



# CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY

## SUPPORTING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Psychology in Schools Team, NSFT

Coproduced with Integrated Community Paediatric Services, WSH, Autism Diagnostic Youth Service for Suffolk (ADYSS), NSFT, Participa8!, NSFT and Suffolk Parent Carer Forum

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

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Slido will be used as our main interaction tool. We will not be able to use the Q&A function or answer raised hands.

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Slido is anonymous, but other users will be able to see what you have written. When answering questions please **do not** include personal or sensitive information such as names or anything that can identify you or your child.

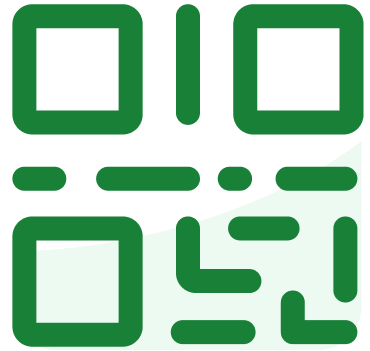
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By using Slido, you are consenting to your anonymised responses being used in possible service evaluation, research projects, publications and/or promotional material.

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Our workshops are recorded and uploaded to YouTube, please be aware that anything shared on Slido may be included in a publicly accessible recording.

# slido




Join at [slido.com](https://slido.com)  
#3559876

 Start presenting to display the joining instructions on this slide.

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How old is your child(ren)?

 Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

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**What is your referral request for...**

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

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**How would you rate your current understanding of social relationships in neurodivergent children?**

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**How would you rate your current confidence supporting your neurodivergent child with social relationships?**

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



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# Today's workshop

Social communication

Early social communication tips

Social scripts, stories, comic strip conversations

Energy accounting

Social vulnerability

Supporting peer relationships: Tips and opportunities

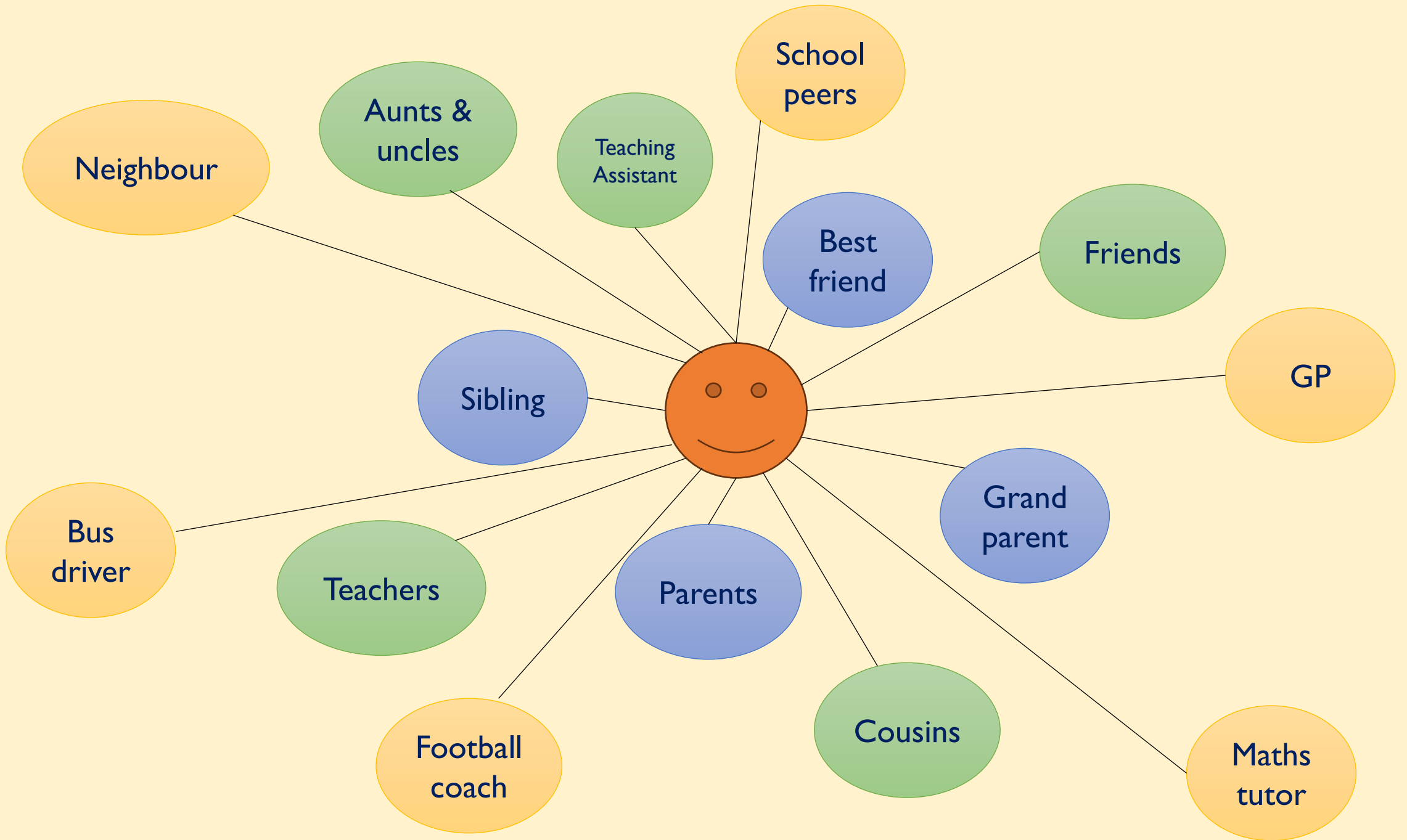
Thank you to



*What we aren't covering*

- *Speech and language*
  - *Selective mutism*
- *Advice for non-verbal children*

[Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Language and Communication \(youtube.com\)](#)



# What is social communication?

- Voice
- Non-verbal signals
- Listening
- Awareness of listener needs
- Turn taking
- Understanding and regulating emotions
- Conversation skills



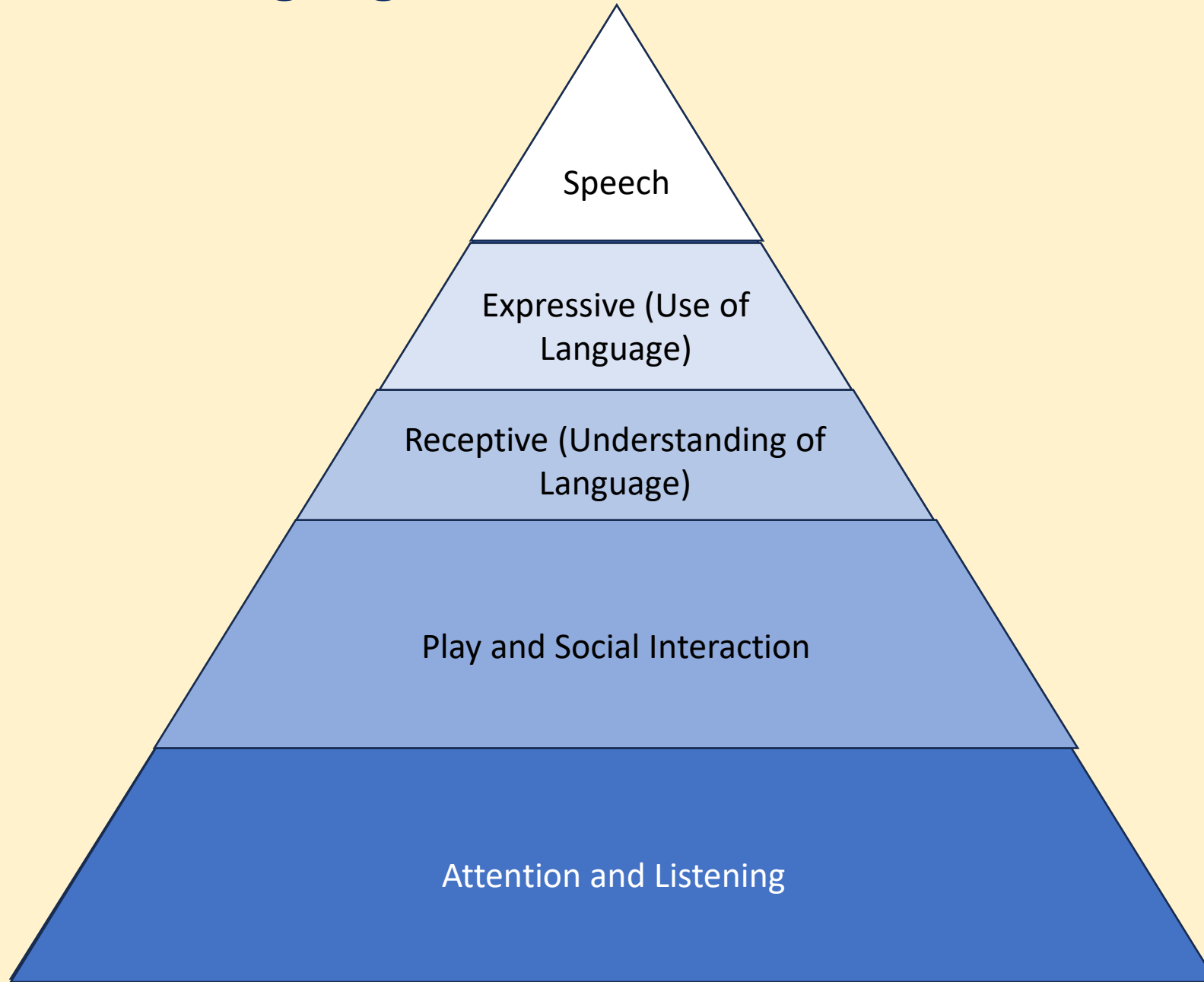
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**Which aspects of social communication  
does your child(ren) struggle with?**

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# Language and Communication



# Social communication differences

- May be related to a diagnosis such as autism or developmental language disorder (DLD)
- Differences with social communication often come from a lack of understanding from others
- We don't want to change the way your child communicates, but instead offer advice and support on key areas



# Social communication differences might include areas such as...

- Using and understanding non-verbal communication
- Starting or finishing a sentence, waiting and turn-taking in conversation
- Seeing other's point of view
- Understanding abstract language e.g. taking things literally
- Communicating in unstructured situations or in changes in routine
- Processing language



# Masking

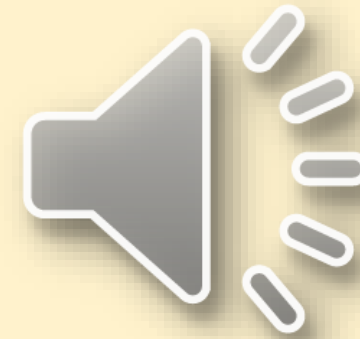
- Neurodivergent children may feel pressured to 'fit in', be accepted by their peers or to not be criticised or humiliated
- May try to 'hide', 'camouflage' or 'mask' their differences
- It is thought that autistic girls in particular try to mask their differences
- Some children mask ADHD behaviours
- Masking is exhausting - negative impact on emotional wellbeing and self-esteem





# Particip8! group: What do you find difficult in making and maintaining positive relationships?

- *“People not understanding that I can find things difficult or judging me for it. Texting has been a big thing, sometimes I won't text back for a while but it's because I don't always have the capacity to do it straight away and then the longer I leave it the more guilty I feel so I just don't message.”*
- *“I find social situations difficult, as I suffer from social anxiety, and maintaining eye contact, hence why I haven't made many friends from school days or jobs that I have held.”*



# The Double Empathy problem

Neurotypical person ←→ Neurodivergent person



Damian Milton (2012)  
Peter Mitchell, Elizabeth Sheppard,  
Sarah Cassidy (2021)

# The Double Empathy problem

**Neurotypical person** may struggle to:

- Recognise and understand neurodivergence
- Be clear in their meaning or intention
- Understand sensory differences
- Have a positive first impression of a neurodivergent person due to negative assumptions
- Tolerate social norms being broken



**Neurodivergent person** may struggle to:

- Read 'between the lines' in conversation
- Understand facial expressions
- Communicate that they don't understand
  - Manage sensory distress or distraction
- Follow social norms e.g. personal space

**Both people** with different brains (cognitive skills, interests, experiences) struggle to understand each other and communicate

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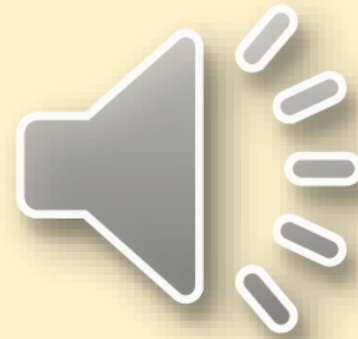


**What does your child find helpful in supporting their social relationships?**

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# Particip8! group: What have you found helpful in making and maintaining positive relationships?

- *“Having supportive people to talk to who make an effort to listen to what I have to say and are also prepared to ask me questions to start the conversation off, as I personally don't feel comfortable with doing all the talking to people.”*
- *“having people around with similar challenges so I don't feel like I have to mask things or change myself. People who are chatty and can make conversation but also accept it if I'm quiet.”*



# Tips for early social relationships



- Use **clear simple language** e.g. *“Mummy’s turn”* *“Ben’s turn”*
- Repeat instructions
- Add **visuals** e.g. cue card for waiting, sand timers
- **Follow your child’s lead** and make comments e.g. what toys/characters might be feeling/ thinking and link back to own experiences. *“Oh no Teddy hit his head, he’s feeling sad”*
- Teach **short social scripts** e.g. *‘Can I play?’ ‘Can I have a turn?’*
- Build **shared attention**: [Building attention skills in children: THE BUCKET! \(youtube.com\)](#)
  - Intensive interaction [What is Intensive Interaction? \(youtube.com\)](#)

# Alternative forms of communication

- Communication cards
- Visual aids
- Signs/Gestures
- Talkpads
- Accommodating and inclusive environments



# Social scripts

- Planning for social interactions e.g. to initiate, for humour
- Scaffolding interactions rather than telling your child what to say
- Initiating, maintaining, seeking clarification, endings
- Scripts may be helpful in building social closeness or transferring information
- E.g. “can I play with you?”, “how was your weekend”





# Social Stories™ by Carol Gray

- A social learning tool that supports the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals and neurodivergent children
- A Social Story accurately describes a context, skill, achievement or concept

[www.carolgraysocialstories.com](http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com)

## Safety Wherever I Go

Wherever I go, there is something – or someone – to help keep children safe.



Wherever I go, there are places with fences, ramps, rails, walkways, doors, or locks that help to keep children safe.



# Using Social Stories™ by Carol Gray

- Purpose: Information giving, not to control behaviour
- Introducing the Social Story
- Check understanding & linking to own behaviour (meaningful)
- Encourage ownership & sharing
- Repeat (e.g. daily before situation)
- Once mastered keep as visual prompt



## My wrapped presents



Wrapping hides a present, and keeps it a secret  
(descriptive sentence)



Lots of adults think it's polite to wait until it is my turn to open a present  
(perspective sentence)



To help me wait, I might like to play with some of my toys  
(coaching sentence)



It is polite to wait until an adult tells me it is my turn to open my present  
(affirmation sentence)



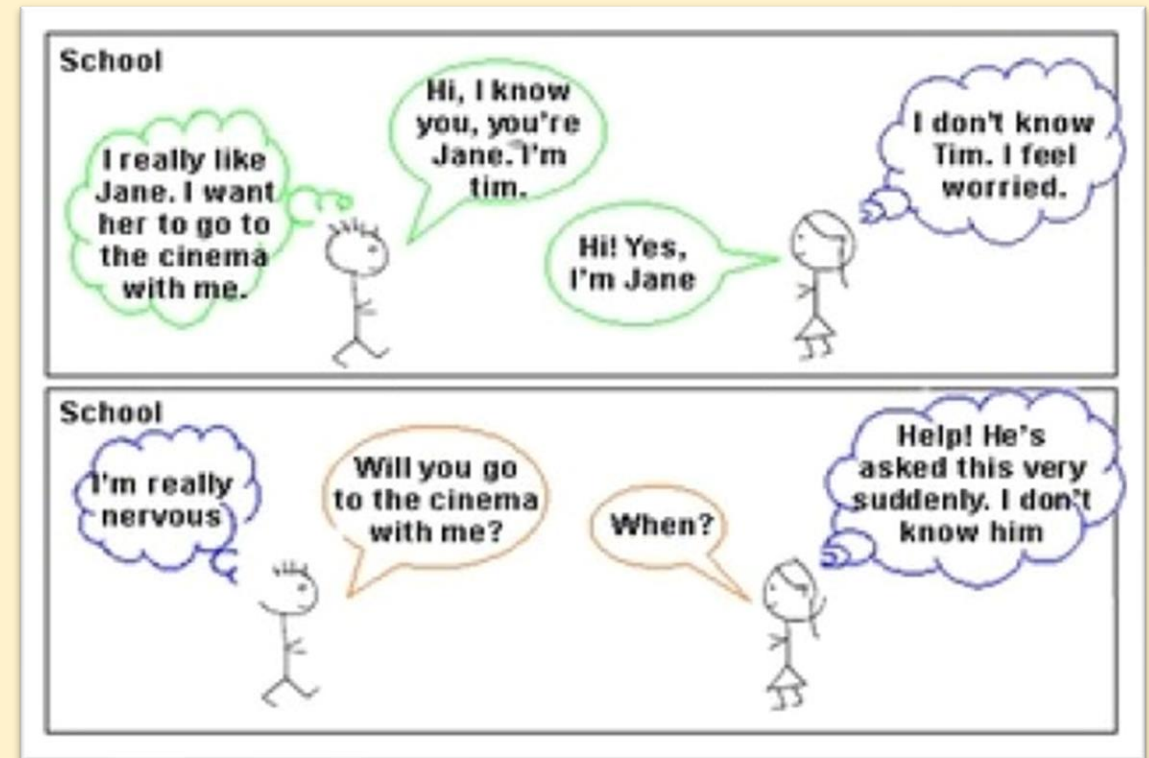
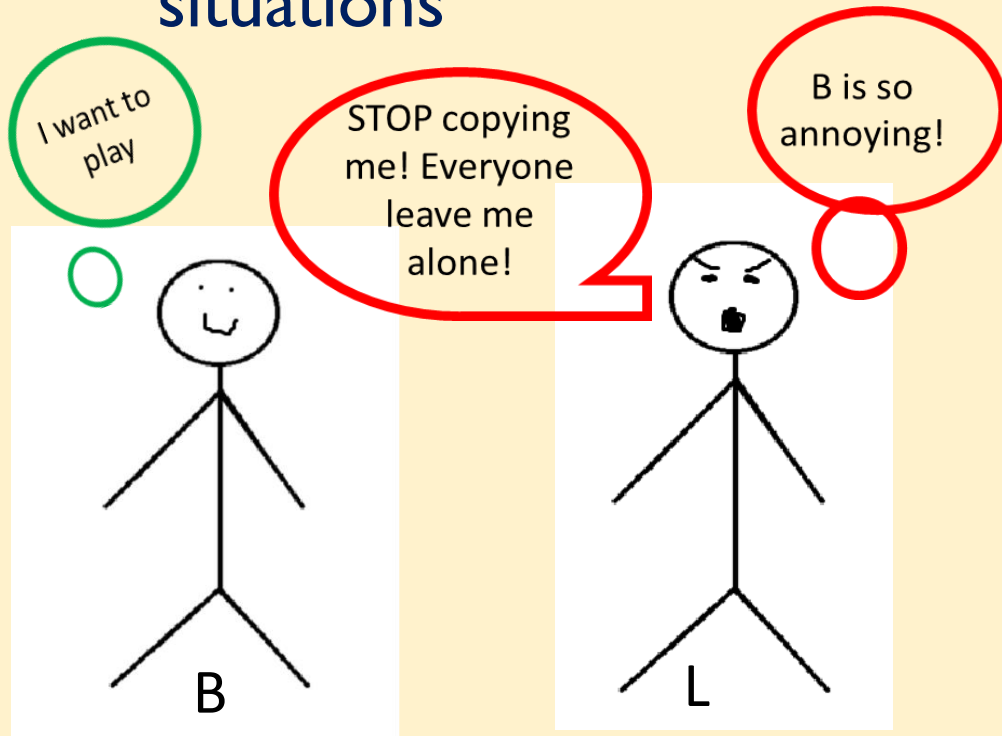
# Social Stories™ - top tips

- Use when calm and engaged
- Tailor to interests
- Don't lift from Social Story book
- Ensure appropriate to age and understanding
- Ensure accuracy, use "sometimes"/ "usually"
- Use "I can try to" and reassuring language
- Abandon assumptions
- Recognise misunderstandings are shared



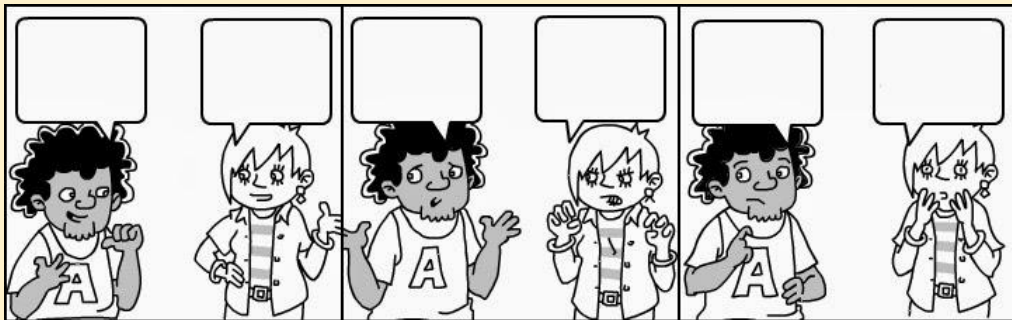
# Comic Strip Conversations™ by Carol Gray

- Provide a visual way to explore, review and reflect on social situations



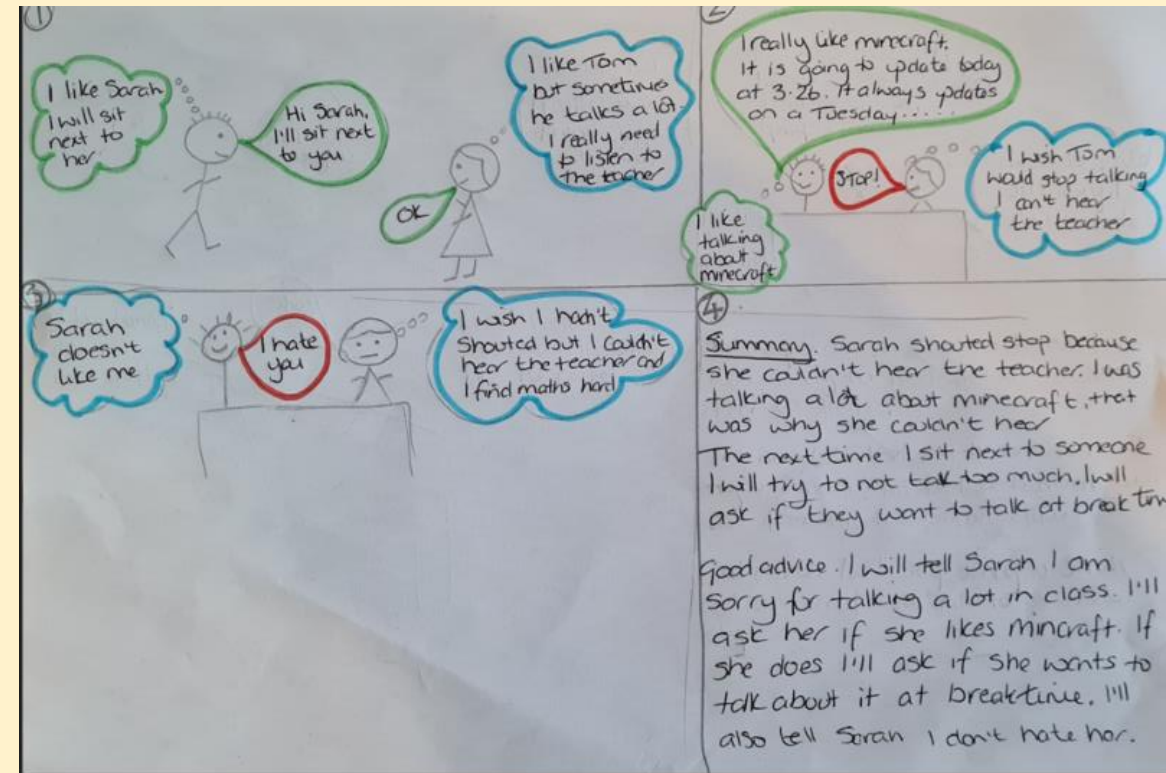
# Comic Strip Conversations™ by Carol Gray

- Draw pictures together to show how an actual social interaction started, developed and ended
- Add speech and thought bubbles



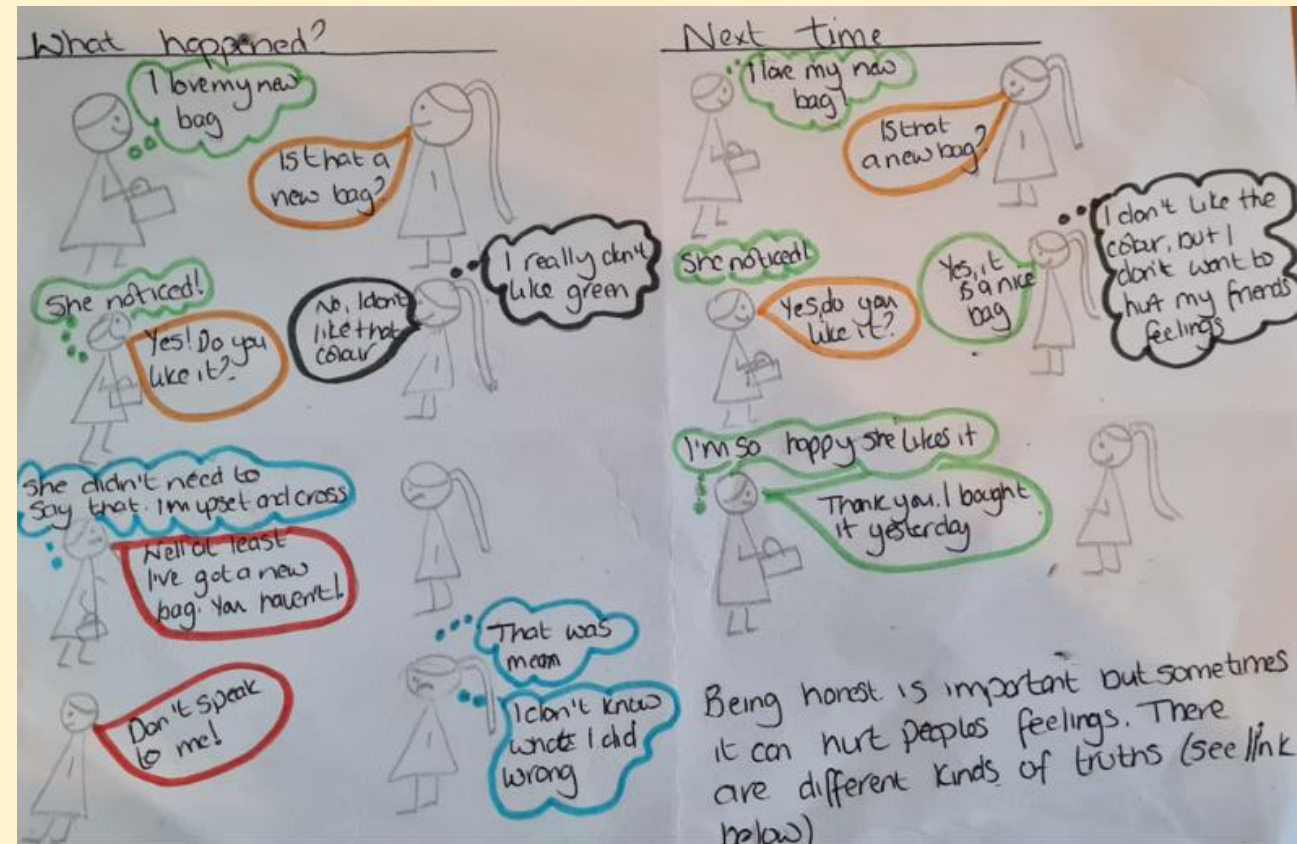
# Comic Strip Conversations™ by Carol Gray

- Look at the Comic Strip Conversation together
- Summarise and discuss what has happened
- Encourage the child to think about what happened
- How were the other people feeling?
- What could he / she have said or done to produce a different, more positive ending?
- Help and suggest ideas if they find it hard



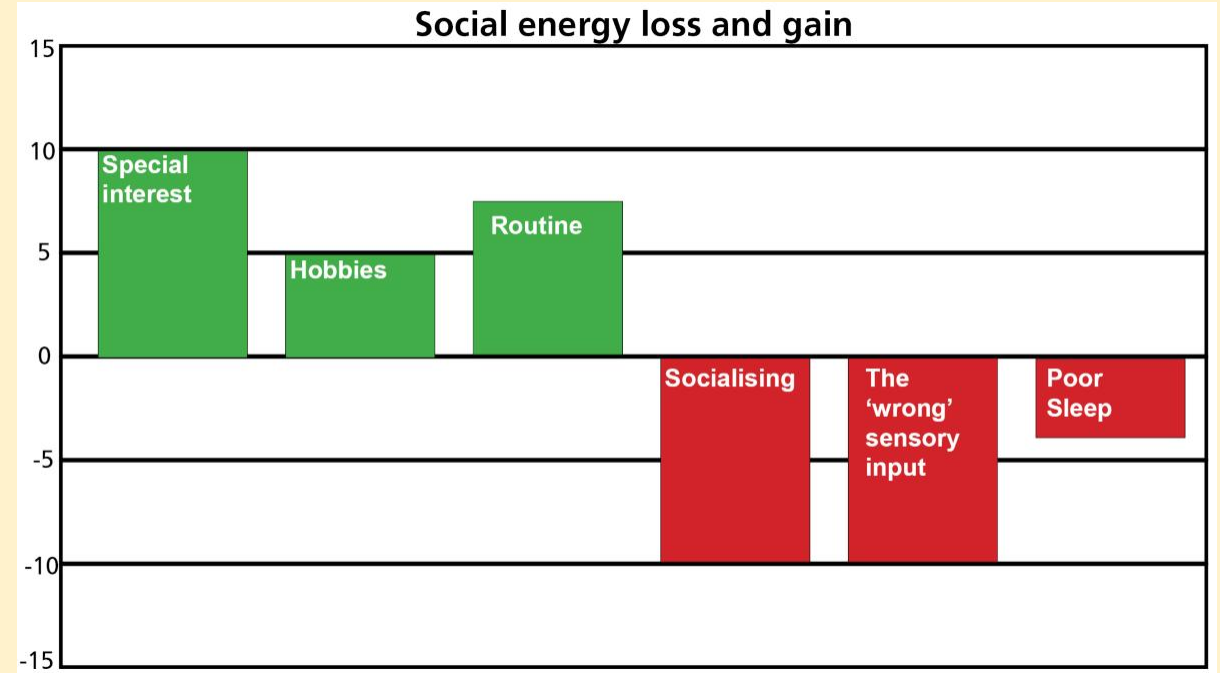
# Comic Strip Conversations™ by Carol Gray

- Draw a new comic strip the same way – **a solution**
- Talk about why this new action might work differently
- Discuss the child's and other people's thoughts, feelings and perspectives
- You could role play this new strategy to help the child feel more confident for next time
- Revisit the Comic Strip Conversation™ again as required



# Energy accounting

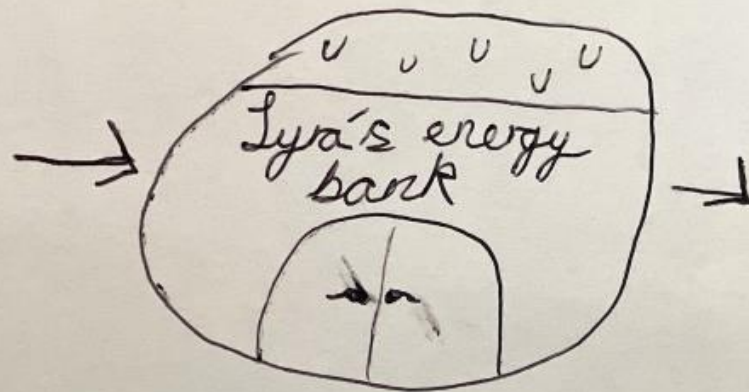
- Also known as social energy or social battery
- Everyday interactions and activities can be very draining for a neurodivergent person
- We use the idea of an 'energy bank account' to think about:
  - **Deposits** – putting in or replenishing energy
  - **Withdrawals** – use up energy





## Things that replenish my energy (GIVE)

- stroking a cat +10
- eating food +4
- reading a book +9
- colouring +5
- organising +5
- cooking/baking +6
- getting new things +3
- riding my bike +6
- being in nature +5
- being read to +5
- interacting with animals +8
- step by step drawing +5
- familiar younger children TV +6
- swimming (in the sea) +10

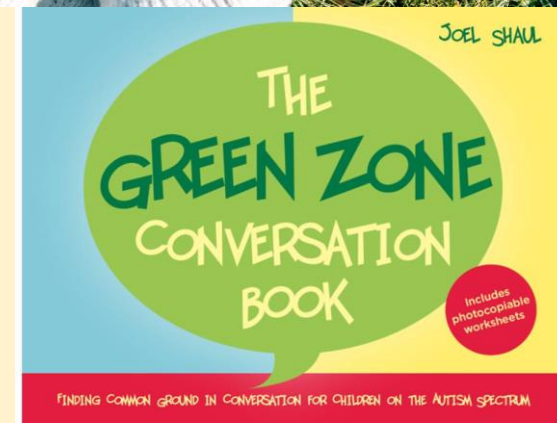


## Things that drain my energy (TAKE)

- when things are different -8
- No cat interaction -10
- Social interaction out of the inner circle -5
- decision making -8
- Too many <sup>voices/</sup> noises -5
- brushing teeth -5
- School -10
- loud clapping sounds -6

# Helping your child to develop conversation and friendship skills

- The Green Zone (Venn diagram/conversation programme) to recognise shared interests and have a conversation based on shared interests. <https://autismteachingstrategies.com/the-green-zone/>
- Collaborative play activities
- Model conversation openers and play
- Finding activities/groups around special interests
- Help distinguish between teasing and bullying, and when to ask for help
- Support to know when and how to move away from a situation



# Social vulnerability

- People who struggle with social understanding and/or communication are more vulnerable to being taken advantage of, bullied or even abused by others
- They may also struggle to recognise and tell someone that they are experiencing difficulties in a relationship or abuse
- Be curious about their relationships
- Be aware of subtle changes in behaviour

[Healthy and unhealthy relationships | Childline](#)

[Healthy relationships | NSPCC](#)

[National Autistic Society - Socialising and relationships](#)



# Helping your child develop skills to advocate for themselves and their needs

- Affirmation cards, e.g. “it’s okay to ask for what I need”. “I can take my time, I don’t have to rush”
- Listing personal qualities and strengths
- Acknowledge attempts for advocacy, e.g. “I like how you advocated for yourself there” (if language accessible)
- Respect when a child says “no”



# One Page Profile

*My One Page profile*

Your Name

Age:  
Occupation:

*What people appreciate about me*

*What is important to me*

*How to support me*

Helen Sanderson



## How I communicate



I have a communication book. The pages are colour-coded for each thing I want to talk about.

I can select by picture to tell you what I am saying.

I prefer to talk using single words, but my speech is not very clear. My body language and facial expression may let you know how I feel.

**Please listen carefully to me and encourage me to use my communication book as well.**



It helps me if you give me time to respond to your questions and comments.



If I'm in pain, I hit my wheelchair arm with my fist!

Produced by Southend Inclusive communication Service using Blackpool, Change, and Clip Art pictures

# Communication Passport

## All About Me!



I am usually a very happy person



I love meeting new people



I am a very good listener



If I get upset I like to be left alone

© 2012 Southend page 1

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Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



**What tips would you share with other parents to support your child's peer relationships?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

# Top Tips for Peer Relationships

- Foster relationships with peers who are understanding and accepting
- Supporting your child to use their strengths in meaningful ways to form peer relationships
- Opportunities to learn about social relationships e.g., through films
- Use social scripts and comic strip conversations to support you
- Consider safety within these relationships



**slido**

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**What activities have you and your young person accessed that you have found helpful?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.



## Social Opportunities

Remember differences in social satisfaction and success and consider your child's unique strengths and interests!

### Beans

## BEANS

Offers support for families journey with neurodiversity. Support for parents/carers, young people (11-25), siblings. Support includes drop ins, groups and activities.

## ACTIVITIES UNLIMITED

Short breaks open to young people with SEND needs in Suffolk

[Activities unlimited](#)

[neurodivergent abilities](#)

## NEURODIVERGENT ABILITIES GROUP (IPSWICH)

<https://www.neurodivergentabilities.org/>

Bespoke support tailored to help young people thrive in a neurotypical world.

Offers 1-1 face to face support in Ipswich. Also offers remote sessions and independent living support.



# Resources

## Further resources

- <http://carolgraysocialstories.com/>
- <https://www.socialthinking.com/> provides resources devised around age and topic teaching social and emotional learning
- <https://do2learn.com/SocialSkills/CommunicationSkills/index.htm> tips for social communication
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>
- [Loneliness - National Autistic Society advice and guidance](#)
- [National Autistic Society - Socialising and relationships](#)
- [Healthy and unhealthy relationships | Childline](#)
- [Healthy relationships | NSPCC](#)

## Books

- *The Green Zone Conversation Book* – Joel Shaul
- *Asperkids Secret Book of Social Rules* – Jennifer Cook
- *Happy Families* – Dr Beth Mosley

## Other workshops/learning

- PST workshop on communicating with teenagers to get the best out of your relationship [Getting the best out of your relationships with your person](#)
- [Selective mutism | Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust](#) online free training programme

## Suffolk support

- Suffolk Local Offer - <https://suffolklocaloffer.org.uk/asset-library/NDD-parent-carers-guide-july-2024.pdf>
- [Paediatric speech and language therapy \(wsh.nhs.uk\)](http://wsh.nhs.uk)

# Language and Communication Resources

[Autistic people and masking \(autism.org.uk\)](https://autism.org.uk)

Helen Sanderson person-centred resources (e.g. One Page Profiles)

<http://helensandersonassociates.co.uk/person-centred-practice/>

Essex website on creating communication passports [Communication Passports | Inclusive Communication Essex \(essexice.co.uk\)](#)

[Autism Diagnostic Youth Service: Suffolk \(ADYSS\) website](#) -Useful information for any autistic children and young people and their families, including information on language and communication

A Kind of Spark (CBBC, on iPlayer) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/a-kind-of-spark>

## **Emotion Resources**

- Inside Out: Guessing the feelings:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOkyKyVFnsS>
- Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) websites  
<https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/> and  
<https://www.elsanetwork.org/resources/free-resources/>

# Key resources if you are worried about your young person

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>
- School /school nurse
- [kooth.com](https://www.kooth.com) – free online counselling for 11-25 year olds (N&S)

- **111, option 2 crisis support**

- **Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide**

[Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org)

- **Psychology in Schools Parent**

## **Workshop: Understanding Self Harm in Children/Adolescents**

[Understanding Self-Harm in Children/Adolescents \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

- [MIND urgent help](https://www.mind.org.uk)



**If you need urgent mental health help, call 111 and choose option 2**



Mental health crisis support 24/7 for people of all ages in Norfolk and Suffolk

# CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

## FUTURE WORKSHOPS

- **Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting your Child's Education**
  - For parents of school aged children. Many parents have reported the struggles their children are facing in education. This workshop will provide advice and guidance on how parents/carers can navigate some of the challenges they will likely be facing.

Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> of November at 13:00pm – [Register here](#)

- **December**
  - **Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Your Child with Anxiety:** A workshop which explores valuable strategies and tips to help your child with anxiety. This workshop will explore what anxiety is, how this may present in neurodiverse children and offer practical advice and strategies to support your child in this area.

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> of December at 13:00pm – [Register here](#)

Other workshops dates TBC:

Sleep; Understanding and supporting sensory needs; planning ordering and remembering; low mood; eating difficulties; managing big feelings; supporting your neurodiverse teenager, parental stress

## INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP.

[Click here to watch the recording of our first workshop in the series:](#)

[Childhood Neurodiversity: What You Need to Know as a Parent/Carer](#)

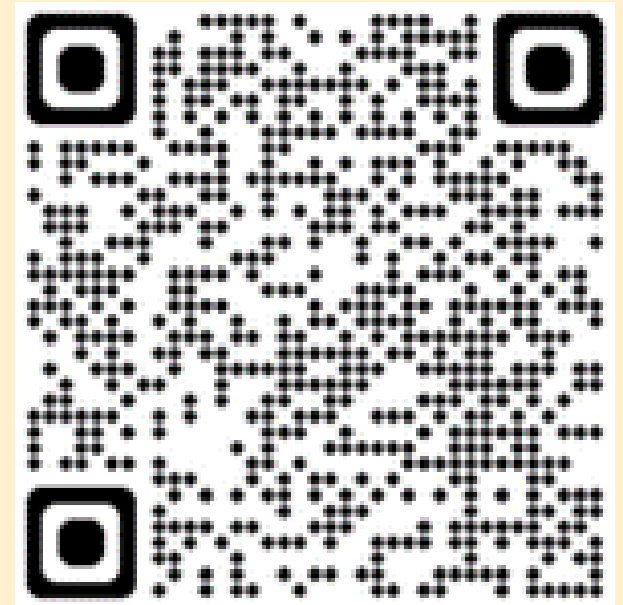
## OTHER FREE WORKSHOPS

### Psychology in Schools Team: Upcoming live parent/carer workshops:

- **Supporting your Child to Manage Anxiety and Big Feelings** - Wednesday 20th November 16:00PM - [BOOK HERE](#)
- **Supporting your Child/Adolescent with Anxiety** - Wednesday 23rd October 16:00 PM - [BOOK HERE](#) or Wednesday 18th December 16:00 PM - [BOOK HERE](#)
- **Supporting Your Child or Adolescent with Low Mood** - Tuesday 19th of November 13:00 PM - [BOOK HERE](#)
- **Building Confidence and Managing Anxiety in Your Child – (two-part workshop)**

Part 1: Thursday 21st November 18:00 PM - [BOOK HERE](#)

Part 2: Thursday 28th November 18:00 PM - [BOOK HERE](#)



[www.nsft.uk/workshops](http://www.nsft.uk/workshops) Eventbrite page  
<https://www.youtube.com/c/NsftNhsUk/videos>

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**I have found today's workshop helpful**

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

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**Two key things I will take away from the workshop are...**

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**How would you rate your understanding of social relationships in neurodivergent children?**

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**How would you rate your confidence supporting your neurodivergent child with social relationships?**

ⓘ Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Childhood Neurodiversity:  
Supporting Your Child's Social  
Relationships Feedback (live)

