

## The Good Mental Health Handbook

A guide for parents and carers



Being the parent/carer of a child who is struggling with their mental health can be utterly heart-breaking and extremely challenging. No one likes to see someone they love in so much pain.

The impact can be far reaching, effecting family dynamics, our ability to work, changing relationships with friends and impacting our own mental and physical wellbeing.

Our worlds can become very small as we focus our time and energy on helping our child, fighting for the right support, and trying to find any strategies or helpful advice we can.

Frustratingly, there is not one answer or solution. Our children and our families are all individual, needing individual approaches and intervention.

The Good Mental Health Handbook has been developed by Hampshire CAMHS and parents/carers. Within its pages it contains information, short videos, and workshops to support our children's mental health challenges.

**\*YOU CAN ACCESS THE ENTIRE HANDBOOK ON OUR SCHOOL WEBSITE\***

The handbook also contains information on parental wellbeing. Remember the airplane analogy: *In an emergency, we are told to put our own mask on first, so that we are able to help others.*

It can feel like yet another 'thing' we must do and finding the time or energy to care for ourselves can feel impossible. However, even learning how to breathe in tricky moments helps to bring control. Managing our own emotional regulation not only helps us to cope but our children also begin to recognise how effective such strategies can be.

The guide gives instant access to information, short videos and workshops. Parents and Carers want strategies, ideas, suggestions, helpful hints, top tips, a guide or anything to try to help their child—a toolkit of information that they can look through when they have the time and energy.

**The Good Mental Health Handbook is that toolkit.**

<https://www.marchwood-jun.hants.sch.uk/page/?title=Support&pid=76>



## MJS Supporting Families ASC

Having an Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) means that the person has a different way of understanding other people and the world around them. ASC is a lifelong developmental condition, not an illness or a disease so there is no 'cure' but there are many ways that difficulties can be managed.

### The nature of Autism Spectrum Condition

#### 1. Difficulties with communication

- Taking what people say literally (thinking people mean exactly what they say).
- Not understanding jokes or sarcasm.
- Preferring facts and logic.
- Finding it hard to understand facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures.
- Only feeling comfortable when talking about topics they are interested in.
- Repetitive in what they say.

#### 2. Difficulties with interaction and socialising with people

- Not wanting to make eye contact.
- Feeling awkward and not knowing what to say or do in social situations.
- Difficulties making and keeping friends and romantic relationships.
- Preferring to be alone and only doing activities they feel comfortable to do.
- Finding it hard to take turns when playing games.
- Not liking to be touched or comforted by other people.
- Difficulty with seeing things from other people's point of view.

#### 3. Difficulties with imagination

- People with ASC can struggle with make believe play or storytelling.
- It can also be hard to imagine what other people might be thinking or feeling.

#### 4. Special interests

- Having special interests that they invest their time and energy into.
- Becoming very knowledgeable about a specific topic and spending a lot of time involved in the topic.

#### 5. Sensory differences

People with ASC may be overly sensitive to sounds, smells, touch, pain or light, finding these things uncomfortable, frightening or painful. Some people do not appear sensitive to these things at all.

#### 6. Routines

- People with ASC can find change and transition (going from one thing to another) hard, so they prefer familiar and strict routines.
- These differences that people with ASC may experience can make everyday life overwhelming.
- Often people can feel worried and stressed by everyday activities such as going to school, meeting people and trying new things.
- Difficulties with social communication and interaction and the differences in their interests, strengths and talents can make them feel left out and misunderstood by other people, which can lead to problems with low mood and low self-esteem.

## Things to try, support and next steps

### Communication

- Use the child's name to get their attention before you speak.
- Be clear and specific about what you mean. For example "pick up your Lego and put it in the box" rather than "tidy up".
- If you need a message to be received, like an instruction, cut out unnecessary social language such as "do you think you could".
- Be careful of using language that is ambiguous or requires interpretation. Some children and young people with autistic spectrum conditions find it difficult to understand sarcasm, humour, irony, figurative language, metaphors. This can lead to the message being misunderstood and your child becoming confused and anxious.
- Make sure what you say matches your tone of voice, gesture, facial expression and body language. However at times of anxiety or distress reduce the volume of your communication to reduce arousal (use less gesture, less eye contact etc).
- Tell your child what you want them to do, rather than what they shouldn't do. For example "Finish your text, then lay the table" rather than "Get off your phone".
- Give instructions in the correct order, and break down into chunks. Only give as much information as your child can cope with.
- Be careful of giving open ended choice such as "What do you want for tea?" You may find it better to give a choice of options "Would you like spaghetti or fish-fingers?".
- Praise and reward when things go well.

### Structure and predictability

- The use of diaries, calendars, timetables and notebooks can be really helpful. Put it where it can be easily seen. Write or draw what your child/young person can expect to happen that day, any particular events, anything they have to remember. Refer to it each day, or more frequently if necessary.
- Use pictures and drawings as well as words if your child finds this helpful. This can make the information easier to understand even if your child can read well.
- Use a calendar or timetable to agree sequences such as when to do homework, when to go on the computer, when to go to bed etc.
- If there are changes to plans let your child know in advance, discuss what will be happening instead, and change it in their diary or calendar.
- Use normal daily routines to provide structure to the day. Make sure you have a good morning routine, meal routine, bedtime routine. Having time points in the day that always happen in the same way can provide security and reduce anxiety.

### The environment and activity

- Be aware of how much sensory information there is going on (sounds, smells, lights etc). Some children and young people can find this overwhelming. Think about reducing it – turn the TV off if you are not watching it.
- Starting and finishing activities can cause difficulties. Think of ways to clearly indicate the beginning or end of something. Consider using timers to count down time to something finishing, so the child/young person is prepared.
- Waiting and unstructured time can be difficult for children and young people with ASC. Plan in advance for when out and about (taking a book to a doctor's appointment). At home make sure your child knows the options for what they can do in free time.
- Physical exercise can be really useful in managing anxiety for all children and young people and especially for those with ASC.
- Seek support from the school teacher or home school link worker.
- Consider talking to the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) at school.
- Consider parenting classes (your child's school should have knowledge of any available in the local area).
- Depending on the context and/or the origins of the anxiety being experienced, other services may be helpful (family guidance if there is family breakdown or conflict).
- Make sure that you have a consistent night time routine. Have a set bedtime. Make sure that all screens are off a minimum of one hour before bed time. Visit: [hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/sleep](http://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/sleep)
- Seek advice, guidance and support from YoungMinds Parent Helpline: **0808 802 5544**

## Strategies and resources to try

Supporting a young person with ASC: [bit.ly/44vJRqs](https://bit.ly/44vJRqs)



Strategies for behaviour of concern: [bit.ly/38P0dBa](https://bit.ly/38P0dBa)



A video on teenage turmoil: [bit.ly/3Bzt1KD](https://bit.ly/3Bzt1KD)



A short film about how people connect, give and receive love and nurture in different ways and approaches: [bit.ly/3xlLd3D](https://bit.ly/3xlLd3D)



A short film on the importance of routine and activity scheduling: [bit.ly/3UxEbbJ](https://bit.ly/3UxEbbJ)



A coping strategy film on how to help your child set achievable goals: [bit.ly/3My8c7A](https://bit.ly/3My8c7A)



A workshop on supporting a young person with anxiety: [bit.ly/3EIWc6v](https://bit.ly/3EIWc6v)



A workshop on getting good sleep: [bit.ly/45vAmc9](https://bit.ly/45vAmc9)



A workshop on CARE (coping and resilience education skills): [bit.ly/2NyIRJG](https://bit.ly/2NyIRJG)



Maslow's hierarchy of needs - a short film to explain the different types and levels of needs we as humans have for healthy growth, development, happiness and functioning and why these are important: [bit.ly/3QXWEuU](https://bit.ly/3QXWEuU)



The Window of Tolerance - a short film to explain a model of emotion regulation how much we can and can't cope with: [bit.ly/3dC5KQn](https://bit.ly/3dC5KQn)

