

CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY

**How To Support Your Neurodivergent Child With
Anxiety**

Psychology in Schools Team NSFT

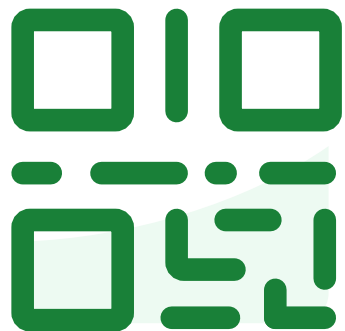
CONFIDENTIALITY
AND PERSONAL
INFORMATION

Slido will be used as our main interaction tool

When answering questions please do **not** include personal or sensitive information such as names or anything that can identify you or your child

Slido is anonymous, but other users will be able to see what you have written

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



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Join at [slido.com](https://app.sli.do)
#1004105

<https://app.sli.do/event/i4Ue9TzEepgMQarneuK732>

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What age is your child(ren)?

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How would you rate your current knowledge of anxiety in neurodivergent young people?

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How would you rate your current confidence in supporting your neurodivergent young person to manage anxiety?

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SESSION OVERVIEW

What is anxiety?

Differences in Anxiety for Neurodivergent Children

Common anxieties in Autism and ADHD

Strategies to support your young person with anxiety

Signposting to further support and resources

ANXIETY:
A FEW THINGS YOU
NEED TO KNOW

- Anxiety has nothing to do with strength character or courage
- Anxiety is a feeling not a personality
- Anxiety is your brain doing exactly what it is meant to do

Karen Young



WHAT IS ANXIETY

- Normal Emotion
- Feels unpleasant
- Triggers: Flight, Fight, Freeze, Fawn



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Have you ever struggled with anxiety?

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When you have struggled with anxiety, what has it felt like?

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RECOGNISING WHEN ANXIETY IS BECOMING A PROBLEM



- High levels of fear, anxiety and worry persist on a daily basis for a significant time period
- Impacts on day-to-day life
- Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless
- Avoidance of difficulties
- Anxious thinking patterns

E.g. not sleeping, persistent 'what if thoughts', avoiding what matters

HOW DO DIFFICULTIES WITH ANXIETY DEVELOP

- Biology, genetics, temperament, brain differences
- Learning and Listening
- Difficult childhood experience

THE BRAIN HOUSE

Upstairs brain

- The control tower

Downstairs brain

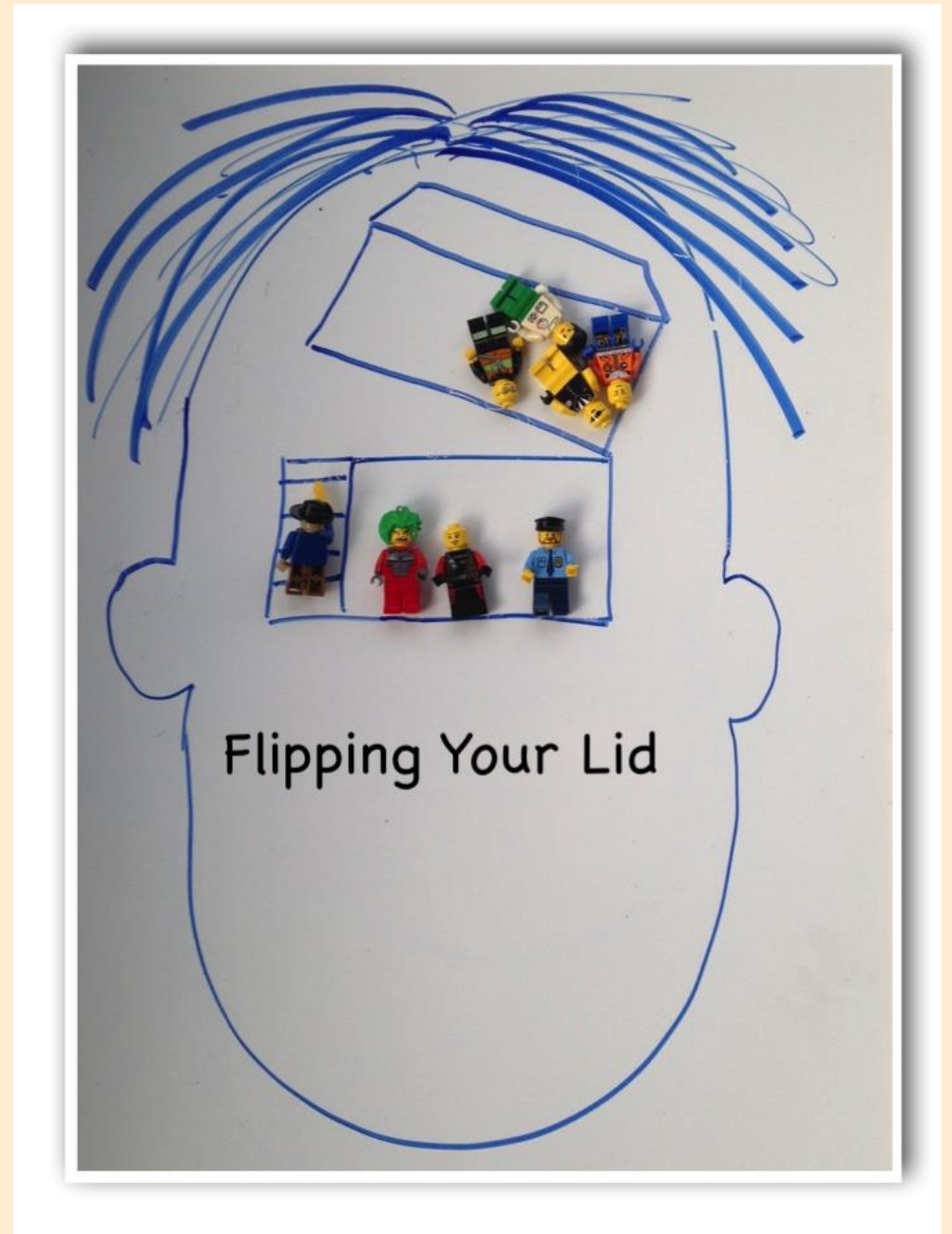
- The alarm system



Illustrated by Dr Hazel Harrison

Flipping The Lid

- This is what happens when people get overwhelmed by big feelings including anxiety
- We lose access to the upstairs part of our brain
- When this happens we no longer have access to the part of their brain that helps make good decisions and supports learning
- Reciprocal communication may be difficult



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What does it look like when your young person has flipped their lid?

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HOW ANXIETY MAY PRESENT

- Quiet/withdraw
- Behaviour that is difficult to manage
- Self-injurious behaviour
- Not able to focus or being more fixed on particular topics
- Changes in sleep pattern
- Avoidance
- Pacing
- Stimming

BRAIN HOUSE IN NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

Processing sensory
information



Impulsivity/mind
wondering



Emotion regulation



Recognising,
differentiating &
expressing emotions



More frequent
negative experiences



Understanding other's
points of view



UNDERSTANDING WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BODY

Neurodivergent children may have differences with:

Interoception

- The ability to be aware of internal sensations in the body e.g., heart rate, hunger, emotion sensations

Sensory Needs

- Differences in how they respond to and receive information in the environment

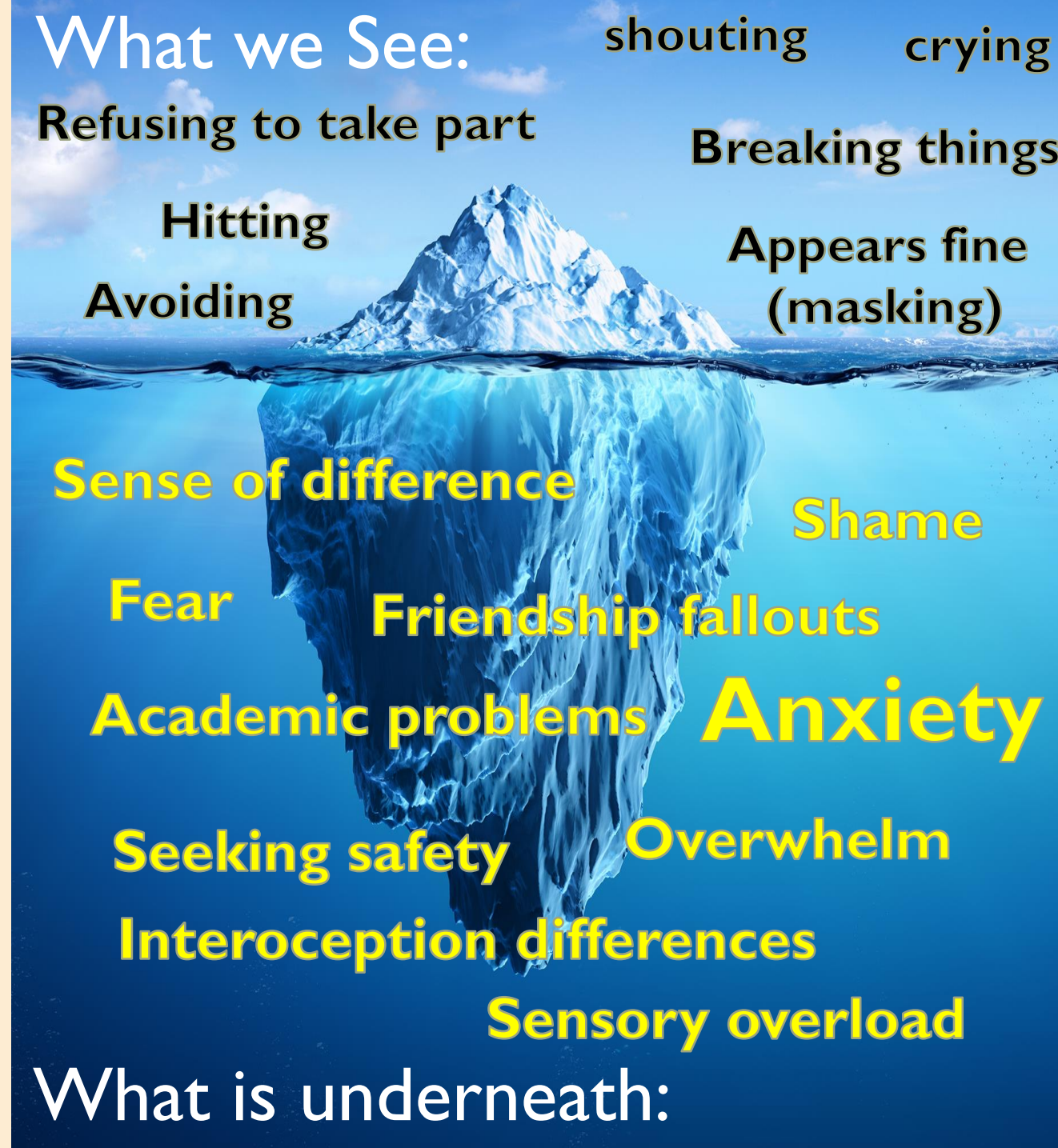


Anxious Behaviour Can Be Misunderstood

Sometimes anxiety is mislabeled

Refusal to take part can be based on anxiety

Anxiety can be so big it outweighs rewards



TOO MUCH INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

Can need extra time to process information

Can experience anxiety in social situations

Can experience anxiety with unexpected changes

Can find noise, smells and bright lights painful and distressing

Can become overwhelmed and experience a 'meltdown' or 'shutdown'



LIVING IN A NEUROTYPICAL WORLD

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

Neurotypical person ← → **Neurodivergent person**

Neurotypical person may struggle to:

- Recognise and understand neurodivergent differences in anxiety
- Understand sensory differences
- Tolerate social norms being broken



Neurodivergent person may struggle to:

- Communicate/recognise that they are feeling anxious
- Manage sensory distress or distraction
- Follow social norms e.g. personal space

COMMON ANXIETIES/WORRIES IN AUTISM

Not knowing what happens next

Routines

Waiting

Not feeling safe

Social anxiety

Social hangovers

Missing out on what others process

Processing things others don't

Fear of "getting it wrong"

Fear of getting it right but still getting it wrong

Not knowing when a passionate interest can be engaged with

DIFFERENCES IN WORRIES

Shared worries	More Unique to Autism
Specific fears e.g., doctors, insects	Transitions/change
Separation from caregiver	Sensory overwhelm
Crowds	Uncertainty about social situations
Excessive demands e.g., academic	Not being able to engage in special interests
Bullying	
Worrying what others think	

COMMON ANXIETIES/WORRIES IN ADHD

About
medication Side
Effects

Ability to
manage in class

Impulsive
choices and
embarrassment

Getting it wrong

Exclusion from
peer
groups/activities

A close-up photograph of a person's hands wearing orange knitted gloves and a blue jacket, touching the rough bark of a tree trunk. The background is a soft-focus green and blue. A white rectangular box with a black border is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

NEURODIVERGENCE+
ENVIRONMENT =
OUTCOME

STRATEGIES




- Understanding the anxiety and connecting with your young person
- Social relationships
- Visual timetables
- Sensory Soothe Boxes
- Environmental changes
- School Based Anxiety
- Importance of your own wellbeing

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What do you or your child already do that helps your child with anxiety?



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UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Keep a diary:

- What your child does/says?
- What do others around them do?
- Does this help or make things worse?
- Are there patterns in your child's behaviour?



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT EACH AREA

Can need extra time to process information

Can experience anxiety in social situations

Can experience anxiety with unexpected changes

Can find noise, smells and bright lights painful and distressing

Can become overwhelmed and experience a 'meltdown' or 'shutdown'

CONNECTION

It's important to
acknowledge anxiety and
help our children to sit
with it

We can help with this by
prioritizing connection
before using strategies



CONNECTING WITH NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

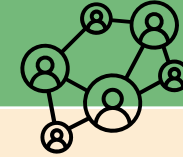
Connecting at the right time



Give alternate ways of communicating



Connection may look different for neurodivergent children



Be mindful of sensory differences



Incorporate special interests

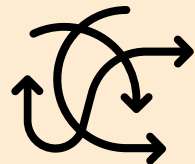


Doing something they enjoy alongside them



SUPPORTING ANXIETY IN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Neurodivergent children may feel different to their peers and may struggle with social relationships.
- If peer relationships feel confusing, as well as their environment, this can lead to increased anxiety.



- They may need support to help them understand themselves and others



We can be open to how they are communicating



Identify peers with similar interests

Show interests in their interests



Social stories



Crossing the Road



When I want to cross the road I need to stop and wait on the footpath.



I need to look both ways and listen for any moving cars.



When there are no moving cars and the signal says so, it is safe to cross the road.



SOCIAL STORIES



LABELLING EMOTIONS

- Neurodivergent children may have differences with:
 - Alexithymia
 - Identifying anxiety
 - Describing/expressing anxiety

It can be helpful to ...



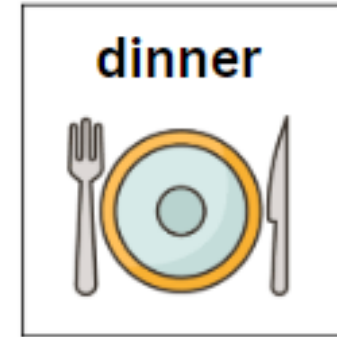
- Use Feeling Cards
- Sentence completion
- Think about what the behaviour may be trying to communicate

VISUAL TIMETABLES

Visual timetables can be a helpful tool for creating predictability for neurodivergent children. This may support with anxiety around unexpected changes.

- Let them know what is going to happen
- Having 'go to' activities
- If something is taken away, let them know when they will get it back

Now:



Then:



SENSORY DIFFERENCES AND ANXIETY

Sensory needs can have a direct link with anxiety

Try to understand sensory aspects which provide pleasure and those that cause distress

Sensory pleasure can be a delightful experience for neurodivergent children

Sensory aspects/profiles can change, making this a difficult area to manage for parents/carers

Consider sight, sounds, taste, smell, touch



SENSORY SOOTHE BOX

[How to Make a Self-Soothe Box | Young Person Blog | YoungMinds](#)



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What sensory experiences have a big impact on your child?

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

SMALL ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES THAT CAN HAVE A SENSORY IMPACT

- “Very often with the sensory world, what seems so minor to others can be the key in terms of what is causing an issue for your child” (Luke Beardon)
 - Ticking clock
 - A child in school seen as disruptive went to model student for being allowed to remove his shoes
 - The teenager who wouldn't walk down the corridor because it was the colour of fire



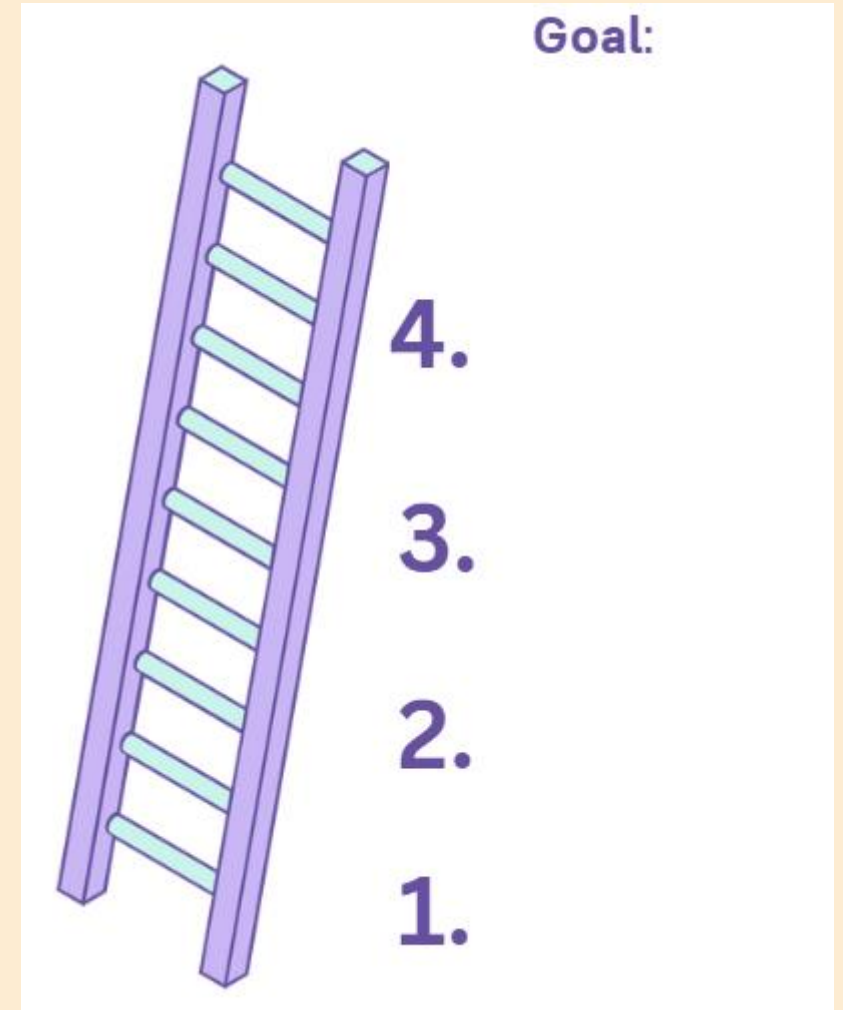
SUPPORTING NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN TO BUILD THEIR SKILLS IN MANAGING LIFE'S CHALLENGES

Even small changes can have a big impact.

This is about progress, not perfection.

Graded Exposure

- Breaking down the anxiety into small steps which feel manageable for the young person
- Opportunity to challenge anxious predispositions
- Building bravery and resilience in your young person



SUPPORTING ANXIETY AT SCHOOL

Vital your school understands your child's neurodiversity – ideally before your child starts at the school

- E.g. consider checklist for autism:
 - Sensory needs
 - Communication needs
 - Social needs
 - Eating requirements
 - Need for individual space
 - Support during class
 - Support needs before and after school, during break times and lunchtimes
- ADHD: Consider things like – need for movement breaks for ADHD or to help with working memory consider how information is delivered e.g. chunking, fewer steps
- Child with tics or who stims – expecting a child to be quiet can exacerbate these - create a shared understanding and plan

ANXIETY AND SCHOOL

Preparation
the night
before

Setting the
alarm

Checking child is
awake and into
routine

Making sure that a
school routine is
clearly identified

Breakfast routine

School uniform –
check sensory
needs

Do you need to
notify school of
anything?

Transport to
school

Before-school
preparation

School timetable

Knowledge of
teachers

School layout

Expectations for
the day

Break-time plans

Lunchtime plans

Transport home
planning

Debriefing after
school

homework

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT REDUCING ANXIETY – SIMPLE CHANGES THAT HELP

Dr Luke Beardon

- Red card/green card system at school (share Charlotte's account p. 115)



The Massive Importance Of Looking After Your Own Wellbeing

- Filling up our own resource bucket first
- Good sleep, healthy diet, physical activity and connection are important for all our wellbeing
- Risk of isolation - find your tribe

[Click here to register for the parental/carer stress workshop](#)



RESOURCES

- [Accessible environments](#) National Autistic Society
- [neurodiverse-children-who-are-experiencing-anxiety-a5-leaflet.pdf](#)
- Holly Blanc Moses – **The Autism ADHD Podcast series**
- Luke Beardon **“Avoiding Anxiety in Autistic Children”**
- **Emotion based school avoidance** Psychology in Schools pre-recorded session. 60-minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BzA0-rGB-OQ>
- [EBSA \(Emotionally Based School Avoidance\) - Suffolk County Council](#)
- **Sleep**
 - <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/pts/sleep/>
 - <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/children-families-and-learning/pts/if/five-tips/>
 - PST Parent workshop on sleep: <https://youtu.be/d6uX8Om0fzA>

Be flexible



Create opportunities for success



We can be open to how they are communicating



Sentence completion to help communication



Feeling cards



Show interest in their interests



Let them know what's going to happen



Give them a go to activity



Let them know when they'll get it back



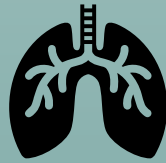
TIPS BY HOLLY
BLANC MOSES

THE AUTISM
AND ADHD
PODCAST SERIES

Identify peers with similar interests



Breathing



Visual strategies



Rewards systems



Time timer plus



Exercise



Giving instructions



Learning differences



Think what are they trying to communicate with their behaviour

Try to understand

TIPS BY HOLLY
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THE AUTISM
AND ADHD
PODCAST
SERIES

PSYCHOLOGY IN SCHOOLS: FREE LIVE WORKSHOPS AND VIDEO RECORDINGS

Upcoming LIVE Parent/Carer workshops on mental health www.nsft.uk/workshops Eventbrite



[anxiety in adolescence](#)

[Supporting your Child with Anxiety and Big feelings](#)

Recorded previous mental health workshops on a range of topics:

- School Avoidance, Tics and Tourette's, Self-harm, Social Media, OCD, Exam stress and more!

Childhood Neurodiversity Workshops:

Access recorded workshops here: [Parent workshops | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)

Topics include:

- Childhood Neurodiversity: What You Need to Know as a Parent or Carer
- How the Brain Develops
- Supporting Social Relationships
- Supporting Language and Communication

And More!

TO WATCH PREVIOUS RECORDINGS IN THIS
SERIES

**Childhood neurodiversity what you
need to know as a parent/carer**

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

**Childhood neurodiversity: supporting
social relationships**

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodiversity:
Supporting Social Relationships](#)

**Childhood neurodiversity:
supporting your child's education**

Watch here: [Childhood
Neurodiversity: Supporting Your
Child's Education](#)

LOCAL SUPPORT

- <http://www.suffolklocaloffer.org.uk/>
- [PACT | Parents And Carers Together | Suffolk](#)
- [Suffolk Parent Carer Forum](#)
- [SUFFOLK SENDIASS https://suffolksendiass.co.uk/](https://suffolksendiass.co.uk/)
- [Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)
- [Suffolk InfoLink | Beans at Access Community Trust](#)
- [Suffolk Family Carers | Support for unpaid family carers](#)
- [Families Together Suffolk | Local Family Charity | Formerly Homestart Mid And West Suffolk](#)

WHAT HELP IS OUT THERE?

- **School:** tutor, pastoral support, head of year, SENCO
- **Suffolk School Nursing** - [School Nursing Service - Suffolk County Council](#)
- **NSFT Wellbeing services:** you can self-refer to Wellbeing 16 years + www.wellbeingnands.co.uk
- **Emotional Wellbeing Hub:** Information, advice, and support for anyone concerned about the emotional wellbeing and mental health of a child or young person. <http://www.emotionalwellbeinggateway.org.uk/>
- **GP**

Recovery College



Recovery College

Open to all those interested in mental health recovery in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Recovery College provides free educational courses to equip you with the skills and strategies to move on with your recovery and/or to support others.

[Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)

Discovery college

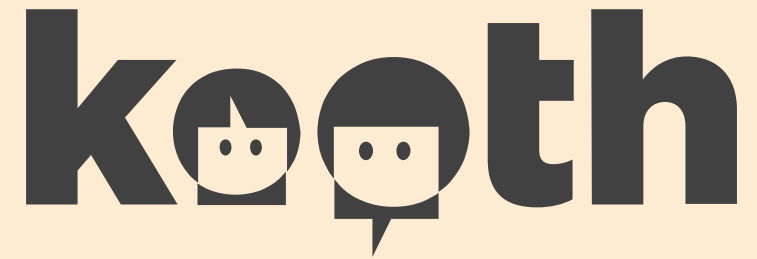
The Discovery College offers free educational online courses and webinars on mental health topics for 16 - 25 year olds. The courses and webinars are designed so that 16 - 25 year olds can become an expert in discovering themselves and their self care alongside others their age.

[Discovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)



- Kooth has qualified counsellors, youth workers and emotional wellbeing practitioners
- The service includes Chat, messenger, discussion board and magazine plus Kooth diary – where you can track your mood and spot what things help lift it; and a goal setting function.
- [Parent and Carer Brochure CO2.pdf \(frimley-healthiertogether.nhs.uk\)](https://www.frimley-healthiertogether.nhs.uk) – A helpful guide put together by Kooth on supporting parents/carers in talking to children about their feelings

you can email : parents@kooth.com



Kooth.com / app:
online confidential
counselling and
support for 11-25
year olds in Suffolk.

OTHER RESOURCES

Apps:

Silver cloud: course to manage anxiety and depression at your own pace

Catch it: manage negative thoughts and look at problems differently

Blue ice / Calm harm: manage emotions and reduce urge to self harm

Headspace: mindful meditation

Websites:

Youngminds.org.uk
Good resources. support for YP & Parentline. Guidance. 24 hr crisis support

Living life to the full littf.com
Free online courses on low mood, stress and resiliency

rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health : Information about mental health and treatment. Has a section on young peoples mental health

Moodgym moodgym.com.au
interactive self-help to learn skills to manage symptoms of depression and anxiety

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How would you rate your knowledge of anxiety in young people?

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How would you rate your confidence in supporting your young person to manage anxiety?

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I have found this session helpful

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What are two things you will take away from this session?

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**Name one thing that could be improved
about this workshop**

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

THANK YOU

If you would like to
share any feedback on
this workshop:

<https://forms.office.com/e/w5WV1g25tP>

Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Your Child With Anxiety Feedback Survey

