

I'M A PARENT, GET ME OUT OF HERE!

THE WEEKLY SCHOOL CLOSURE NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Growing friendships

Megan Williams – Autism Advisory Teacher Service

I've given up counting what week of lockdown we're in now, are we even still in lockdown? All I know is that I am struggling with people! Like many, I have regular work and social video meetings but now I am starting to venture out again, I've noticed I have lost the art of small talk and conversation. As I go out for my daily walk, I smile as I cross the road to socially distance, but now I can chat more to neighbours and at the checkout of the supermarket, I'm often not really sure where to start. This could well be how your child feels a lot of the time. Practise and a few handy comments about the weather have eased me back in! It may well be that you and your child do not feel ready to start socialising yet and this is very much an individual decision but now might be a good opportunity to talk through with them a few strategies about how to chat to their peers and make friends.

Knowing how to start

Making friends is such a complex thing and if it doesn't come naturally it is difficult to teach but helping build your child's self-confidence and practise could help. Helping your child learn a few age appropriate greetings and conversation starters may be helpful. If your child has struggled with friendships in the past, now could be an opportunity to try and help as gradually schools are starting to reopen. It might be worth asking them why they want a friend (they may not). Listening carefully to their response, could give you an indicator of where things have previously gone wrong. For example, if it is because the other person has a particular toy or game that they like, this can put pressure on from the start. Perhaps your child has focussed on just one person in the past and this has not been reciprocated which can then be devastating. Where appropriate, encouraging your child to talk to as wide a range of people and knowing about a few age appropriate topics, should open up a wider pool from which to make friends.



The friendship deal

Because making friends may not come naturally, it could be helpful to be quite explicit with your child about the "friendship deal". To have a friend requires some give and take, sharing of possessions, ideas and opinions and also maintenance in term of spending time in each other's company. These are all things that autistic people often find difficult. If your child is still young enough to rely on you to help build their friendship network, it is worth considering that very defined arrangements feel more manageable. For example, a play date on Tuesday 10.30 to 11.30 where both children can play alongside each other with lego will probably be enough and then some time set aside afterwards for downtime. Parties and large friendship groups are often just too overwhelming. 1:1 interaction is so much easier as there is only one other person to "understand."

Having friends can be pretty exhausting for those on the autistic spectrum where working out the social expectations and nuances are draining. The amount of energy and effort needed to maintain friendships may mean that your child is more than happy with a small social circle. Growing friendships is hard work and takes perseverance. Friendships do end, but like all of us would I'm sure agree, a few loyal, kind, supportive friends are worth making the effort to try and find.

TRANSITIONS

Rob Emery – Autism Advisory Teacher Service

If your young person is due to transition into secondary or primary education this year and has a confirmed diagnosis of ASD and/or ADHD, then you may have given permission for the involvement of the Autism Advisory Teacher Service to support your young person's transition. If you haven't and you would like the service to support the transition, then get in touch with the school or setting that your child attends. This year, the transition into school and between schools has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. But that doesn't mean that work hasn't been going on in the background to make sure that pupils can transition successfully. Here we share some of the work that has been happening to support all pupils transitioning this academic year.

YEAR 6

This year, we have gathered greater quantities of information and more detailed information about pupils with ASD/ADHD than ever before. The situation regarding schools opening in September is still relatively unknown and plans vary between schools. We are working with secondary schools to ensure that they have the strategies and tools they need to deliver a successful transition for all pupils. Schools are planning new



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and innovative ways to support transitions including video tours, summer visits in small groups and other transition materials that will be sent home. Bear with schools at this time they are still ironing out the details, but they will get in touch in due course.

FOUNDATION

The situation with those entering primary education is a little more complicated. Nurseries and pre-schools have been closed and diagnoses have been delayed. We are supporting schools with the pupils that we are aware of and schools are likely to take a slow and considered approach to transition in September for all pupils entering foundation stage. Home visits and meetings with parents will likely take place in nearer September. Our Service will be ready to support schools as necessary.

Parent Top Tips

In this section we want to share your tips and advice. Have you got a great activity? Found a brilliant resource? We'd like to hear about it! Please share your top tips at:

SENandInclusion@Peterborough.gov.uk

Is your child starting school in September or going to secondary school or college?

The Autism Team are working to support these transitions. If you would like us to support your child, we require email permission from parents to your child's current setting.

Check out our other weekly newsletters:

Cosy Crew – A newsletter for Primary Aged Children with Autism.

Lockdown Lift Up – A newsletter for teenagers and young people with Autism.

Available from our [Local Offer Page](#) each week.

Boredom Bashers

Resource:

Homescapes is a free to play video game available on most platforms and app stores. If your young person enjoys interior design, this is the game for them.



Activity:

He enjoyed using the toy hammer to bang a golf tee into the egg box like a nail. We put numbers on the box to help him learn numbers to 10.



Something for me:

If you are a fan of 'Game of Thrones' and are missing your fantasy fix, then check out Joe Abercrombie's books. His latest is the first in a new trilogy set in a pre-industrial world on the brink of war.

