

## **This worked for me. It may work for you!**

Hello everyone. I have worked as a teacher and SENDCo for many years supporting amazing children who have anxiety disorders, trauma, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, sensory processing needs, dyslexia, and dyscalculia, and I am a proud mum to an amazing young neurodiverse adult. The following are just some ideas which have really helped me as a teacher, but more importantly as a Mum.

When my child was younger - always having bubbles or a feather in my handbag to use to distract or help with breathing really helped. You blow the bubble slowly and let them watch it and encourage them to say p/p/p or 'pop' when they pop it. You and your child can blow together.



If your child suffers with high levels of anxiety- having a straw to blow through can help your child to take control of their breathing. Child takes a deep breath through their nose and slowly out through their mouth. A paper bag can also be useful too.



Always having intimate care products or change of underwear available even when your child is potty/toilet trained as a child, young person or young adult can have accidents when overwhelmed by emotions, sensory information, or stress.

Have a little book and pen to draw or write what you are going to do now and next. This can help children, young people, and adults to understand what they are going to do and when. If your child is finding leaving you at the start of the day, drawing you and your child together or writing who is picking them up can really help them to know that you will be back.

Now	Next
Drink	Bed

Fiddle toys to pull, turn, or stretch can really help your child to regulate or manage all the feelings that can



be hard to cope with. Being able to move can really help a child to calm themselves and think about what they need to do next.

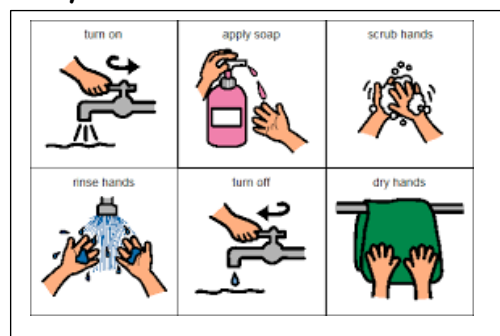
Having a favourite cushion, object, toy, or picture can be helpful when going somewhere new to visit.

When going somewhere new, planning how long you are going to stay and keep to that can help. I always found that if my child did not settle after 20 - 30 minutes then very often for that day it was just not going to work. If things were going well, on average it would take my daughter about 20 - 30 minutes to regulate. If this did not happen then it was often due to her being overloaded with sensory information and we would need to leave, have a walk outside, and then try again. If it still did not work, then we would leave and not feel bad about it. It just wasn't right today or the place we were visiting just wasn't suitable. We can always try again. If possible, we now try and drive past or look on the internet what somewhere looks like, so it becomes a bit more familiar. If we are going somewhere, we will arrive a bit earlier so we can walk around the edge of the room to get used to it.

I would always plan in time for distractions or refusals for my child to leave the house when getting ready to go somewhere. It didn't always work but was always worth a try and did help to keep me a bit calmer.

Breaking down a task into tiny steps and always using these each time we do the task really helped. My daughter taught me that each day for her was like a blank page. She needed to be cued in or reminded by pictures, words, objects to help her to sequence what she needed to do.

Now my daughter uses her phone which will ring and has a picture and/or words telling her what she needs to do to go to college or her apprenticeship place. For example, at 8.25 her phone will ring and tell her to put her shoes on. Then 8.30 her phone will ring to tell her to get her coat on.



Knowing when your child is getting overwhelmed and planning what you will do can really help. My daughter does not like to be hugged when first upset. She wants quiet and a space in the room which is hers.

GIVE ME TIME!

She is happy for me to be in the room, but not too close.

Once she begins to regulate or calm down, then she welcomes a hug and a deep squeeze.

Reducing your language into simple chunks, pause and then repeat what you want to say in a calm and quiet voice can really help too. Even if your child can talk really well, they can struggle to understand what you are saying when feeling anxious, overwhelmed, excited, or really interested in something.

**'COAT ON' can be better than, 'Time to put your coat on to go to school.'**

If your child does not talk yet, remember they will talk to you through the sounds they make with their voice and through their gestures such as pointing or taking you to what they want. I would use Makaton, a signing programme, to help my daughter in the early days to communicate and even now she can revert to using that to enable her to share her ideas.

When a child becomes overwhelmed it can feel like lots of people are talking all at once and everyone is moving too fast. You can get an idea of how this feels by putting the TV on very loud alongside your phone playing music, while opening all the doors and windows, and walk up and down the room while trying to have a conversation with someone and remember what they are saying. Some people describe ADHD and/or autism as having lots of words in their head, but none of them link or make sentences or make sense! Sometimes it can help to have music on quietly in the background as this shuts out the sounds and confusion in the head and enables the child to focus. Sometimes children will make loud sounds themselves by talking in a loud voice, singing, tapping the table, or tapping their feet to block out other noise so they can think! For some children being quiet is important while for others being quiet just does not work. If children are anxious, they can feel their anxious thoughts come back and distract them if it is too quiet

.Being overloaded with sensory information can be hard. This can mean that a person can be oversensitive and can notice the labels in their clothes, fluff on their hands, a drop of water on their fingers, sounds that we can't hear or notice the lights being too bright. When a child is under sensitive it means it can be hard for them to feel, hear, see, taste, walk, judge space etc. The children can then want to repeat a movement again and again, bang things together lick objects, or look at things closely etc., so I found it helpful to let my daughter do that. When children eat nonedible things, I have found having dry foods or cereals crushed up, Ryvita, or crackers, to chew on can reduce the need to eat stones, soil etc.

Movement always helped. Going on the roundabout always helped my child to be able to focus. It made me feel sick watching her, but she would just get off and be ready to do an activity. Running, playing football, rolling, sliding, climbing into small places, hiding under a blanket, having weight on their body can really help children to prepare to focus and learn



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Having ear defenders ready if needed can help. Not all children like these and sometimes when the child gets older, they do not want to be seen to be wearing them so having a hooded top can help.

Letting your child keep their coat on and hood up when they go somewhere new can really help. They will take their coat off when they feel better.

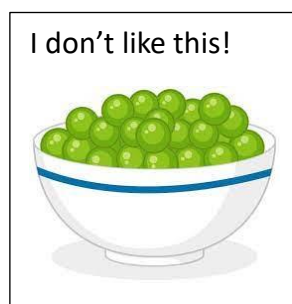


Sometimes having sunglasses can help a child to shut out too much noise and too much light. When we get overwhelmed by our senses the eyes, ears, taste, and smell etc can get mixed up! Helping one sense can help another.

Having a card with information about my child really helped when she wanted to start staying somewhere on her own. It helped her to feel confident. She would point to the colour when someone checked in on her. It looked a bit like this.

	I am OK!
	I am feeling a bit anxious. It would really help me if you could come with me to leave the room and just go outside. I may start to use gestures or signs as I find it hard to talk. A thumbs up means I am beginning to feel better. A thumbs down means I need a bit more help.
	I am very anxious and unhappy. I might start to rock, put my head to the side or pull my hair. Please ring my Mum or Dad and tell me when they are coming. Please don't pressure me to talk. I find it hard to talk when I am anxious and very unhappy. I can draw or sign to you to tell you what I need next.

It can be hard for a child to tell you how they feel. Emotions can be hard to describe. It can be hard to 'read' a 'happy or a sad face'. I found it helpful to match something that my daughter really liked with being happy - for example our cat is linked with being happy, eating peas is horrible so is linked with feeling sad or uncomfortable. When we would try to talk about how something feels we use the image of a cat for, 'this is great, I liked that', and peas for, 'I don't like it and don't want to do it again.' Having these can really help to break up a day in terms of how it went. When things go wrong children can say that the whole day was horrible, when in fact it may have been assembly, lunch, or leaving Mum/Dad/Carer at the door is like a bowl of peas, but everything else was great was like our cat. You can think about how you can help to make these challenging times easier, and you can work with your child's teacher or SENDCo.



Sometimes things that your child does can seem very illogical to you, but they are totally logical to your child. Own clothes day in school created lots of difficulties to begin with, but we found that having a non-uniform day - uniform helped. So, we put aside the same top and trousers etc for that day.

Try not to feel guilty. It can be hard if your child does not sleep, and you are so tired to not feel down about yourself. There will be moments that are hard, but I have had so many wonderful times which have been so unique to my child. Milestones such as starting school, leaving primary school, becoming an adult can be hard times - when you see other children or adults doing something that your child may not be doing or is doing very differently. Doing something differently is not wrong, it's wonderfully exciting and 'different' can remind us that there is always another way to do something. This really takes the pressure off us to be 'perfect'. No one needs to be perfect!

Sometimes it can be hard to keep going or know how to help your child. What has helped me is to remember that there will always be a way or an answer. We just don't know what that is yet, but you will get there in their own way and in their own time.

I have got so many things wrong, but if you do just one thing right you are doing well! The most important things I have learnt is each day is a new day for you and your child. Start again! Never assume that your child remembers what they are to do. It can seem when the next day comes that everything learnt before has gone. It hasn't really, it just needs to be prompted by words, pictures, or objects to remind your child what to do. Organising what you need to do can be hard for many children. They can find it hard to sequence so having time to show and practise what they need to do to get dressed or wash themselves, move from one place or activity to another can help. It may be that your child may need this support all the time. They and you have not failed. It is just something you both need to do. Remember being different is not wrong. It is so wonderful and reminds us how exciting and interesting the world is. Try not to be too hard on yourself and don't be afraid to ask for help. You are not weak; you are human trying to do something quite amazing and enabling your child to make a contribution to this wonderful but sometimes very confusing, busy, fast and mad world.



Finally, I have found ADHD Foundation and Autism Together websites to be very useful. Child line is also very useful for an older child if they want to talk to someone. You can ring them for your child and talk for them initially if they find it hard to start and then the adviser can talk to your child. Don't feel ashamed if your child wants to talk to someone else. You have not failed them. Koala NorthWest is very useful to provide support for you as a parent and your young family. Talking therapies can help you as a parent. You can refer yourself through the NHS talking therapies.

I hope this helps. Just remember - never give up no matter how hard it might feel today, and anything is possible if we are willing to accept that we all don't have to learn, play, listen, and talk in the same way. If I was completely honest, I would say that as a Mum I have screamed, cried, shouted in frustration, felt useless, and scared of now and the future. Is this how you sometimes feel? If so, try and be proud of yourself and your child/ren. There is nobody else like you or your child in the world. How amazing is that!! Oh, and take one day at a time. You can't do more than that.

Helen Bibby



**Be kind. Be confident. Be your best.**  
**#ThatsTheCastleWay**