

Norfolk Waveney ASD/ADHD Support Service January 2022

Dear Families.....For many of you the best thing about the Christmas holidays was not having to deal with the daily grind of getting children and young people out the door to school in the mornings. They may struggle to get to sleep at a decent time and so struggle to get up. They may argue about what to wear or brushing their teeth because of sensory sensitivities. And for many, especially adolescents and teens, anxiety about the day ahead can be crippling.....

It is in no way inevitable that a young person with a neurodevelopmental condition will develop low mood or anxiety but we do know that it is a common co-morbidity. And there can be a vicious cycle of neuro-diverse traits leading to anxiety, leading to heightened neuro-diverse traits such as increasing repetitive behaviours and social withdrawal.

Central to understanding and helping is the idea of '**intolerance to uncertainty**'

This is why your young people often dislike plans changing, supply teachers, people 'dropping in unexpectedly, road closures, new foods appearing unexpectedly at dinner times or global pandemics changing everything. An inability to think flexibly leads to uncertainty, lack of control and ultimately stress and anxiety.



But there is more to it. For young people with ASD for example, there may be a real difficulty working out what is in another person's mind. Add to this difficulty in reading facial expressions and body language and you can understand why this also leads to uncertainty about other people's intentions. If someone was rushing across a playground with their eyes on you, you would almost subconsciously be reading the signs that tell you whether they want to hug you or punch you. So not being able to read those signs can lead to uncertainty, fear, anxiety and even paranoia. It can also make it difficult to distinguish between the deliberate and accidental actions of others. Did they bump into me deliberately, did they mean to hurt me, are they not actually my friends? And in social situations literal thinking can lead to more uncertainty about whether others are laughing with you or at you.

For those with sensory sensitivities, who cannot control when they may encounter loud noises or too many people or strong smells, the uncertainty about when your senses may suffer some kind of assault can make you anxious and fearful about leaving your safe environment.

Young people with ADHD often live daily with anxiety about their difficulties with concentrating on school work, organising themselves, planning study time for exams and meeting deadlines.

Teenage years are difficult for almost everyone as they worry about exams, body image, friendships and the future in general. For teens with additional needs it can also coincide with a greater awareness of their own differences and that they are approaching a time of change and, yes you've got it, **uncertainty**.

You are almost certainly already trying to stick to routines, avoiding unnecessary change and being as consistent as you can be. Review what you are doing and think about how you can help to reduce uncertainty. Planning, preparing, repeating, timetabling will all help. Think about your own responses. Are they as consistent as they could be? We are all guilty of accepting a behaviour one day and hitting the roof about it the next, creating uncertainty. Knowing what a large role uncertainty plays in anxiety can help you to improve the environment around your young person.

Give them tools and strategies to use at those uncertain times, including the use of technology for planning and keeping notes to guide them, discuss social situations and talking about what they *could* have said or done and there is more about social stories and comic strip conversations below.

Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations

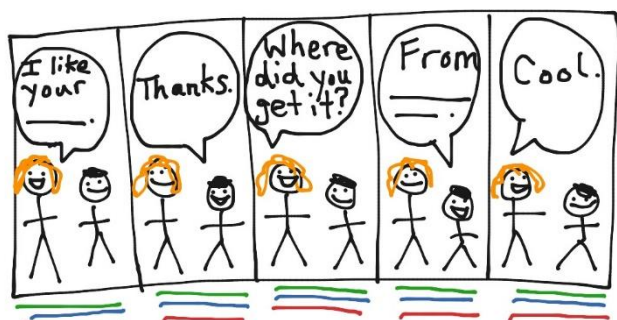
Social stories and comic strip conversations explain social situations to a person with autism. Social stories help a person to understand what might happen in a particular situation by clearly describing details, events and actions within the setting using supportive and descriptive language. Comic strip conversations are a visual way of describing a conversation using simple stick figures. Carol Gray, the Australian speech and language therapist who created social stories and comic strip conversations, has developed clear guidelines, processes and criteria to help people to produce effective social stories and comic strip conversations.

Social stories can be used to teach self-care activities, such as brushing teeth and getting dressed. They can help to reduce anxiety about a change in routine or a distressing event, such as moving house. They help to provide structure about a future event by describing what might happen and

how to respond. They can improve a person's self-esteem by providing positive feedback about an achievement. They help a person explore appropriate behaviour and responses in a situation.

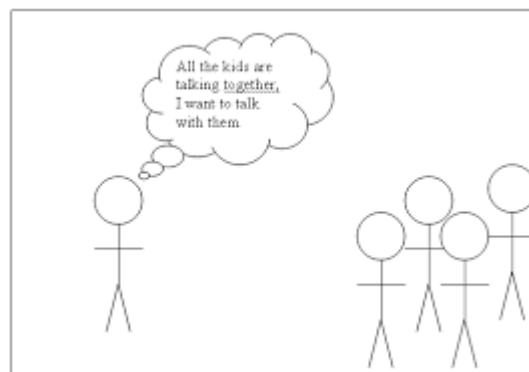
Comic strip conversations are simple visual representations of a conversation. They show what is being said in a conversation, how people might be feeling and what their intentions may be. For example, a comic strip conversation may represent two or more people in a conversation as stick figures. Feelings and emotions can be shown through expressions drawn on the stick figures' faces.

The Compliment Conversation



Direct speech can be shown in speech bubbles. Thoughts and feelings can be shown in thought bubbles floating over the characters' heads.

Comic strip conversations help a person with autism communicate their feelings and perceptions of a situation. They can be used to understand where things might have gone wrong in a social situation, resulting in conflict or distress. They allow reflection about a situation in a non-threatening way by drawing the situation rather than being asked lots of questions about it. They slow the conversation down, allowing time for the person to process and think about the interactions in the situation. They can help a person to understand another point of view in a situation.



For more information on developing a social story or a comic strip conversation, please see:
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com>

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>

<http://www.smcacademy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/comicstrip-conversations-booklet.pdf>

Come along to one of our activities or events for parents/carers.

Family Action are working with Norfolk Community Health and Care to run the **Puffins ASD Programme for Parents/Carers of children or young people with a diagnosis of ASD**,

This is a free, comprehensive, four week course with sessions led by Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy professionals from within the Neurodevelopmental Service and by the ASD Specialist Educational Team. Please contact us to book your place on 01760 720302 or Swaffham@family-action.org.uk.

February 2022 – Thursday 3rd, 10th Feb, 1/2 term break, Mondays 21st, 28th February, 9:30am to 12:30pm. Gaywood Church Rooms, Gayton Rd, **King's Lynn**, PE30 4DZ

March 2022 – Thursdays 3 March, 10 March, 17 March and 24 March, 9:30am to 12:30pm at N. Walsham Community Centre, New Rd, **North Walsham**, NR28 9DE

Do you live in the West of the county? Why not come along and have a cuppa and a chat in the quiet upstairs room in Costa Coffee, Market Pl. Swaffham, PE37 7AB at our very friendly and informal Drop-In Support Sessions

WEDNESDAY 12th January

Wednesday 9th February

Wednesday 9th March



Drop in anytime between 9:30 and 11am. No need to book. At least one of our team will always be there to welcome you and answer any questions. Come and meet other parents coping with their child's ASD or ADHD and so really 'get it'. For more information ring family action on 01760 725801 and ask for Susan, Mary or Toby.

Or book your place on our free, friendly, courses for parents/carers which do not require your child to have a diagnosis. Running in West and Central Norfolk in January and February 2022.



Plan Bee – Understanding & Supporting your Child or Young Person with Additional Needs.



Plan Bee in King's Lynn – Mondays 10th, 17th and 24th January 2022.

9:30-11:30am at Gaywood Church Rooms, Gayton Road, King's Lynn, PE30 4DZ

Plan Bee in Norwich – Wednesdays 26 Jan, 2nd and 9th February, 10am to 12pm, Owen Barnes Room, Breckland Road, New Costessey, Norwich, NR5 0RW



And what's happening in the East of the county?

Our friendly and informal Drop in Groups are back!



Lowestoft – this group starts on Wednesday 26th January and will run fortnightly, 10 to 11am, term time only, at St Mark's Church, Bridge Rd, Oulton Broad, NR33 9JX

Gorleston – Starts on Wednesday 19th January and runs fortnightly, 10 to 11am, term time only, at Gorleston Library, High Street, Gorleston.

Keep your eye on our newsletter and Facebook group for news of a course running in Great Yarmouth in March 2022.

Plan Bee – Understanding and Supporting Your Child or Young Person with Additional Needs.



To contact us for advice and support, or to book a place on one of our courses or information sessions, please use the details below.

Phone Swaffham 01760 725801/720302 or Email Swaffham@family-action.org.uk

Phone Gorleston 01493 650220 or Email Gorleston@family-action.org.uk

For North and South Norfolk and Norwich please ring the Swaffham number above or Email Central@family-action.org.uk

Unsure which area to contact? Use any of the above - **We are all here to help you.**