

# Fife Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway

Newsletter (Spring 2023)



Welcome to the fourth of our quarterly Newsletters for families who are on our neurodevelopmental assessment pathway. This on-line newsletter contains useful information, links and updates from the team which may be useful while you are waiting for the assessment process to begin.

Previous copies of the newsletter are available on the resources page at <https://theautismnetwork.co.uk>

## New Resources (Social Media):

For those of you who are right up there with your social media, you will know there are a huge number of sites about all neurodivergent conditions and particularly about autism.

Here is our third set of suggestions that have been recommended to us by others. This time we are looking at Twitter feeds (please feel free to email other suggestions to [info@theautismnetwork.co.uk](mailto:info@theautismnetwork.co.uk))

### Twitter

Most of the useful twitter accounts are specific to a national or local organisation. There are also twitter feeds from individual autistic people as well as topic specific. Here are some accounts that offer some useful links to nationally useful information.

- Autism Understanding Scotland @AU\_Scot Autistic lead organisation offering a growing range of services and information
- Understanding Autism @AutismIS\_ Inspiring Scotland's portfolio of work connected with the Scottish Government's Autism Understanding initiative
- Autism Practice @AutismPractice The National Autistic Society's site for information , guidance and resources

## New groups and supports

### DO WE WANT THIS BIT IN AGAIN?

#### Siblings

We are still looking at developing something for siblings of children who have received an autism diagnosis. If you have any ideas or thoughts about what this should look like, please send a message through to [info@theautismnetwork.co.uk](mailto:info@theautismnetwork.co.uk)

#### Children and Anxiety

We are also planning the development of a post diagnosis programme/course for autistic children. We are planning to pilot the group for high school pupils early spring. It will be advertised through the NHS Fife facebook and twitter accounts and self referral through Access Therapies Fife. For more information contact [info@theautismnetwork.co.uk](mailto:info@theautismnetwork.co.uk)

## Sensory Systems and ASD: Vision.



Autistic children are often visual learners.

This might be because visual information lasts longer and is more concrete than heard information. That additional time might help autistic children to process information and choose how to respond. By presenting information visually as well as by speaking can give a better chance to understand and process information. Autistic children with very good language skills can also find the use of visual supports very helpful.

Visuals make it easier autistic people to understand what's being said or taught without having to make quick sense of spoken words. Visual tools can also allow those with very restricted language skills to communicate with others.

People with autism are usually quite literal in their thinking. In some cases, this can make abstract concepts very difficult to understand. Even words like up, down, under, and over can be difficult, as can phrases like "on the right" or "next week." Visuals can make all of these concepts instantly understandable.

Some autistic children might use visual stimming as one of their self-stimulatory behaviours. This could include repetitive visual behaviours such as: Staring or gazing at objects, such as ceiling fans or lights. Repetitive blinking or turning lights on and off. Moving fingers in front of the eyes. There can be different reasons that the autistic child enjoys this:

- It can act as a focus of sensory input and help block out other senses when things are overwhelming
- If a child is hyposensitive they might be seeking out something visual that gives an extra sensory pleasure.

The appropriate length of time and when to give someone eye contact when you are talking to them is a very subtle skill which some autistic people find difficult to get right. Some autistic people seem to avoid eye contact, particularly when anxious, and some might seem to give too much intense eye contact.

Some autistic people find that use of Irlen lenses helpful in processing visual information. This is when someone has a hypersensitivity to certain wave lengths in full spectrum light which provoke the brain to process visual information incorrectly. <https://irlen.com>

## **Emotional Identification**

Why is Emotional Identification Important?

Emotional identification simply means accurately identifying the emotion we are experiencing in any given moment. It turns out that emotional identification is often the first step in regulating our emotions. When we identify and label our emotions, we're bringing awareness to what we're feeling, which can help us better understand what we're experiencing, and 'tune it down' or calm. Research has shown that identifying emotions can improve emotional regulation, better decision-making, and a greater sense of well-being.

This is likely one reason we see increased rates of anxiety among people with alexithymia.

(Alexithymia is your ability to recognise and describe your own emotions. So you might be aware of feeling something, feeling a strong emotion but have difficulty in labelling what that emotion is).

Because they cannot label their emotions, they aren't as able to self-soothe when their fear system gets activated! So for people who struggle with emotional regulation or alexithymia, emotional labelling can be particularly helpful in developing effective self-soothing and coping strategies.

There are some simple and fun games to teach your children about naming their feelings such as emotion thermometers or emotion bingo, when you mark off feelings shown in favourite tv shows or movies. To quote the book *the Whole Brain Child* By Dr Dan Siegal, "name it to tame it".

## **Helpline for parents of children on the Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway**

The Autism Network has been commissioned by Fife HSCP to support families who are on the Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway.

Details about The Autism Network and the team can be found on their website :

<https://theautismnetwork.co.uk>

Although they don't have details about the waiting list for the assessment, they may be able to provide information that would be useful for you or signpost to another source of help. Sometimes it's just good to talk to someone who has the time to listen and to share your concerns and challenges.

To contact the Helpline call: 07706 012967. The helpline is not manned at any specific times but if you leave a message they will get back to you.

You can also email them at [info@theautismnetwork.co.uk](mailto:info@theautismnetwork.co.uk) and in your message let them know you are contacting the Fife Helpline.