless or just completely confused. Using kindness to understand how you feel will give you the emotional space needed to regroup and be available for your child again.

Do I need some extra help? If you find that you are stuck in difficult feelings much of the time and they are starting to take over and affect your ability to do things, it's important to be honest with yourself and others about this. See your GP about mental health services available in your area.

It's Good To Talk

Care-givers who have a good social circle show less physiological signs of stress than those without. It's not necessarily about having a network of people who can fix your problems, but people who will listen, show compassion and help you to reflect and try different strategies. If you feel you are isolated, try to access a local group with parents who share your experience and are likely to understand the challenges you face.

Exercise

Exercise can be incredibly beneficial not only for us but for our children and is great for anxiety and stress. Regular exercise is likely to improve mood and emotional wellbeing; just what you need for the challenges of parenting a child with a disability.



Dr Carla Innes

About Carla

Dr Carla Innes is a clinical psychologist at Healthy Young Minds (a child and adolescent mental health service) in Stockport under Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust. She has worked in the NHS for over 10 years and specialises in working with young people with learning disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC).

Further Information

Research:

Hutt, C.; Hutt, S.J.; Lee, D.; Ounstead, C. (1964). Arousal and Childhood Autism. *Nature*, 204, 908-909.

Books you might like:

The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges by Paul Gilbert. Published by Constable.

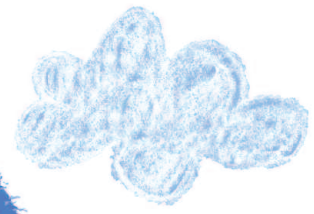
Self-Compassion: An Alternative Conceptualization of a Healthy Attitude Toward Oneself by Kristin-Neff. Published by Psychology Press.





Hurrah for Pablo

The New Star of the Small Screen!



For non-autistic viewers, I hope that they will know a little bit more about autism if they meet someone on the spectrum.

A breakthrough in children’s entertainment was celebrated last autumn when Pablo was launched on CBeebies and Ireland’s RTÉjr channel. This ground-breaking cartoon series for under sixes is the first animated TV show have an autistic character as its hero. It’s also the first TV programme with an all-autistic core cast, written by and starring autistic youngsters.

Through live action and 2D animation, Pablo tells the story of a five-year-old boy on the autism spectrum who uses his creativity – and magic crayons – to invent an imaginary art world filled with animal characters who help him to make sense of social situations and process confusing or anxious thoughts and feelings.

At the show’s launch, Gráinne McGuinness, creative director at the show’s production company Paper Owl Films, said that Pablo is more than just a television series: “It’s a movement that seeks to build awareness internationally about what it might be like to see the world from the perspective of someone with autism.

“In order to do that, every story across the 52 stories in the series are based on the real life experience of someone on the spectrum. They’re all written by autistic writers and voiced by autistic talent and what that brings you is really fresh writing and storytelling and a lot of funny, because these stories are written from the point of view of people who see the world differently”.

When making the series, the creators wanted to ensure they reflected the authentic voices of young people on the autism spectrum. **Rosie King**, the voice of Llama, has Asperger’s and was illustrating her mother Sharon King’s mythical stories before she hit her teens. Soon after, Rosie became a national star after presenting an award-winning Newsround Extra on autism. She is now an international speaker on autism and as well as voicing Llama (who has echolalia) she is one of Pablo’s writing team.

Nineteen-year-old Rosie tells AuKids how it all came about. “The production team came to our family in the way of research to make it a more authentic experience, because autism runs in our family and we’ve done a lot of awareness. So, they came to us asking for advice on how to portray an autistic person. Then after talking with us, they offered me a writing position and I discussed some episodes with Andrew Brenner, the show’s head writer.

“Then he said ‘We really liked your accent, do you want to audition for a part?’ I never in a million years thought I’d actually get it but I did and I can’t believe it actually happened!”

Pablo is about first-hand autistic experiences, wrapped up in creative story telling. What’s unique about it is not only its subject-matter, but the fact that its writing team are also young people with autism.

Rosie explains that the show’s writing team collaborated with a group of young creative talent: “A lot of it is written from my experience, or my parents’ experiences, or siblings and friends



who are on the spectrum.”

Although Rosie is a public speaker, accustomed to addressing audiences in their hundreds, she admits that Pablo was at times a challenge: “I’ve never done any voice acting before so it was a very new experience - I had to learn about how to do a take. I was convinced I wasn’t doing a very good job and I kept having to redo the takes - I think I just annoyed everybody!”

Despite the learning curve, she is immensely proud of the show, as she knows how much it will mean to people on the spectrum. Would she have watched it when she was little?

“Oh yeah absolutely! I remember when



'Something Special' first came out on Cbeebies and how excited me and my family were to see something like 'us' on the TV and I think it's good for a lot of kids who are on the spectrum or who have family and friends on the spectrum to be able to recognise themselves in the media".



More than anything, Rosie hopes people enjoy the show and that it makes them happy. "For non-autistic viewers, I hope that they will know a little bit more about autism if they meet someone on the spectrum. They may learn about stimming, or how much noise can affect a person. It's sort of normalising it for people who aren't on the spectrum so that they understand".

Is she proud of what the show is achieving?

"I'm so honoured that they've let me be a part of Pablo. I love it so much. The reaction has been positive so far. I have some young cousins and some friends that have young children and they all like it. There have been good reactions from people who have family on the spectrum or who are on the spectrum themselves. I'm glad that people like it."

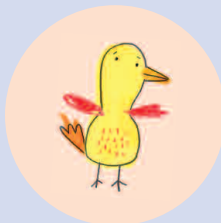
As for Rosie, it's time to go back to her studies at Roehampton. She is planning to be an English teacher and wants to teach disabled children.

You can see Pablo every day on Cbeebies at 5.50pm and if you miss it you can download it from the Cbeebies iPlayer. There are awesome Pablo games on the Cbeebies App – each game is based on one of the shows' personalities:

Meet the Pablo Team!

Wren

Wren is very excitable and has lots of energy which she channels by flapping her wings. Flapping calms her down if she is frustrated and helps to accentuate her good feelings when she is excited. Wren often lacks concentration and focus, being distracted by the next wonderful thing.



Noasaurus (Noa)

Noasaurus is a small dinosaur, who is gentle and kind. Noa can't read social cues or facial expressions very well but his maths and sequencing abilities are quite advanced. Noa is sometimes a little clumsy, but this can often turn up a solution to a problem.

Mouse

Mouse is organized, reliable and dependable. She is perfectionist and hates it when things are untidy or out of sequence and will always try to restore order, which is very soothing for the group. Mouse is also sensitive to sounds and smells.



Tang

Tang can't control his energy – or his limbs – very well. He loves to dance and is full of love and kindness. Tang is not great at reading social cues or gauging how another person is feeling. This, coupled with his natural propensity for the dramatic, can lead to quite chaotic confusion at times. For all of his natural chaos and his ability to make a home in whatever tree he chooses, Tang is resistant to real change, which can make him feel very anxious.



Draff

Draff loves facts and knows a lot of them. His most commonly used phrase is 'in point of fact'. He makes pronouncements very confidently but his outward bravado covers an inner insecurity and sensitivity. We don't need to scratch the surface too far to see that Draff needs reassurance like the rest of us.



Llama

Sensitive Llama is a thinker. She is very careful to protect her personal space and doesn't do physical displays of affection. She has echolalia, repeating things that people say, as does Pablo in the real world. In the moments where she speaks in this echolalic way we can see how intelligent she is – her voice often giving pause to reflect or to underline something that can become a solution. Llama loves details. She can often become absorbed in a detail for ages and will be fixated by a shiny button or interesting object.



The Pablo team celebrating the show's launch. *Back Row:* Gráinne McGuinness, Creator, Sheila De Courcy RTÉJr., Pauline Mc Namara RTÉJr. and Key Benbow, Cbeebies. *Front Row:* Scott Mulligan (Draff), Rachael Dickson (Mouse), Sumita Majumdar (Wren) Jake Williamson (Pablo), Tony Finnegan (Noa), Rosie King (Llama) with writer Michael White, who is the voice of Tang.



The Last Word

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

Autism-friendly Means Integration, Not Segregation

Those of you who have read my columns for a while know that I tend to focus on practical autism rather than politics. Recently, however, Tim and I attended an event held by Greater Manchester Autism Consortium and spearheaded by Mayor Andy Burnham. The event invited anyone with a stake in autism to outline the positive changes they felt needed to happen in future. Councillor Burnham attended in order to listen to people's real life experiences and is dedicated to making a difference.

In the wake of a rise in autism awareness, I think it's important not to make well-meaning mistakes. A potential pitfall is the autism-friendly hours that are starting to happen in supermarkets. Don't gasp in horror, they are a good thing, don't get me wrong – and they are certainly better than nothing. But I have a vision for the future and it doesn't involve putting autistic people in a 9am timeslot where they won't mingle with the rest of society.

The term 'neurodiversity' is sprinkled around like confetti, but what does it mean in practise? It means that we accept a world where people around us operate in a fundamentally different way from ourselves. That means we develop an understanding of autistic behaviour such as anxiety and overload in public places. It means we learn how to take the pressure

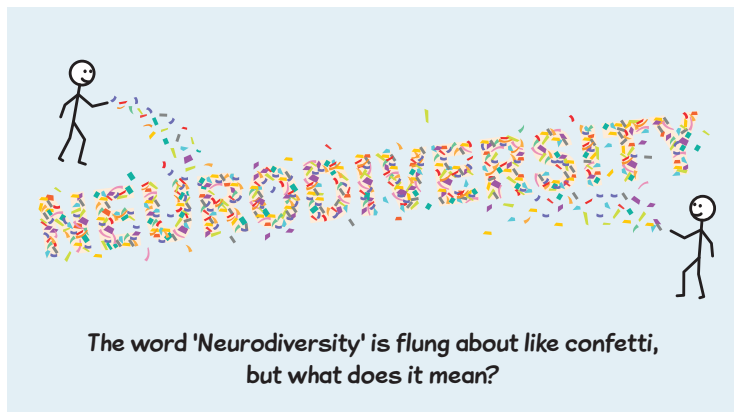
off people who work at their best in a familiar environment. It means we learn about autistic strengths and how best to capitalize on them, not always seeing autism as something that needs to be tolerated, but also something to be celebrated.

So, how do we do that? It's dead simple. We train people in autism. We train them in understanding their peers from primary school upwards. We don't make things autism-friendly at the expense of others. We have autism-friendly supermarket hours in the middle of the day, where everyone is welcome and people get to mix with those on the spectrum. If people see autism more, they become less scared of it. If we don't do that, if we say we have special autism days and special autism hours where everything is perfect for autistics, we consign our loved ones to a ghetto. And from what we know about race relations, with segregation comes intolerance and the whole battle starts again.

Let's make our world autism-friendly, but let's make those words mean 'integrated' rather than 'separate'.

AuKids does quite a bit of autism training to raise funds for the magazine, so we're doing our bit in this respect.

And here endeth my soapbox column. Back to normal next time.



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- Simon Knight outlines a new approach to improving staff's SEND skills
- How to support children with autism during PE lessons
- 4 Lesson Plans



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