

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM GROUP DELIVERY MANUAL

Developed by the Waltham Forest Mental Health
Support Team



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Introduction

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition. Around 1/100 people are autistic (Zeidan et al., 2022). Autistic people have many strengths (Happé, 2017), but also face many challenges in their daily lives (e.g. Adams et al., 2019, Menzinger & Jackson 2009; Wood & Happé 2020;), including stigmatization from other children and professionals (Aubé et al., 2021; Libster et al., 2022; Mantzikos et al., 2017). Research shows that post diagnostic support can be beneficial for neurodivergent children (e.g., Gordon et al., 2015) and their families (Crane et al., 2015).

The following manual details a six-session group to support children and young people who have recently received an autism diagnosis. Instructions are provided on how to run each session, with slide-by-slide guidance and the materials needed for each session. This work is extremely important and can make a big difference to young autistic people's lives.

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Overview

Materials required for every session-

- Mini whiteboards (1 each)
- Flipboard/interactive whiteboard
- Goal Based Outcomes (Appendix 1)
 - Optional
- Traffic light check-in (1, A3) (Appendix 2)
 - Optional (For primary school groups, print and use for each session for YP to put their name on)

Goals of the group-

- I have a good understanding of Autism and what being Autistic means to me.
- I know helpful coping strategies to use when I feel upset/ worried.
- Personal goal

It is optional if

Every session will begin with the following format.

1. Hello
Introduction to those who will be leading the session
2. Group Rules
It is important to go over these rules and check everyone agrees
3. How are you doing today?
Check-in on how the YP are doing today, are they red, amber or green
Note. This may not be appropriate for older age groups, please
4. What the group will cover
5. Today's Agenda

*****Note to practitioner***** Some parts of the group will have activities; it is not compulsory for YP to take part in all these. Should a YP not want to participate, please allow them to do so.

If you are delivering the group, you must follow your school and local safeguarding procedures.

This will be unique for each educational establishment - please liaise with the head teacher or safeguarding team within your school for further information.

Abbreviations

YP- Young Person

ASC - Autism Spectrum Condition

Session 1: What is Autism?

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Setting goals
- Getting to know each other
- What is Autism?
- Neurodivergent conditions
- Autistic strengths
- My Autism spectrum
- Gender differences and Autistic girls
- Famous Autistic people
- End of session

Handouts:

- Post it notes (multiple)
- My Autism Spectrum Handout (1 each) (Appendix 3)

Session content-

Start of session:

Begin the session by introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: Goals

- This is an optional slide, should you wish to record outcomes
- Think about what the YP may want to get out of the group
- Goals can be rated by the YP out of 10. With a 10 being the highest/most confident and 0 being the lowest/not confident

Slide 2: Getting to know each other – Identity

- This is a way to get to know each other and maybe share some facts about each other and highlighting importance of identity
- Explain how everyone has an identity
- Identity is who a person is, especially as defined by one's name, gender, interests.

Activity:

Give YP post it notes. Each YP can write something about themselves that they would like to share.

This can be about autism, something they like, their culture, school etc

Slide 3: What is Autism?

- Facilitate group discussion

Slide 4: What is Autism?

- Play video

Slide 5: What is Autism?

- Read content from slide

Slide 6: Neurodivergent Conditions

- Autism is under the umbrella of neurodivergence
- Some autistic people may also have other forms of neurodivergence
- For example, dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD, Tourette's syndrome, Dyspraxia, ASC, Acquired Neurodiversity

Slide 7: Autistic Strengths

- Show slide

Slide 8: What are your strengths?

Activity:

YP use their mini whiteboards to write down their strengths, this can be more than one!

- Have YP share strengths if happy to do so

Slide 9: Spectrum Wheel Image

- Explain that Autism has many different traits or ways the brain processes information

Slide 10: My Autism Spectrum

Activity:

Give out the My Autism Spectrum handout. Putting a cross closer to the centre of the wheel indicates that the YP may find it difficult/bad/dislike. Putting a cross closer to the edge indicates that the YP may find it easy/like/be good at.

Highlight to the YP that this will change over time and to do it for how you feel right now.

Slide 11: * For secondary school only* Gender Differences

- Explain that we know that not all autistic people identify as either male or female
- Read quote from Madge Woollard
- Facilitate group discussion

Slide 12: Autistic girls

- Read content from slide

Slide 13: You are not alone

- Read content from slide

Slide 14-15: Pictures

- Famous/celebrities/successful autistic people
- Ask YP if they know any of the people on screen or if they know anyone else

List of people included on slide:

- Chris Packham (CBE): Wildlife and TV presenter (Springwatch)
- John “Doomsday” Howard: MMA fighter, professional competitor since 2004
- Fern Brady: Scottish comedian and podcaster (Edinburgh fringe festival)
- Stephen Wiltshire (MBE): Artist known for ability to draw a landscape from memory after only seeing it once. Work displayed in Royal Opera Arcade.
- Tylan Grant: Transgender actor known for CBBC sitcom “so awkward”.
- Niall Aslan: Love Island contestant and Mental Health advocate.
- Greta Thunberg: Swedish environmental activist, nominated several times for a Nobel peace prize.
- Plumbella (Jesse McNamara): Sims Youtuber 700k subscribers.
- Jessica-Jane Applegate (MBE): British Paralympian and gold medallist in the 2012 Paralympics for the 200 meters freestyle swim.
- Dr. Camilla Pang: Computational Biologist and Author of book “Explaining Humans.”
- Anne Hegerty: Professional quizzer on the Chase also competed on I’m a Celebrity.
- Dr. Temple Grandin: American animal behaviourist and autism spokesperson. Included in the national women's hall of fame in 2017. Was the subject of a biographical drama Temple Grandin.

Slides end: How was today? Next week

- Ask YP how they found the session

Session 2: What is masking & stimming? Grounding strategies

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Recap of last session
- Talking about masking
- Talking about stimming
- Exploring grounding:
- What is grounding
- Strategies which may help you

Handouts:

- Handouts: 'Masking' and 'Stimming' (Appendix 4)
- Creating a calm down kit (Appendix 5)

Optional:

- You can create a sensory bag for each young person – this may include a textured toy, a fidget toy, something sour (I.e., a sour sweet), aromatherapy oils, scratch and sniff stickers and a bubble wand etc. You can use this when practicing grounding techniques later in session.

Session content

Start of session:

Begin the session by re-introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: What can you remember from last week?

- Start by inviting YP to share what they remember from last week. Validate all responses and normalise that it is okay not to remember everything. We will be covering a lot of content over the next 6 weeks.
- Using images as prompts for the week before briefly overview; what autism is, some of the challenges and strengths shared and the concept of autism being a spectrum.

Slide 2: Our experience

- Read content from slide
- Share that from our experience (professionals) autistic people often find the following challenging
- Invite YP to share if any of the above sounds familiar. If so, what is familiar to them?

Slide 3: Masking

- Read content from slide
- Explain that in situations which might be challenging people can engage in 'Masking'
- Define Masking - Masking' or 'camouflaging' are metaphors to describe how an autistic person may learn, practice, and perform certain behaviours and suppress others to be more like the people around them
- Examples of masking are:
 - Mirroring others' facial expressions or social behaviours
 - Rehearsing or preparing scripted responses to comments
 - Imitating gestures such as handshakes or initiating eye contact
 - Camouflaging sensitivities to sound and other sensory sensitivities
- Masking can be conscious or subconscious. It might be more difficult to mask in unfamiliar or anxiety-provoking environments

Slide 4: Masking

- Read content from slide
- Facilitate group discussion about masking and YP experience
- Explain that we will look at some strategies in later sessions that may help with the emotional strain of masking.

Slide 5: Stimming

- Read content from slide
- Define stimming - Stimming or self-stimulating behaviours includes arm or hand-flapping, finger-flicking etc. It can also include the repetitive use of an object.
- Explain that stimming can vary from person to person and the reasons as to why some people may stim may differ. However, common reasons for stimming include:
 - Enjoyment
 - To gain sensory input
 - To reduce sensory input
 - To deal with stress and anxiety
- Play video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fexHcGqKIUQ>

Slide 6: What Stimming Behaviours do you engage in?

- Facilitate group discussion around stimming behaviours YP engage in
- Normalise all behaviours shared. Highlight that this is going to differ from person to person.

Provide YP with summary handouts on masking & stimming so they can reflect independently on how masking and stimming relates to them (Appendix 4).

Slide 7: Grounding

- Read content from slide

Note: grounding is not an alternative to stimming, it is an additional method of self-soothing. Grounding can be a great addition to any YP's toolbox to help manage during challenging situations or when emotions feel too big.

- Explain that there are three types / ways of grounding. You may find that one of these types works better for you, or that each is helpful:
 1. Mental (focusing your mind)
 2. Physical (focusing your senses)
 3. Soothing (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

Explain that for the rest of our group today we are going to be focusing on identifying strategies we can use to help manage during times of distress, when our emotions feel too big. And to help label and identify sensory soothing behaviours.

Slide 8: Mental grounding tools

- Explain that we can use mental grounding tools to refocus our mind. These can be helpful when in sensory stimulating or overwhelming situations.
- Mental exercises can take your mind off upsetting thoughts – the aim is to do these until your body and mind have calmed down. This will look and feel different for everyone.
- Try out one or two of the exercises with YP (how to complete the exercises is detailed on slide)

Slide 9: Physical grounding tools

- Physical grounding tools can help to reorient yourself to reality. They help to relax the body and mind and can help bring about feelings of calm and collectedness.
- Show video of box breathing – alternatively practice the 5-senses grounding or infinity breathing.
- Try out with YP

Slide 10: Soothing grounding tools

- Explain that each YP may like/dislike certain tools but can use the 5 senses to discover new grounding techniques.
- Sometimes we may find a certain smell, sound, texture, taste or sight of something soothing. Having access to items which stimulate these senses, and this experience can be helpful.
- Are there any items similar or different to those displayed on the slide which you find soothing or calming? Do any of these senses trigger different emotions for you? It can be helpful to consider senses we may wish to introduce more of and senses to avoid.

Slide 11: Making your own grounding toolbox

Activity:

Ask each YP to think about what stimming behaviours and self-soothing sense help them. What could they add to their own grounding toolbox (see worksheet).

Consider items which may be helpful to carry around or have access to in different environments.

Slide 12: Recap

- Ask YP what they have learned today

Slides end: How was today? Next week

- Ask YP how they found the session

Session 3: Making friends & conversations

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Making friends
- Bullying
- Specialised interests
- Topics of conversation
- Creating a backup team
- End of session

Handouts:

- Family, occupation, recreation, future (1 each) (Appendix 6)
- Back up team (1 each) (Appendix 7)

Session content-

Start of session:

Begin the session by re-introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: What are your experiences of making friends?

- Facilitate group discussion of experiences of making friends
- If those attending the group struggle to provide answers you can ask if these experiences are positive or negative? Do the young people have lots of friends or few friends?

Slide 2: Making friends

- Read content from slide
- This slide details some things that can be helpful for making friends, share this information with the group, ask the group if they have any other ways of making friends? Or things that import when making friends.

Slide 3: Conversation Topics:

- Read content from slide

- Conversation can be a helpful way to generate friends, some autistic people find conversations difficult

Activity:

Get each YP to pick a topic on the slide they are interested in, then ask if they feel comfortable to get into pairs (if not assign pairs) to practice discussing the conversation topics listed in the slide.

Slide 4: Bullying

- Show slide

Slide 5: What is bullying?

- Read content from slide

*Autistic people are more likely to experience bullying from their neurotypical peers it may be that YP in the group disclose bullying at this point, please follow the appropriate procedures within the school if a disclosure is made.

Slide 6: Bullying

- Read content from slide
- Bullying is not acceptable and that it is not the YP fault

Slide 7: What to do if you are being bullied

- Read content from slide
- Ask the young people what they think they should do if they or someone they know is being bullied?

Slide 8: Areas of interest

- Read content from slide
- Many autistic people have particular areas of interest, but not all do. Please be mindful of this

Activity:

Ask the YP on their white boards to write down one thing they are really interested in, if any of the YP feel comfortable they can share this with the group.

Slide 9: Back up Team

- Read content from slide

- Describe what the back-up team is and the different types of support members of the back-up team can provide.

Slide 10: Back up Team x2

- Show the slide
- An example back up team, with support at home, in school and from other places. Other places includes out of school clubs, activities, social workers, psychologists/mental health professionals, or any other sources of support the young people think off. Emergency help lines can also be put in the other box e.g. Samaritans. Additional support and signposting can be found at the end of this manual.

Slide 11 Who is in your back up team?

Activity:

Get the young people to write down the names of the people in their back up team in different locations (home, school, other) and the type of support they can provide E.g. Emotional or practical support.

Slides end: How was today? Next week

- Ask YP how they found the session

Session 4: Understanding emotions

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Understanding our emotions
- Why do we have emotions?
- Emotion wheel
- Zones of regulation
- Difficult feelings
- Anxiety, why we feel it and how it feels
- End of session

Handouts:

- Emotion wheel (1 each) (Appendix 8)
- 1 piece of red, blue, yellow and green paper
- A3 body cut out (1 sheet) (Appendix 9)

Session content-

Start of session:

Begin the session by re-introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: Understanding our emotions

- Read content from slide
- Explain that the way in which world has been set up can make it a difficult environment for autistic people and this can bring up feelings of anxiety, stress or low mood.

Slide 2: Why do we have emotions?

- Read content from slide
- Explain that emotions are there to get us to act and do things. For example, fear causes us to fight, flight or freeze, which are all important for survival.

Slide 3: Emotion wheel

- Facilitate group discussion on range of emotions

- There are a wide range of emotions, normalise that is ok to feel all these

Slide 4: Zones of regulation

- It can be helpful to group emotions into 'zones'. Your body will feel different in each zone. Explain which emotions would go into each zone.
- Facilitate group discussion: What are the face and body clues for each zone? E.g

Blue: No energy, still facial expression, moving slowly, starring.

Green: Lots of energy, smiling, laughing.

Yellow: Irritable, quick movements, difficulty sitting, unable to concentrate, eyes looking around, tapping legs.

Red: Uncontrolled energy, tense, lots of movement, loud.

Slide 5: Zones of regulation activity

- Explain that all the zone colours are ok, there are no good or bad emotions. There are times when you will be in different zones. Think about times that you expect you would be in the Blue, Green, Yellow or Red Zone.

Activity:

Add a coloured piece of paper to each 4 walls of the room for each of the zones. Facilitator reads out scenarios and group members choose where to stand in the room to show which zone they think they would be in during this scenario.

What zone are you in now?

1. You are watching your favourite TV programme.
2. You are in a lesson you find boring.
3. You are waiting to go into an important exam.
4. Someone pushed you in the corridor.
5. You just won an award for something you worked hard on.
6. You are in a crowded shopping centre.
7. You are playing with a pet.
8. Someone just broke something that belongs to you.
9. You are really hungry.
10. You got a test result back and you are disappointed with the result.

Slide 6: Difficult feelings - Group discussion

- Facilitate group discussion
- What feelings have the YP found difficult to manage? In what scenarios have they experienced these feelings?

Slide 7: How does anxiety feel

- Experiencing anxiety can feel scary and unpleasant, you might recognise some of these physical sensations when you are anxious.

Activity:

Group anxiety body map exercise. A3 body map, YP all add pictures of words around it to show sensations of anxiety they have felt.

Slide 8: Why we feel anxiety

- Play video
- Facilitate group discussion on thoughts from video

Slide 9: End of Session

- Ask YP how they found the session

Session 5: Managing emotions

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Looking after our emotions
- Emotion regulation strategies
- Alexithymia
- Spoon theory
- Creating a toolbox
- End of session

Handouts:

- Relaxation techniques (1 each) (Appendix 10)
- Toolbox (1 each) (Appendix 11)

Session content-

Start of session:

Begin the session by re-introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: Warm up game

- How many animals can you see in the picture. Give YP some time to look at the picture and go round the group to get ideas.

Slide 2: Looking after our emotions

- Read content from slide
- YP may like to share some emotions that they struggle to regulate/ look after.

Slide 3: So, what can we do?

- Give YP and opportunity to think about and discuss different things they like to do when they are feeling upset, worried or angry to help them calm down or cheer up.
- If YP are struggling to identify strategies it may be helpful to give some examples such as, playing favourite games, talking to an adult, doing something creative.

Slide 4: Some new things to try – Breathing

Activity:

- Practitioner chooses one of the breathing activities in the slides and goes through it **with** the YP.
- Hot Chocolate Breathing – Ask YP to sit comfortably in chairs and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine they have a mug of hot chocolate in their hands, they may hold their hands out if they wish. Ask YP to breathe in slowly by imagining they are taking a big sniff of the hot chocolate. Ask the YP to breathe out by blowing on the hot chocolate to help it cool down. Repeat this around 5 times ensuring that YP are taking slow deep breaths.

Or

- Square breathing - Ask YP to sit comfortably in chairs. YP can follow along with fingers on the printed handout of the square. Ask YP to breath in slowly whilst you count to four. Ask them to hold their breath whilst you count to four and then ask them to breath out slowly whilst you count to four. Repeat this around 5 times ensuring that YP are taking slow deep breaths.
- With both it is helpful to remind YP to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.
- Following the breathing exercise invite YP to share what they thought of it, if they liked it or didn't like it. It is important to normalise that it is okay if they did or did not like this activity as different things work for different people, and we will be trying some more relaxation strategies out in the next slides.

Slide 5: Grounding

Activity:

- Explain to YP that grounding is all about distracting yourself and can be useful for when you feel like there are a lot of thoughts going round your head. The purpose of grounding is to shift your focus from the internal (what is going on in your mind and body) to the external (the world around you).
- Ask YP to complete this activity in their heads (without speaking).
- First ask them to look around the room and notice 5 things they can see. It can be helpful to give an example by describing an object you can see in the room. E.g. ' I can see a clock on the back wall, it is round and white with black numbers on it.' Give some time for YP to look around and describe the 5 things in their head.
- Next ask them to touch 4 things close by to them.
-
- **Note** If necessary, you may need to remind YP to only touch themselves or their own things and not to touch anyone else or anyone else's things.
- Ask YP to notice the texture of the object they are touching e.g., is it hard, soft, rough, does it have edges or is it round.
- Then ask them to listen for 3 things they can hear. Again, draw their attention to noticing aspects of the sound, is it loud or quiet is it high pitched or low.
- Next 2 things you can smell. This could be hair, clothes or an object they have with them.
- Lastly one thing they can taste. If there is not something readily available ask YP to imagine their favourite flavour and what it would taste like.

- Following the exercise invite YP to share what they thought of it, if they liked it or didn't like it. Again, normalising that it is okay if they did or did not like this activity as different things work for different people.

Slide 6: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Activity:

- Read through the handout asking the YP to tense and release different muscles, holding each muscle for around 5 seconds.
- Ask YP what they thought of each relaxation strategy and if they have a favourite one, why was it their favourite?

Slide 7: Alexithymia

- Go through phonetic pronunciation of the word with YP. 'Has anyone ever heard of this word before'.
- Read explanation of Alexithymia from the slide.

Slide 8: Can you think of time where you struggled to identify your own or someone else's emotions?

- Facilitate group discussion. Facilitator may want to give some of their own examples.

Slide 9: Spoon Theory

- Read content from slide

Slide 10: Another way to think about it...

- Read content from slide

Slide 11: What drains and fills your battery

- Facilitate group discussion

Slide 12: * For secondary school only* - Autistic Burnout

- Read content from slide

Slide 13: Tool Box

- For older YP you may prefer to make this more discussion based.

Activity:

Ask YP to fill out worksheet with different strategies they can use in each of the zones. It may be helpful to bring back up the slide explaining which emotion goes in each of the zones.

Session 6: Wrapping things up

Duration: 45 minutes-60 minutes

Summary of content:

- Recap of all sessions
- Game
- End of session and group

Handouts:

- Certificate (1 each)

Session content-

Start of session:

Begin the session by re-introducing who you are and the Group rules. Additionally, a check in with those attending the group using the traffic light system. If you feel a different check-in is more appropriate for your group, please use this.

Slide 1: Session 1 Recap

- Using the images that come onto the screen, facilitate a discussion on what the YP remember from session 1
- Ask YP if they learnt anything from this session, if anything stood out to them, anything they liked or disliked

Slide 2: Session 2 Recap

- Repeat instructions above for session 2

Slide 3: Session 3 Recap

- Repeat instructions above for session 3

Slide 4: Session 4 Recap

- Repeat instructions above for session 4

Slide 5: Session 5 Recap

- Repeat instructions above for session 5

Slide 6: Final session game

Activity:

Please chose a game/activity to end with something fun and enjoyable. This can be something the YP have chosen and does not have to be related to the group.

Slide 7:

- End of session(s)

Appendices

Appendix 1- Goal Based Outcomes

Appendix 2- Traffic Light check in

Appendix 3- My Autism Spectrum Handout

Appendix 4- 'Masking' and 'Stimming'

Appendix 5- Creating a calm down kit

Appendix 6- Family, occupation, recreation, future

Appendix 7- Back up team

Appendix 8- Emotion wheel

Appendix 9-Body cut out

Appendix 10- Relaxation techniques

Appendix 11- Toolbox

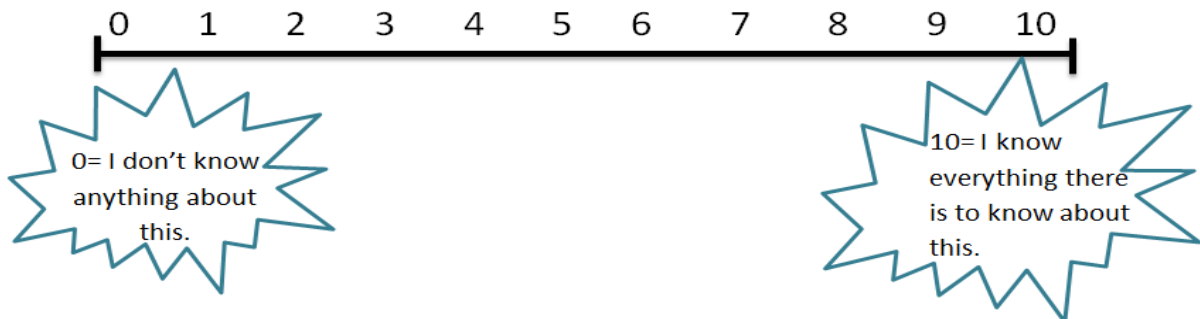
Goal Based Outcomes – Understanding Autism Group

Name:

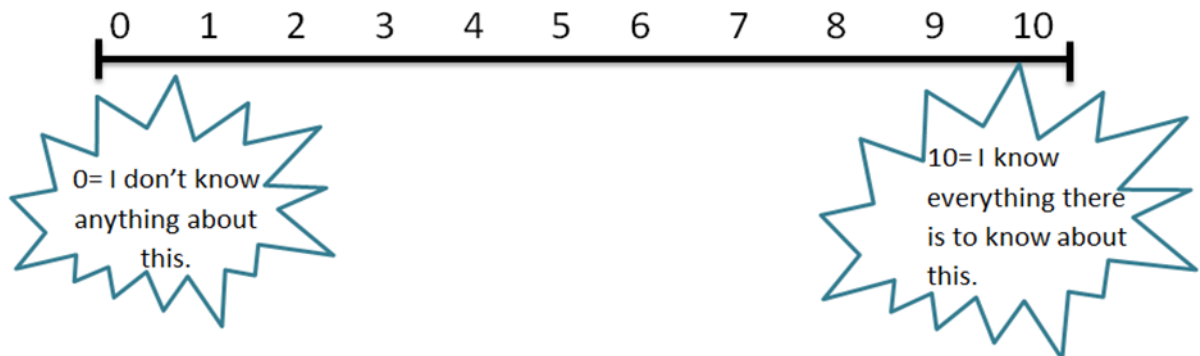
Goal 1: I have a good understanding of Autism and what being Autistic means to me.

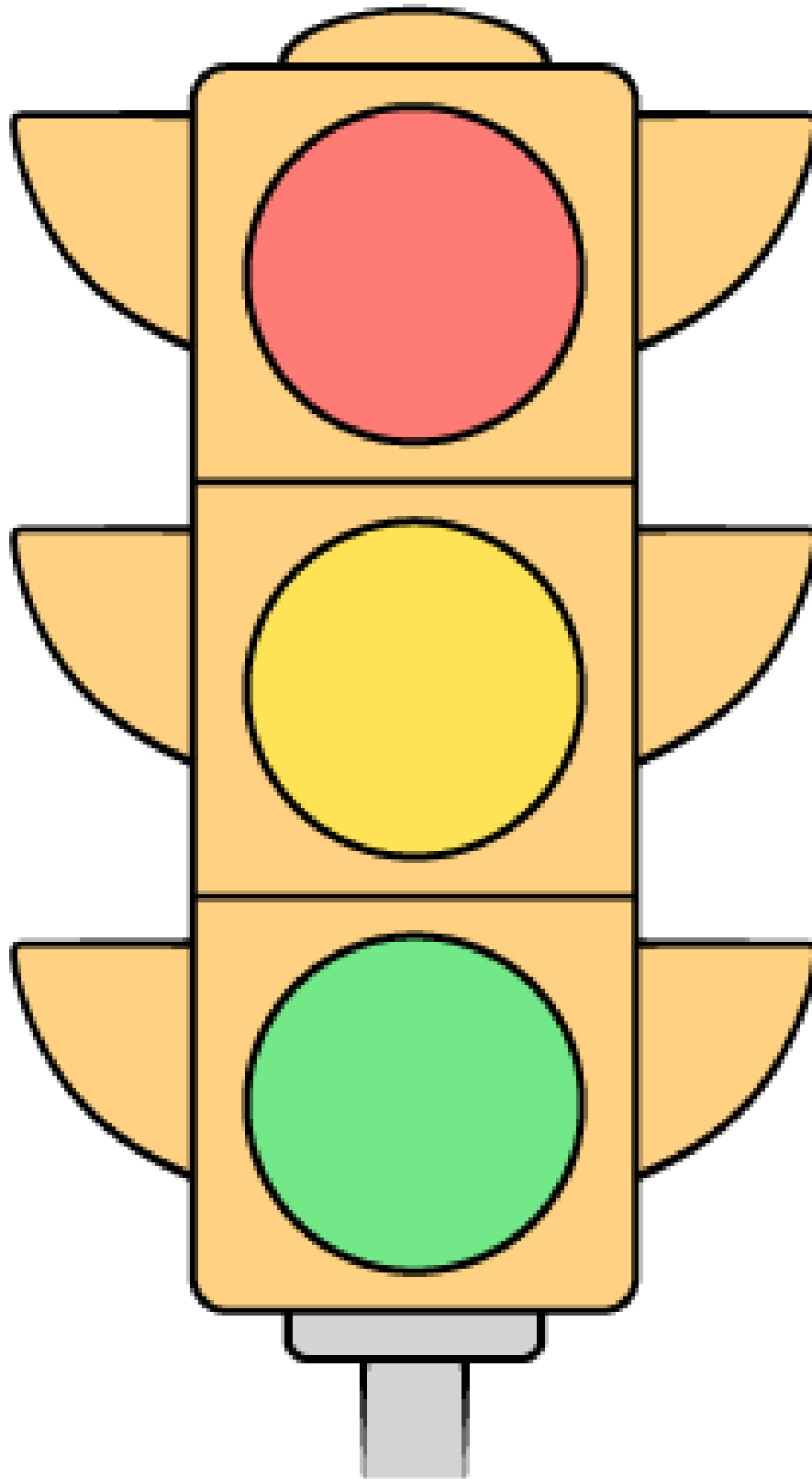


Goal 2: I know helpful coping strategies to use when I feel upset/ worried.

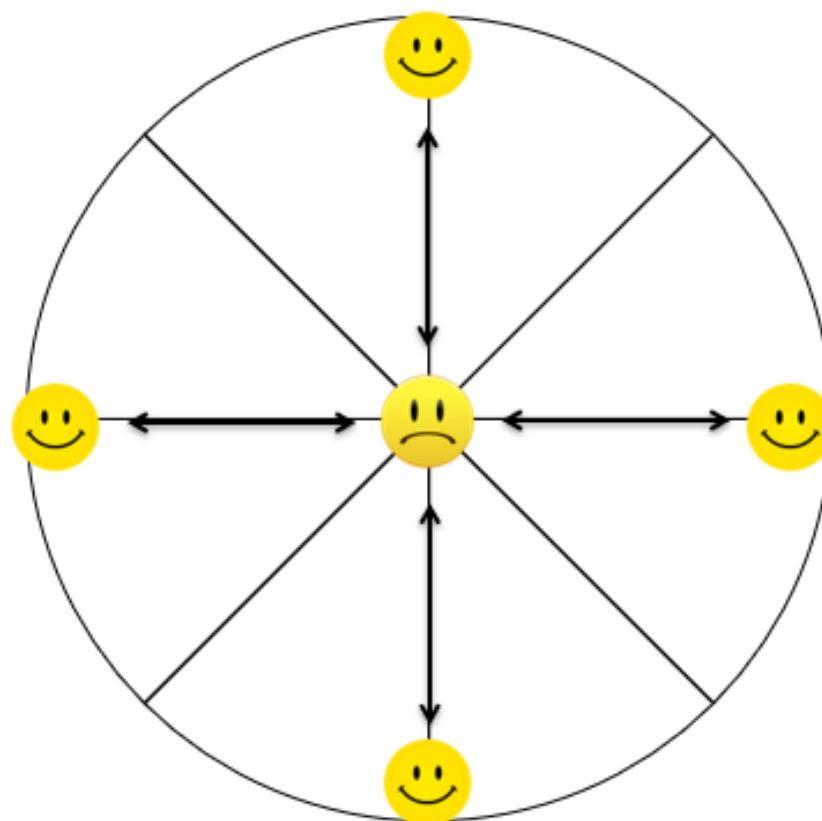


Goal 3/ Personal goal:





My Autism Spectrum



- These are some different areas that people with autism can find difficult or be really good at. Each autistic person will be different, and there will be other things that you find easy or hard that aren't on this wheel.
- Add a cross (x) to each section of the spectrum wheel.
- Crosses near the centre show that you find that thing hard or you don't enjoy it.
- Crosses near the edge show that you enjoy that thing or find it easy. Where your cross is for each section might change over time, this is ok, try to fill it out for **how you feel today**.
- E.g. for 'My mood' a cross near the centre means you are often worried or sad, a cross near the edge means you are mostly happy.
- For 'My senses' a cross near the centre means you are often overwhelmed or upset by sensory information e.g. loud noises, bright lights, strong smells. A cross near the edge means you enjoy these things or are not upset by them.]

Masking

What Is Masking Or Camouflaging?

- Masking is when an individual 'masks' or hides behaviours (such as stims – self-stimulating behaviours) which may be seen as socially unacceptable, or when an individual behaves in a certain way to fit in with those around them i.e., changing the way they act around peers in order not to be seen as 'different'.



Masking may manifest itself as:

- Becoming withdrawn and quiet in certain environments, so that any neurodiverse traits are less obvious.
- Suppressing self-stimulating behaviours, such as hand flapping or chewing.
- Some individuals may prepare topics of conversations and jokes.
- Mirroring the actions of others.

What Effects Can Masking Have?

- May cause stress responses in an environment where an individual feels safe and comfortable. For example, an individual might be able to mask at school, but sensory behaviours or 'meltdowns' may be a lot more apparent at home.
- Can have a negative impact on mental health in the longer term.
- Can cause individuals to burn out (become tired), causing withdrawal (isolating from others or disengaging from activities once enjoyed).
- Reduce self-esteem and self-identity.

What Can You Do To Reduce Masking?

- Regular movement activities or other feel-good strategies in all environments.
- Ask for / allow movement breaks or opportunities to engage in feel good strategies as these are essential to remain regulated.
- Identify and share discreet signals for when things are too much and when a break is required. You may wish to share these signals with family, close friends or teachers.
- Explore a range of sensory seeking strategies that can be used in a range of environments (Grounding strategies may help)

Stimming

Many individuals, particularly those living with ASC find coping with sensory input and social communication difficult and stimming is a way to release stress and anxiety in these situations.

What Is Stimming?

The term “stimming” is short for self-stimulatory behaviour, sometimes also referred to as “stereotypic” behaviour. It is the repetition of physical movements, sounds or repetitive movement of objects.

Examples of these can be hand-flapping, rocking, spinning or repeating words and phrases.



Why Do People Stim?

Stimming is a way to regulate stress and emotions. These behaviours lead to sensory input but also release tension and energy, which relieves stress. This helps with sensory processing and aids in social communication (supports how we communicate and interact with others).

Embracing stimming

People used to be discouraged from stimming and were encouraged to unlearn the behaviour, however, this does more harm than good (as long as the stim itself isn't causing any harm).

Top tips for stimming safely

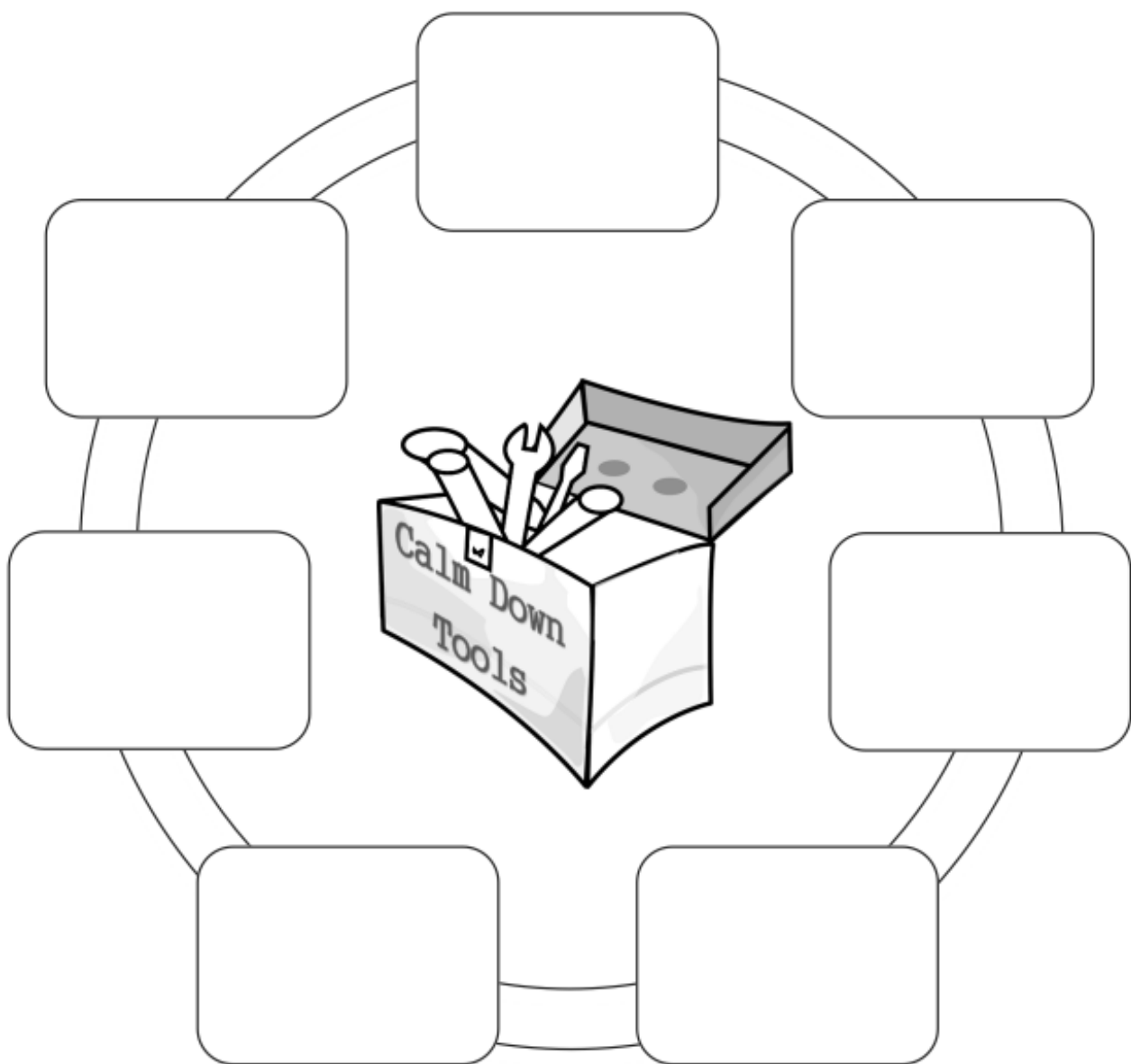
- Make sure you aren't causing harm to yourself - check whether how you stim damages any part of your body and use protective aids if it does.
- Carry a card that explains your behaviour, communicates your needs, and reassures those around you that you are safe.
- If you feel pressured to not stim in public, create a safe space to practice your stims at home and explain to friends and relatives why stimming is so important to your well-being.
- Stimming is a coping and communication skill; it can help you to learn more about what triggers your emotions or what causes you to feel overwhelmed.
- Finding community support can help you to learn more about these triggers, there are also pro-stimming sites on social media, which can help you to feel less alone.
- Never let others shame you into changing harmless behaviours.
- Don't feel ashamed if you mask your stimming in certain environments - the choice to modify or stop your behaviours should only ever be made by you!

****Adapted from the Autism Information Service Website**

Create a Calm Down Kit

Directions: What objects, activities or practices help you calm down? Draw or write them in the boxes below. Feel free to add new ideas you haven't used yet and would like to try. This "calm down kit" can be a useful tool to use when emotions run high.

Reflect: Imagine putting this kit together. How would it feel? Where might you keep a "calm down kit" at home? Could you make a kit to use when you are not at home?



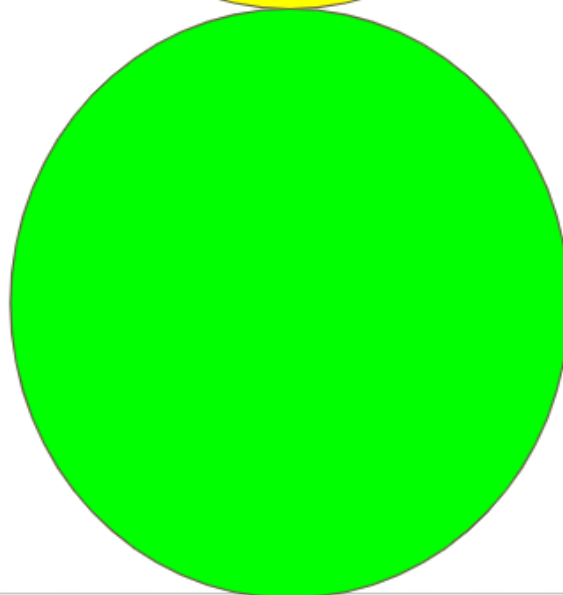
Conversation topics

You can ask questions about lots of topics , here are some ideas for conversation topics:

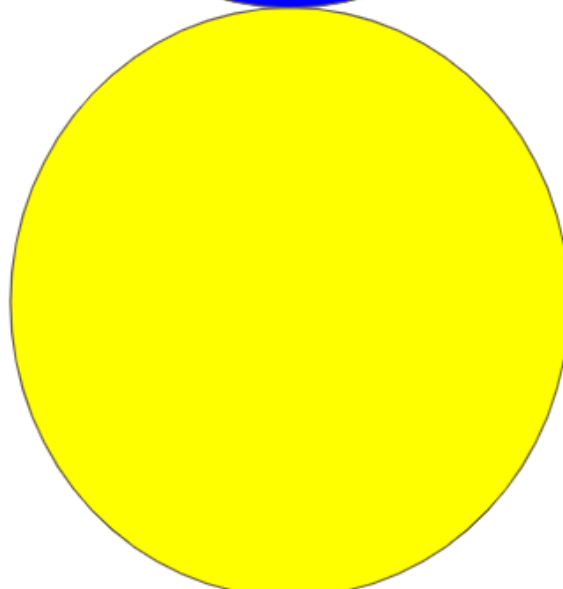
- * **Family** – ask about their family (who do they live with, mum, dad, how many siblings?)
- * **Occupation** – ask about what they do at school/college/for a job (e.g. what is your favourite lesson?)
- * **Recreation** – what do they like to do in their spare time? (E.g. their hobbies, or clubs they go to, games they play, music people listen too).
- * **Future**– what are they hoping to do in the future e.g. holidays and travel, university, college, as a job (e.g, where is one place you would like to go on holiday?)

Activity: Who is in your back up team?

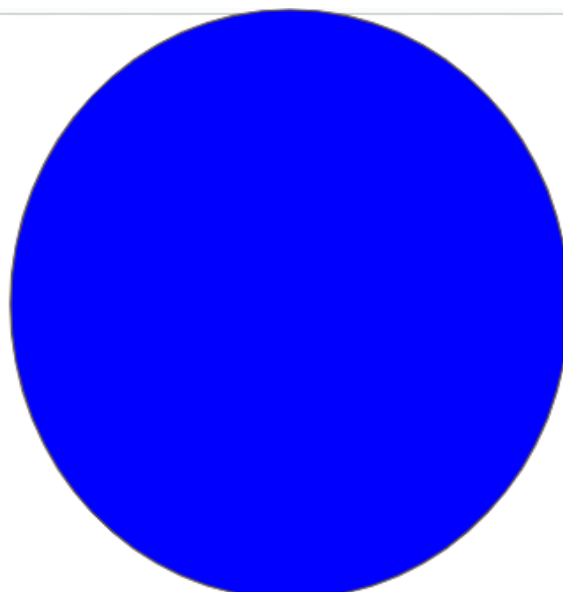
Home

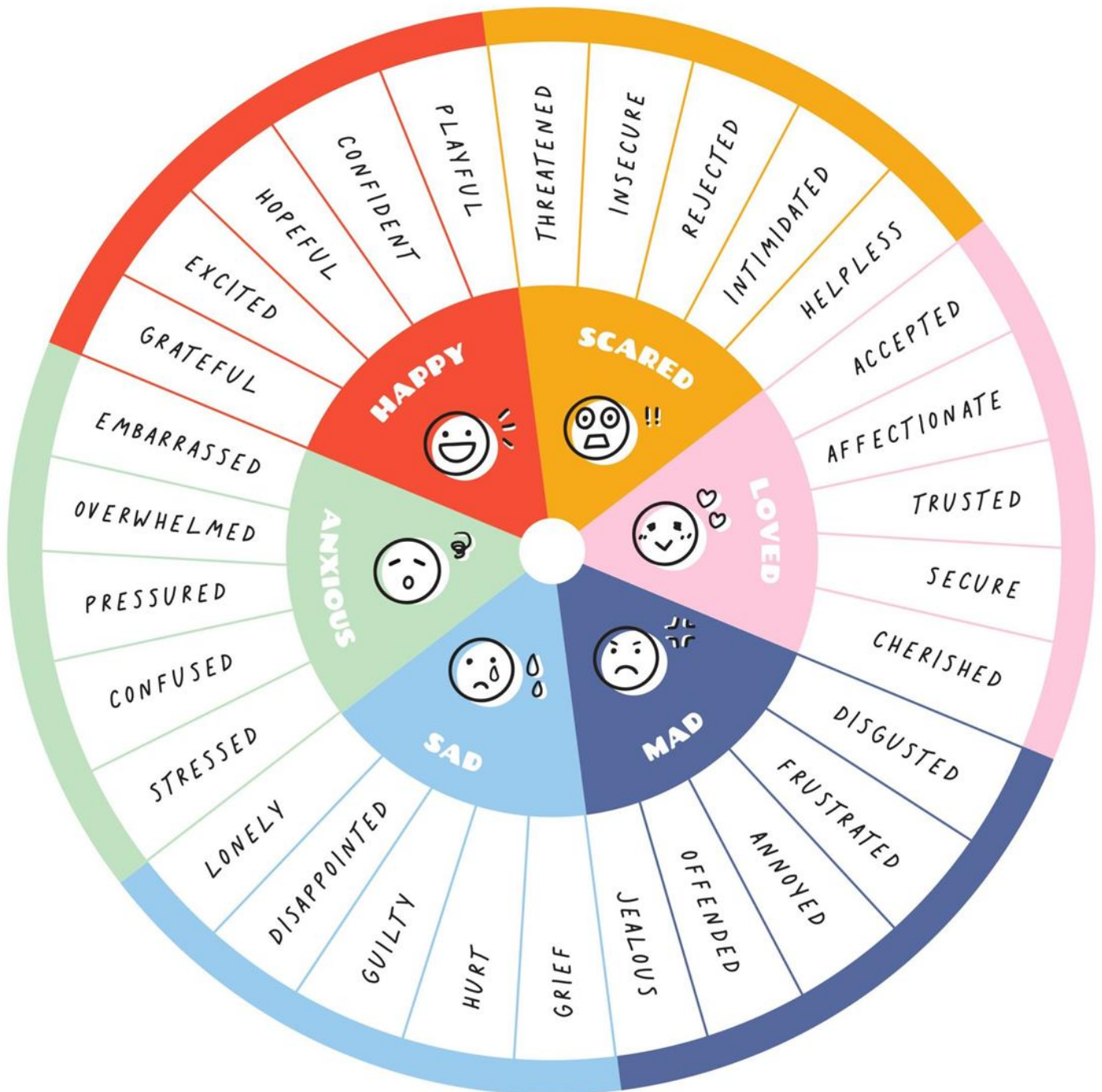


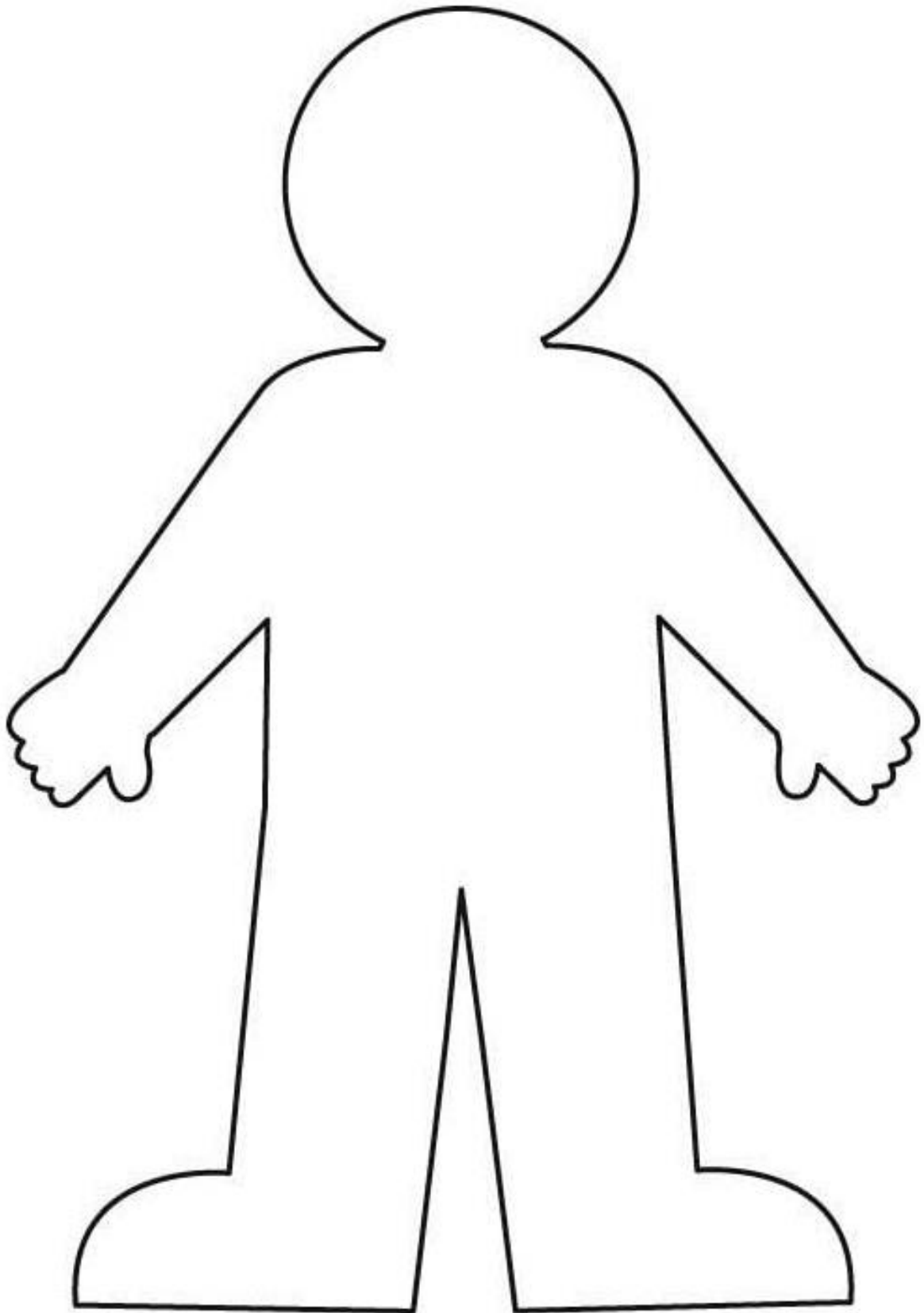
School







**Other e.g (after
school club)**







The ZONES of Regulation®

				<p>BLUE ZONE</p> <p>Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly</p>	<p>GREEN ZONE</p> <p>Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn</p>	<p>YELLOW ZONE</p> <p>Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control</p>	<p>RED ZONE</p> <p>Mad/Angry Terrified Yelling/Hitting Elated Out of Control</p>
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Hot Chocolate Breathing

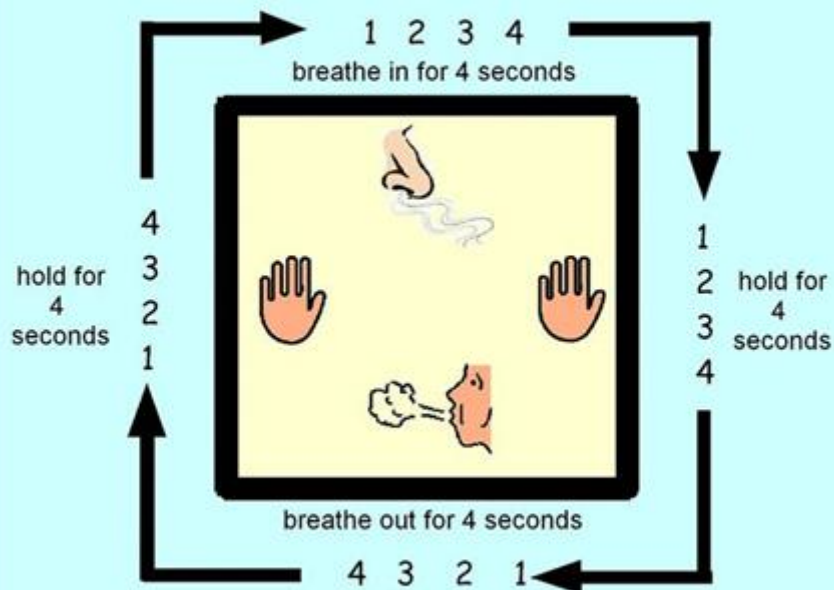


Pretend you are holding a warm mug of hot chocolate. Take in a **slow, deep breath** through your nose to smell the treat. Then **breathe out** through your mouth to cool it off. **Repeat this five times.** Deep breathing is a great tool to calm your mind and your body!



NurseManShop.com 2011

SQUARE BREATHING



5 ★ 4 ★ 3 ★ 2 ★ 1

SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN:

FIRST OFF... TAKE 3 SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS!

5 LIST 5 THINGS YOU CAN **SEE** 

4 LIST 4 THINGS YOU CAN **FEEL** 

3 LIST 3 THINGS YOU CAN **HEAR** 

2 LIST 2 THINGS YOU CAN **SMELL** 

1 LIST SOMETHING **POSITIVE ABOUT YOURSELF!** *MAKE today COUNT*

FINISHED? TAKE 3 MORE SLOW & QUIET DEEP BREATHS.

Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. For each area of the body listed below, you will tense your muscles tightly, but not to the point of strain. Hold the tension for 10 seconds, and pay close attention to how it feels. Then, release the tension, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs from the feeling of tension.

- Feet** Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
- Calves** Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
- Thighs** Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
- Torso** Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
- Back** Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
- Shoulders** Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
- Arms** Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
- Hands** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
- Face** Scrunch your facial features to the center of your face, then relax.
- Full Body** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

_____'s **Toolbox**

Blue Zone Tools

Green Zone Tools

Yellow Zone Tools

Red Zone Tools

Additional Resources and Signposting

Further Reading for facilitators

Research Papers:

Autistic Strengths

Happé F, Vital P. What aspects of autism predispose to talent? *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci.* 2009 May 27;364(1522):1369-75. doi: 10.1098/rstb.2008.0332. PMID: 19528019; PMCID: PMC2677590. What aspects of autism predispose to talent? - PMC (nih.gov)

Devenish, B. D., Mantilla, A., Bowe, S. J., Grundy, E. A. C., & Rinehart, N. J. (2022). Can common strengths be identified in autistic young people? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 98, 102025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2022.102025>

Pennisi, P., Giallongo, L., Milintenda, G. *et al.* Autism, autistic traits and creativity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cogn Process* **22**, 1–36 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10339-020-00992-6>

Masking:

Chapman, L., Rose, K., Hull, L., & Mandy, W. (2022). “I want to fit in... but I don’t want to change myself fundamentally”: A qualitative exploration of the relationship between masking and mental health for autistic teenagers. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 99, 102069. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1750946722001568#bib40>

Camouflaging in autism a systematic review (Cook et al. 2022): Cook, J., Hull, L., Crane, L., & Mandy, W. (2021). Camouflaging in autism: A systematic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 89, 102080. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272735821001239>

Debunking myths on Autistic communication:

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective. *Autism*, 24(7), 1704–1712. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286>

Crompton, C. J., Hallett, S., Ropar, D., Flynn, E., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). ‘I never realised everybody felt as happy as I do when I am around autistic people’: A thematic analysis of autistic adults’ relationships with autistic and neurotypical friends and family. *Autism*, 24(6), 1438–1448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320908976>

Autistic people’s views on stimming:

‘People should be allowed to do what they like’: Autistic adults’ views and experiences of stimming

Kapp, S. K., Steward, R., Crane, L., Elliott, D., Elphick, C., Pellicano, E., & Russell, G. (2019). 'People should be allowed to do what they like': Autistic adults' views and experiences of stimming. *Autism*, 23(7), 1782–1792.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319829628>

Books:

1. Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate by Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé.
 - [Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate: Amazon.co.uk: Fletcher-Watson, Sue, Happé, Francesca: 9781138106123: Books](#)
2. The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain (published in Hardcover as Neurodiversity). Da Capo Lifelong Books. By Thomas Armstrong.
 - [Link The Power of Neurodiversity: Unleashing the Advantages of Your Differently Wired Brain \(published in hardcover as Neurodiversity\): Amazon.co.uk: Armstrong PhD, Ph.D. Thomas: 9780738215242: Books](#)
3. Neurodiversity! What's That?: An introduction to neurodiversity for kids by Nadine Ramina Arthur:
 - [Neurodiversity! What's That?: An introduction to neurodiversity for kids: Amazon.co.uk: Arthur, Nadine Ramina: 9781399918237: Books](#)
4. NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently by Steve Silberman
 - [NeuroTribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently: Steve Silberman: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)
5. Inclusive Education for Autistic Children: Helping Children and Young People to Learn and Flourish in the Classroom
 - [Inclusive Education for Autistic Children: Helping Children and Young People to Learn and Flourish in the Classroom: Amazon.co.uk: Dr Rebecca Wood, Foreword by Dr Wenn B. Lawson: 9781785923210: Books](#)
6. Nurturing Your Autistic Young Person: A Parent's Handbook to Supporting Newly Diagnosed Teens and Pre-Teens
 - [Nurturing Your Autistic Young Person: A Parent's Handbook to Supporting Newly Diagnosed Teens and Pre-Teens: Amazon.co.uk: Wassell, Cathy: 9781839971112: Books](#)

Weblinks:

- The national autistic society autism in women and girls: <https://autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls>
- The ADHD Neurodiversity foundation: <https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>

Signposting

Phone Numbers:



Mental Health Direct: 0800 995 1000

Mental Health Direct can arrange for you to speak with a mental health professional. They can also advise you about what service to contact to get the support you need. Mental Health Direct can be contacted any time of the day or night.



Shout: text 'shout' to 85258

Free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging service for anyone in the UK. Shout will connect you to a volunteer to share mental health worries with and offer advice and support.



Papyrus: 0800 068 4141

run a suicide prevention hotline every day of the year 9am till midnight. They offer confidential support and advice to young people, and anyone worried about a young person with thoughts of suicide.



ChildLine: 0800 1111

Childline is a free confidential service for anyone under the age of 19, where you can call to talk about anything big or small that you are going through. Councilors are available everyday 7:30 am – 3:30 am.



Bullying UK helpline: 0300 323 0169

(Mon-Fri 9am-9pm, Sat-Sun 10am-3pm)

Websites



Kooth: www.kooth.com

an online mental health service, a product of XenZone, for children and young people aged 11-18 years which offers online counselling and emotional wellbeing support.



Nia: [What is Violence Against Women and Girls? - NIA | Ending Violence Against Women and Girls \(niaendingviolence.org.uk\)](http://www.niaendingviolence.org.uk)

runs services for women and girls who have been subjected to sexual and domestic violence and abuse, including prostitution.



Young Minds: <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

has resources to educate children and young people about mental health and wellbeing.



Mentally Healthy Schools: www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk

is a website with mental health resources and was originally developed in partnership between the Anna Freud Centre, Young Mins, Place2Be and The Royal Foundation.



National Autistic Society: <https://www.autism.org.uk/>

Provide support advice and guidance for autistic people.



WeHeartCBT: www.weheartcbt.com

is a collection of free resources aimed at helping children and young people who are struggling with anxiety and/or low mood related mental health difficulties. Resources are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and are made for mental health professionals, schools and parents/families.

Services



ZigZag: <https://www.bartshealth.nhs.uk/blogs/spotlight-onthezigzagchildrens-service-10106>

The Zig Zag Children's Service is a specialist bereavement counselling service forming part of the Psychological Support Service at Whipps Cross Hospital's Margaret Centre – and covering the whole Borough of Waltham Forest. Zig Zag accepts referrals of children aged 3-12 in Waltham Forest with pre- and post-bereavement difficulties.



East London Out Project (ELOP): [elop](http://elop.org.uk) : : [holistic lesbian and gay centre](http://elop.org.uk)

is a holistic lesbian and gay centre that offers a range of social, emotional and support services to LGBT communities, and our core services include counselling and young people's services. We can also offer training and consultancy for fellow professionals and those seeking to enhance their understanding of issues facing LGBT communities.



Sibs Siblings of disabled people: www.sibs.org.uk/

is a charity to support children and young people aged 7-17 years and adults who have a brother or sister who is disabled, has special educational needs or a serious long-term condition. Support includes information about disability and conditions, help with sibling issues at home and at school.



Anti Bullying Alliance: [Anti-Bullying Alliance | United against bullying \(anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk\)](http://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk)

Offer free CPD training for anyone who works with children, the training is particularly focused on reducing bullying of disabled and SEN children but applies to all children.



SEND Success: www.sendsuccess.org.uk

Schools outreach service developed by Whitefield Outreach Service and Schools Educational Service for children and young people aged 0-19 years in mainstream Waltham Forest schools with sensory impairment, autism, learning and cognitive disabilities. SEND Success also provide free online training for all teachers and TA's.

Parent Support Groups



Waltham Forest Parent Forum:

<https://www.walthamforestparentforum.com/>

A voluntary group of parents/ carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/ or disabilities. They work with local authorities to make sure families voices are heard in the planning and provision of services.

Dad's Group: www.walthamforestparentforum.com/dads-group

is a group that meets up every half term to discuss special needs. They invite speakers who can cover areas like statement, diagnosis, "What is the best way of supporting my disabled child?", "Should I chose special needs or mainstream school?" It is Six evenings a year, 6pm to 8pm at Le Delice Café (Walthamstow).

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