

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

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

## Autism & The Coronavirus: What Have we Learned?

Rob Emery – Autism Advisory Teacher Service

The Coronavirus swept the globe leaving chaos, confusion and sorrow in its wake. The world will not be the same again and as we search for a 'new normal' the uncertainty around what this will look like can be difficult to comprehend. We have all learned personal lessons from the experience. Whether it is the importance of staying in touch with family, the importance of our neighbours and communities or the importance of knowing our own minds and our coping strategies. But what wider lessons for families of Autistic children and young people can be learned from this?

### The NHS is Something to be Treasured

For the families of children with Autism, the NHS is an organisation that they are only too familiar with. It is not perfect and people's experiences of it can vary. There is no doubt that austerity measures have had an impact. Families will know only too well the difficulties in accessing some services but the evidence of its value when compared to other health systems is undeniable.



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Take America for example, where health insurance is often tied to employment. Many of the 26 million people in the US who applied for benefits in the last month lost not only their jobs but also their medical coverage. The NHS isn't perfect, but it's better than many other health systems and it is something to be treasured.

### Schools are More Than just Places of Learning

Under the current government there has been a change in the focus of education. This was perhaps signalled by the change in name of the

'The Department for Children, Schools and Families', to 'The Department for Education'. The implication was clear, schools should focus on education and academic rigour.

When the government announced school closures nearly 7 weeks ago teachers and school leaders didn't stop working. Almost overnight, schools arranged childcare for key worker families, meal deliveries for pupils eligible for free school meals, online learning environments to support learning at home and procedures to monitor and support vulnerable pupils. Schools are still communities that strive to support pupils and their families with more than just their education. For the families of pupils with Autism they are often the go to place for support with a range of issues and they know that teachers will do their best to help.

### Education is About More Than Maths and English

For the families of children and young people with Autism this has been a more difficult time than for most. For many parents who have tried implementing some semblance of home-schooling they have come to the realisation that, before any learning can take place, children need to be comfortable, free of anxieties or sensory needs. Many parents recognise that education isn't only a formal process of instruction and the acquiring of facts and skills. What's more, 'progress' cannot be measured merely by Maths and English grades. Writer and mother, Chitra Ramaswamy, recounts 'I wouldn't call any of it home-schooling exactly, unless doing a roly-poly on to a cherry tomato is on the curriculum, but his progress continues at its own pace. And witnessing the flowering of my son's relationship with his sister has been one of the happiest experiences of my life'. 'Progress' takes many forms and it is enabled when children are happy and relaxed. This should be, and to a large extent, still is the first focus of education.

**Coming Soon:** Dealing with 'Meltdowns' - More Boredom Bashers - More Parent Top Tips.

# Dealing with Sensory 'Meltdowns'

**Sam Carter**

*Autism Advisory Teaching Service*

During this most testing time as parents we are going to have to deal with the odd 'meltdown'. Some people shy away from using this term but, in my experience as a parent, it is a pretty accurate descriptor!



If we can see these 'meltdowns' as our child's way of telling us they are not ok. Children with Autism can experience sensory overload, they are unable to regulate their sensory input from their environment, and their bodies perceive these inputs as threats. So, from one parent to another, here are some tips: Recognising the signs of a 'meltdown' in advance (rumble stage) will allow you to put strategies in place to reduce your child's stress and anxiety. This is referred to as a sensory diet. Here are some ideas to support your child's sensory needs; however, every child is different so you will need to experiment with what works for you.

**Preferred Sensory Activities:** Water play, kinetic sand or sensory jars.

[www.autismsupportnetwork.co.uk](http://www.autismsupportnetwork.co.uk)

• **Heavy work activities:** Fill a backpack with books, Trampoline, bounce a ball.

[theinspiredtreehouse.com/](http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/)

- **Calming Breathing Exercises:** Deep breaths, blowing bubbles, breathing beads. <https://www.parent.com>
- **Deep Pressure Activities:** Bear hugs, weighted blankets. [theinspiredtreehouse.com/](http://theinspiredtreehouse.com/)

If the 'meltdown' has already begun remember to give them time. Keep a low, slow, quiet voice to speak to your child, as their processing is slower than ours (especially after a meltdown) Give them a couple of choices that they can choose to do now to feel better e.g. safe quiet space, calm music, favourite toy.

## 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](mailto:SENandInclusion@Peterborough.gov.uk)

'My son loves to be outdoors. I found this activity to be really simple and kept him engaged for ages. We are lucky because we live quite rurally but you could easily do this in a garden or even adapt it for around the house. The 'treasure hunt' involves putting a strip of tape with the sticky side facing out around the arm like a bracelet. They then find things of interest and stick it on.'

**Dave - Father of Harry**



**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

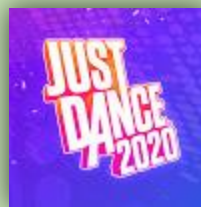
**Resource:**

The Oak National Academy have online lessons for all year groups, they even have assemblies.

[www.thenational.academy](http://www.thenational.academy)



**Activity:**



Just Dance is a YouTube channel that is a great way to learn new dances to lots of popular songs. There is something here for any music genre.

[www.youtube.com/user/justdancegame/](http://www.youtube.com/user/justdancegame/)

**Something for me:**

Spotify is a music streaming service. For its basic service it is completely free, and you can listen to millions of songs.

[www.spotify.com/uk/free/](http://www.spotify.com/uk/free/)

