

Supporting the Mental Health Needs of a Child with a Learning Disability

*Hampshire Specialist Child and Adolescent Mental
Health Service*



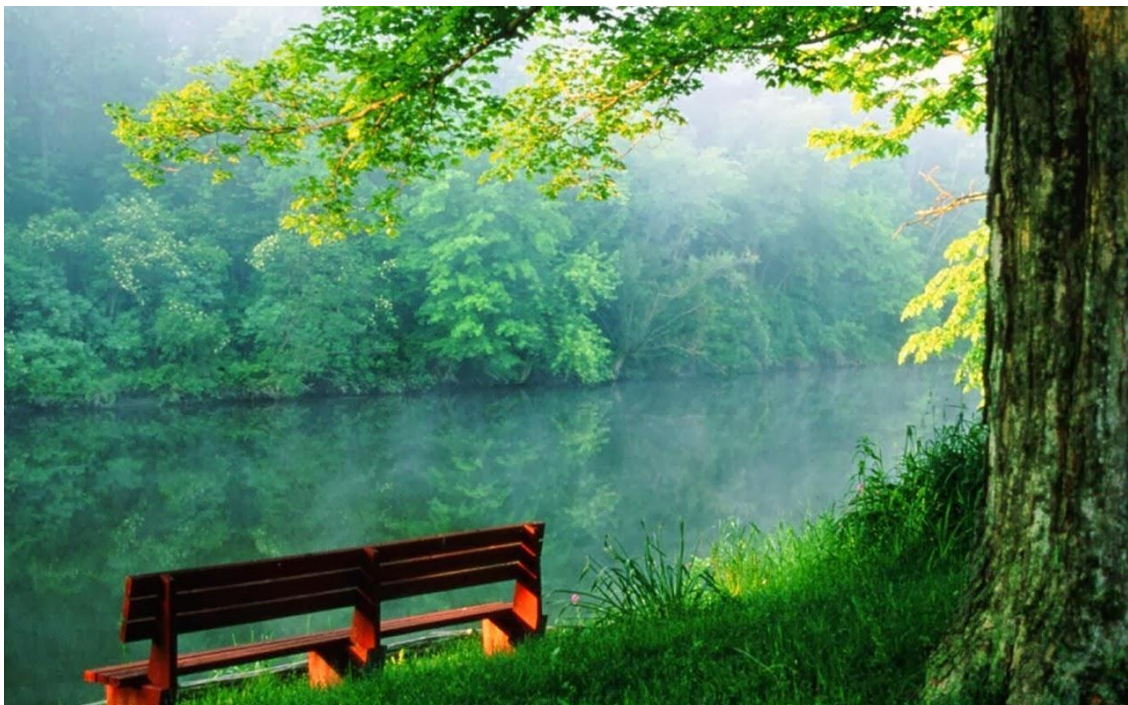
Self-Help Booklet

A Guide to this Booklet:

The aim of this booklet is to provide parents with a source of information and strategies to help understand and promote your child's mental health. This booklet has been designed for parents who have a child and/or children with Learning Disabilities. It offers a first step intervention to help you and your child learn about the mental health challenges that can occur alongside a learning disability and/or autism. You can use this booklet to help guide your approaches of working alongside your child and also learn about their mental health needs as you work through the booklet and help apply the new skills. There are activities inside to try at home with your child to give you strategies for helping your child self-regulate, to improve mood and how to cope in distressing and challenging situations.

A message from parents who have been or are currently supporting their child/young person's mental health:

"Together we can beat this. Let them know you are there for them every step of the way. Understand that being there for them is the most important thing, a hug when they don't want to talk and a listening, non-judgemental ear when they do, and space when they need it."



Content:

Anxiety

- What is anxiety?
- Identifying symptoms of anxiety in a young person with a learning disability.
- Strategies to help incorporate relaxation techniques in day to day routine

Low Mood/Depression

- What is Low Mood/Depression?
- Identifying symptoms of low mood in a young person with a learning disability.
- How to support your child to feel more positive and help boost their self-esteem and mood

Challenging Behaviour and Positive Behaviour Support

- What is challenging behaviour?
- What are the reasons for a child to display challenging behaviour?
- Emotional regulation - how to aid in 'co-regulation' and teach skills for your child to begin to try to 'self-regulate'.

Starting to record an ABC chart

- Antecedent
- Behaviour
- Consequence

Looking after you as a parent!

*There are lots of ideas and suggestions in this booklet, and it **is intended as a guide**. Some of the strategies in this booklet will be more useful than others for your individual child. It may be best to try one thing at a time, or adapt the strategy for your child. You know your child best so try and incorporate their likes and interests into the activities and introduce them to each strategy one at a time to try avoid confusion and frustration for both you and your child. Be kind with yourself and be patient!*

Learning Disability and Anxiety

"Children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism are more likely to experience anxiety than other children. In fact, anxiety is thought to be one of the most common forms of psychological distress for people with learning disabilities and/or autism. "

North Derbyshire CAMHS

Anxiety Characteristics:

Children with learning disabilities may experience difficulties with expressing their feelings of anxiety. Children, who have limited communication and experience sensations/feelings of anxiety, may result in behaviours which are interpreted as challenging and are not related to the possibilities of anxiety.

→ If you would like more information regarding **Challenging Behaviour**, there is a section further on in this booklet providing more information in this area.

It is important when supporting a child with learning disability to be aware of what might be causing challenging behaviour, aggression, self-injury, withdrawal, crying, disturbed sleep or screaming.

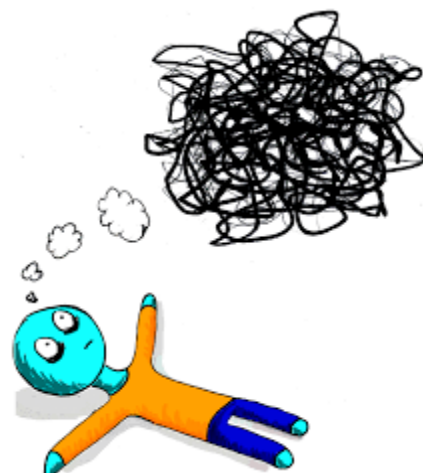
→ Anxiety may present itself in difficult or upsetting behaviours such as aggression. These behaviours could be triggered by not being able to express difficult feelings such as anxiety.

To simplify it, a situation happens, and we have **thoughts** about the situation; those **thoughts** trigger **feelings**, and based on those **feelings** we engage in **behaviour's** which impact the situation (either positively or negatively).



Symptoms of anxiety in a child with learning disability:

- Changes in appetite – eating too much or too little
- Changes in usual sleeping habits. Waking early in the morning or sleeping too much
- Loss of skills (e.g. self-care, independence skills, concentration)
- Loss of interest in daily activities usually enjoyed
- Increase in outbursts of anger, aggressive behaviour or self-harm
- Irritability and agitation
- Pacing around rooms/environment's
- Drinking more fluids.



What your child may be feeling physically/biologically:

You can't think properly and feel lightheaded or dizzy. This is because there is less blood flow running to your head as you don't need to think in order to run or fight; you just need to react quickly.

Your mouth becomes dry. This is because your digestive system is switched off to make sure all your energy is used for fighting or running. Your mouth and the saliva it makes are part of the digestive system, so when this system is switched off, so are the salivary glands.

You feel like you will choke or can't breathe. This is because as all your muscles tighten, so do the muscles in your neck.

Your heart beats very fast. This is because your body needs to pump your blood to your muscles as quick as possible to feed them the extra oxygen they need to work at their highest capacity.

Your breathing becomes very fast and shallow. This is because your body is trying to get as much oxygen as possible to make sure your muscles can work at their highest capacity.

Your hands become tingly or cold. This is because the blood flow is quickly diverted towards your large muscles so that they are ready for a large spurt of energy.

You become very sweaty. This is because when you use a lot of energy at once, by fighting or running, you are at risk of overheating so your body needs to increase its sweating to keep you cool.

You suddenly need the toilet. This is because as stomach muscles tighten they press on bowel and bladder.

You feel like you have butterflies or will be sick. This is because your digestive system is quickly switched off to make sure all your energy is used for fighting or running. The blood flow is then diverted away from your stomach and towards your larger muscles.

Your muscles become very tight. This is because they are preparing to use quick, strong movements to either run from the predator or fight the predator.

Supporting your child with Anxiety:

Be aware of the symptoms of anxiety. Trust your intuition about your child's behaviour, especially any changes in their behaviour and where there is a family history of anxiety. You might want to discuss your concerns with teachers - they may ease your concerns if teachers don't observe similar behaviours, or may confirm if teachers observe similar behaviour.

Feelings thermometers:

Like when a child has a temperature, a thermometer is a useful tool which tells parents information about your child's physical health. Applying this to your child's feelings or mental health state can be a very helpful tool *for both parents and the child* to understand how your child is feeling.

*Like temperatures, feelings can change and vary in intensity. Anxiety can vary from **very strong** to **less intense**, to **slightly anxious** to **not at all**.*

- Feeling thermometers help identify the level and intensity of your child's emotion.
- This helps parents understand that their child's behaviour and reactions will be different depending on how intense they are feeling that emotion.
- Once parents and children know and understand how they are feeling and the level of the feeling, it will become easier to decide what to do next to try and calm them down.

Make your thermometer **simple** to begin with, and use a **three point scale**.

- You don't have to use written words to represent different levels of feelings if you don't want to
- You can use colours (**red, yellow and green**), pictures, symbols and/or word labels.
- To keep it simple, imagine a traffic light system

Green would represent a low level of feeling like '**calm**' or '**ok**'.

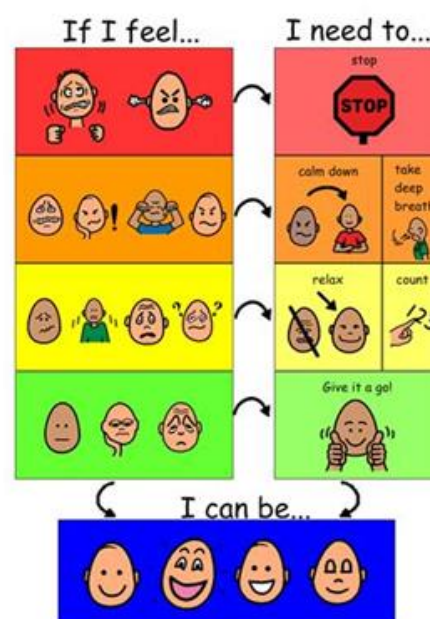
Amber would represent little or medium level of feeling like '**stressed**' or '**anxious**'. **Amber** should be seen as a '**warning**' to implement pro-active strategies so that your child's emotions don't escalate into '**red**'.

Red would represent a lot or a very high level of feeling.

Remember that the thermometer can be used for a variety of feelings including, happiness, sadness, anger, fear etc.



- Make it **creative** and **fun** when you design your own thermometer.
- Try and find symbols/words/pictures that apply to the feeling, and the feelings intensity, to make it easier for **your child** to **explain** and **understand**.
- Think with your child about what you can do together to try feel better and to lower the intensity of the feeling.
- Then think about examples of what each colour of the thermometer would look like.



Think about times when your child has felt that way before (how strong the feeling was) and what situations they were in, and how they dealt with the feeling.

- Then you can begin to link the pro-active strategies to lower the strength of the emotion on the thermometer.

Remember to practice the pro-active strategies when your child is in the green area of the thermometer where both you and your child are calm, happy and relaxed. This will be good time as you will both be able to engage positively with each other.

Communication:

If you think that your child may be displaying signs or symptoms of anxiety, communicating about it with your child can be helpful to **unpicking how they are feeling** in order to support their anxieties. When children are stressed or in the **red** phase of the feelings thermometer, try not to talk about their feelings with them until they are calm. **Social Stories, PEC boards, talking mats** and many other tools of non-verbal communication can come in useful when trying to communicate about how your child may be feeling.

- <https://smarkidzwithld.org> is a non-profit organisation who provides information, guidance, and support to parents of children with learning disabilities. Their website provides parents with an opportunity to purchase helpful tools and resources for their child to communicate with.

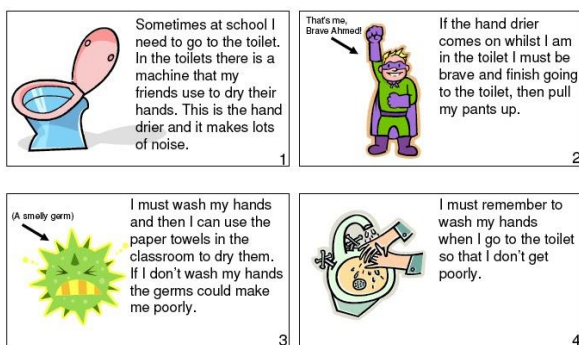
If your child becomes anxious with new or unknown people/events, or maybe is over stimulated in new places **Social Stories** can come in so handy!

- A little preparation can help your child in a large way!

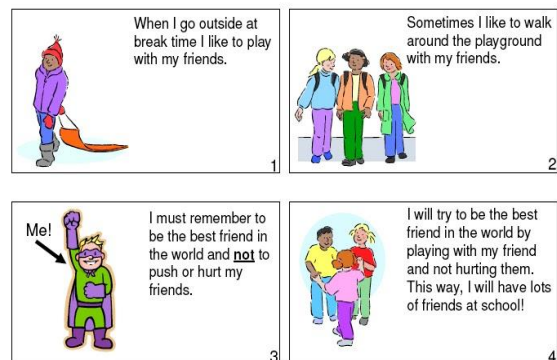
- **Social stories** were developed by **Carol Gray (1994)** to help prepare individuals for new experiences or experiences which may cause them hyper-arousal and stress/anxiety.
- **Social Stories** can help children transition into environment's easier which they may have initially struggled with.
- **The social story describes what people do, why they do it, and what the common responses are.**

Examples:

Going to the toilet at school



Being a friend



Visual Timetables:

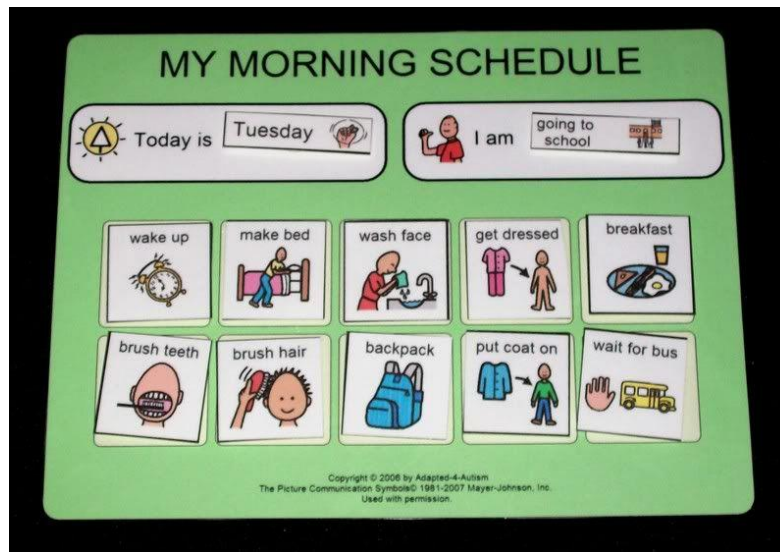
Using a **Visual Timetable** can be very important in reducing anxiety in your child.

- It supports spoken language
- It promotes predictability for your child and promotes routine for them to follow.
- It is proven to help young people transition between activities.
- It also helps prepare children for changes in their routines and also prepares them for unexpected events.

How to make your own visual timetable:

- You can google many simple symbols/pictures/images off the internet like 'wake up' and 'eat breakfast'.
- Use symbols and pictures based on what your child will understand or use!
- You can design your timetable to go from **up to down**, or **left to right**.
- Ensure that the timetable is at your child's height so that they can read and access it easier.
- Talk through and prepare the routine with your child in their chosen form of communication to ensure that they understand the timetable.
- An **important factor to remember** is to ensure that the **next activity is prepared**.

- You can take the card off when the next activity is ready. Then take your child to their next activity.

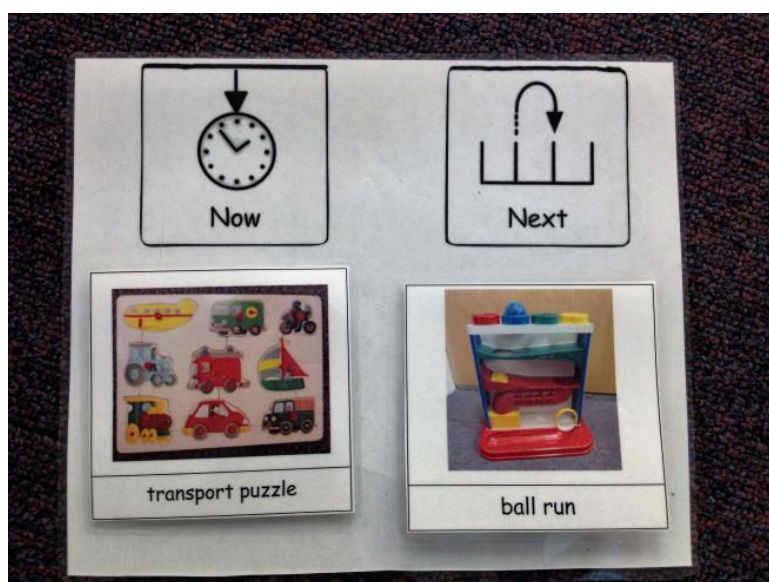


Some parents may have pictures around the house where activities take place e.g. toilet. You may have a symbol on the toilet door and the child can take the symbol off the schedule and match it there, do the activity, then go back and check the schedule or timetable for what is next. Ideally you need to teach or support your child to eventually do this by themselves.

- Remove the activity as it finishes and talk this through with your child. The aim of the visual timetable is to increase your child's independence; to begin with you may need to teach your child how to use the timetable. Once your child is used to the timetable they can begin to learn to do this by themselves.

Some children work better knowing what is happening **now and next**. Creating this visual timetable is very similar to the routine timetable however it provides **two cards** for your child: **now and next**.

This can help visually show your child what is happening now and what we will happen straight afterwards which can help to reduce anxiety.



A useful website that parents can use is Do2learn.com - it provides lots of free picture cards and schedules that you can download or print.

Offer a 'safe space':

A 'safe space' can be a useful way for your child to calm down or process information. It is important that your child has a space that they can solely use to ensure that they can access it freely when they want. They may use this space when needing to calm down, have quiet time, play, read and many other things. This space can be in a familiar place like their bedroom, living room, or spare room; you can even use a pop-up tent if you don't have available space. Furniture, soft furnishings and floorings can all be incorporated in their calm space. You can design these spaces with your child incorporating their ideas and helping them choose items to go in the safe space.

You could include (customise your child's safe space to suit them!):

- **Movement** - Your child can get their sensory stimulation from bouncing on exercise balls, mini-trampoline or even sitting on a rocking chair.
- **Lighting** - the lighting does not need to be 'high-tech' and can be very simple by using holiday lights, string lights, glow sticks or lava lamps. Remember to cater this directly to your child and if these lighting forms aren't suitable for your child due to things such as PICA, please do not use in their safe space.
- **Sensory** - include sensory toys such as bubble tubes, blankets, stress balls, bean bags, cushions and blankets. We would suggest dividing the toys into storage containers and introduce the containers one at a time into your child's safe space - this way your child won't become bored of the toys or overstimulated by too many toys.
- **Music** - a radio, speaker or CD player is a wonderful option to include in your safe space. It can help calm and lower anxiety. You don't need to listen to just music, you can play nature sounds, mindfulness tracks, classical music, and instrumental.



*This safe space can be a useful space for your child to practice their relaxation techniques as the aim of this space is to promote **green** on their feelings scale. This is a **relaxed** and **positive** space where your child can regulate themselves.*

Relaxation Techniques:

Try to incorporate relaxation techniques into your child's daily routine and practice with them and maybe begin to encourage them to self-soothe. Your child's body cannot be both relaxed and tense at the same time. Children who learn how to relax their minds and bodies when calm can implement this skill to alleviate feelings of tension and stress.

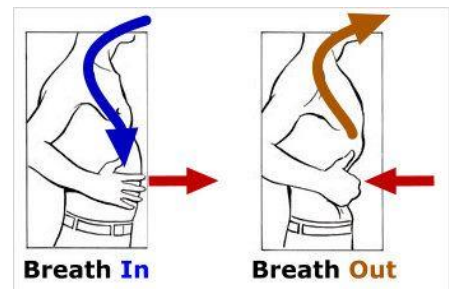


1. Work on your child's breathing:

→ Relaxed Breathing:

- Breathe in and out **slowly**, focusing on the breaths.

Bring attention to the rise and fall of their tummy (this can be done by encouraging your child to place their hand on their tummy and feel the rise and fall); counting together.



→ Another way you can practice **breathing** is to blow bubbles.

- You will need bubble mixture or imagine you are holding a bubble wand, whatever works best for your child.
- Encourage your child to take a deep breath and to try blow the biggest or most bubbles possible.
- If your child blows too fast, they will only get small bubbles, or bubbles that burst too quickly.



→ A useful tool for relaxation for you child:

<http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26930/Relaxleaflet.pdf>

2. Help your child to understand tense/relaxed muscles:

→ Anxiety manifests itself through tension in muscles. Tightening and relaxing various muscles, slowly, and at one at a time.

→ Feel free to simply guide your child through muscle relaxation however it may be beneficial for your child if you do the activity with them. This way it can be more interactive, engaging and fun.

The relaxation sequence is:

- Tense the muscle
- Notice the feeling in the tense muscle
- Relax
- Notice how much nicer the muscle feels relaxed.



Body areas to practice relaxation:

→ **Toes and legs:** Encourage your child to squeeze their toes as if they are walking on sand.

→ **Bottom:** Encourage your child to squeeze their bottom really hard to make it look smaller.

- **Arms:** Encourage your child to pretend they are lifting something really heavy up to their Chest: Guide them to clench their fists and lift them to touch their shoulder then tense their arms.
- **Shoulders:** Encourage your child to lift their shoulders up really high so that they touch their ears.
- **Face:** Encourage your child to scrunch up their nose as tight as they can. Try and make as many wrinkles as possible.

To finish off this activity, encourage your child to let their body go floppy. Try and get your child to notice how much nicer it feels to be relaxed.

For more relaxation techniques and techniques to relieve anxiety in young people, please see the Challenging behaviour section of this booklet. It has a how to make your own 'keep calm sensory box'. This is a helpful box for children who have additional sensory needs. It helps to provide the stimulation or calming that they need.

Learning Disability and Low Mood/Depression

"We all have periods when our mood is low, and we're feeling sad or unhappy about life. These feelings usually pass over time and we get back to being ourselves.

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your daily life. The feeling of depression is deeper, longer lasting and more unpleasant than the short periods of unhappiness that everyone experiences occasionally."

<https://camhs.elft.nhs.uk/Conditions/Depression--Low-mood>

Common Symptoms of Low Mood/Depression in a young person with a Learning Disability:

- Loss or increase in appetite.
- Changes to your child's sleep pattern.
- Loss of interest in usual motivators; withdrawal from daily routines/motivating activities.
- Apparent loss of skills.
- Increase in challenging behaviour/irritability/ anxiety.
- Increase in dependence from parent/carer.
- Deterioration in self-help and social skills.
- Increase in self-injurious behaviour.

Supporting your child with Low Mood/Depression:

Be aware of the symptoms of low mood/depression. Trust your intuition about your child's behaviour, especially when there is a change in the behaviour and where there is a family history of depression. You might want to discuss your concerns with teachers - they may ease your concerns if teachers don't observe similar behaviours, or may confirm it, if teachers observe similar behaviour. Then strategies can be put in place to support your child at home and at school!

Encourage your child to see the positives as much as possible!

- You can offer specific praise on what your child is doing well - this will not only boost self-esteem but will also cultivate desired behaviours.
- With specific praise, a child can be very clear on what behaviours are liked and expected.

Examples of positive comments:

"Thank you for helping me it is very kind"

"You are listening carefully, good job!"

"You picked up the bag the lady dropped, you are so kind"

"You finished your homework, well done!"

"You cleaned the table after dinner, you are so helpful!"

You can give praise in numerous different ways:

- Praise is a **motivator** for children and young people.
- ***It helps them understand that they are loved, and cared about.***
- Kisses, cuddles and high fives are good forms of praise.
- If your child doesn't tolerate these then you can try thumbs up and clapping to show that you're happy with your child.
- In addition - some children thrive off of visual praise such as homemade certificates, gold stars, and sticker charts etc.



Encourage rewards for positive behaviour:

- This can include common everyday privileges (screen time, internet, video games, going to a friend's house, anything your child enjoys)
- Special privileges (movies, activities, buying an item).

This helps the child to feel confident about their accomplishments.

Get your child more active:

- Exercise is a powerful depression fighter - it promotes all kinds of changes in the brain that promote feelings of calm and wellbeing.
- Try going for 15 minute walks, letting your child carry in shopping bags, take them swimming - there are many ways that you can increase the amount of physical activity your child has.
- Research has shown exercise is very effective in relieving stress and getting rid of frustrations and that as fun increases, difficult behaviours reduce. It can also have a positive effect on behaviour generally.



- Exercise can also be very helpful for children with sensory processing difficulties.

Try and ensure that your child is getting the right amount of sleep:

- Having a low mood affects our sleep, and because everything feels a lot harder when we're tired it's especially important to practice healthy sleeping habits.
- Try and encourage a routine before bed where there is relaxation techniques used, limit screen time during the evenings, read your child their favourite stories, and having a warm bubble bath etc.
- In addition to this try as best as you can to encourage bed time at the same time each day (even the weekends!!).



Provide nutritious, balanced meals:

- Make sure they eat regularly.
- Low blood sugar can cause mood swings and tantrums.
- Prepare a meal or a healthy snack every three hours. Include some protein, some fibre and some carbohydrates for energy.
- Try to avoid refined carbohydrates (white bread, white rice/pasta).
- If your child is a fussy eater it is better they eat something, even if it is not a healthy choice.
- Reduce sugar intake.
- Try swapping foods for healthier alternatives such as swapping biscuits for fruit or sugary drinks for sugar free squash or water.



Challenging Behaviour and Positive Behaviour Support:

'Most children without learning disabilities display lots of challenging behaviour during the 'terrible twos,' but usually this doesn't last because most 2-year olds develop a range of communication and social skills which enable them to get what they want and need more easily. Many children with learning disabilities do not develop these skills and are left with the same needs as other children their age but are much less able to get them met.'

Peter McGill, Tizard Centre, University of Kent

What is Challenging Behaviour?

"Behaviour can be described as challenging when it is of such an intensity, frequency or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and it is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive, aversive or result in exclusion." (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2007)

Behaviours that people find challenging can:

- Put a child's safety at risk.
- Put other's at risk.
- Disrupt home life.
- Stop the child taking part in ordinary social, educational and leisure activities.
- Affect the child's development and their ability to learn.

How does challenging behaviour present?

- Hurting others (hair pulling, biting, kicking, biting)
- Self-Injurious behaviour (head banging, eye poking, hand biting, hitting themselves)
- Destructive behaviour (throwing, breaking things i.e., furniture, tearing things up i.e. clothes)
- Eating inedible object (cigarette butts, pen lids, bedding, leaves, flowers)
- Other behaviours (spitting, smearing, running away).

When your child is displaying challenging behaviours stay calm. Try to remember that when children are reacting in the moment - they cannot respond to logic or reasoning, so verbal demands won't be helpful here.

Stay calm, keep your child safe, show empathy, help your child to become self-aware and guide them through calming strategies.

Managing challenging behaviour is all about **teaching your child new skills**. When children learn how to cope with their internal emotions their behaviour will improve.

Medication and/or punishment of challenging behaviour may reduce the behaviour however it **will not** teach your child the skills that they need to manage their emotions.

- **Support your child towards developing self-regulation skills through guidance, feedback and loving support.** You will notice that your child will begin to handle changes in their home/school environment and respond to their emotions more appropriately.

Children often behave in a 'challenging' way if they have problems understanding what's happening around them or communicating what they want or need. **In this part of the booklet you will be able to learn how to 'co-regulate' with your child to reduce their distress and anxiety and to teach new skills so your child can learn to deal with 'big emotions' and manage their emotional wellbeing.**

- **'Co-Regulation'** - *this refers to the way that one person can adjust themselves when interacting with another, to maintain an emotionally regulated state. Some children and young people who find it difficult to self-regulate will be soothed by the presence of their parent or caregiver. They can be calmed by experiencing the tone of voice, physical contact for example; deep pressure massages, being stroked and having their physical needs attended too. It is important to remember that co-regulation can be achieved through not focusing on the child's behaviour but simply staying in the moment with them showing empathy, calmness, and acceptance of their feelings.*
- **'Self-Regulation'** - *this is an internal response to maintain and control big emotions and to respond appropriately to the environment. For example - If you were upset you would be able to calm yourself down and cheer yourself up. If someone has difficulties with their 'self-regulation' they may respond to a situation with an emotional response outside of the accepted range of responses. Self-regulation is important as it allows children to feel good about what they can handle and helps boost self-esteem.*

Remember the feelings scale from the anxiety section of this workbook - **using the feelings scale can indicate to you prior to your child displaying behaviour, that they are feeling 'big feelings'**. Implementing the feelings scale can allow your child to communicate their feelings before they become 'too big', to implement strategies to maintain a **regulated emotional state**.

Calming strategies:

Identify: What emotion your child is experiencing? (for example; anger may be fear)

- Ask appropriate questions to check you have the right emotion.
- Use the feelings scale if this is a method of communication you use with your child.

Reflect: Encourage your child to use pictures and/or words.

- Labelling can reduce frustration.
- “You feel sad because your toy broke....”
- **Don’t label if you are not sure.**

Reassure: You are there to help, show them how to manage emotions and or problems.

- For example; practice slow deep breathing.
- Calming will be easier if they know the problem is under control.

Redirect/Distract: Physically move your child to another area away from trigger (if trigger was identified), to something they enjoy.

Empathise - Use personal examples

- For example; “I was cross when my phone broke”
- **Praise all your child's attempts at calming**

As a parent, when your child's behaviour begins to escalate and the pro-active strategies don't appear to be working, prepare for your child to enter the **red area of their feelings (*they have very strong, big feelings*). This is when you *make your child and their environment as **safe** as possible.***

How to keep your child and environment as safe as possible:

- **Keep Calm!** *Including body language and tone of voice*
- **Keep safe!** *Keep other members of the family safe by removing them from the room. This also reduces the noise of the room which can promote a calmer environment.*
- **Interrupt!** *The behaviour **calmly**. Block the behaviour (for example; putting a pillow down for a child who head bangs on the floor). Changing the environment (for example; if a noisy room causes your child distress - try remove them from the room which is causing them distress). Or try moving away from your child.*
- **Ignore the behaviour not your child!** *Let your child know that you are still there when they need you. Try to remember to limit **verbal cues**. Use small clear words (for example; stop and breathe)*
- **Redirect!** *Have activities to hand so you don't have to think in times of stress! Any activities that you know they enjoy. If your child enjoys certain toys or games include them.*

- **Reward any sign of calming/positive behaviour!** *Any sign of your child trying to calm down, offer them praise and positive phrases. Any attempt of positive behaviour, also offer them positive phrases and praise (for example; “good hands!” when they stop hitting).*

What is the reason behind the challenging behaviour?

What is your child trying to communicate?

- **Pain or health reasons:** (headache, ear ache, infection etc.)
- **Social attention:** (everyone needs attention and it may just be the way that your child has learnt to ask for attention/knows that they will get attention)
- **To get their needs met:** (a child may learn that to get an object/something they want/need, by displaying challenging behaviour, they will get what they want)
- **Escape:** (the behaviour may result in them not having to do what is required for them or to avoid a certain environment)
- **Sensory:** (sometimes the behaviour that a child presents can stimulate and meet their sensory need; they enjoy the feeling that the behaviour gives)

Emotional regulation - The Keep Calm Sensory Kit

During distressing situations, we would recommend having a box/kit that includes something that can use each of the 5 senses.

- Journals and pens
- Bubbles - *it forces your child to focus on taking deep breaths without feeling like you're working on your breathing*
- Weighted blanket - *this can help your young person feel grounded and protected (almost like having a tight hug)*
- Fidget toys - *Rubik cubes, slinkies, fiddle toys*
- Colouring books
- Scented lotions - *you can help your child apply and rub the cream into their body or encourage them to do it on their own.*
- Audio-books/meditation apps/ mindfulness
- Silly putty or slime
- Photos of people/things/places that make the young person happy.



ABC Charts

Children and young people with learning disabilities can find it harder to concentrate or to understand what is expected of them and harder to tell people what is upsetting them and to communicate their needs. All these difficulties can lead to great feelings of anxiety, confusion, frustration and rage, which they may then express through their behaviour.

- If this happens, a lot of parents can feel helpless and are frequently exhausted. Their child's behaviour can therefore become more challenging.
- Is it possible to prevent this challenging behaviour?
- How do you manage the elements of your child's behaviour that you find difficult if that behaviour is already well established?

Keeping a record of challenging behaviour can help identify its function. In the ABC chart it is **important** to have a clear and concise definition of the behaviour that is of concern - this can include specific examples of the behaviour and also, how often it happens. It is important with an ABC chart to be as **consistent** as possible to ensure a consistent approach.

There are 4 main outcomes/functions that are achieved through displaying behaviour:

Sensory needs: to stimulate or feel sensations.

- Sometimes the behaviour that your child displays is internally rewarding or self-reinforcing.

Tangible: to get what the young person wants.

Escape: to avoid doing something that is asked of them

Attention: your child wants some form of interaction with another person.

- For a variety of reasons e.g., limited communication skills, boredom, poor self-occupation skills, some people may learn that behaving in a particular way is a reliable way of attracting others' attention, even if it is negative.

An important tip to remember - ***Behaviour is your child's way of communicating with you!***

Guidelines for completing an ABC chart:

Day/Date/Time	Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence	Notes

'A' stands for Antecedent: What happened **before** the behaviour?

Take into account **environment**:

- Who was in the room?
- Where did it happen?
- Was it quiet, crowded, noisy, hot?

Take into account **activity**:

- What was your child doing?
- What had happened that day? Appointments, school, arguments, tests.
- Had an activity just ended?
- Were they waiting for anything? If so, for how long?

Take into account **attention**:

- Was your child interacting with anyone? If so, who?
- Had this stopped/put on hold?
- Were they asked to do anything?

Take into account **health**:

- How did they sleep that night/previous night?
- Was your child well, tired, hungry, in pain, sad?

'B' stands for Behaviour: What was the **Behaviour**?

What happened?

A **description** of the behaviour:

- *'Tom became angry and upset and became aggressive towards myself and his siblings. He began by crying and screaming for 30 seconds. Then he was throwing household items, kicking and punching me and biting his finger for 5 minutes.'*

The more details of the behaviour in the chart can result in the better the understanding of the function behind the behaviour.

'C' stands for Consequence: What happened **Afterwards**?

What happened **next?**

- Think about the ***immediate*** consequence of the behaviour.
- What you said or did straight after the behaviour.
- Think about the ***longer term*** consequence (for example; time out/ removal of preferred item/activity.)

Attention:

- What did you do/say when you see the behaviour?
- Did you stop interacting with your child?
- Did you divert their attention? If so, did it work?

Activity:

- Did you give something to your child i.e. food, drink, toy?
- Did you take something away? i.e. activity, food, toy, drink.
- Was an activity given/was your child redirected onto something else?

Demands:

- Were demands removed? Did you ask your child to do something but stop when they started to display the behaviour?
- Did you give any help/assistance?
- Did you ask them to do something? i.e. go to their room/another room, calm down, breathe.

To look after your child you need to look after yourself...

Being a parent of a child with a learning disability carries unique responsibilities, stresses and rewarding experiences. It requires the parental skills of emotional resilience, perseverance and resourcefulness

- None of these strategies and suggestions from this booklet is easy to carry out consistently and persistently, especially when you are tired.
- **You** need time out and ways to care for yourself and see to **your own needs**.
- Parents are often so busy thinking about everyone else that they can find it very hard to set aside time to do something they really enjoy.

This might be as simple as having a bath in peace or reading or seeing a friend. The important thing is that you take your own needs seriously.

Get Community Support:

- You need to be able to hand your child over to another responsible adult when things get too much. If you are a single parent, is there a relative who can give you a break/support?
- Parents of disabled children have the right to ask for an assessment of need by Social Services.
- If your child has severe behaviour difficulties you may be eligible for a regular short break from care.
- If you allow yourself a positive 'time-out', it can help replenish your internal responses so you can become more resilient.

Find time to do things you enjoy:

- You need to be disciplined about your self-care.
- The more balanced and relaxed you are, the more patient and proactive you can be when you are with your child and supporting their needs.
- You could write a list of things of things that you could do if you had the time
 - For example; going for dinner, riding a bike, reading a book, going for a walk etc.
- Then start ticking them off one by one.
- Try meditation or mindfulness even if it is only 5-10 minutes a day
 - There are multiple phone apps available, both free or with a low fee with brief guided meditation to help you 'reset'.

The important thing to remember is that you can't help your child unless you are feeling fit, healthy, relaxed and calm. When parents have fun with their children - even as simple as being silly and laughing, and can enjoy life as much as possible together, **everyone benefits**.

Additional Resources and Information:

Challenging Behaviour Foundation: [**https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/**](https://www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/)

Hampshire CAMHS website: [**https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/**](https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/)

Do2learn: [**https://do2learn.com/**](https://do2learn.com/)

SafeSpaces: [**https://www.safespaces.co.uk/**](https://www.safespaces.co.uk/)

SmartKidz with LD: [**https://smarkidzwithld.org**](https://smarkidzwithld.org)

Hampshire Children's Services: [**www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services**](http://www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services)

Samaritans: [**www.samaritans.org.uk**](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

Barnardo's: [**www.barnardos.org.uk**](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Mood Café: [**http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26930/Relaxleaflet.pdf**](http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/media/26930/Relaxleaflet.pdf)

Learning Disabilities Matter: [**https://learningdisabilitymatters.co.uk/**](https://learningdisabilitymatters.co.uk/)

Hampshire Sendiass: [**https://www.hampshiresendiass.co.uk/**](https://www.hampshiresendiass.co.uk/)

BILD - [**http://www.bild.org.uk/capbs/pbsinformation/introduction-to-pbs/**](http://www.bild.org.uk/capbs/pbsinformation/introduction-to-pbs/)

Contact Details for Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service teams:

Aldershot CAMHS	Tel: 01252 335600 Email: SPNT.Aldershot-CAMHS@nhs.net
Basingstoke CAMHS	Tel: 0300 304 0800 Email: receptioncamhs@nhs.net
Eastleigh CAMHS	Tel: 0300 304 0625 Email: SPNT.EastleighCAMHSTeam@nhs.net
Fareham CAMHS	Tel: 0300 3040447 Email: SPNT.CAMHS-OC@nhs.net
Havant and Petersfield CAMHS	Tel: 0300 304 0099 Email: SPNT.HavantCAMHS@nhs.net
New Forest CAMHS	Tel: 023 8074 3000 Email: SPNT.NewForestCAMHS@nhs.net
Winchester and Test Valley CAMHS	Tel: 0300 304 0070 Email: spnt.wtvspecialistcamhs@nhs.net

Website: <https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/>