

# Bi-Borough Autism Advisory Team Newsletter



Bi-borough  
Inclusion Service

## Autumn 2023

- Hello!
- Welcome to the Team
- Top OT Tips for Christmas
- Resource Zone
- Christmas Crackers
- Information and Updates

To be added to our newsletter mailing list or to contact the team with a question/request for a forthcoming newsletter please contact us on:

Phone: 0207 854 5885

Email: [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk)

Information on services and support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families.



[www.rbkc.gov.uk/localoffer](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/localoffer)



Information on services and support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families.



[www.westminster.gov.uk/local-offer](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/local-offer)



## Hello!

Dear Parents/ Carers,

This term we welcomed a new Team Lead. Her name is Deborah Bowers and you can find out more about her later in our newsletter. A very warm welcome to the team Debs!

Our parent groups continue to offer a safe space to share thoughts and experiences within a co-created community, founded on mutual respect and understanding. We are always keen to hear from parents/ carers on any topics that you would like more information on, so please don't hesitate to get in touch.

In the newsletter this term, we have lots of information and resources that may come in useful over the festive break and also for the transition into the new year.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Christmas/ December holidays and a safe and peaceful new year.

Warm regards

The Bi-Borough Autism Advisory Team

## Welcome To The Team – Deborah Bowers!



Deborah joined the Bi-borough Inclusion Service in September 2023, taking over from the excellent Christa Morely as Autism Advisory Team Lead. She has worked in education and special educational needs for over 30 years in various parts of the country. She has a particular interest in supporting SEN pupils, their families and professionals to work together so that the voice of everyone is heard.

Deborah enjoys history, architecture, live comedy, music, gardening, and learning. She likes people and chatting but also enjoys spending time on her own providing her cat with a lap to sleep on.

Deborah's career so far has been spent in the public sector. She thinks that the best thing about her job is working with others to help people and is therefore extremely pleased and excited to be leading such a caring and highly skilled team.

## Top OT Tips for Christmas



Christmas is a time that can be very exciting for some, stressful and challenging for others. No matter which way you see the Christmas period, there are a number of sensory experiences that can be triggering or super motivating, causing dysregulation for children and adults alike. Our routines can often be filled with unfamiliar or triggering events such as school festivities in busy, crowded and echoey halls, additional hours travelling (both near and far), additional time with extended family, parties, different sleeping arrangements, different meals and expectations from others – to name but a few. Our natural everyday relievers can sometimes therefore not be enough to support us through the triggers or excitement.

### What can I do to support my child?

- Preparing your family for differences in the routine, where possible, in advance. Use visuals – countdowns, visual timetables,
- Should your child have mealtime preferences, try to stick to these as much as possible.
- Bring along your calming strategies and aids – noise cancelling headphones, music, a fidget, a comfort blanket or toy etc. Know where they are and have them readily available where possible.
- Allocating “downtime”, time where the usual/ familiar can happen

### Here are a few places I've found valuable information that I'd like to share:

- The Sensory Integration Network's December edition focuses on “Socialising and Sensory differences” with a Christmas Sensory Survival:  
<https://sensoryintegrationeducation.ck.page/a4d175106c>
- Sensory Snapshot: Managing the Comedown After Christmas. For those who love a bit of creative messy play they also share a Christmas Playdough Activities to Develop Motor Skills.
- Autism Level UP founders, Amy and Jac, shared one of their tools for the holiday season in a Facebook post on the 17th December, the Making sense of Our World Together tool, as part of their “Support Sunday”. The tool focuses on the different senses (except interception) and navigates a person and their partner's sensory similarities and differences using a simple table and flow chart template. (any relationship – peer, colleague, family, friends). <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/p6bm7moz/production/8dbfacff77b59069525d9f9aa21cb3b583ffb15f.pdf>

### Resource of the Month: What is Anxiety?

Around this time of the academic year, timetables and routines can become a little more relaxed. This can sometimes cause feelings of anxiety in autistic children. Anxiety is a feeling of unease such as fear or worry. It's one of the body's natural responses to stress and affects our thoughts, feelings, body, and behaviour. Anxiety activates the body's fight-flight-freeze response. This means that the body prepares to either confront, escape or freeze in the face of a perceived threat. Anxiety is not necessarily a mental health condition. Most of the time, anxious feelings are normal responses to stressful situations in everyday life (more of a worry), and they will pass naturally.

There is a great video about anxiety on the Anna Freud website: [What is Anxiety?](https://youtu.be/dknTQktH5Z0)  
<https://youtu.be/dknTQktH5Z0>

Here are some strategies you can try at home:

#### Positive self-talk



##### *Feel calmer and more confident*

Think of some negative thoughts you might sometimes have (e.g., "I can't do this!")

Think of three positive phrases you might try to use instead (e.g., "I can do it, I've done it before!")

Write these phrases down and reflect on when you might use them.

#### Five senses



##### *Feel relaxed and more aware*

Take a deep breath. Look around. Try to notice:

five things you can see  
 four things you can touch  
 three things you can hear  
 two things you can smell  
 one thing you can taste.

#### Thoughts in the sky



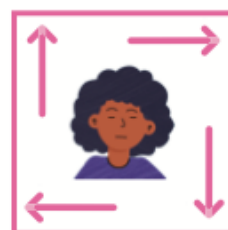
##### *Relax and let go of anxious thoughts*

Sit comfortably. Focus on breathing in and out.

As you breathe out, imagine any anxious thoughts floating away into the sky.

Continue this for a couple of minutes, focusing on your breath.

#### Box breathing



##### *Feel calmer and more relaxed*

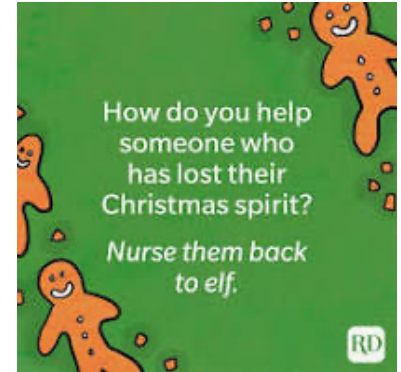
Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.

Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. Feel the air fill your lungs.

Breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds.

Repeat this several times.

## Christmas Crackers!



### Victorian Santa's Grotto @ Museum of London Docklands



Santa welcomes you to our festive grotto. Experience the Sailortown gallery, transformed with festive decorations. Find Santa in his grotto and receive a festive gift. Each morning autistic children can meet Santa in a quiet and relaxed environment. Early booking recommended. Tickets can be purchased here:

<https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/book?instance=1026236>

### Ideas for Christmas activities at home

Shoebox tasks are great concrete activities for younger autistic children as they have a clear beginning and a clear ending. Here are some ideas that you could make at home:





### **Parent Group: Secondary age Autistic Girls**

Online sessions for parents of secondary school age autistic girls. Join our community of parents for a chat and information on topics of interest.

**Time: The first Wednesday of the month from 4.30-5.30pm**

Please book via [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk)  
(Please include the age of your child when booking)



**Online sessions for parents of secondary age autistic girls**

Delivered by the Bi-Borough Inclusion Service– Autism Advisory Team

- Join our online parent group and meet other parents with autistic daughters (or who are on the social communication assessment pathway)
- It is important to understand your daughters and how we can best support them
- Our monthly group will be on the first Tuesday of the month (term time only)

Time: the first Tuesday of the month from 4.30 - 5.30pm

Please book via [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk), letting us know the age of your child- you will then be sent the information to join the group

### **Support Group: Parents of Autistic Boys (Under 11's)**

Are you a parent / carer of a boy under 11 years of age, who has a diagnosis of autism?

Join us for our next session on **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January @ 10am – 11am via Microsoft Teams.**

Further sessions will run on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> February, 14<sup>th</sup> March.

Please book via [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk)  
(Please include the age of your child when booking)



Bi-Borough Autism Advisory Service

**PARENTS / CARERS OF AUTISTIC BOYS – SUPPORT GROUP (UNDER 11)**

Are you a parent / carer of a boy under 11 years of age, who has a diagnosis of autism?

Would you like to meet other parents / carers of autistic boys?

When?: Last Thursday of the month @ 10am – 11am via Microsoft Teams

Register your interest – [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk)

### **Support Group: Parents of Autistic Boys (Over 11's)**

Are you a parent / carer of a boy over 11 years of age, who has a diagnosis of autism?

Sessions will run on the last Wednesday of every month starting on the 31<sup>st</sup> January @ 4pm-5pm via Microsoft Teams

To register your interest please email: [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk)



**Online group for parents of secondary age autistic boys**

Delivered by the Bi-Borough Inclusion Service– Autism Advisory Team

When? – Last Wednesday of the month, 4-5pm

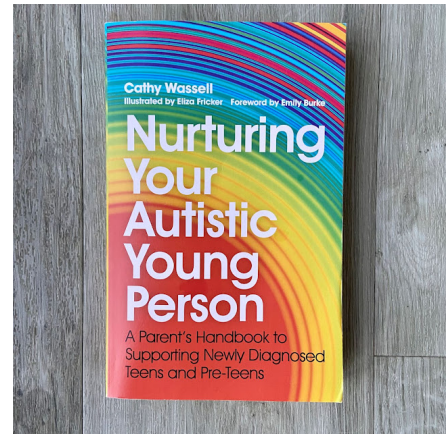
Please book via [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk), letting us know the age of your child - you will then be sent the information to join the group



### Nurturing Your Young Autistic Person

This book is highly recommended by Lucy Munn. It aims to support parents with older children or teenagers who are newly diagnosed. Some of the topics include co-occurring conditions, puberty, and safeguarding, as well as looking to the future, advising on schooling options, and beyond.

Designed to help parents become fully informed and ensure a nurturing and positive environment for our autistic young people, this is a guide with a focus on difference - not deficit.



### MANGA CLUB 'XPRESS

Our highly regarded 'Manga Club 'Xpress is open to 10-16 year olds.

It's held at the Westbourne Park Family Centre. Young people can access a range of social activities such as role-playing games (Dungeons and Dragons) and sharing ideas and tips on Manga characters and art.

Sessions run on Wednesdays from 4.30- 6pm.

For more information please visit:

[www.westbourneparkfamilycentre.org.uk](http://www.westbourneparkfamilycentre.org.uk)



### Relaxed Screenings at the BFI

BFI Southbank has been awarded The National Autistic Society's 'Autism Friendly' award. They have a range of relaxed screenings and have created a video of what a visit to the BFI might look like from ticket to screen:

[https://youtu.be/dIE3k\\_HRU30?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/dIE3k_HRU30?feature=shared)

They have also got a great visual guide here:

<https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/10322/download>

For more information about relaxed screenings, please contact:

[relaxedscreeningsfeedback@bfi.org.uk](mailto:relaxedscreeningsfeedback@bfi.org.uk)



### Westminster and RBKC HAF Programme

The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is a Department for Education (DfE) initiative that provides FREE activities and food provision for children aged 4 to 16 eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) during the Christmas Holidays.

**CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY CLUB:** Join us for Christmas half-term fun, with a packed programme of arts, sports games and much more at The Feathers Marylebone. Ages 8-19yrs. For more information see:

[RBKC & Westminster HAF Programme | Our City](#)



### The Roundhouse – Relaxed Performances

The Roundhouse in Camden are commitment to making sure all audience members feel welcome and comfortable. They offer relaxed performances for certain productions.

Relaxed performances are aimed at encouraging and welcoming audiences who could benefit from a calmer environment, including autistic people, people with learning difficulties and sensory or communication needs, so they can fully enjoy the experience of live performance.

These shows aim to create an experience that removes and reduces obstacles to attendance, including anxiety and unfamiliarity, through creating a supportive and less formal atmosphere.

There is a visual story, about what to expect on a visit to the Roundhouse, here:

<https://roundhouse-prod-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/app/uploads/2023/04/14202331/Visual-Story-Main-Space.pdf>



## Information and Updates

### Parents Autism Awareness Course (PAAC)

Our highly commended Parents Autism Awareness Courses (PAAC) will run again in the Spring Term 2023-2024

We will be running the PAAC Secondary and PAAC for 0-10yrs both of which will run on Wednesday mornings, starting on Wednesday starting in February 2024. All sessions will be delivered via the Teams platform.

We will also be running the PAAC Puberty, Sexual Wellbeing, Relationships and Autism course. This will consist of 3 sessions and will start in March 2024. All sessions will be delivered via the Teams platform.

You can register your interest by emailing [AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:AEYIT@rbkc.gov.uk) with your name and which course you are interested in attending.

#### Parents Autism Awareness Course (PAAC) 0-10yrs

### Timetable



Session	Theme	Dates
Session 1	What is autism?	07/02/2024
Session 2	How autism affects... communication	21/02/2024
Session 3	How autism affects... the senses	28/02/2024
Session 4	How autism affects... behaviour	06/03/2024
Session 5	Visuals and routines	13/03/2024
Session 6	Mental wellbeing and looking forward	20/03/2024



## Parents Autism Awareness Course (PAAC) Secondary

### Timetable of sessions

Session	Theme	Dates (10am-noon)
Session 1	Autism and Young People	24/01/24
Session 2	Sensory Processing	31/01/24
Session 3	Social Communication	07/02/24
Session 4	Discussing Diagnosis	21/02/24
Session 5	Puberty	28/02/24
Session 6	School & Transition to Adulthood	06/03/24



Online support programme  
for parents of autistic  
children aged 7 and over

- part of the PAAC programme of courses

Topics include:

- How to support your child as their body changes
- Helping them understand 'private' and 'public'
- Helping them understand relationships and consent

3 online sessions – 13.03; 20.03; 27.03.24

10.00-11.30am

Via Microsoft Teams

Please book via;

[znoakhes@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:znoakhes@westminster.gov.uk) or

[Lucy.Munn@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:Lucy.Munn@rbkc.gov.uk)

letting us know the age of your child - you will  
then be sent the information to join the group.

## Parents' Autism Awareness Course Puberty, Sexual Wellbeing, Relationships and Autism

