



Norfolk & Waveney Autism and ADHD
Support Service February
2024 Newsletter

We hear very often from families we speak to that difficulties around food and eating are among their leading daily challenges.

It is a complex issue, and if you become really concerned about eating issues or suspect there may be some kind of eating disorder then do please seek support from a medical professional. It is important not to attribute all of your child's picky eating to their neurodivergence. Always consider that there could be a potential underlying gastro-intestinal or emerging mental health issue which may have to be ruled out.

Every child or young person is an individual and needs an individual approach but we thought it might be useful this month to talk about some strategies for supporting with food issues and which could hopefully promote a bit of harmony at meal times. We will consider in turn how both autism and ADHD may impact on food and eating but there are lots of overlaps and commonalities, so be open minded and try something new.

This month's newsletter looks at:

- **Autism, Food and Eating**
- **ADHD, Food and Eating**
- **Our Upcoming Courses, Workshops and Support Groups**
- **News from other Services**
- **Family Action FamilyLine**
- **About our Service - contact details**

Just as every child is unique, every family's situation is different. We in the Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service speak to many families with children of differing needs. Some of the information contained in this newsletter is anecdotal and some from respected websites. We hope you find the following interesting and helpful.

Autism, Food and Eating



There are lots of reasons why food and eating and mealtimes in general can be difficult for your autistic child or young person.

THE SENSES – Food and Eating are a sensory minefield. We taste food, smell it, feel the texture in our mouths and see the different colours on the plate. Add to this the noises that other people may be making as they eat or the clattering and clanging of cutlery or the smells coming from other people's food or the discomfort of the dining room chair. There is so much to unpick if you are to help your child to make it to the table and eat. Don't expect them to be able to tell you why they find it so difficult. They may simply not be able to verbalise the problems or how they can be overcome. They may think everyone experiences food in the same way as them, so why then would it have to be explained.

A key reason for picky eating does seem to be texture. There is a tendency to tolerate a particular texture in the mouth which might be soft and mushy or hard and crunchy. But taste, smell and even sometimes colour can all be factors.

Make a list of the foods they do eat, or sometimes eat on a good day. Can you see patterns of texture or taste?

Can you extend the list with similar textures or tastes they haven't tried before? So if you know your child won't eat bread but will eat crackers, think about whether they might try breadsticks, french bread, melba toasts, pretzels, crunchy carrot sticks or apple slices, nuts, seeds, sugar snap peas, dry cereal, banana chips, crispy fried bacon sticks, oatcakes, toasted sandwiches, tortilla chips, plain biscuits, raw broccoli or cauliflower florets, granola bars, pittas or rice cakes. Introduce new items gradually and on the table rather than on their plate so they can choose to try something new at their own pace and when they are having a good day. Use praise when they show an interest in new foods even if all they do is smell and lick them.



Resist the temptation, and we know it is difficult when you feel your child is not eating enough, to pile the plate high. If overwhelmed they are more likely to disengage. In fact small portions and making mini versions of foods can be a useful tactic. Four small circles of sandwich made with a pastry cutter might feel more manageable than one large sandwich.

Other senses are also at play in food and eating. **Interoception** relates to the messages we receive from our internal organs and our neurodivergent children and young people may not always be getting clear messages from the stomach to say that they are hungry or conversely, that they are full. **Proprioception** is about messages from muscles and spatial awareness and it has been suggested that differences in this sense can sometimes make it difficult to know exactly where things are in your mouth and lead to fear about choking. This may be the reason why crunchy foods with definite corners and shapes are often preferred as the eater is more aware of and therefore in control of where the food is in their mouth which feels safer. Harder, crunchier foods also require more work from the oral muscles which triggers the proprioceptive senses and can have a calming affect.

Think about the environment in which you are all eating. Is the TV loud, are siblings quarreling or laughing, is the washing machine on its final spin just as you are all sitting down?

School dinner halls are an assault on the senses. If eating lunch in school is a regular problem, speak to the school about what 'reasonable adjustments' could be made to make them more comfortable. Can your child have access to ear defenders, sit with an older year group or different children, eat outside at a picnic bench if it is dry, listen to music or perhaps be allowed to leave the class five minutes earlier than the others to wash their hands before the toilets get overly busy and giving them the chance to at least arrive in the dinner hall regulated and ready to eat.

Need for Routine – Don't underestimate the comfort gained from consistency and routine and for some this will be why they want the same foods at the same time each day. If already a bit anxious in the school environment for example they will want to open up their lunch box and see familiar foods which they know they like. The time for trying out new foods is at home in their safe space and when anxiety is under control. The sensory challenges of food and eating can lead to the development of routines which your child will become strongly attached to. The comfort of these routines can help them to 'offset' anxiety about eating. Help them by sticking to routine and structure around food as much as possible. Keep when you can to regular times for food, which room you eat in, which chair they sit in. Always having the same plate or cup or cutlery may be familiar and comforting as is eating the same brand of beans with the familiar taste they like. For some it can also be beneficial to involve them in the planning

of meals, producing a weekly timetable which they can access if they start to feel anxious about what might be for dinner. Word of warning - if you agree such a plan, do please try hard to stick to it.

Anxiety - If you have been on one of our courses you will have heard us talk about 'the bucket'. This is the idea that each of us has a bucket inside us which is filling up with all the stresses, worries, disappointments and difficulties of the day. When we have had a bad day the bucket can be full up meaning that one more small drip can be enough to cause it to overflow into challenging or distressed behaviour. Understanding this bucket model of behaviour can be helpful for parents. It is so frustrating when a preferred food has been lovingly prepared in the usual fashion and presented on the right plate at the right time but which tonight your child will not eat because the potato waffle is a funny shape. *They* are not just being difficult, *you* have not done anything wrong and it does not mean that they will not from now on eat potato waffles. The question you need to ask is 'Why was my child's bucket so full tonight that there was not room in it for one more tiny drip caused by the irregularity of a potato waffle?' Recognising how your child presents when the bucket is full up and knowing a few strategies to reduce the level in the bucket is so important. A child or young person who leaves school with their bucket full to the brim might need alone time. lots of movement, no demands, no words, time on a regulating activity or time doing absolutely nothing except recharging their batteries, in order to be ready to cope with the difficulties we have already discussed about food and eating.

Rigid Thinking – We know that children with autism can have very fixed and rigid interests and particular subjects which they become obsessive about. So it makes sense that some may become obsessed with eating only certain foods also. It can also mean that if they have had a difficult experience with a particular food, the taste made them feel sick, or the texture made them choke a bit, it may be impossible to persuade them to try to eat that foodstuff again. If their refusal to eat a wonky potato waffle caused a lot of shouting from mum or dad and a punishment for them, they may recoil from the next potato waffle they see because of those memories. Stay calm and respond proportionately to disagreements about food or they can become much bigger problems than they need to be.

Interaction - Eating tends to be a time when we come together in one place. Sometimes the expectation is that we will sit round the same table at home or that we meet friends in a restaurant. For children and young people who find social interaction difficult and who also find food and eating difficult, it can just be asking too much of them. Eating might be something they only want to do at home or they may be prepared to eat in the room with you but not at a table with you. Be led by them and choose your battles.

Demand Avoidance - Demands can be difficult for your neurodivergent young person. And we do make demands around food. I have gone to the bother of cooking so please eat - eat it now while it is hot - you cannot go out unless you eat your dinner. If you recognise that you have a child who is triggered by demands you need to switch to a more low demand approach. Involve them in choosing food, serve food buffet style rather than putting a full plate in front of them, be more flexible about where or when they eat, choose your battles and be prepared to let some things go, use your tried and trusted methods for making some holes in the bucket before dinner time and be ready to adapt. And think about the language you use'. Is it confrontational? Try saying things like, 'I wonder what I should make for your dinner tonight?' and just leaving it out there for them to process and come up with an idea. 'How do you feel about pizza tonight?' or 'You choose, pasta or pizza.' 'I bet you can't eat all of that!' is better than 'Eat all of that!'

The National Autistic Society has produced:

[Eating – a Guide for all Audiences](#)

ADHD, Food and Eating



It has long been felt that ADHD can predispose individuals to various issues around eating because of their likely impulsivity and other cognitive, biological and emotional factors. It is vital that any GP who treats them is aware of their ADHD and takes it into account. Binge eating is particularly associated with ADHD, with individuals finding it difficult to exercise much control over the amount of food or speed of eating. This has led to a link between ADHD and obesity, despite the fact that we often think of those with ADHD as being 'always on the go'.

Weaker executive functioning can lead to poor interoceptive awareness of when they really are hungry and when they are full but also result in poor planning and decision-making around food. This often becomes more evident as they reach an age where they have more agency in when and what they eat rather than when you are still planning and making meals for them. Poor sleep can lead to a dysregulated metabolism. Boredom, anxiety, anger and low self-esteem can lead to emotional difficulties with food for every one of us but a lack of impulse control can compound this for those living with ADHD.

More recent studies have also found that food triggers a higher reward reflex in the ADHD brain than in the neurotypical brain with more dopamine being produced. And the most 'rewarding' foods are likely to be the ones higher in fat or sugar. This is not to suggest that all children with ADHD overeat and in fact many are very picky eaters who have little interest in food and an inability to therefore focus very much on it or are so 'busy' that they forget to eat or do not make the time for it.

If you are worried about picky or impulsive and emotional eating what can you do to encourage better eating habits?



- The sensory issues already discussed can also apply to children and young people with ADHD. Be aware of the difficulties. Be empathetic and be in control of your reactions. Anger and raised voices are the opposite of helpful in these sensitive situations.
- Some ADHD meds can suppress appetite during the day but mean that hunger pangs become more noticeable as these wear off in the evenings. Plan for this and have plenty of healthy snacks available and be creative in the evenings about activities they could be doing other than eating.
- Linked to the above you may want to organise meals and snacks to fit with hunger cues rather than the time on the clock.

- Model mindful eating. Encourage them to concentrate on their eating and not be gaming, watching TV or studying at the same time. Their brains really need to register what they have eaten. One suggestion is asking your child to name five things about the food they are eating, although this might become quite annoying if you asked them every time they ate.
- Think of ways to make sitting still at a table easier for your child. Wobble cushions, resistance bands round the legs to push and pull against with their feet can be effective.
- Lots of small snacks and meals throughout the day can be quite appealing to children who do really find it hard to stop moving long enough to sit at a table and can actually be a good option as long as the snacks are nutritious.
- Encourage drinking of a glass of water with food.
- Ask them to take some deep breaths before eating.
- Use smaller plates and bowls to help with portion control.
- Make sure any leftovers are placed out of reach and not just left on the table. They are much less likely to help themselves to another spoonful if they have to get up to do so.
- Don't get bogged down in convention. If they want to eat breakfast cereal or bacon and eggs for dinner rather than breakfast....does it really matter?
- Encourage them to put their knife and fork down between mouthfuls.
- Don't keep snacks lying in open view in the kitchen. Out of sight is out of mind.
- And make sure you have healthy alternatives available. The fruit bowl can be in plain sight.
- Help them make a list of things they can do when bored which do not involve food, cycle round the block, contact a friend, read a chapter of a book, do a puzzle or walk the dog for example.
- Don't let them drink too many calories. Many drinks are just as fattening as food.
- Read food labels and make them label aware.
- When they are anxious or angry and seeking comfort, encourage them to take five minutes to breathe before deciding if they still need a snack.
- If they ask for 'more' after finishing their meal, ask them to wait for ten minutes and check in with their stomachs after that time to check that they are in fact hungry. For your child, it may take longer for those message to reach their brain.
- Help them to understand that negative emotions can lead to mindless eating.
- Encourage regular sleep and exercise both of which help to regulate appetite, mood, cognitive clarity and traits of ADHD
- Consider supplements. People with ADHD are more likely to be deficient in certain micronutrients including [omega-3, magnesium and zinc](#). These nutrients are important for ensuring the brain, body and immune system all function at their best.

Get Involved this Month

Drop-in support groups - Come along and meet other parents/carers and share concerns...and successes.

Our Drop-In Groups are friendly and informal. No need to book. Just come along for a tea/coffee, meet other parents and chat to members of our team. We would like to welcome you to one of our drop-in support sessions soon.

Click on the cards below to find a drop-in group near you.

Join us at our Drop -In 6th Feb in WATTON

Click to see More.

family action Building stronger families **FamilyAction Norfolk** **ADDSupport**

Central
Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

Join our friendly 'Drop In'

If you have personal experiences with a child with neurodiversity or are waiting for a diagnosis, come along to our 'drop In' session to meet our Family Support Workers, who can offer support and answer any questions.

When
Tuesday
6th February
2024
10.00-12.00
noon

Where
Watton Youth & Community Centre
Harvey
Street, Watton,
IP25 6EB

Refreshments will be provided

For more information contact our team on 01603 972589 (Swaffham Office).
or email swaffham@family-action.org.uk

KING'S LYNN Drop-In Group

DOBBIES, next to TESCO HARDWICK, KING'S LYNN PE30 4WQ

Come along and join us on **Tuesday 13th February 2024** - 9.30 am - 11.00 am, FIND US IN THE COMFY, SOFA AREA.

RING **01603 972589** or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information.

A New Drop-In Group recently started in EMNETH - Come and Join us.

Click to see More.

If you have a child with a diagnosed or suspected neurodivergence why not join us?

PLEASE COME ALONG FOR A CUPPA AND A CHAT IN...

SWEET THINGS SAVOURY

33 GAULTREE SQUARE EMNETH PE14 8DA on Wednesday 14th February 2024

DROP IN ANYTIME BETWEEN 9:30 AND 11AM. NO NEED TO BOOK. WE WILL BE THERE TO WELCOME YOU.

COME AND MEET OTHER PARENTS LIVING WITH THEIR CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON'S AUTISM/ADHD AND SO REALLY 'GET IT'. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A MEMBER OF OUR TEAM TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS OR GIVE ADVICE, SUPPORT, INFORMATION, RESOURCES OR SIGNPOSTING TO OTHER SERVICES.

For more information ring Family Action on 01603 972589

Or email Swaffham@family-action.org.uk

We will see you there!

GORLESTON Drop-In Group

GORLESTON LIBRARY, FAMILY ACTION OFFICE, GORLESTON-ON-SEA, NR31 6SG

Come along and meet our team and other parents on **Wednesday 7th February 2024** from 10:00am to 11:30am

In March - **Wednesday 6th March 2024**. RING **01493 650220** or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information.

SWAFFHAM Drop-In Group

UPSTAIRS IN COSTA COFFEE, MARKET PLACE, SWAFFHAM, PE37 7AB

Come along and join us in the quiet, upstairs room in Costa Coffee on **Wednesday 14th February** - 9:30am - 11:00am.

RING **01603 972589** or EMAIL Swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information.

LOWESTOFT Drop-In Group

AT THE RIVERSIDE FAMILY HUB, 6 CANNING ROAD, LOWESTOFT, NR33 0TQ

Come along and join us on **Thursday 8th February 2024** from 10:00am to 11:30am

In March - **Thursday 7th March 2024** RING **01493 650220** or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information.

ZOOM Workshop in February - Introduction to the Low Demand Approach



This workshop aims to help families to reduce the demands placed on the child and provide an environment that minimises stress and anxiety.

By recognising that the child's needs are unique we can offer some ideas and solutions to create more harmony, happiness and well-being for everyone involved.

Wednesday 14th February 2024

10.00-11.00 am

Presented by

Neurodevelopmental Support Services for West Suffolk and Norfolk and Waveney

PLAN BEE



Plan Bee – understanding and supporting your child or young person with additional needs

‘Plan Bee’ is a FREE 3 week course (2hrs per week) written by two clinical psychologists working in Norfolk and is aimed at parents or carers of children or young people with additional needs including suspected or diagnosed Autism or ADHD.

During the three week course, we will explore:

- Behaviour as communication.
- Understanding the full range of needs your child may have.
- Developing a plan to support behaviour in difficult situations which can then be shared with grandparents, schools and others.
- Strategies for creating an environment in which your child or young person can thrive.
- Sharing experiences, challenges and successes with other parents experiencing similar issues and learning from these.

FEBRUARY 2024 - Breckland Hall, New Costessey, NORWICH, NR5 0RW *This course is FULL but we are back in Norwich in May* Mondays 5th, 12th and 26th February 2024 10am to 12noon

MARCH 2024 - Watton Youth and Community Centre, 37 Harvey St, Watton, THETFORD, IP25 6EB
Tuesdays 5th, 12th and 19th March 2024 10am to 12noon To book your place please ring **01603 972589** or email swaffham@family-action.org.uk

Also in **MARCH 2024 - PLAN BEE on ZOOM** for those who cannot get along to a face to face course.
Wednesdays 13th, 20th and 27th March 2024 10am to 12noon RING **01493 650220** or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information. Zoom joining details will be sent to those who book a place.

You can still access the online videos of our Positive Behaviour Strategies course (now Plan Bee) on the NHS for Norfolk website, Just One Norfolk.

Just click here: <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/norfolk-positive-behaviour-strategies-pbs/>

Puffins Autism Programme - for parents/carers of children or young people with a *diagnosis* of Autism



Family Action is working with Norfolk Community Health and Care to run the Puffins ASD Programme for Parents/Carers of children or young people **with a diagnosis of Autism**. This is a free, comprehensive, four week course with sessions led by Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy professionals from within the Neurodevelopmental Service and by the Autism Specialist Educational Team.

FEBRUARY 2024 - Breckland Hall, New Costessey, NORWICH, NR5 ODW

Thursdays 1st, 8th, 15th & 29th 9:30am - 12.30pm*

- Please note that the first session only is slightly longer, finishing at 1pm. All other sessions ending 12:30pm.

March 2024 – Fakenham Community Centre, Oak Street, FAKENHAM, NR21 9SR

Mondays 4th, 11th, 18th and 25th March 9.30am – 12.30*

April 2024 – St Faiths Community Hub, Nxt Gaywood Church Rooms, KING'S LYNN, PE30 4DZ (Parking at Gaywood Church Rooms) Thurs 18th Mon 22nd Thurs 25th & Mon 29th Apr 9:30am – 12.30*

RING 01603 972589 or **EMAIL** swaffham@family-action.org.uk for more information or to book your place.



Do you live in East Norfolk or Waveney? In February/March 2024 our team in the east are delivering Cygnet in Lowestoft. CYGNET is the approved post-diagnosis course for families who use the Newberry Clinic for assessment.

CYGNET- Riverside Family Hub, Canning Road, LOWESTOFT, NR33 0TQ. - 10am-

12pm

Thursdays 29th Feb, 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th March - 10am-

12pm

Please call 01493 650220 if you would like more information or want to be placed on the waiting list for another course.

News from Other Services



The NHS for Norfolk website, **Just One Number**, has just launched a new service for young people from 11-24 years. The service is called **FYI** and enables young people themselves to read about common issues for this age group and explore links, chats and videos as well as signposting to other agencies which can provide emotional, mental health and other specialist support.



[Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust](#) is advertising a significant number of workshops for parents. The workshops they are offering include areas of concerns such as supporting with anxiety, supporting a child to return to school, building resilience, supporting low mood, understanding the teenage brain and, specifically for parents of children and young people who are neurodivergent, supporting language and communication, sensory needs and supporting big feelings.

These are just a few of the topics covered. Some are new workshops you can sign up for and some are videos of workshops which are ready on the website for you to watch. Follow the link for more information.

News from the SENDIASS SERVICE re their ADVICE CLINICS

You can book an hour face to face appointment with one of our SEND Advisors to discuss or review paperwork related to special educational needs in education.

For example, we can support with:

- EHC Needs Assessment paperwork
- SENDIST (First Tier Tribunal) paperwork
- Draft Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

28th February 2024 - Thorpe, Norwich

[BOOK NOW](#) Clicking this link will take you to their website where you can book your place through Eventbrite.

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ASD Team building & activities group

The New Kings Lynn Activities Group
will be starting Thursday 1st February 2024.
And then Alternate Thursdays During term time.



We Organise / Plan / Do !



For more information, please contact
Jade at j.saint-laurent@asperger.org.uk
or by phone on 07985 504835.



**Do you live in Breckland? Aged 11-18? On a mental health
BRECKLAND FAMILIES waiting list or finding it hard to attend school?**



Build Together Breckland Families is a series of workshops funded by Breckland Council and Breckland Youth Advisory Board to support families living in Breckland to improve their wellbeing and mental health.

Are you a parent or carer in Breckland looking to support your child's mental health and wellbeing? The Build

Together Breckland Families Workshop is a fantastic opportunity to come together with other families in the community and explore strategies to promote positive mental health.

The University of East Anglia, Norfolk County Council and the Norfolk Autism Partnership Board are working together to identify how to evaluate the new Norfolk Autism Adult Support Service. This is a new short-term support service for autistic adults.

We would like autistic adults to help shape how we evaluate the service, by taking part in a short survey, which is:

- Open to all autistic adults (18+) in Norfolk.
- About your needs, wellbeing and quality of life, and how we can measure this to evaluate effectiveness of the service.
- Anonymous – we do not ask for your name or contact details.

The survey opens on Wednesday 17 January 2024 and closes on Wednesday 14 February 2024.

For more information and to take part in the survey: <http://tinyurl.com/afjnk47b>

Family Action also serves families in West Suffolk





For information about courses, drop-ins and workshops which you can access if you live in West Suffolk just click and enjoy their February newsletter below.

Embed: `<iframe width="760px" height="500px" src="https://sway.cloud.microsoft/s/hJ9MF3mqCqLieMTP/embed" frameborder="0" marginheight="0" marginwidth="0" max-width="100%" sandbox="allow-forms allow-modals allow-orientation-lock allow-popups allow-same-origin allow-scripts" scrolling="no" style="border: none; max-width: 100%; max-height: 100vh" allowfullscreen mozallowfullscreen msallowfullscreen webkitallowfullscreen></iframe>`

Family Action FamilyLine



FamilyLine

Supporting adult family members
via telephone, text, email and
web chat



Family life is full of special moments but it can feel difficult sometimes too. Whether you're feeling anxious or worried as a parent or carer, or need support with a problem big or small, our free FamilyLine is here to help.

[FamilyLine](#) is a service for adult family members that aims to:

- provide both immediate and long-term support
- help with practical information and guidance
- provide emotional and listening support
- help with understanding and accessing relevant services and information
- provide regular one-to-one befriending
- support to service users feeling isolated
- access to short term telephone counselling
- a referral into our many projects across England and Wales, where relevant.

Family members aged 18 years old and over from anywhere in England, Wales and the Isle of Man can get in touch with the service for free via telephone, text message, web chat or email, using the details below.

Opening times: Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm

Contact details: Telephone: 0808 802 6666

Text message: 07537 404 282

Email: familyline@family-action.org.uk

Live web chat

Contacting FamilyLine out of hours

Do you need FamilyLine but it's out of our operation hours? You can either call back in our opening hours, leave a message on our voice mail for a call back in our operation hours or if you're in crisis you can contact our crisis line to get in touch with a trained professional.

Text FAMILYACTION to 85258

Our crisis messenger text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. We know that getting the correct support at the correct time is so beneficial which is why we've introduced our crisis line. This service is delivered in partnership with [Shout](#).

About our Service - Contact Details



To contact us for advice and support, or to book a place on one of our courses or information sessions, please use the details below.

For West and Central Norfolk **01603 972589** or email swaffham@family-action.org.uk

For East Norfolk and Waveney **01493 650220** or email gorleston@family-action.org.uk

Unsure which area to contact? Use any of the above – we are all here to help you.

If you wish to join our closed Facebook group, go to Facebook and to the Family Action page and then search for Norfolk and Waveney Autism and ADHD Support Service.