



I'M A PARENT, GET ME OUT OF HERE!

THE HALF TERMLY NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

UNLOCKING uncertainty

Rob Emery - Autism Advisory Teacher

As we begin to unlock society and reopen shops, attractions and public places we enter a new phase of this pandemic with more uncertainties. Uncertainty is a source of anxiety for most people, but for people with a diagnosis of Autism these feelings of anxiety can be extremely problematic. Here we look at some of the feelings and behaviours associated with anxiety and some strategies for managing them.

For the past year, we have become used to the predictability and routines of our small 'bubbles'. As the world 'unlocks' and our freedoms increase, we once again face more uncertainties and less predictability. This uncertainty can fuel feelings of anxiety which can present itself in a number of ways.

Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours

Your child/young person may want to avoid the uncertainty. They might make excuses as to why they can't go somewhere or do something. They may ask a lot of questions about where they are going and what it will be like to try create a sense of certainty and predictability. You may notice that your child/young person reverts to comforting behaviours that they haven't done for a while such as flapping or rocking. These are all signs of an underlying anxiety that is having an impact on your child/young person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours.



Life is full of uncertainties, and we all face situations in which we are anxious. As a result, we build a resilience. We learn that we can deal with the feeling and the situation. Constant avoidance of uncomfortable situations only perpetuates a negative spiral of anxiety.

Short-Term Relief

- Looking at pictures of where you are going beforehand.
- Making a list of what you will do.
- Listing what can be controlled and what cannot be controlled.

These strategies may provide some short-term support; however, this could also cause increase anxiety as your child/young person ruminates on the information. It can also cause issues when something unforeseen inevitably happens that your child/young person was not prepared for.

Effective Long-Term Strategies

Effective long-term strategies involve a 'graduated exposure' to the feelings associated with uncertainty. This is something that we can support our children and young people with. You can start by introducing a planned small 'surprise' that is manageable for your child/young person. For example, if as part of their regular routine you always walk to the park the same way, you could introduce a small 'surprise' by explaining that you will walk a different way so that you can post something in the post box, but we will still end up at the park. You can plan 'surprises' into your routine regularly and build them up into bigger changes. This gradually exposes your child/young person to uncertainties, and they learn the resilience needed to cope with the associated feelings.

Young people might find a mindfulness approach helpful. Remember: **APPLE**.

A – Acknowledge the feeling.

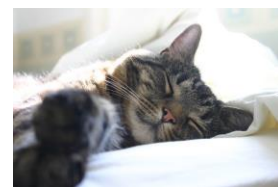
P – Pause, don't react, just breathe.

P – Pull back. Tell yourself that this is just worry. It is just a feeling. We can't be certain about everything in life. This apparent need for certainty is not helpful.

L – Let go of the feeling/thought of needing certainty. You don't need to respond to it. Imagine it floating away.

E – Explore the present moment. In this moment all is well. Notice your breathing and focus on your senses. Now shift your attention to your task.

A good night's sleep



Megan Williams—Autism Advisory Teacher

We all know that poor sleep can have a profound impact on our behaviour and thoughts and many children and young people on the autism spectrum struggle with getting to sleep and waking regularly throughout the night.

General recommendations of daily physical exercise in daylight and experiencing nature, avoiding rich food before bedtime, undisturbed bed space in a dark room in a cool temperature, having a warm bath or shower and switching off mobile devices are all things that should help but in addition these suggestions may also be worth a try:

For younger children:

- Use a social story TM (devised by Carol Gray) to help your child understand why we need sleep and what to do if you wake during the night.
- Listen to an audio book to help them drift off to sleep
- Use a visual timetable to support the bedtime routine
- Encourage your child to think of "happy thoughts" - a favourite pet/person/activity
- Remove labels from bedding and night clothes
- Keep a sleep diary to see if any patterns appear, [Click here](#). This can help you identify areas of inconsistency and areas to praise. You might even notice your child is getting more sleep than you thought!

Research that specifically asked **teenagers** what helped their sleeping patterns found:

- spending time on focussed interests before bedtime can help distract them from stresses of the outside world (and this may mean they find screen time helpful)
- Opportunities to exercise in their own time on activities they choose
- Having "feel good factors" during the day: choice on how to spend their time which helped achieve positive feelings
- A personalised sleep routine that achieved the right sensory stimulus for them such as wearing a specific set of clothes
- Also consider using a worry book to note down any night time worries that can then be discussed at an agreed time during the day

Parent Notice Board

In this section we want to share relevant news and information that you might find useful. If you have any news to share please contact us.

SENandInclusion@Peterborough.gov.uk

Pinpoint Cambs (for parents by parents)

are running free courses and support groups. Advice on topics such as relaxation techniques for children, explaining autism to siblings and how to get financial help. [Pinpoint Cambs Website](#)

Autism Show Webinar Week (14th -21st June) includes experts speaking on sleep and autism and ADHD (There is a charge for this).

The Big Ask is the largest survey ever by the government to find out what children and young people's hopes are for the future and things that are holding them back. Parents can also give their thoughts: thebigask.uk

Check out our other newsletters:

Cosy Crew – A newsletter for Primary Aged Children with Autism.

The Lift Up – A newsletter for teenagers and young people with Autism.

Available from our [Local Offer Page](#) half termly.

BOREDOM BASHERS

ACTIVITY:

Burghley Game & Country Fair is on for 3 days of the Bank Holiday with dog displays, fishing demonstrations, a craft village and cookery demonstrations.



RESOURCE:

Try some gardening upcycling using old mugs, bricks and even trainers as "pots". Cactus compost is the best compost to use to create miniature rockery gardens.



SOMETHING FOR ME:

The Healthy You service in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough offers help with health, fitness and wellbeing. <https://healthyyou.org.uk/> or telephone 0333 005 0093

