



**Building
stronger
families**

Norfolk & Waveney Autism and ADHD Support Service October 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our October 2023 newsletter.

We really hope that your child or young person was happy to return to school and has settled in well. We suspect that for many of you however, it has all been a bit of a struggle.

The summer holidays are long.....long enough for doubts and fears to begin to percolate.

Even a child or young person who finished the previous term in a good place emotionally, has six long weeks to begin to wonder whether their friends from last year will still be such good friends, will they cope with the increased levels of difficulty in the school work, will they like their teachers, will their teachers like them or will someone else be in their seat on the school bus?

Hopefully, the first few days or weeks back school answer some of those questions and allay a lot of the fears.

We know though, from talking to families, that for many of you, dealing with anxiety about school and the physical symptoms of that anxiety, lead to a daily battle with school reluctance and, in some cases, school refusal.

The newsletter contains this month:

- **School Anxiety**
- **Finding Out What the Problems are**
- **Geoff Evans Talk in King's Lynn**
- **YOUNG MINDS - The Anxiety IceberG**
- **Upcoming Courses, Workshops and Support Groups**
- **Family Action FamilyLine**
- **About our Service - contact details**

Just as every child is unique, every family's situation is different. We in the Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service speak to many families with children of differing needs. Some of the

information contained in this newsletter is anecdotal and some from respected websites. We hope you find the following interesting and helpful.

I can't go to school today



[The National Autistic Society](#) does use the term 'school refusal' but qualifies this by stating that the term is not perfect as it suggests the child or young person is making a choice about attendance "when in fact they may not be simply unwilling, but actually unable to tolerate school."

While there are definitely children who will develop some school anxiety in Primary settings, we see a huge rise in school reluctance and school refusal in High School settings. Generally speaking the greater stability and structure in primary schools, the continuity of teachers, of classrooms and of your peer group will help to build a feeling of routine and safety for children, especially for those who may be neurodiverse. High School is a different challenge. Yes, there are timetables and regular teachers but there are also transitions every time a bell rings, more supply teachers, different seating plans in every lesson, more unstructured times in busy, noisy corridors and an expectation that you are now old enough to navigate and organise all of this with minimal instruction and support. And so High School environments are already tough for young people with additional needs who will also be dealing with the universal problems of growing up, puberty, self-image, friendships and exam stress.



Parents know that they have a legal duty to make sure their child receives an appropriate education and worry about difficult telephone conversations with Attendance staff. Parents will often begin to feel their own anxiety escalating when a child is resisting attempts to get them out to school in the morning and so voices and tempers begin to rise on both sides. This is understandable but really not helpful. Try to stay calm and show empathy. The campaigning group [Not Fine in School](#) advises "Believe your child's distress is real, listen to what they say and trust in your instincts as a parent." Most of the time, they are not just being difficult but being assailed by difficult feelings, sometimes accompanied by real physical symptoms such as headaches or tummy problems. We can at least acknowledge this while explaining that it needs to be talked about and worked through between child, parents and school because, in most cases, the goal will be to help them back to a situation where they can access an education which will allow them wider choices in later life. Making your GP aware of the issues can be key as you may be asked to provide some kind of medical evidence for absence. (This may change because there is an ongoing challenge to the legality of demanding medical evidence in situations where a medical condition is not in dispute.)



Schools have a duty to *try* to overcome barriers to learning your child may have and a difficulty getting into school in the morning is a clear barrier. Schools should be using their '*best endeavours*' to help your child to succeed, but they have to know what the issues are so they can begin to make some changes..The problem we hear about often however is that the child or young person who is finding school intolerable will struggle to clearly verbalise what the main barriers are. We all find it difficult to communicate effectively when anxious or stressed. Neurodiverse traits can make understanding your own feelings, your own behaviours and the feelings and behaviours of others, difficult to fathom and definitely difficult to verbalise. Concentration and focus differences may be the reason you do not do well in tasks but you may just think you are not clever enough. Processing delays or literal thinking can make you appear rude when there is no intention to be so. Sensory difficulties can make busy, noisy situations like, assemblies, music lessons, PE or playtimes something that you just want to run away from without really understanding why. When you have difficulty reading body language, facial expressions and social cues your perspective can sometimes be a little off. One person's love of pranks may be another person's bullying. Try to be as open as you can with your child or young person about what their differences may be, while remembering that every neurodiverse person is an individual. Help them to understand they may just need some adjustments in order to succeed in school and that this is not just what they deserve but what we expect from all schools.

See also:

The Autism Education Trust - [School stress and anxiety – how it can lead to school refusal and impact on family life.](#)

Let's talk about school



We are going to leave the wider discussion about school anxiety and focus on how you as parents can gather the information about the difficulties your child or young person is having in order to give the school something to work on. Schools need to know what the problems and issues are before they can make any adjustments to support your child and begin to make things better.

Try to **ask open questions**. Young people are good at closing down our questions about how school went with an 'OKAY'. What was your favourite lesson today? What did you find hard today? What did you do at playtime? Who did you eat lunch with? How was your friend Lily today? All of these kinds of questions are harder to answer with 'okay' or 'I don't know'. Always remember though to give your child processing time. We are all guilty of asking a question and waiting about three seconds before saying 'Did you hear me?' or 'Why are you not answering me?' Ask the question and then do not say anything else for around 12 seconds before asking the question in exactly the same way. Allow them to process and come up with an answer. And let them know that you are there for them if they are not ready to talk now but want to talk at any other time.

Consider whether there is another **trusted adult** whom your child might be able to open up to, such as an uncle, older sibling or family friend. If you have been clashing over school refusal and tempers have

become frayed, if they know that you are having difficulties at work because they are not always in school, they may be ashamed or embarrassed to open up to you in case you think their reasons for not going to school are trivial.

For those who really do struggle with verbalising how they feel you can **introduce a scoring system**. Keep a note of the scores so that you can begin to see patterns. You can then ask why Maths is only a score of 2 today when it was scored 5 the rest of the week? Ask High School children to score all the teachers they have worked with that day and begin to work out who routinely gets a low score. You can then ask the school why this might be and be able to ascertain whether it is the subject or the teacher who is the problem.

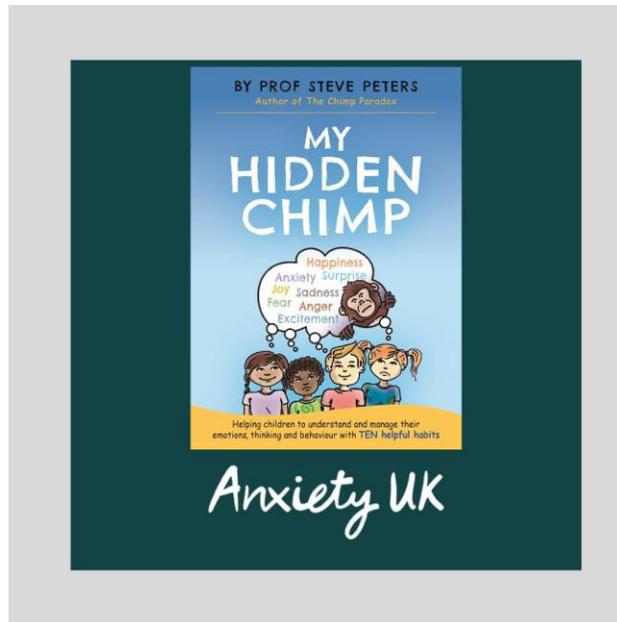
Keep a diary of absences and try to look for patterns. Are certain subjects or teachers being avoided? Have sleep difficulties been a factor on those mornings and what could you do to improve sleep routines. Click on [SLEEP](#) to see one of our previous newsletters which focused on this topic. Also make a note in the diary of the days when you child has a meltdown when arriving home from school as this is often a sign that they have been masking difficulties during the long day. Tell the school this has happened and ask if they know what the problem may be.

Ask school if they would be open to a **home/school diary**, where both home and school and communicate any difficulties, incidents or worries which they are aware of. Primary schools are more open to this useful method of communicating.

Introduce a **worry journal** or, for younger children, a worry box or teddy. When they cannot say what is wrong they may be able to write it with a bit of encouragement. This is also useful for those children who want to talk about their worries at bedtime. Tell them that you will put the worry in the worry box and you can discuss it the next day. What you do not want to do is have a discussion at bedtime and leave your child alone in a room with lots of difficult feelings when you want them to be falling asleep. And if they do not want to write they might be able to draw how they are feeling or what is worrying them.

Consider whether **demand avoidance** may be a factor influencing your child's ability to share information requested by you and how you might approach questions about school differently. A useful approach can be, 'I wonder why you were upset after school today....' and then you carry on with what you are doing and let them think about that without any pressure to answer straight away.

Interested in **some further reading**? My Hidden Chimp, by Prof Steve Peters' My Hidden Chimp' is an educational book for children to work through with an adult or by themselves. The book offers parents, teachers and carers some ideas and thoughts on how to help children to develop healthy habits for life. The science behind the habits is discussed in a practical way with exercises and activities. The neuroscience of the mind is simplified for children to understand and then use to their advantage.



The [West Norfolk Autism Group](#) are excited to announce that Geoff Evans, renowned autism speaker, is coming back to King's Lynn on Thursday 5th of October for a talk at **The Globe Hotel, King Street, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 1EZ**. There is plenty of public parking on the Tuesday Market place or behind the Corn Exchange and the premises are accessible .

Geoff Evans is an independent autism trainer and consultant. Over the last 30 years Geoff has gained considerable experience as an autism consultant and trainer. His services have been used by Universities, the National Autistic Society, local authorities, providers of children and adult specialist services as well as parent groups.

He will talk about Understanding and Supporting autistic children and adults with high levels of stress and anxiety.

To book your place use the links below. Make sure you are booking the correct afternoon or evening talk.

Afternoon

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/daytime-geoff-evans-talk-tickets-710329032257?aff=ebsdoporgprofile&fbclid=IwAR0ahb-SqJO_wL1jzpxtstzgLxQZSE92-IP6HlcdbS1HqAAUK-XWpUdQZIU_aem_ATXkoV4hwaSZbGbzM0Koi34qns-ugxAli_SUVu8CoxYpRsV_cSqN4nrfQ0ePgVL3DZU

Evening

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/evening-geoff-evans-talk-tickets-710353746177?aff=ebsoporgprofile&fbclid=IwAR0y4Og_em7sqUP5oSiRyNQf3eL3kZ_Gq6Saxmvl8okvi9tJYMUxh72p93U_aem_AUQ2zPP9bkZKfLUeC3T-OheKsyenNG6oRF5LPbjzL04AMze-jr4w0Ln4cDdleeZAEmA



YOUNG MINDS IS A CHARITY WHICH CHAMPIONS YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH and you will find a lot of helpful information on their website about school anxiety and how to support your young person.

We like this section from the website about using an ANXIETY ICEBERG

'Sometimes it can be difficult to work out what's making your child feel anxious, and the first step is often helping them to identify exactly what's worrying them. Once you understand the problem, you'll be in a much better position to make changes that can help.

Young people can find it hard to explain what's causing their feelings, and might not be able to answer direct questions like 'what's going on?' Using an anxiety iceberg can help to open up the conversation – giving you a more relaxed way of exploring together what's causing their anxiety.

Watch our video to find out how to make an anxiety iceberg with your child.'

[Play Video: How to support your child with anxiety](#)

OUR Upcoming Courses, Workshops and Support Groups



Drop-in support groups - Come along and meet other parents/carers to share similar experiences.

Our Drop-In Groups are friendly and informal. No need to book. Just come along for a tea/coffee, meet other parents and members of our team.

BANHAM - Banham Primary School, 37 Crown Street, Banham, Norfolk, NR16 2EX

Come and join us on **Tuesday 3rd October** from 10am to 12pm

RING **01603 972589** or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information.

KING'S LYNN

DOBBIES, next to TESCO HARDWICK, KING'S LYNN PE30 4WQ

Come along and join us on **Tuesday 10th October** - 9.30 am - 11.00 am, FIND US IN THE COMFY, SOFA AREA.

RING **01603 972589** or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information.

SWAFFHAM

UPSTAIRS IN COSTA COFFEE, MARKET PLACE, SWAFFHAM, PE37 7AB

Come along and join us in the quiet, upstairs room in Costa Coffee on **Wednesday 11th October** - 9:30am - 11:00am.

RING **01603 972589** or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information.

GORLESTON

GORLESTON LIBRARY, FAMILY ACTION OFFICE, GORLESTON-ON-SEA, NR31 6SG

Come along and meet our team and other parents on **Wednesday 4th October** from 10:00am to 11:30am

RING **01493 650220** or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information.

LOWESTOFT

AT THE RIVERSIDE FAMILY HUB, 6 CANNING ROAD, LOWESTOFT, NR33 0TQ

Come along and join us at this new venue on **Thursday 5th October** from 10:00am to 11:30am

RING **01493 650220** or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information.

WE ARE SO LOOKING FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU TO ONE OF OUR SUPPORT SESSIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE - Family Action's Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service Team.

PLAN BEE



Plan Bee – Understanding and supporting your child or young person with additional needs

'Plan Bee' is a FREE 3 week course (2hrs per week) written by two Clinical Psychologists working in Norfolk and is aimed at parents or carers of children or young people with additional needs including suspected or diagnosed Autism or ADHD.

During the three week course, we will explore:

- Behaviour as communication.
- Understanding the full range of needs your child may have.
- Developing a plan to support behaviour in difficult situations which can then be shared with grandparents, schools and others.
- Strategies for creating an environment in which your child or young person can thrive.
- Sharing experiences, challenges and successes with other parents experiencing similar issues and learning from these.

OCTOBER - The Hub, St Faiths Church, Church Drive, Gaywood, **KING'S LYNN**, PE30 4DW
Tuesday 3rd/10th/17th October from 10am-12 noon - **This course is now FULL**

NOVEMBER - The Riverside Family Hub, 6 Canning Road, Lowestoft, NR33 0TQ
Wednesdays 8th, 15th & 22nd November 10-am - 12noon. Please call 01493 650220 if you would like more information

DECEMBER - Banham Primary School, 37 Crown Street, **BANHAM**, Norfolk, NR16 2EX
Tuesdays 5th, 12th and 19th December 10am to 12pm

RING 01603 972589 or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk FOR MORE INFORMATION or to book a place

You can still access the online videos of our Positive Behaviour Strategies course (now Plan Bee) on the NHS for Norfolk website, Just One Norfolk.

Just click here: <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/norfolk-positive-behaviour-strategies-pbs/>

Puffins Autism Programme - for parents/carers of children or young people with a *diagnosis* of Autism



Family Action is working with Norfolk Community Health and Care to run the Puffins ASD Programme for Parents/Carers of children or young people **with a diagnosis of Autism**. This is a free, comprehensive, four week course with sessions led by Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy professionals from within the Neurodevelopmental Service and by the Autism Specialist Educational Team.

OCTOBER 2023- The Charles Burrell Centre, Staniforth Road, THETFORD, IP24 3LH

Mondays *2nd/12th and Thursdays 9th/16th October 9:30am to 12:30pm (*session one only - 9:30am to 1:00pm)

NOVEMBER 2023 - Owen Barnes Room,, Breckland Road, New Costessey, NR5 ORW

Thursdays *2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd November. 9:30 to 12:30pm

NOW FULL

THIS COURSE

DECEMBER 2023 - Mondays 27th November 4th, 11th and 18th December. 9:30am to 12:30pm To be delivered online ZOOM *Joining details available for participants once place is secured.*

RING 01603 972589 or **EMAIL** swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information or to book your place.

CYGNET- East Norfolk version of Puffins

Please call 01493 650220 if you would like more information or want to be placed on the waiting list.

Family Action FamilyLine



FamilyLine

Supporting adult family members via telephone, text, email and web chat



FamilyLine

Phone: 0808 802 6666
Text: 07537 404 282
Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk
Out of Hours: Text FAMILYACTION to 85258
Hours: M-F, 9am-9pm

family action Building stronger families

Family life is full of special moments but it can feel difficult sometimes too. Whether you're feeling anxious or worried as a parent or carer, or need support with a problem big or small, our free FamilyLine is here to help.

[FamilyLine](#) is a service for adult family members that aims to:

- provide both immediate and long-term support
- help with practical information and guidance
- provide emotional and listening support
- help with understanding and accessing relevant services and information
- provide regular one-to-one befriending
- support to service users feeling isolated
- access to short term telephone counselling
- a referral into our many projects across England and Wales, where relevant.

Family members aged 18 years old and over from anywhere in England, Wales and the Isle of Man can get in touch with the service for free via telephone, text message, web chat or email, using the details below.

Opening times: Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm

Contact details: Telephone: 0808 802 6666

Text message: 07537 404 282

Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk

Live web chat

Contacting FamilyLine out of hours

Do you need FamilyLine but it's out of our operation hours? You can either call back in our opening hours, leave a message on our voice mail for a call back in our operation hours or if you're in crisis you can contact our crisis line to get in touch with a trained professional.

Text FAMILYACTION to 85258

Our crisis messenger text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. We know that getting the correct support at the correct time is so beneficial which is why we've introduced our crisis line. This service is delivered in partnership with [Shout](#).

About our Service - Contact Details



To contact us for advice and support, or to book a place on one of our courses or information sessions, please use the details below.

For West and Central Norfolk **01603 972589** or email swaffham@family-action.org.uk

For East Norfolk and Waveney **01493 650220** or email gorleston@family-action.org.uk

Unsure which area to contact? Use any of the above – we are all here to help you.

If you wish to join our closed Facebook group, go to Facebook and to the Family Action page and then search for Norfolk and Waveney Autism and ADHD Support Service.