



# AuKIDS®

Issue 47  
Mar/Apr 2020

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Available from  
[www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)

For Parents and Carers of Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions



**Pandemic Parenting**  
Coping with the unexpected



**Sundae Girls**  
The AuKIDS team launches our kids' guide to autism



**Little Gems Readers**  
share their pearls of wisdom

**PLUS**



**WIN** an Aura projector worth £144!





# Letter from the Editors

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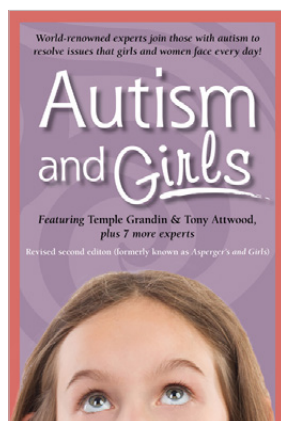
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## A Spring We Didn't Expect...

We certainly didn't expect to be planning this issue around a global pandemic. As always, you've got a friend in us – keep in touch on Facebook - @aukidsmag - that's where you'll find lots of online support; AuKids fans are a loyal and positive bunch! We can all help each other out and offer advice and ideas – lots of our parents are hugely knowledgeable and we've also got plenty of professionals among our readers.

This issue, we've included a feature especially for this current time of uncertainty, with lots of help and advice. Please e-mail us with feedback, especially if there's anything you'd still like us to cover in our July issue. As your co-editors, Tori and Debby wish you and your family a safe and healthy year ahead. We'll help you however we can.

## AuKids is Changing...

Big news at AuKids HQ. In January 2021, you will be receiving Issue 50 of the magazine. Can you believe it? Well, if you've been with us since 2008 you probably can, but most of you have joined us since then.

And that's just the point.

We have built up an immense archive of autism advice over the last 12 years, and we've decided that after Issue 50 it's time to stop producing new issues of AuKids.

Instead, on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, we'll be launching a completely free, downloadable archive of AuKids magazines at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk). That's 12 years' of AuKids info available at any time for you to dip



into at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk).

Plus, our Facebook community will remain as it is for on the spot support, updates and general autism chit-chat.

So it will still be AuKids, but not as you know it. Read on to find out why we've made this change and how it will work.

## Nothing changes until next January...

Until Issue 50 (sent out January 25<sup>th</sup> 2021), you will continue to receive your postal or online issues as normal. All subscriptions will end on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2021 and no new magazines will be produced. Any automatic subscription payments will be cancelled by AuKids. See the column on the right of Page 3 for further details on your subscription.

Up until the end of February 2021, single past print issues will remain available for anyone to order online should you wish to take advantage of our remaining stock.

From 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, the AuKids site will scale back slightly and relaunch to reflect its new online library status. From then on, all downloads will be free of charge, with disability charity Dimensions supporting the website.

Our Facebook site - @aukidsmag - will remain in action and as always will be overseen on a voluntary basis. We have a following of nearly 5,000 on Facebook and will still be there for you.

## Why stop making new magazines?

A long time ago in a galaxy far away, when AuKids began, autism information was thin on the ground. These days, there's plenty of great information on autism. New books are appearing all the time on every aspect of this condition. Advice is also becoming far more attractive and accessible – we've watched it and witnessed the changes. It's amazing and encouraging; the landscape is improving year by year for families like ours.

In addition to that, during the last decade we have tackled a huge array of common issues that parents face. We feel it's time to direct people towards those past resources without you having to

continue to pay a subscription.

Finally, AuKids has been immense fun but as you can imagine it's a challenge to run a not-for-profit enterprise for 12 years and we'll be honest, raising funds annually to stay afloat is a difficult job.

We couldn't have done it without co-founder **Tori Houghton**, autism advocate **Tim Tuff** and **David Laslett**, our photographer, working voluntarily. Co-founder **Debby** and graphic designer **Jo** work for a fraction of their professional fees.

## Why now?

Most magazines just repeat themselves and continue to take your money. We'd rather point you instead to our searchable library of past issues.

Digital downloads are now much easier and more common than in the past. With the recent upgrade to our website, you can now search for a topic and then download individual issues of AuKids in an instant.

Finally, through some generous funding from the Dimensions (whose initiatives include autism-friendly cinema screenings, see Page 14), we are able to remain funding our website presence even without the income from your subscriptions.

We can't thank Dimensions enough for continuing to bring AuKids to you from 2021 onwards.

## What will happen to AuKids?

Following her first book *15 Things They Forgot to Tell You About Autism*, co-founder **Debby Elley** will be writing further books with parents like you in mind. If you like the style of AuKids magazine, you'll love her books, which focus on daily living with autism in a down-to-earth and chatty style.

Co-founder **Tori Houghton** will continue to run her Manchester-based support agency for autistic children and young people, *Time Specialist Support*. **Debby** and **Tori** will still be running our Facebook site.

Autism advocate **Tim Tuff** will be kept busy with his ever-increasing number of volunteer positions. He will still

be available to give his popular talks, as will co-founder **Debby**. You can contact us through [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com) to arrange them.

Look out for more book illustrations from our graphic designer **Jo Perry**. Following her work for our new book *The Ice Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*, she has recently been signed up by our publisher **Jessica Kingsley** as part of its team of illustrators and cover designers.

Don't forget that **David Laslett** our photographer is still available for schools and individuals. He has a very special talent when it comes to photographing autistic kids! You can contact him at [www.manchesterphoto.com](http://www.manchesterphoto.com) or e-mail [manchestercreativemedia@gmail.com](mailto:manchestercreativemedia@gmail.com)

## Stock up!

Until February 2021, you will be able to order past print issues through our website. After that date, they will no longer be available as we will cease trading. Why not take advantage of our new Bargain Bundles? You can buy 10 past print issues for just £20 whilst stocks last!



## Finally...

We know some of you will be disappointed that we won't be producing any further magazines after Issue 50. But stick with us, the next three issues will be worth waiting for... We intend to go out with a bang! Remember, there's still a year's worth of magazines left to enjoy. It's not time to say goodbye just yet.

*Tori & Debby*

# What happens now?

## Annual payment

If your subscription is an annual one due to renew this year, you'll still receive a reminder and you can still renew with us online at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk). You will only be charged for the amount of issues there are left to run at that point, rather than the full subscription price. AuKids is £4.00 an issue, so you'll be charged anything up to £12. Simple!

## Automatic payment

If your annual renewal runs **automatically** through either PayPal or Direct Debit, you don't have to do anything. As your renewal comes through during the year, we will cancel the arrangement for you so that no further payments are made.

If your automatic renewal happens later in the year and takes you beyond Issue 50, you'll be e-mailed a discount code to the value of the remaining copies left to run on your subscription. As there are four copies of AuKids a year, the maximum discount code will be to the value of £12, as you won't ever be owed more than 3 issues. You can then use your code to buy past issues of your choice through our website. You'll have until the end of February 2021 to spend the value of your discount code.

If it suits you better, you can cancel your automatic payment with us now before it renews in 2020 and renew online instead for the remaining issues left to run at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk). If you need guidance on how to cancel your automatic payment, just contact us at [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

If your renewal takes you past issue 50, you can of course request a refund instead.

Please bear in mind though that we are a social enterprise, AuKids is managing to keep in print through these tough times and we would so appreciate your support in using the discount code if you feel you can.

Don't forget: If you decide to do nothing, your automatic payment agreement will still be cancelled at Issue 50 – we will do it for you.

## Questions?

If you're not sure what type of payment you have for your subscription or when it's due to expire, just ask us by e-mailing [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

After your subscription ends, any personal data we hold on you will be deleted in accordance with GDPR laws.

**Remember, we still have three issues left, so we're not going anywhere yet!**



# Reviews & Prizes



**The Autism Language Launcher: A Parent's Guide to Helping Your Child Turn Sounds and Words into Simple Conversations**

By Kate Wilde  
Published by Jessica Kingsley  
£14.99 • ISBN 9781785924828

Although I had heard of the Son Rise program (predominantly used in America), I hadn't seen it in action, and so I really enjoyed reading this book, which gives you an in-depth understanding of the approach.

As a Speech and Language therapist who regularly uses child-led approaches (i.e. engaging with what's capturing your child's attention rather than dictating the focus of play), many of the descriptions here sound familiar. The Son Rise program teaches parents to take their child's lead in play and interaction, but packages this in a very structured way.

The book is divided into three sections. The first helps you to get into the right mindset, the second explains key techniques and the third helps you to identify goals for your child.

Although the author suggests a room dedicated to therapy, the many suggested activities - such as using books, balls, balloons and cars - are easy to undertake in your usual home environment.

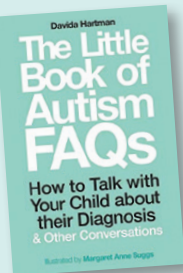
This book resonated with me for its 'can do' assumptions and I liked the author's assumption that every child is capable of speech (assuming there's no physical barrier to them forming clear spoken language), ensuring high expectations throughout this book. Readers are given tools to help develop not just spoken language, but also other communication and interaction skills, even including attention span and flexibility.

One of the best pieces of advice in this book is a 'red light' versus 'green light' guide to help readers work out whether or not they should allow more time and space to develop a skill (red light), or whether they could start teaching new language (green light).

As a professional in the field of autism, I would tend to weigh up this book's advice alongside other approaches and not necessarily use one program in its entirety. The Autism Language Launcher is more prescriptive than this, dedicated to purely the Son Rise approach.

However, if you are looking to try something new that is well researched, based on years of experience and has a step-by-step guide to follow, you might want to check this out. You could choose to follow the program on its own, or simply use some of the authors' excellent ideas to supplement what you're already doing.

Karen Massey, Independent Speech and Language Therapist  
[www.karenmasseytherapies.com](http://www.karenmasseytherapies.com)



**The Little Book of Autism FAQs: How to Talk with Your Child about their Diagnosis & Other Conversations**

By Davida Hartman  
Published by Jessica Kingsley  
£9.99 • ISBN 9781785924491

This is a handy little gem of a book to help parents explain autism to their child in a positive and inspiring way. The Little Book of Autism FAQs contains interviews with autistic children, supported by realistic, positive advice from the author, a senior educational and child psychologist based in Dublin.

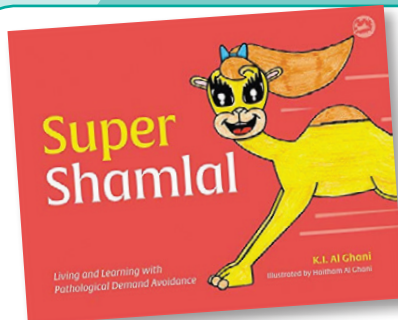
With a clear, easy to read format, the book provides simple, thorough answers to many common questions asked by parents of recently diagnosed autistic

children. Terminology and definitions (such as Autism Spectrum Condition versus the traditional Autism Spectrum Disorder), are explained clearly and informatively.

I really like Hartman's child-centred approach and the way she encourages you to re-frame so called autistic 'problems' and to see them in a more positive light. For example, instead of seeing your child's special interest as an obsession that needs to be reigned in (therefore possibly impacting on his/her mental health), see them as passions, to be celebrated and enjoyed. Those special interests will then help to motivate and engage your child, enabling them to interact more with the wider world.

Davida Hartman is refreshingly honest about the difficulties of being a parent of an autistic child. But her book is an up to date, useful and empowering guide for families.

By Hilary Schrafft, SEN Teaching Assistant



**Super Shamlal: Living and Learning with Pathological Demand Avoidance (Hardback)**

By K.I. Al-Ghani  
Published by Jessica Kingsley • £13.99 • ISBN 9781787750562

Super Shamlal is the latest in a series of illustrated storybooks from Jessica Kingsley Publishers aimed at SEN children as well as their parents and teachers. The 'therapeutic story' introduces us to the world of Shamlal the camel, explaining what it is like to have the complex condition called Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). As well as experiencing 'regular' ASD difficulties such as social/ communication and sensory processing problems, an individual with PDA feels compelled to resist ordinary demands to an extreme degree - having major meltdowns and sometimes violent, destructive outbursts - as a way of dealing with their severe anxiety.

According to Kay Al-Ghani, an SEN teacher and lecturer at the University of Brighton, traditional techniques used for working with children on the autistic spectrum often don't work with children with PDA. Her book introduces the problems experienced by children with PDA and their families in a gentle and clear way, as well as providing practical, positive information on how to manage the condition.

The storybook contains many charming hand drawn illustrations of Shamlal and her camel family, all drawn by the author's autistic adult son, Haitham. At the back is a section on 'Operation SODA' (an effective technique for helping to build Emotional Intelligence), home and teaching strategies and other useful resources.

PDA is a relative newcomer to the autism family and it's still not recognised in every region of the UK - so as a Teaching Assistant working in a UK SEN school I found the book really useful and I'd definitely recommend it to families and education professionals.

The book's opening quote by Persian poet Rumi sums up the tone of the gentle story that follows:

*'Listen with ears of tolerance; See through the eyes of compassion; Speak with the language of love.'*

By Hilary Schrafft, SEN Teaching Assistant

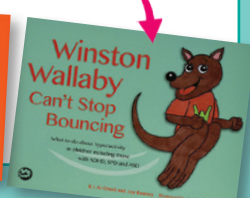
Other books by K.I. Al-Ghani published by JKP

**The Red Beast** (handling Anger)

**The Disappointment Dragon** (learning to cope with disappointment);

**The Panicosaurus** (dealing with anxiety)

**Winston Wallaby Can't Stop Bouncing** (conditions such as ADHD, SPD & ASD)







**The Art of Weeing in the Sink: The Inspirational Story of a Boy Learning to Live with Autism**

By Richie Smith

Published by Jessica Kingsley

£9.95 • ISBN 9781908211873

To read  
Richie Smith's  
Inside Angle article  
on sensory issues,  
download or order  
Issue 41 at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)

What I really love about books written by autistic authors is that they stem from an absolute passion for communicating the truth and overcoming ignorance.

In Richie Smith's case, that truth is sometimes far from pretty. But Richie's mission is far too important to gloss over the unhappy details of his childhood, detailed in this sometimes tragic but ultimately uplifting account of his life story, ghost written by Peter Barron.

Taken from his neglectful birth-parents and then adopted, Richie remained without a diagnosis until only a few years ago. As a child, his sensory processing issues made him feel like a 'freak' and he showed huge resourcefulness in disguising what he felt at the time were shameful habits. In fact, they purely stemmed from unmet sensory needs. It was only an understanding partner in later life that saved him from himself.

Richie's book is beautifully laid out with attractive visuals put together by the North-East Autism Society, who deserve praise for seeing this project's potential.

For any reader, witnessing Richie's Phoenix-like rise from the ashes of his terrible beginnings is inspiring. But for me, the highlight of this book is his vivid descriptions of sensory attractions including – yes – weeing in the sink. They'll have you smiling with enlightenment at some baffling behaviour.

Richie recently founded the highly successful company Awesometistic and tours the country giving training talks. He's become a voice for many autistic children who can't articulate their inner experiences. His mission - to ensure that no one has the sort of childhood that he endured - is already being achieved.

By Debby Elley, AuKids co-editor

**Projectors  
Lend the Right  
'Aura' to Your  
Sensory Space**



**Projectors are a must for any self-respecting sensory room. Soothing images can support relaxation, ease agitation and promote sleep. AuKids met the team from Optikinetics at an autism conference and loved their compact, lightweight Opti Aura projector.**

The Aura projector is an easy to use analogue system that will allow you to turn your child's bedroom into an instant sensory space. Project onto the walls, ceiling or floor – the world's your silver screen! The projector has bright output, features a fine focusing wheel and its magnetic wheels simply snap onto the wheel rotator inside. Recommended projection distance is 2-4 metres for the full immersive effect.

The fun part of course is choosing from the company's large range of effect wheels. Swap them to create new moods, theme the room, suggest temperature, a time or season and encourage interaction. With a blank wheel, you can even make a bespoke effect to suit you! Get creative with your child with pens and photo transparencies or choose some easy peel reusable stickers from the Opti Sticker Pack, suitable for children over three.

The Opti Aura doesn't have to plug into mains – it can run off a battery-operated USB power pack. The standard Aura package, which costs £144.00, includes one lighting effect 6" magnetic wheel and a sticker pack. The projector also comes with a table stand and wall mount with fixtures and fittings, so you can choose where to position it.

Want to see your effects before you choose your wheel? Course you do! Just click on [www.optikinetics.co.uk/effects](http://www.optikinetics.co.uk/effects), choose your effect option and select 'Read more' on the

description page – you can watch a video of the chosen effect.

To watch this projector in action, look up [www.youtube.com/watch?v=44QfKeEb1wc&t=7s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44QfKeEb1wc&t=7s)

**Give Our Competition a Whirl!**

We're giving you the chance to win an Opti Aura projector worth £144, plus two 6" wheels of your choice, worth £38 each for a picture wheel or £52 for a liquid one.

Plus, the Optikinetics team is even throwing in a £15.95 sticker pack with a blank wheel so you can create and recreate your own effects. Each sticker pack consists of a blank magnetic effect wheel, one sticker pack and a cleaning cloth. <https://optikinetics.co.uk/product/opti-sticker-pack/>

**Just answer this question: On the liquid wheel effects page of Optikinetics' website, what's the first wheel called? A) Jungle Jive B) Rainbow Dream or C) Galactic Rapture?**

Send your answer to [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com) with Aura in the subject header, and don't forget to include your name and address.

One winner will be chosen at random after the closing date of May 31<sup>st</sup> 2020. No cash alternative. By entering this competition you agree for us to forward your details onto Optikinetics, (only in the instance that you're the winner), so that they can send you your prize directly.

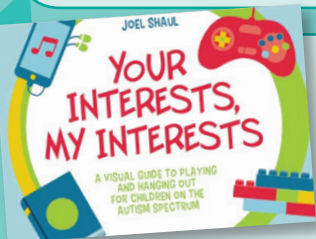
**Good luck!**

**Your Interests, My Interests: A Visual Guide to Playing and Hanging out for Children on the Autism Spectrum**

By Joel Shaul

Published by Jessica Kingsley

£15.99 • ISBN 9781785926501 (Hardcover)



This much needed book teaching autistic kids about the art of socialising is superb. Not only is it immensely visual, but it's also fully interactive.

Colourful chapters detailing different kinds of challenges encourage readers to problem solve through visual games. These help them to match people's overlapping interests, spot common ground and consider compromise. Importantly, there are exercises at the end of each chapter that encourage youngsters to relate what they've just learnt to their own lives.

Whilst acknowledging how autistic people often feel about their own play and the challenges faced with socialising, Joel's book also supports an awareness of the benefits of connecting with others and accommodating their needs.

Isolation can be very enjoyable and productive for autistic people. What this author truly

seems to tackle is the problem that autistic children face when they want to be with others but are restricted by their skills and understanding.

Not everyone will need to work through this book from start to finish. I'd advise that you read it first and think about the parts of it that your child will respond to. I'd recommend using small sections at a time when your child is feeling alert.

I'd also recommend it for social communication groups at school – many of the exercises lend itself to this purpose beautifully.

By Debby Elley, AuKids co-editor

**WIN!**

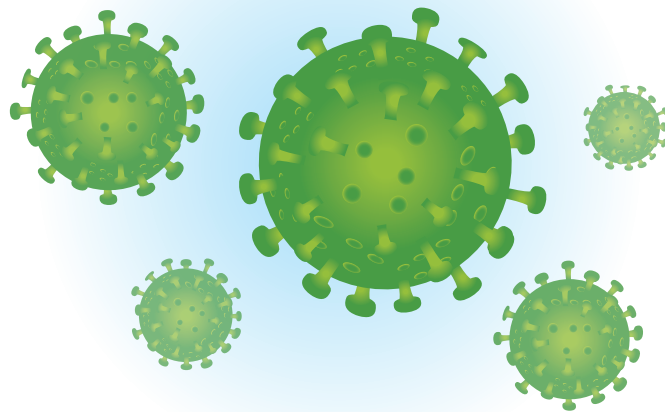
A copy of *Your Interests, My Interests*. Just tell us where the games controller is hidden in the magazine. Write to [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com) putting Interests in the subject header, complete with your name and address. One winner will be chosen after the closing date of May 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.



# Pandemic Parenting

## YOUR TOP TIPS

If you're a parent reading this, you may well be facing one of your biggest challenges ever; keeping your youngsters happy whilst being limited to the space inside your own home. We're not going to pretend this is easy, but here are some tips to get you through.



### Handling anxiety

- If your child is computer literate, make sure you keep in touch with what they're reading from elsewhere and how they are interpreting it.
- Ensure that your manner is calm; autistic children are extremely sensitive to your mood particularly if they aren't verbal.
- Explaining how anxiety works will help verbal children to keep on top of it. See the end of this feature for great books.
- Explain shortages without being alarming: if there's none of their favourite yoghurt in the supermarket, it isn't because there is no food. Food is still being manufactured; it just isn't always reaching the supermarket shelves in time.
- Our kids can't control the uncertain wider picture right now, but giving them choices over what they CAN control is very important. Make sure even those children with limited understanding get to decide between activities and smaller choices in their day,

like what to wear.

- Headspace at [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com) is an amazing app that includes meditations for children of all ages and has been very successful in calming all children, not just autistic ones!

things that you never have time to do. Don't put out everything your child needs, allow the opportunity to think it through for themselves and problem solve with you.

### • Sensory play!

Most kids with autism enjoy some sensory play. You'll know best whether they like slimy, gloopy, wet play or dry sensory play such as sand, oats or pasta. There are oodles of ideas for sensory play on the internet. Allow time for this. It helps develop all senses and provides opportunities for language, as it can really spark their interest.

Bath times can be sensory heaven for those who enjoy them and with all this spare time, your child can enjoy a daytime bath – why not? Put something different in the bath to spark an interest, like glow sticks to create a 'disco' bath or bath bombs that fizz.

Ice cubes can be fun to play with. Make different-coloured ice cubes and freeze small items in the ice cube trays. Watch them melt with hot water – you can even paint them.

### • Technology!

Don't feel too guilty about iPad time. However, look for apps that are interactive and that your kids may need help with to encourage communication and interaction. Or, use them when you need time to yourself. Issue 17 (free to download at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)) has some great app ideas. Don't forget that Bluetooth headphones are invaluable for saving you from the monotony of repetition.

### Your new 'normal'

- Be kind to yourself: This was unexpected, and we don't know how long this is going to go on for: two incredibly difficult things for young people with autism. So, get through it as best you can and don't expect yourself to be a perfect parent.
- Your usual respite (if you have any) will most probably have ceased, so find times in the day when you get a break with members of the same household helping out. One suggestion is to create a "den" or quiet area where people can retreat to. This is a chill out area for anyone in the family who wants alone time.
- Stay in touch! Keep getting support from other parents through social media sites for parents and carers, like our Facebook site @aukidsmag.

### Use this time for...

#### • Independence skills!

Practise using cutlery, getting dressed, zips, pouring, spreading. The pressure is off to be up and out of the house by a set time so now is the time to slow down your pace of life and work on all those

**'THIS READS LIKE A BEST FRIEND'S GUIDE TO AUTISM'**  
- ADELE DEVINE, SPECIAL NEEDS TEACHER

BY THE CO-FOUNDER OF AUKIDS MAGAZINE  
**DEBBY ELLEY**

**FIFTEEN THINGS THEY FORGOT TO TELL YOU ABOUT AUTISM**

THE STUFF THAT TRANSFORMED MY LIFE AS AN AUTISM PARENT

**£12.99 PAPERBACK**  
**AVAILABLE AT [WWW.JKP.COM](http://WWW.JKP.COM)**



Use technology to interact and connect with friends/family/support workers/teachers for some familiarity. Give them the best chance of success at these live interactions by discussing what you might talk about before linking up.

Alexa has many functions – you can ask Alexa for a joke, play guessing games (guess the number) and learn how to say things in different languages. This could be a fun activity to plan together and often children with autism communicate easier with technology.

## • Physical activity!

If you are lucky enough to have a garden – great. Don't limit outside time to purely when it's sunny. Umbrellas are fun, so is splashing in puddles and playing in mud. Create obstacle courses within your child's capabilities. These can help with balance and co-ordination. You could make a tunnel or a den.

Have races – hopping, jumping, skipping, running, walking backwards! How many kids love to be chased? Play catch with balloons, balls and beanbags. Balloon tennis is much slower and easier.

## • Housework!

Give your child a special job to do each day. This builds their self-esteem, gives a sense of responsibility and helps you. This may be emptying the washing machine, putting out the bins, washing the dishes. But let's face it, most kids are not going to volunteer to do jobs without something in return. Give them all day to do the job and some sort of reward when it's done.

For those with less understanding of language – think about how you can explain a job in pictures. Build it into their routine – showing them a picture of the job under 'Now' followed by a picture of the reward under the word 'Next' (this is called a Now and Next board and can be very motivating). Show them hand over hand how to do the job and then gradually reduce your help. Eventually, you can allow them to decide when they do

their "job for the day".

## • Structure!

You know your child best. Some kids with autism may respond to having kept familiar daily structures. Others may go with the flow more and be more relaxed at home. Don't put too much pressure on yourself to have a structured day if it's going to be a battle. Instead opt for a more relaxed approach with perhaps some daily objectives, like some exercise, sensory activity, reading and an independent task. Let their mood guide you.

## • Special moments!

Build in some special time for child-led play with your child. Allow them to make the rules, follow their lead, copy and respond to their directions (verbal or non-verbal) and use this time to really bond with your child. If you can, turn off your phone and really focus on giving them that attention at the time. You can do 5 or 10 minutes per day and it's a great opportunity to work on fundamental communication skills and language building.

## • And what about Home Education?

Don't put pressure on yourself to reproduce school at home. You simply can't do it in the same way, and why would you want to? There are so many different learning opportunities at home. Most home education parents will tell you that their day is nothing like a school one.

At the moment, there are a lot of 'what to do' ideas on social media – and schools are sending them out to parents, too. Your teachers aren't sending you ideas to put pressure on you. They're sending you ideas because this is the only way that they can help you remotely and they want to help. But don't be hard on yourself if you don't feel like following suggestions. Our autistic kids can't often swap between different settings so easily, so making them do something educational at home may feel incredibly foreign and confusing for them.

# Stress-Busting Exercise Ideas!

Exercise is known to reduce anxiety and can help you stay calm. Thanks to Dr Heather MacKenzie for recommending these fun channels:



**Fit Factor Kids:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LndXdPdKaQ&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LndXdPdKaQ&feature=youtu.be)

**Brain Breaks:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=388Q44ReOWE&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388Q44ReOWE&feature=youtu.be)



**Kids 20 Minute Workout:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY8yixtVGMs&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MY8yixtVGMs&feature=youtu.be)



**Fitness Blender:** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=McD6\\_oOWs-M&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McD6_oOWs-M&feature=youtu.be)



**Cosmic Kids Yoga:** [www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga](http://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga)



Or of course tune into **The Body Coach – Joe Wicks** – each weekday at 9am when he provides the nation's kids with a live keep fit session. If the time is not good for you, the sessions also appear on his You Tube channel later in the day.



## Further information

- Carol Gray's Social Story on Covid-19: [www.carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pandemics-and-the-Coronavirus.pdf)
- More symbol stories can be found here: [www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/FREE-Coronavirus-COVID-19-Social-Story-5319239](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/FREE-Coronavirus-COVID-19-Social-Story-5319239)
- **Five Minute Mum** by Daisy Upton (Penguin) is for real mums (and dads). It's full of easy activities which take no more than 5 minutes to set up and require items which you are more than likely to have in the house already. There are educational games, interactive games, speech and language development games and our favourite.... Five minutes' peace games!
- **What to Do When my Worries Get too Big** by Kari Dunn Buron and **What To Do When You Worry too Much** by Dawn Huebner are great picture books for kids.
- **Jed Baker's Overcoming Anxiety in Children and Teens** is a great read for parents.
- **A Week of Switching, Shifting, and Stretching: How to Make My Thinking More Flexible** by Lauren H. Kerstein (AAPC Publishing) is very helpful at this time, it helps children to move from 'black and white' to 'rainbow' thinking. Issue 33 of AuKids (free to download at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)) has an article on improving flexibility of thought by this author.





# HOMework

## HOW TO WIN THE BATTLE WITHOUT MAKING ENEMIES

To understand the problem that autistic children have with homework, you only need to look at the word itself. It requires a child to take a task that they are used to doing at school and perform it in a completely unrelated setting. Combined with that is a deadline. Oh good. If you want to guarantee a meltdown, we'd suggest you add some noise and flashing lights, but there's usually no need.

But wait, there's one extra ingredient here – your own anxiety. Will they fall behind if they don't do it? Will they get into trouble and if so will that cause extra battles, extra stress...?

And breathe.

All this worry causes so much pressure. For these reasons, homework can turn the living room into a war zone, with both sides entrenched until Sunday evening. This isn't a good state of affairs as it can damage an otherwise good relationship with your child.

We can do this with peace, love and understanding. Honestly, it's possible!

Here's AuKids' top tips on tackling homework:

### Points to Discuss with Your Child's Teacher

- 1 Can they be flexible with the amount of homework expected?
- 2 Could time be made available during the school day for them to spend 15 minutes on it instead?
- 3 Agree with your child's teacher how much time should be spent on homework. It's better for autistic kids to have a set routine for homework involving the same amount of time each session.
- 4 Can they let you know the learning objectives each time they set homework? If they can make these clear to you and are flexible about how you achieve them, you'll stand a better chance of success.
- 5 Make teachers aware that a definite expectation, such as completing a series of questions, is much easier for a child with autism than tasks involving imagination and general research that are more vague in nature.
- 6 If it's the handwriting aspect of homework that causes upset, but handwriting isn't the aim itself, discuss with your child's teacher whether it's okay for your autistic child to type the work. Many autistic children find the motor planning of handwriting combined with the executive functioning required to complete a task extremely challenging.
- 7 Discuss adapting homework so that where practical it uses your child's interests as a motivator.

### PREPARING THE GROUND FOR HOMEWORK

#### ✓ Make a timetable

Having a colour-coded home timetable showing your child's hours of leisure and time set aside for homework will help them to make homework into a routine. Also, it will help them to see that in the grand scheme of things, homework takes up hardly any of their time.

#### ✓ Make an agreement

Ask your child for the best time to do homework and put it on a visible calendar. The calendar then becomes boss, not you.

#### ✓ Discuss timings

You might prefer the homework to be done in one go, but your child may prefer a collection of 15-minute slots. Discuss what might work best. They can't control being given homework, but it will help if they in control of when and how it's carried out.

#### ✓ Rate difficulty

Ask your child to rate each task according to difficulty using a traffic light system. Start with some 'green' tasks. After the ease of those, try something tricky. Grab a brain break by sneaking back to 'green' tasks for a bit – have a giggle about it.

You can use 'green' tasks as motivators. E.g. 'How about we do that difficult bit for five minutes, then head back to the easy stuff?'

Ratings are really powerful as they allow children to see homework not as one big insurmountable mountain, but as a series of small hills to climb – some difficult, some not so bad.

#### ✓ Get a timer

If you or I were told to sit down for a meeting without being given an idea of how long it would last for, I doubt our attention would be that good. Set a timer for the length of time they'll be working and stick to it. Hours of struggle are damaging to enthusiasm, so providing the child has done their best, don't move beyond the time set. Let the teacher know that you're making this very reasonable adjustment for your child's disability.

#### ✓ Reward system

Autistic children won't do homework just for the applause. Use other motivators, such as promising a favourite activity later, or having rewards that are reserved exclusively for when homework is done.

### WHAT YOU NEED

#### ✓ Secure surroundings

A special 'homework' place helps a child deal with the concept of schoolwork at home and creates a routine.

#### ✓ Equipment to hand

Make sure that all the tools are nearby. There's nothing like having to wander off for a pencil to add an extra 10 minutes to the proceedings.

#### ✓ Minimum distractions

Think of how your child focuses best. Try and cut out distractions and clutter.

#### ✓ Comfort items

Make sure they're physically comfortable with a snack if it relaxes them.

#### ✓ The right mood

If you are feeling even slightly impatient, reconsider a better time. Make sure the person helping is *always* in the right frame of mind. One bad session can damage your future chances of success.

#### ✓ The right position

Sitting side by side means you can focus on a task together and perceive it in the same way, but if you sit to the





side and slightly behind the child, you'll promote their independence and reduce their reliance on you. If you sit face to face, you're placing extra social and sensory demands on a person. Try different ways, find what works best. Thanks to Heather Mackenzie's book *Reaching and Teaching the Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, for this one.

## DURING HOMEWORK

### ✓ Unveil the homework

Treat it as if it's the most exciting thing you've ever seen. If you approach it as a drag, your child will definitely think it's a drag.

### ✓ Check understanding

Ask them to explain to you what they think they need to do. Ask this as if you have no idea yourself. Put them in charge, but check they know what they're doing to avoid frustration later.

### ✓ Define expectations

In some cases it might help to provide some guidance on the effort required:

e.g.

*Homework: Research the author of your book*

☹️ Google the name of the author and cut and paste the first two paragraphs you find. Oops.

😊 Google the name of the author and select 10 facts that you find the most interesting about them. This means you've had to think about it and that's what the teacher is looking for. Yay!

### ✓ Ask them if they need help

You know what it's like when you're working and someone is watching your every move. The temptation to tell them to get lost is overwhelming! Respect your child's wishes and keep a polite but available distance.

### ✓ Helpful helping

If they are stuck, use questions to direct their thinking and stay positive about their answers. 'I can see why you thought that, that's great, can you think of another way...?' Jennifer O'Toole and Heather Mackenzie, both heroes of ours, favour the 'adult playing dumb' approach. i.e. "What are we going to do, here?! Ooh this is tricky!" It feels so much nicer to be problem solving together than being directed. Express huge enthusiasm for the puzzle they've been set. Praise good thinking and any suggestions made by your child. Show them the end point and get excited about it: "Wow, you're doing such good thinking - I think we're nearly there you know!"

### ✓ Mask questions off

It can help autistic children to mask off a list so that only one question is visible, allowing them to focus and not get overwhelmed.

### ✓ Get creative

What if they could practise spellings in shaving foam in the bath? Or do maths with groups of Pokemon or Moshi Monster figures moving about the table? Holding ideas in your head is difficult, seeing them in front of you is easier. You could get a load of colour Post Its and write ideas on each one before putting them in order, or write each sentence in a different colour pen. If the equipment is fun, the work will be more fun.

### ✓ Hook onto special interests

Do we need to mention this?! Find what motivates them and work around it.

Not going in? If something hasn't clicked, don't explain it in the same way more than twice. Think of another way. Don't let a stumbling block ruin the session. Get through the easy stuff and go back to the trickier things later.

### ✓ Step back

You can help your child to plan the work and stay on task, but don't be afraid to leave them to complete written work themselves. Incorrect homework may highlight a problem in understanding during lesson time and that's still valuable information for the teacher.

## AFTER HOMEWORK...

### ✓ Pat on the back

Give them a massive pat on the back even if it's only been a quarter of an hour. They have still focused themselves to do something that wasn't their choice.

### ✓ You're free!

Don't make any further demands on the child for now, such as accompanying you to the shops. Let them do what they like for a bit. They should be able to enjoy the breather.

### ✓ Praise where it's due

If your child has completed homework without fuss, praise like mad. Consider a surprise reward when they've not asked for one.

### ✓ Quit while you are ahead

If your child is happy and doing well, avoid the temptation of extending or improving on what you have already. If homework always ends with having had



enough, they will be less willing to give it another go.

### ✓ Reward yourself

They've done their homework without stress? It's time for you to sit back and breathe that lovely calm, meltdown-free air.

## MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU!

### Further Information

**Why Do I Have To?** A Book for Children Who Find Themselves Frustrated by Everyday Rules by Laurie Leventhal-Belfer, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.



### WIN THIS BOOK!

We have copies to give away to two lucky readers. Simply send you name and address to [competitions@aukids.co.uk](mailto:competitions@aukids.co.uk) no later than May 31<sup>st</sup>, with 'why' in the subject header, or write to AuKids PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE.

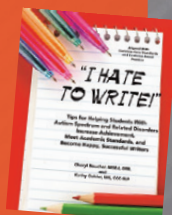
**The Asperkid's Launch Pad: Home Design to Empower Everyday Superheroes** by Jennifer Cook O'Toole, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers



**Self-regulation in Everyday Life: A How-to Guide for Parents** by Dr Heather Mackenzie, published by Wired Fox Publications



**I Hate to Write! Tips for Helping Students with Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders Increase Achievement, Meet Academic Standards, and Become Happy, Successful Writers** by Cheryl Boucher, published by AAPC





# There's Hope in the Future

Alex Manners is 23 and has Asperger's. He presents his talk 'My Life Living with Asperger's' all over the UK and his book *That's Not Right! My Life Living with Asperger's* was published last year and is available in Paperback and for Kindle.



Recently, I was chatting to my parents and they told me how worried they were, when I was younger, about my future. Indeed, my mother said: "When Alex was at school, up to 18 years old, he gave us no indication of being mature enough to cope in adulthood on his own."

When I was doing my GCSEs in secondary school I was in a really bad place and very depressed. At school I had to cope with a lot of changes and my parents said they were worried about how I would cope as an adult, how I would earn a living, what sort of job I could get and if I would ever be able to live independently.

For most families, their biggest fear is what their child will do once they leave school and become an adult. But my advice is that they must always have hope.

Another of my parents' worries was how would I be able to travel on my own. I was lucky enough to travel to and from school in a taxi, which was stipulated in my Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The thought of having to get a bus or a train used to fill me with dread. However, when I was 18, I was given three days of 'travel training' by my local council. Knowing how much I disliked public transport, my parents were not very optimistic, but afterwards I was like a changed person. Although I was still not very confident with buses, I was much more confident using trains. Even today, I still don't feel confident

using buses, but I now travel all over the country by train and it has completely changed my life. If I had done the travel training earlier, then who knows what might have been? I may have become more independent at an earlier age and used trains to get to school.

.....  
**"You never know what someone with autism can achieve when they become an adult."**  
 .....

Whilst I was in Sixth Form, I started to volunteer at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens for work experience. I had a real interest in gardening and at the time I wanted to become a landscape gardener. My parents hoped that I could possibly have a career in gardening or landscaping, but it soon became apparent that this type of career would not be suitable for me. I don't like manual jobs and hate working in the heat, so a job in gardening was out of the question.

My parents have always encouraged me to pursue my passions and do something that I enjoy. At school they were more concerned about me being happy than achieving good grades.

After I had decided that a garden-based job was not for me, my dad came across an advert for a one-

day TV presenter training course. He asked me if I would like to go on it. The course absolutely changed my life and made me realise exactly what it was I wanted to do. From that point onwards, I decided that I wanted to become a TV presenter and nothing was going to stop me.

I suddenly went from being a little lost to being really motivated, positive and energised as I now felt I had a purpose and a career to pursue. Because of my new-found passion, I decided to do a media studies course at my local college. I knew that a media studies course was not going to get me a job as a TV presenter, but I wanted to learn as much as I could about the industry and especially what goes on behind the camera.

Once I had started the course, I set up my own business creating promotional videos for sports clubs and local businesses and even started writing articles and conducting interviews on the TV and radio about my Asperger's. It was a two-year course and whilst I loved the first year, the second year started to drag my motivational levels down. I had become so motivated to achieve my dreams that I ended up leaving the college three months before the end of my course. My dad has told me that he was really proud of me for making such a tough decision and sticking with it. I still got the qualification, but it now meant that I could focus all my energy and time on pursuing my career.

One thing led to another and I

am now presenting talks about my life living with Asperger's all over the country to businesses, schools and universities as well as presenting my very own radio show once a week and becoming a published author.

My mother told me: "Suddenly, almost from out of nowhere, we could see how Alex was going to earn a living. Also, he was travelling by train to meet companies and do interviews, so we started to see how he could begin to lead a more independent life. To be honest, it was as if Alex was turbocharged and on a path to success and happiness!"

The reason I wanted to share my story with you is to turn your fears into hope. You never know what someone with autism can achieve when they become an adult. It may take time to discover their talents and their interests. If you encourage them to pursue what they are passionate about and provide them with positive support, you will empower them and then they will start to flourish.

Over the last few years, my parents can't believe how many people I have met, how many places I have visited and how many things I have achieved. I bet this all seemed like a far flung dream a few years ago!

If I can have a life pursuing my passions, then anyone can!

For more information on Alex, go to [www.thealexmanners.com](http://www.thealexmanners.com)



# Tell Me on a Sundae!

June is an exciting month for the AuKids team as it sees the release of our children's book *The Ice Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*. But why did we do it? We interviewed ourselves. Which was interesting.

After autism was first identified in the early 1940s, researcher Lorna Wing and her lifelong collaborator Judith Gould built on this work in the Seventies to establish the term 'Triad of Impairments'. It was this term that came to define the condition until into the new Millennium.

The Triad of Impairments referred to three key features of autism that were common to everyone on the spectrum – 'impairments' with communication and social interaction, plus repetitive behaviour and interests.

There's no doubt that the concept of a triad was ground-breaking and would form the basis for identifying people on the spectrum whose functioning was widely varied.

But there was a problem. The word 'impairment' implies something faulty and therefore signals an implied obligation to 'fix'. Yet in recent years, the message coming from adults with the condition (who had grown up with stigma) was that they didn't always want to be 'fixed'. Autistic brains are different, but society needs difference in order to thrive. Why define autism purely in terms of its downside?

Whether you perceive autistic difficulties as 'impairments' (i.e. this child is a faulty version of a non-autistic one) or just the result of different neurological wiring will have a huge impact on how you view autism and therefore your parenting strategies. As a society, we've moved from 'correcting' autistic behaviour to understanding its cause and adapting our strategies accordingly.

Time for a change.

As AuKids magazine began to grow in 2010 onwards, parents asked us how they should 'break the news' to their child that they had autism – and even whether they should tell their child about their autism at all.

the AuKids editors came up with the *Ice-Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*.

First published in AuKids magazine in 2013, the aim of the sundae was to help parents explain autism with a simple but neutral, rather than negative, analogy.

The concept of the 'triad' was explained with a Neopolitan ice-cream sundae, with three flavours. Chocolate represents speech and language, vanilla represents social skills and strawberry represents rigidity of thought.

The key difference to the static concept of the 'triad' is that 'scoops' of ice-cream can vary in size from person to person, from day to day and even according to the environment. Autism is presented as being changeable.

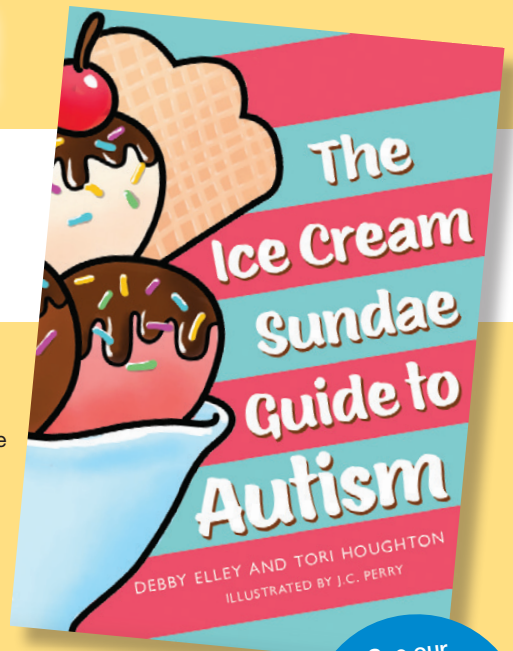
The 'Triad' hadn't included sensory issues, which these days form part of the definition of autism. In the ice-cream sundae, sensory issues are the 'chocolate sauce' that can cover central traits of autism, obscuring what we can really see about communication difficulties.

The idea that sensory issues have an impact on the other key ingredients of autism is key. Sensory issues aren't just an added extra. By causing people to retreat into 'survival mode' they can increase difficulties with communication and rigidity of thought.

represented the more positive aspects of autism – for instance, the flip side of repetitive interests being expertise, attention to detail and good memory skills. We wanted to celebrate the workings of a mind that develops through focusing on things rather than people.

The ice-cream also includes a 'wafer' which represents difficulties with self-regulation. The wafer can easily be removed, showing that changes in the environment (and in the behaviour of others!) can impact on a person's ability to self-regulate. People can be taught to self-regulate, so it was important to us that the wafer could be removed. Likewise, with a 'spoon' for support, the key difficulties in autism can be 'eaten up' too!

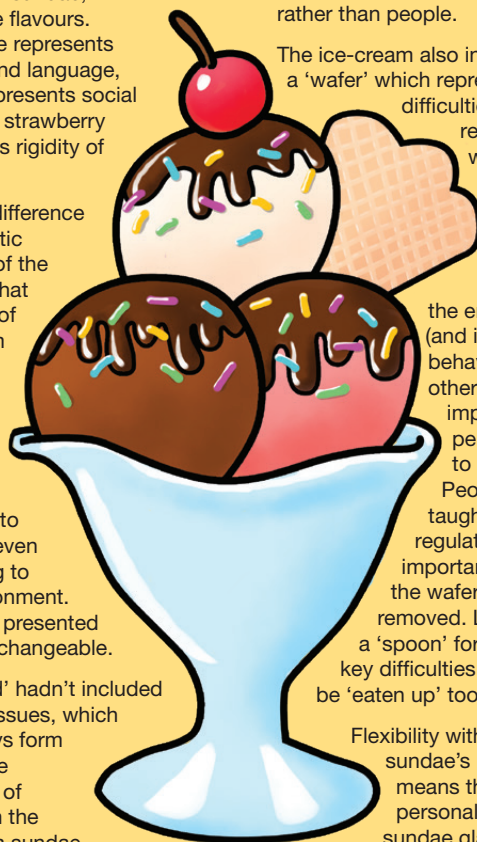
Flexibility with the sundae's ingredients means that you can personalise it. The sundae glass itself represents personality – showing that the 'look' of the



See our July issue to win a copy of the *Ice-Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*.

autism is completely different in each person.

Last year, we changed the language of the sundae to make it simpler for a younger audience of children with autism and their peers. The resulting book, for 7-11s, means that kids with autism, their friends and their family will now have a simple way to understand autism. With our interactive new book - which includes fun puzzles - you don't have to find words of your own!



You can download the *Ice Cream Sundae guide for adults* which can be found in Issue 20 at [www.aukids.co.uk](http://www.aukids.co.uk)

J. C. Perry

Illustrator of the *Ice-Cream Sundae Guide to Autism*



[www.jcperry.info](http://www.jcperry.info)



In answer to this conundrum,

The sundae sprinkles



# Pass the Pearls 2

Ten years ago, AuKids asked the parents of older children for some pearls of wisdom that they'd like to pass onto other autism parents. If they could do this all over again, what would they love to know sooner? It was an awesome little feature, and so we decided to ask yet more parents, this time through our Facebook site. Here's what they told us:

Take time for you! It's not something to feel guilty about, it's essential. If someone says 'What can I do to help?' - take them up on it! Even if it's a coffee ☕ /glass of wine 🍷 and a chat!  
- Lucy

As an autistic dad of two boys, one with autism/PDA, remember that your kid's world is a very overwhelming place and although we all try, it is still easy to look at the behaviour/battle rather than what's causing it and how the child may be feeling.  
- Mark

Never leave a meeting until you have a date for the next one (if you need one). - Lucy

July 17

Children never do something for no reason...so ask yourself why they are doing what they are doing before hitting the roof. 😊 That goes for any child, not just ASD ones. - Jan

Run a mile from anyone who claims they can 'fix', 'cure' or 'recover' your child (but not literally). Oh, and keep a sense of humour!  
- Maura 😊

Use visual support early on and continue as they grow but adapt to maturity. It does not have to be fancy laminated pictures; a white board and a list will do. Later on, teach them how to use reminder lists or write the order of events on their phones. It reduces so much anxiety when they know what is going to happen or what they need to do.  
- Christelle

Celebrate the small stuff!  
"He licked a carrot!"  
"He let me wipe his face without kicking me!" - Lucy

If you're starting off on the journey, invest in a printer and a binder file. **Printer** 🖨️ - to make copies of letters or reports. **Binder** 📁 - take that file with you to anything relating to your child. Make sure you receive a copy of everything. Paperwork does get lost. Never pass on an original copy. You will be amazed at how easily admins lose important information. - Nicky



Be kind to yourself, even when everything you try fails. You forget the ear defenders or mints for the journey, mess the schedule up and answer the 100<sup>th</sup> 'Why?' with 'Because I said so!' Take a breath, count to ten, eat some chocolate 🍫 and remind yourself that sometimes the coach in the team needs time out, too.  
- Julie

Easier said than done, but try not to compare your child to others. Stay in your own lane 🚗 and don't worry about everyone else.  
- Clare

After school they need time to decompress. I don't ask questions, I just give my son his time. When he's ready (usually when he's hungry!) he will come to me for a quick chat. I've learnt to not take his solitude personally, it's vital and respectful.  
- Kerry

Pick your battles! ✖ If their behaviour is not having a negative effect on theirs or someone else's physical and mental health, let it go!  
- Lucy

Carefully schedule to avoid overloads and use visuals to support the schedule. 📅  
- Chrystal

Use visual supports - they help you communicate better with your child and your child to communicate better with you. Used effectively, they really can reduce anxiety, decrease behaviours that result from difficulty communicating and help children cope with change. - Clare

Not for everyone, but find a good support group. This literally changed my life forever! The friends I made at the beginning are friends for life because they get it. Okay our conversations are usually about poo, wee, kids running around naked etc., but it's our world and that's OK!  
- Lucy 😊

Get together with other autism parents. It feels good to be able to talk 🗣 about the strangest things that your other friends and family just don't understand. - Kelly

Keep a diary, 📖 type it up, take it to your appointments. Add names of people you have seen and when you expect to see them again or what actions they are supposed to be doing.  
- Lucy

Countdown to finish is the 🕒 best thing we've put in place for my son. No more tantrums leaving an enjoyable activity and we also use it for things he doesn't like, like haircuts and shaving so he knows that it is going to end soon.  
- Kelly

A good sense of (dark) humour is essential for your sanity. - Kelly 🐱

Do what's best for your child and don't worry what other people think. You know your child best, you are their voice.  
- Paula



# The Rise and Rise of Relaxed



**Sarah Walters**

**T**en years ago, if you wanted to go to the cinema with an autistic child, then...er... good luck! It was a case of packing some ear defenders and waiting while your child counted all the seats in Row A before leaving after 15 minutes' of other people's 'shushing' and Paddington hard stares. For most, it was too stressful to contemplate.

Fast forward to just less than a decade ago in 2011 and Odeon became the first major cinema chain to trial monthly autism-friendly screenings. Cineworld and Belvue soon followed suit. And before too long, theatres were producing relaxed performances, then came 'quiet hour' at supermarkets and the UK has gradually started to become more autism-friendly.

For cinemas, Dimensions have been at the helm of much of this positive change. So how did it all begin and where is it going? **Sarah Walters** of Dimensions spoke to **AuKids** co-editor **Debby Elley**.

## **Q: Tell us the story. How did it start?**

In 2011, we approached Odeon with the concept of autism-friendly cinema screenings. We were lucky enough to have someone well networked within our organisation and Odeon management was very keen to get involved.

The screenings gained popularity and it wasn't long before Cineworld, Vue and Showcase came on board. Within the past year, Picturehouse and Everyman have also joined our list of partner cinemas.

We also work closely with the UK Cinema Association. The major cinema chains are all members of the UKCA, which promotes accessibility and inclusivity. Last year, they played a major role in the development and publication of autism training for cinema staff, available free to all cinemas in the UK.

## **Q: So, has the autism-friendly cinema initiative been successful?**

A: We've recently clocked up 500,000 visits to our autism-friendly cinema screenings since they started! We can see from the uptake and the screenings that this initiative is very popular with both cinema-goers and staff.

## **Q: Are improvements being made as time goes on?**

A: Yes, we regularly run surveys on our guests' experiences – 1,600 autism-friendly cinema-goers responded to our last one. Our last survey in 2018/19 revealed that what was most important to people was being able to go somewhere they didn't feel judged. They also appreciated being able to see the same blockbusters as everyone else. The results are fed back directly to the cinemas. We also encourage families to share their experiences through our website. The cinemas are extremely keen to hear the feedback.

## **Q: So, what next for Dimensions and its autism-friendly initiatives?**

A: Our mission is to develop more inclusive and accessible communities across the UK, so we now provide free autism friendly training for libraries. Because libraries are calm and safe spaces, they are very important for autistic people. But there can be

## **What to Expect From an Autism-friendly Screening**

- The staff you meet will have had autism awareness training
- The screenings are held at a quieter time of day so that you can avoid queueing
- The lights and sound are on low
- There are no adverts
- Guests can sit where they like and move around
- Guests can make noise and use hand-held devices
- Guests can take their own food and drink

"I'm always really happy I get to see the same films, I don't have to wait to buy the DVD. I am so much less anxious because I know it is autism friendly."

"There is just myself and my son, and it is very difficult to do normal things. Going to the screenings is the only 'normal' thing we do."

"It's nice how the boys' friends all talk about seeing the latest Disney film and the boys can now join in."

"It gives my son the opportunity to learn in a social setting as well as see the movies."



# Cinema

uncertainty about making noise and what to do. In fact, 90% of autistic people we surveyed told us they would be more likely to visit their library if some changes were made.

We're working with the Association of Children's and Education Librarians and Libraries Connected to make local libraries more inclusive.

Talk to your local library about taking the training and they could be featured on our website.

## Q: Any other work with community attractions?

A: Yes, 80% of autistic people we surveyed said they felt excluded from their community. So, we decided to offer museums free autism training so that they too would be more inclusive.

The adjustments most important to people with autism and their carers are staff training (to include tolerance of noise!) and understanding from the public. Simple adjustments can make so much difference.

Museums that take this training can also apply to be included in Dimensions' directories. They're shared with over 20,000 social

media followers, so it's great marketing!

## Q: Is it true that you're even getting GAME stores in on the act?!

A: Yes, you heard right! This relates to GAME stores that include Belong Arenas. These are separate areas at some GAME stores where customers can play the latest video games on the latest equipment – including high-tech gaming PCs, PlayStations and Xboxes.

Following successful trials at Belong by GAME stores in Bristol, Cardiff, York and Manchester Trafford Centre, we are now rolling out the autism-friendly changes to arenas elsewhere in the UK including Hull and Preston.

Belong Arenas are already quiet, welcoming spaces where some people with autism go to meet new people and try new games. We're helping them to take this forward by introducing a range of autism-friendly adjustments and training staff in autism awareness. The training was written in partnership with people who have autism, staff at the participating Belong Arenas and our in-house experts.

## Further information

- To find out where your nearest GAME Belong Arena is, look up: [www.belong.gg/arenas](http://www.belong.gg/arenas)
- To find out more about autism-friendly films, go to: [www.dimensions-uk.org/autismfilms](http://www.dimensions-uk.org/autismfilms)
- To find out about Dimensions' autism friendly work and to suggest a venue for training, go to [www.dimensions-uk.org/autismfriendly](http://www.dimensions-uk.org/autismfriendly)
- Facebook: @DimensionsUK

We look forward to welcoming you back to cinemas when it's safe. Keep in touch!

"It's so nice to watch a film like a normal family and being relaxed, not worrying about other people judging and/or commenting on their behaviour."

"My children don't feel left out...it gives them a topic of discussion if they feel brave enough to have a conversation."

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## Curtain up on Relaxed Theatre!

- Autism-friendly cinema screenings have inspired many theatres to produce 'relaxed' performances for audiences who may otherwise find their shows too overwhelming.
- The ATG group owns 39 major theatres in the UK. It says that relaxed performances are far more informal. Making noise during the performance is not discouraged. Depending on the show, slight alterations are made to the performance although the overall content doesn't change. House lights are normally left on low and strobe lighting may be removed. Loud noises or explosions are either taken out entirely or reduced. The audience are free to go in and out as needed and latecomers rules are relaxed.
- At ATG's theatres, there are additional staff members on hand to assist and chill out areas are provided for anyone who may become overwhelmed by the performance. In addition, visual stories are sent to all bookers in advance, with detailed information and photos of both the theatre and the show.
- You can have a look at some of ATG's symbol resources here: [www.atgtickets.com/access/symbol-resources](http://www.atgtickets.com/access/symbol-resources)
- To see your nearest relaxed theatre performance at any of ATG's theatres, look up: [www.atgtickets.com/access/show-and-theatre-access-information](http://www.atgtickets.com/access/show-and-theatre-access-information)
- ATG's dedicated booking line is 0800 912 6971.
- Each of ATG's theatres also has an access champion who you can contact directly: [www.atgtickets.com/access/contact-us](http://www.atgtickets.com/access/contact-us)





# The Last Word

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

## Reduce the Pressure, Increase the Performance

My son Bobby is now reaching the pinnacle of his high school career, just about to take his exams - and thus experiencing the dreadful pressure that goes alongside them. *N.B. His exams were cancelled since this was written.*

For autistic children, though, 'pressure' isn't just something you experience every so often when exams are on the horizon. School life is full of it. The experience of pressure creates anxiety, which stops children from learning. It's a tricky one - no wonder so many parents home educate their children.

Most of us thrive on a little pressure. It motivates us to work harder. However, a key learning point for teaching staff is that the 'scare' tactics used to motivate lazy peers will have quite the opposite effect on an autistic child; rather than motivating them, these kinds of warnings can send them into a panic. Like sponges, they absorb that feeling of anxiety being transmitted from teacher to class. If you don't want to peel an autistic pupil off the ceiling, just don't use scare tactics.

I'm aware that Bobby has experienced similar warnings, so I've adopted Dr Heather MacKenzie's tried and tested method of the imagined shield. I've told him to ignore any scary talks to do with exams and just let them bounce off his imaginary shield. In the past, I've also asked him to imagine that he's an island and some of the 'telling off' that is directed at class aren't to do with him, he should be staring at palm trees in his mind instead.

It also helped Bobby when I explained to him that pressure is simply a perception. The experience of pressure feels as if it's something being done to you, coming from the

outside...when actually it's something you're doing to yourself, from the inside.

This is really important when it comes to autistic kids, because their perception of the pressure being put on them by others is often VERY inaccurate. My solution in Bobby's younger years was to make sure that I checked that his perception of a task was the same as his teacher's. Often, he was asking something entirely different of himself, or rating himself as a failure for not achieving 100%.

This black and white thinking is one of the consequences of rigidity. It's made worse if a child happens to be particularly good in a subject (Bobby was a whizz in maths and computing). This made him suppose other subjects should be a lot easier than he found them.

By checking their perception, we can usually reduce the pressure that our kids experience at school. Do they even understand the purpose of learning - that it's normal to be rubbish at something at first and improve over time? You'd be surprised!

And if you want to go one better, never give the impression that exams are that important. It's hard when other parents are bragging about great results, but don't put much store by a score. Exams prove that non-autistic pupils can interpret an obscure question. If you can leap through a hoop that wasn't designed for your shape, then the fact that you've got through it at all is some kind of miracle. Let's not hassle about the height of the jump.

*P.S. A great book on this subject is What to do When Mistakes Make you Quake, by Claire A. B. Freeland and Jacqueline B. Toner, published by Magination Press.*

# READERS' SECTION

Send your letters and images to [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)

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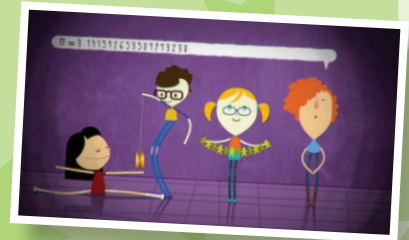


Ben Cameron-Smith (hat) with his brother Harry who has autism. On our cover, Ben is at the top and Harry is beneath. Our cover image was used for our siblings feature in Issue 39 two years ago, as obviously our spring issue's plans had to change.

## 'Amazing' Sequel on Its Way

In 2017, Alex Amelines created an animation that aimed to explain autism to non-autistic children. It was called **Amazing Things Happen** and you can watch it here: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JdCY-cdgkI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JdCY-cdgkI) The animation went viral and to date has had over 70 million views and has been translated into over 34 languages.

Both the National Autistic Society and the Royal College of General Practitioners recommend this animation as an educational tool.



After the warm reception this animation received, Alex launched a fresh campaign on Kickstarter to produce a follow-up animated series, but it never reached its goal budget. In the meantime, more than 14 children had shared their personal experiences of being on the spectrum with Alex and he decided to make a one-off animation using their voices.

The campaign to complete the animation is a crowdfunding one, this time on gofundme, where there's no deadline. Alex hopes to reach his target £8,000 by this May and the money raised will purely cover production costs. Once finished, the animation will be released under a creative commons license so anyone has access to it.

At the time of printing, Alex is over halfway to his target. Can you help him get there? Go to [www.gofundme.com/f/amazingkidshappen](http://www.gofundme.com/f/amazingkidshappen)

## See you in July...

If we're really stuck because of restrictions, we'll bring July's AuKids to you as a download issue. For this reason, keep checking Facebook and Twitter - and make sure that we have your up to date e-mail address. Contact [aukidsmag@gmail.com](mailto:aukidsmag@gmail.com)



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