

Fife Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway



Newsletter number 5

Welcome to 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>

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 and in your message let them know you are contacting the Fife Helpline.

Groups and Support

Understanding my Autism

This new online group for adolescents was run over the summer holidays and will be run again in the autumn. This group is run on a self-referral basis through Access Therapies Fife or following this link: <https://www.accesstherapiesfife.scot.nhs.uk/how-can-we-help-you/teenager-and-child-groups/understanding-my-autism-group/>

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

Sensory Systems and ASD: Tooth Brushing

Many parents of neurodivergent kids mention difficulties with hygiene, particularly around brushing teeth and hair. Thinking about what these experiences entail can help us make sense of our child's difficulties!



Tooth brushing seems to be challenging for so many young people, and can be a source of conflict between parents and children. It can end up feeling like a source of daily struggle or even a sense of failure for some parents. Like many things related to hygiene, brushing teeth can be difficult in many ways, which can combine to end up something to dread or avoid...

What might be hard about tooth brushing?

Sensory sensitivities;

- The flavour and texture of toothpaste
- The feel of water on their face
- The sensation of a toothbrush against sensitive skin inside their mouth
- The noise and vibration of electric toothbrushes
- Having to brush without seeing where the tooth brush is inside their mouth

Executive Functioning difficulties;

- Multiple steps of the task mean it can feel overwhelming so something to avoid
- Tooth brushing might be seen as boring and not rewarding! They might not care what the dentist thinks and struggle to 'imagine' future consequences

Possible solutions to reduce distress;

- Experiment with fruit flavoured or flavourless toothpaste
- Try out different brushes of various shape, size and softness
- Have a wash cloth ready to wipe any water that goes on their face away quickly
- Use a smaller mirror to draw attention to and help them see where they are brushing
- Break the task down into small steps with visuals to help with executive functioning/planning
- Listen to music or pair with another fun activity to make sure it doesn't feel boring

Remember it doesn't need to be perfect, focus on small changes and remember many of our kid's difficulties are because they "can't" rather than "won't". Please remember to give yourselves and your kids' credit for all progress no matter how small it seems. Also remember that often sensory sensitivities and other needs change over time, so there might need to be adjustments along the way.

Window of Tolerance; the Tolerance Cup

Explaining emotions can be difficult for all parents, especially when difficult feelings become “too big” and spill over into everyday life.

A helpful metaphor is the ‘tolerance cup’;



We all have a “tolerance cup”
All annoying or frustrating experiences add water to our cup throughout the day
Didn't sleep well
Sister broke my favourite toy
Feeling worried about going back to school



As we go through our day our cup gets fuller and fuller.
Sometimes, when our cup is really really full, **even the tiniest drop can make it spill**



When our cup spills, **lots** of big big feelings can come out. They won't necessarily be about the last ‘drop’ that made us spill!



When big feelings come out, it means our cup is empty again. So it's a good idea to try and “pour some water out” **BEFORE** we get too full...



Ideas to help “pour water out” before we get too full;
Relaxation exercises: take slow, deep breaths, stretch out your body, practise tensing and then relaxing muscle (progressive muscle relaxation)
Good sleep hygiene to improve sleep
Meet sensory needs, whether that is stimming, Hugging your loved ones including pets!, showers or baths, listening to music or dancing it out
Talking it out with loved ones

AND FINALLY.....

We know that young people who are neurodiverse or have autism struggle with change, so we hope all our families have had a smooth transition back to school following the summer break...