

# AUTISM, ANXIETY & 'CHALLENGING' BEHAVIOUR

RIVERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL  
JAN '23














The purpose of this session:



- Why autistic children's behaviour can sometimes be 'challenging'
- What you might try to make life easier
- Answer questions

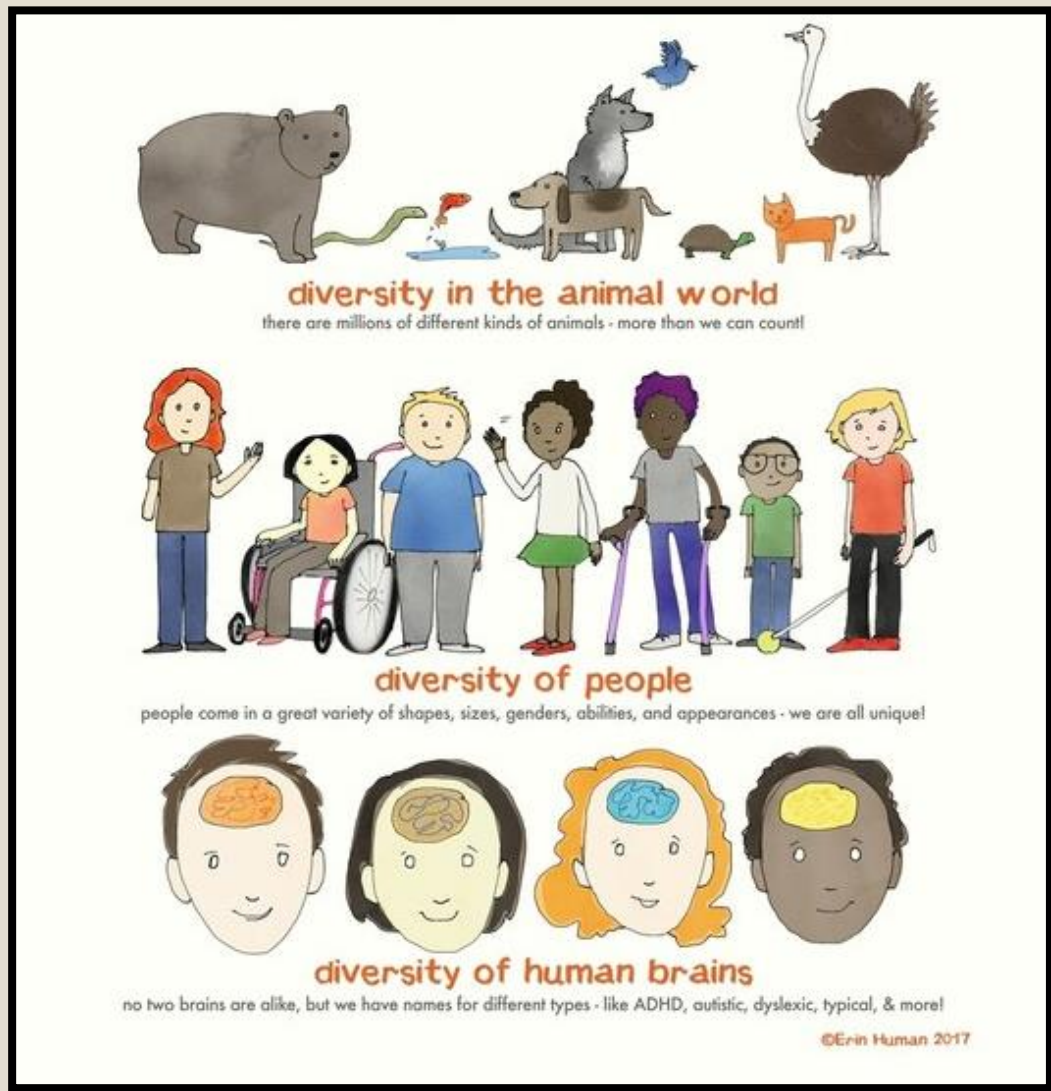
Autism Spectrum Disorder (Condition) is a lifelong developmental disability that affects how people perceive the world and interact with others (NAS)

 What is autism? 

<u>What it is</u> ✓	<u>What it isn't</u> ✗
 A neurodevelopmental difference (different brain wiring), a natural variation	 A learning disability
 Affects every aspect of a person's being: how they perceive, experience, interact with and interpret the world	 An illness or disease
 A minority neurology	 Bad behaviour/willful defiance
 Lifelong	 Bad parenting
	 Affects only children

... a different way of understanding the world

# Neurodiversity



Neurodiversity is ....

the idea that everyone's brains are different and that's okay, and that no one type of brain is better than another



**So many adults  
expect children, with  
their still developing  
brains, to know how  
to masterfully  
regulate their  
emotions, while so  
many grown-ups  
still don't know how  
to do this for  
themselves. It  
always starts with  
us.**

RAISING YOURSELF



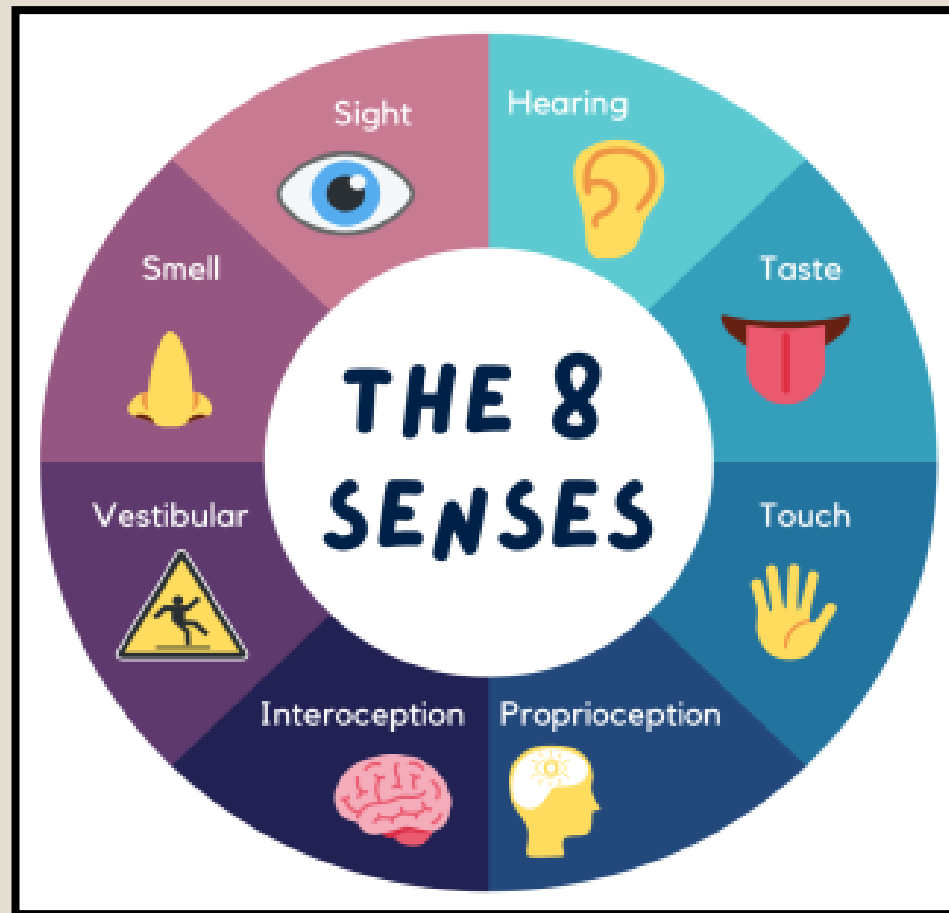
Follow The Contented Child  

## So much more going on for autistic kids ...

- Take things people say literally
- What's ok and not ok in different situations
- Time to process what people say
- Misunderstanding social situations
- Need to talk about things as soon as they come up – interrupting?
- Talk at length and in detail
- Different interests to peers
- Working out others' motives – friendly/teasing/bullying?
- Honest, open, matter-of-fact
- Lots of time on their own
- Hard to work out what others feel/think of them
- Difficulty understanding friendships and relationships
- Difficulty understanding social rules – the way others communicate and behave



- Find it hard to make choices
- Prefer routines – struggle to cope with changes
- Wary of new or unfamiliar situations – don't know what to do or how to ask for help
- Planning and organising can be difficult (poor executive function)
- Sensory differences







I don't like to brush my teeth

I can be sensitive to loud sounds

I don't like to brush, wash or cut my hair

I don't like bright lights

I like to smell people and objects sometimes

Some smells really bother me

I don't like tags on my clothes

I am a picky eater

I don't like to wear clothes

I can be clumsy and fall over things sometimes

I enjoy being squeezed, I like pressure

I have poor gross motor skills

I don't want my hands dirty

I have poor fine motor skills

Sometimes I don't like to be touched

I get overstimulated and meltdown

I like wearing the same clothes

I get fearful and anxious sometimes

I lose my balance

I overreact to minor scrapes and cuts

I crave fast spinning

I cling to adults I trust

Poor body awareness

I sometimes walk on my toes





## What is behaviour?

- Dictionary says 'the way in which a person acts or conducts themselves, especially towards others'
- A way of communicating – tells other people how we are feeling and what we need/want
- Sometimes ours more challenging!
- Likely to be more tolerant at some times than others
- Sometimes we can analyse and explain our behaviour, sometimes we can't
- We can all demonstrate challenging behaviour!
- **All** behaviour is communication.
- VERY common for (autistic) youngsters to communicate through behaviour

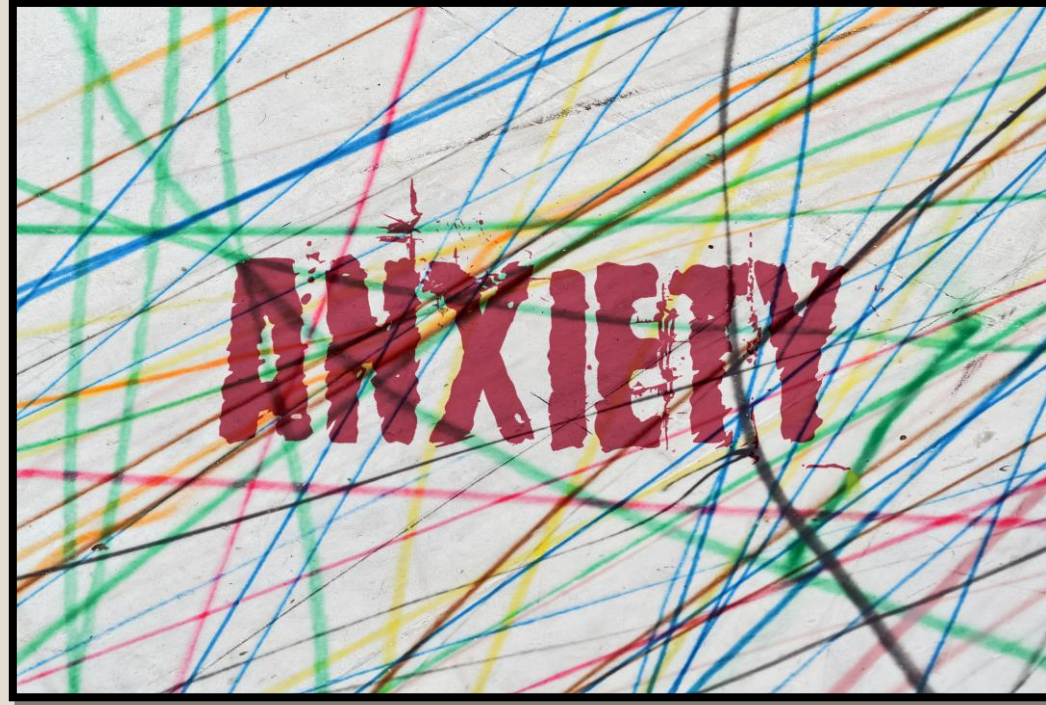


# What is ~~Challenging~~ Behaviour?

Behaviour that challenges us ✓



- Living with distressed behaviour is stressful and exhausting. It can be very challenging for US and the young person
- Even every day activities can become more complicated



42% of autistic children  
∨  
just 3% of children not autistic

# Anxiety presents itself in many different ways...

The desire to control people and events



Difficulty getting to sleep



Feeling agitated or angry



Defiance and other challenging behaviors



Having high expectations for self, including school work & sports



Avoiding activities or events (including school)

Pain like stomachaches and headaches



Struggling to pay attention and focus



Intolerance of uncertainty



Crying and difficulty managing emotions



Over-planning for situations and events



Feeling worried about situations or events

## How can you make life easier?



- No 'overnight fix'
- But ... with the right environment (people and places) and support things can change



# Help them understand (their) autism



Talking to children about Autism





# Think about your communication

Use their name first and try to remember ...

Anne,

I've been coming along to your parent sessions and wanted to share a success with you. I managed to get Emily to be changed and ready to leave after swimming within 7 minutes! Simply using say less and stress, and using her name before every instruction.

Thank you so much!! We usually end up in a terrible mood and take about 20 minutes.

**The Four "S"s**

Say Less and Stress

Go Slow and Show

**R Repeat often!**

The Hanen Program  
www.hanen.org



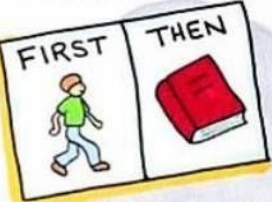

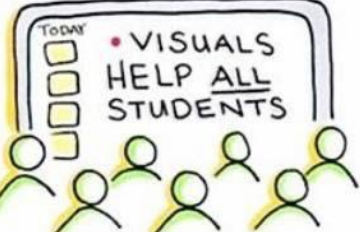



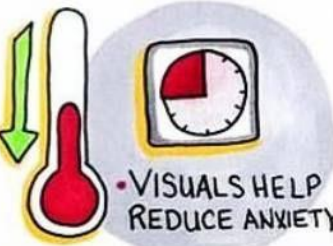
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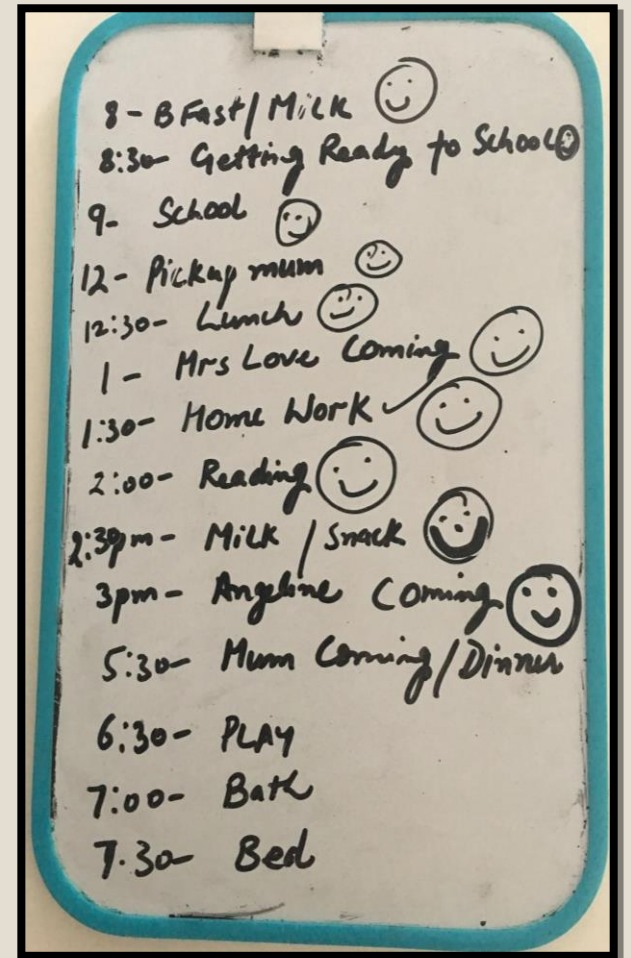
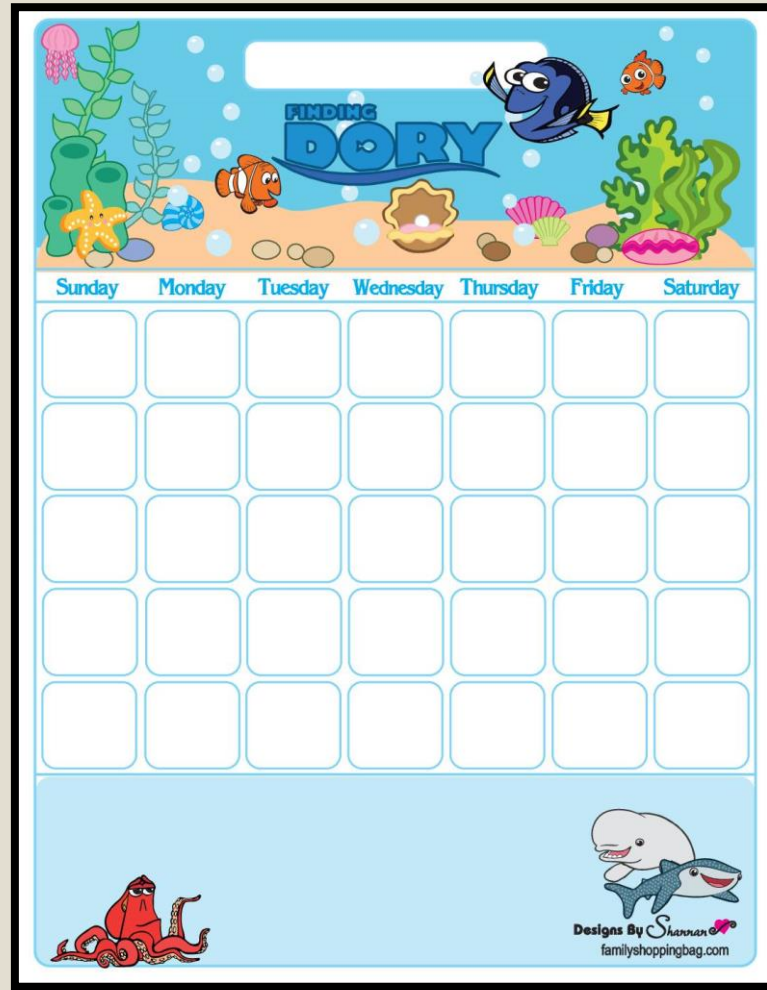
# Use visuals

## 9 REASONS TO USE VISUALS

www.northstarpaths.com @kwiens62

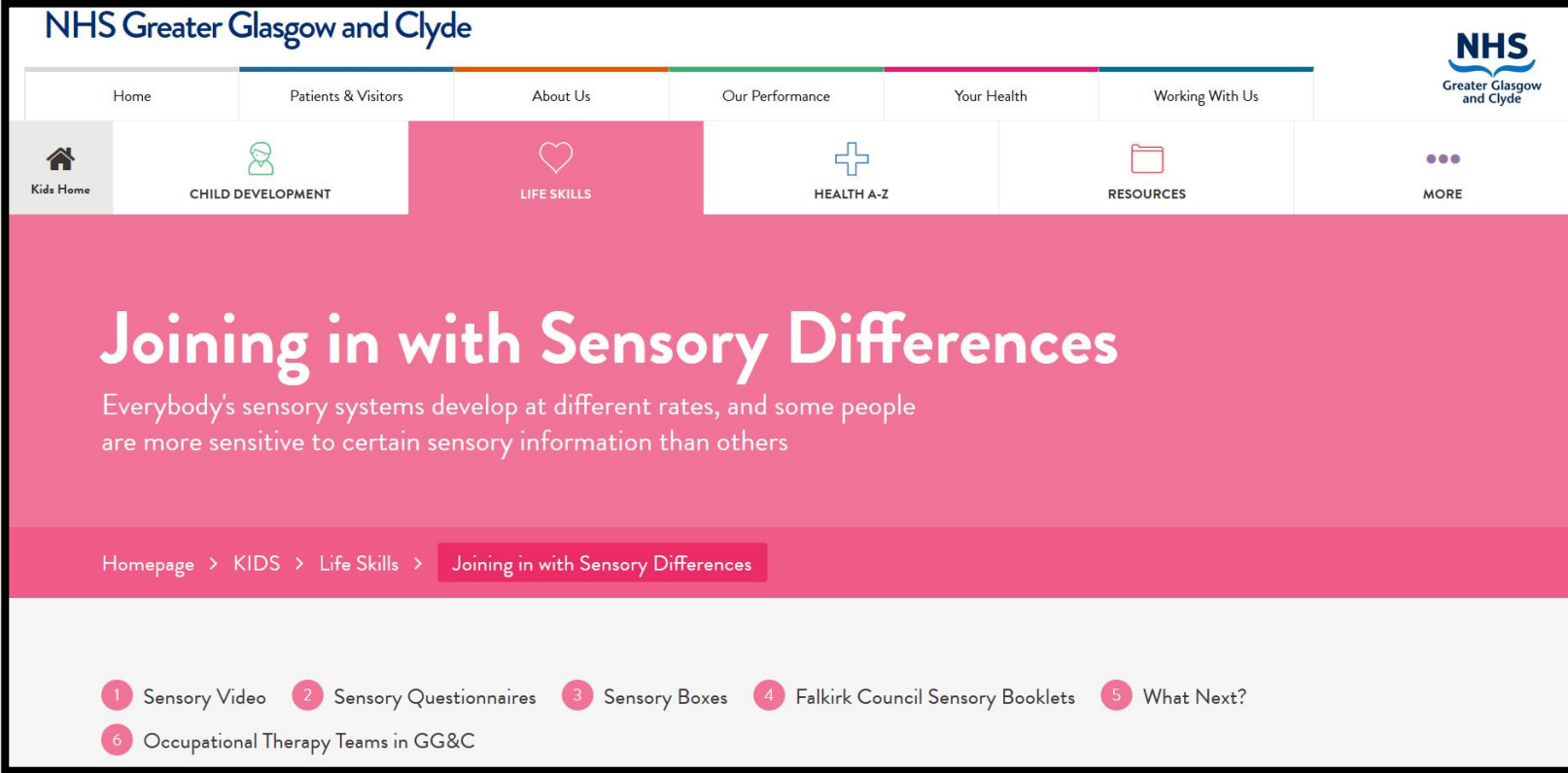
- VISUALS ARE PERMANENT (SPOKEN WORDS DISAPPEAR)  

- VISUALS ALLOW TIME FOR LANGUAGE PROCESSING  

- VISUALS PREPARE STUDENTS FOR TRANSITIONS  

- VISUALS HELP KIDS SEE WHAT YOU MEAN  

- VISUALS HELP ALL STUDENTS  

- VISUALS HELP BUILD INDEPENDENCE  

- VISUALS ARE TRANSFERABLE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS AND PEOPLE  

- VISUALS HAVE NO ATTITUDE  
• NO TONE  
• NO FRUSTRATION  
• NO DISAPPROVAL  

- VISUALS HELP REDUCE ANXIETY  


Provide structure and routine to reduce uncertainty. Explain, using visuals, uncertainty and change





# Understand (and help them understand) their sensory differences



The screenshot shows the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde website. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Patients & Visitors, About Us, Our Performance, Your Health, and Working With Us. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with icons and labels for Kids Home, CHILD DEVELOPMENT, LIFE SKILLS, HEALTH A-Z, RESOURCES, and MORE. The main content area has a pink background with the title 'Joining in with Sensory Differences' and a sub-headline: 'Everybody's sensory systems develop at different rates, and some people are more sensitive to certain sensory information than others'. A breadcrumb trail reads: 'Homepage > KIDS > Life Skills > Joining in with Sensory Differences'. At the bottom, there is a list of six items: 1 Sensory Video, 2 Sensory Questionnaires, 3 Sensory Boxes, 4 Falkirk Council Sensory Booklets, 5 What Next?, and 6 Occupational Therapy Teams in GG&C.

**NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde**

Home Patients & Visitors About Us Our Performance Your Health Working With Us

Kids Home CHILD DEVELOPMENT LIFE SKILLS HEALTH A-Z RESOURCES MORE

## Joining in with Sensory Differences

Everybody's sensory systems develop at different rates, and some people are more sensitive to certain sensory information than others

Homepage > KIDS > Life Skills > Joining in with Sensory Differences

- 1 Sensory Video
- 2 Sensory Questionnaires
- 3 Sensory Boxes
- 4 Falkirk Council Sensory Booklets
- 5 What Next?
- 6 Occupational Therapy Teams in GG&C

# Teach them about quiet spaces



## NAIT Safe Space at Home Guidance

### What is a Safe Space?

A Safe Space is a place in your home where your child can choose to go when they are beginning to feel overwhelmed or need time and space to regulate themselves.

Safe Spaces should be:

- Readily accessible to the child so that they can go safely and independently when they need to
- Available whenever they are needed by the child, for as long as they are needed
- Specific to them; not used by anyone else

When your child is in their Safe Space, everyone else in the house should try not to talk to them or to ask anything of them, but should give them time and space, unless they are unsafe. Ideally they should choose to come back out whenever they feel ready.

### What does a Safe Space look like?

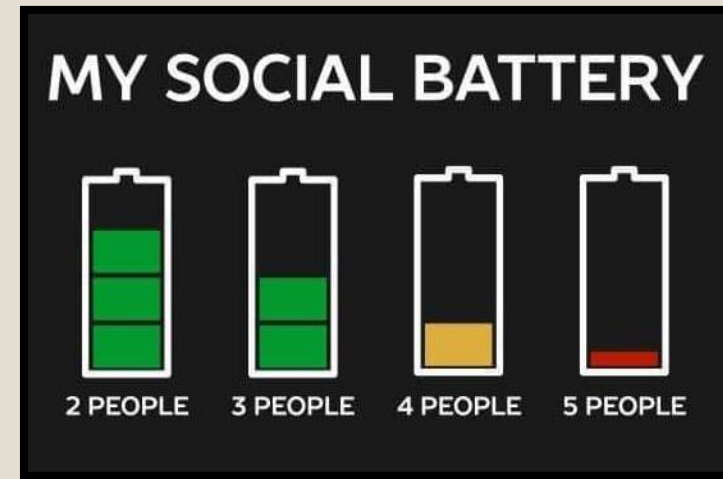
It could be:

- A pop up tent, if a child likes to feel enclosed
- A light cloth over a table
- A corner of the room with cushions or a bean bag
- A corner space between two chairs or sofas
- A quiet corner in an infrequently used room
- A high backed chair, perhaps facing away from the rest of the room
- space containing things you know will help the child to calm down – you might involve your child in planning this

Last week I attended a conference about autism spoken by Tony Attwood and learned so much. One thing that I thought was a revelation in teaching children (and adults!) self-regulation skills was the concept of a Energy Bank Account. The idea being; learning to be aware of where energy withdrawals and deposits come from. So today Sno and I sat down together and did her list of things that sap her energy and things that revitalise her. Then we gave them all a numerical value. Now, the gist is - when a withdrawal is made, or numerous withdrawals made - deposits HAVE to be made too to top up the bank account otherwise it runs into negative and then that's when meltdowns occur. Hopefully this will help Sno be more mindful of her triggers and the things she needs to take responsibility for when it comes to recovering and avoiding melt down. #autism #asd #girlscanbeautistictoo #autismspectrum #selfregulation #selfempowerment #tonyattwood #energybankaccount #selfcare

WITHDRAWAL	DEPOSIT
- not sleeping (80)	- walking (20)
- school (90)	- reading (40)
- crowds (70)	- painting (30)
- noise (80)	- origami (50)
- brightness (50)	- solitude <del>(50)</del> (80)
- shopping centres (50)	- catlin (60)
- swimming pools (60)	- cat cuddles (20)
- hot days (50)	- cross stitch (20)
- rushing (70)	- choren noise (50) (50)
- pain (90)	- time with mum
- change (90)	- rug rolling (10)
- screens (50)	- miss Dari (20)
- sport (70)	- accomplishing hard things (90)
- social events (80)	- Lego alone (50)
- busyness (60)	- noise-cancelling headphones (50)
- appointments (70)	- tactile play (50)

Teach them about their social energy





## Encourage physical activity

Get them moving!

- Endorphins – feel good chemicals
- Endorphins increase with activity -> more positive feelings
- Increase a little -> benefits. Walking to and from school, carrying washing basket, pushing shopping trolley, helping move snow ...
- Team games can be a challenge
- Doesn't have to be sports ...

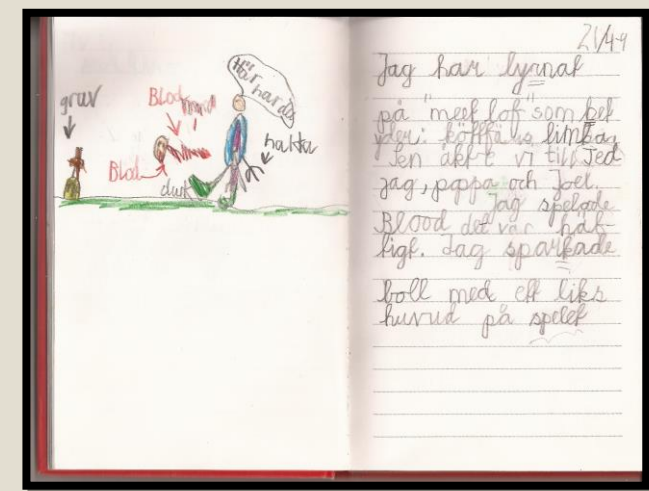
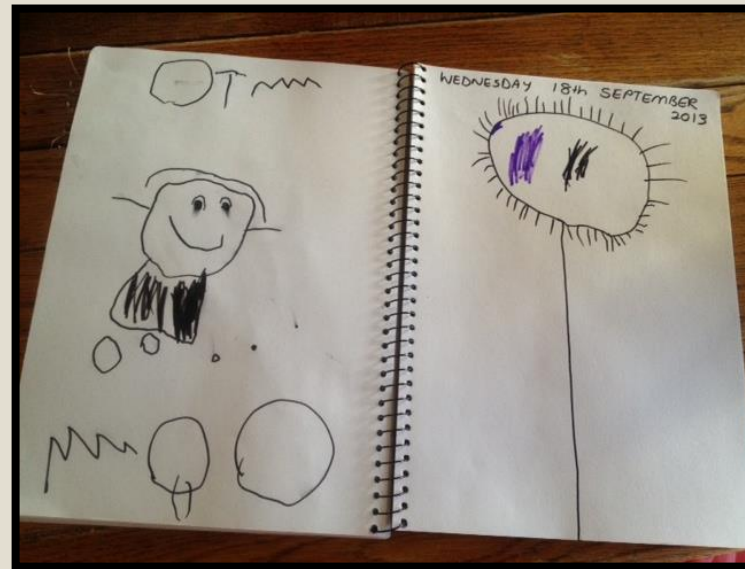
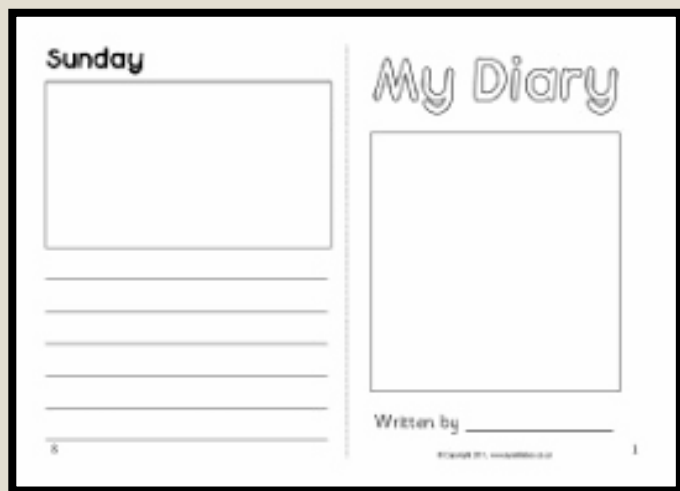
Everyday activities	Traditional sports
Gardening	Swimming
Walking the dog	Jogging
Playing on the Wii	Tennis
Washing the car	Trampolining
Hoovering	Athletics
Running errands	Team sports such as rugby, football and netball

## Special interests

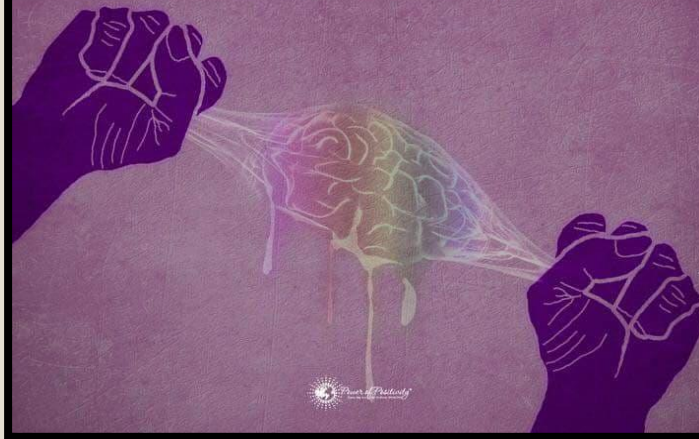
- as a 'thought blocker'
- distraction
- during quiet times
- energiser
- reduce anxiety
- BUT ... use in moderation
- how can they 'shine?'

## Teach them to/ help them keep a diary

- Research shows that uncertainty can be difficult for autistic people.
- Keeping a diary may help them understand their anxiety and manage it better.
- Writing about situations and how they make them feel helps identify the causes and symptoms of their anxiety.
- A daily routine can make the world a more predictable place and reduce anxiety.



Too much stress  
literally causes the  
human brain to shut  
down and freeze  
temporarily.




from sensory or  
social overload

We call this meltdown or  
shutdown

## Let's talk about meltdowns ...

### Tantrum v Meltdown

Spotting the differences



Tantrums		Meltdowns
✓	Is the child <b>watching</b> for your reaction?	✗
✓	Is the child <b>considering</b> their own safety?	✗
✓	Is the child in <b>control</b> of their own behaviour?	✗
✓	Is the child making an effort to <b>communicate</b> their needs?	✗
✓	Is the child able to <b>calm down</b> once the situation has been resolved?	✗

**tes**  
resources

When young person is in the middle of a 'meltdown' it means they are in the middle of overwhelming distress.

'Fight or flight' mechanism has kicked in. When this is triggered ... all our energies are focussed on muscular strength and the thinking part of the brain (make judgements, control impulse, listen to reason, respond to requests) temporarily shuts down.

In this heightened state a child is extremely frightened, very confused and unable to process thoughts or ideas clearly.



# How to deal with a Meltdown

## Dos!

- Stay calm
- make sure they are safe
- remove dangerous items
- Decrease stimulation
- Be understanding of their emotions
- Take them to a calm and quiet place
- Use some sensory objects for stress release

## Don'ts!

- Don't try to reason with them
- Don't make demands
- Don't judge them
- Don't try to discipline them
- Don't get nervous





WHEN LITTLE PEOPLE ARE  
OVERWHELMED BY BIG  
EMOTIONS, IT'S OUR JOB  
TO SHARE OUR CALM. NOT  
JOIN THEIR CHAOS.

~ L. R. KNOST

Finally ... always remember there are sooooo many strengths!

