



Dear Parents/Carers,

Welcome to our new Year 5 parents. If you haven't done so already, please check out our SEND tab on the website which has lots of information and previous newsletters which are chock-full of advice and useful links/information. Year 5 parents with children on the SEND register will be receiving an invitation to an APDR meeting with me, which will be sent on Edulink. If you don't receive it or have any other difficulties please contact Mrs Mann on the details below.

So, another year has started and as usual we are busy welcoming our new children and assessing need. To those of you whose children are on the SEND register who have not received a copy of your child's plan, please rest assured that skeleton plans are in place and we have prioritised setting up provision and intervention over paperwork but we are getting through them. Our Zones, Social Understanding and Reflection groups are underway. We have introduced our 'Fresh Start' interventions outside the class, and inside classes, our Curriculum Team are assessing spelling and working to close any gaps for our children whose needs are not met through Ordinarily Available Provision. We are introducing a new maths intervention for children with very low attainment in maths and testing has begun for identified children.

So, it's all go, and we are preparing for our upcoming move (see below for more details). As ever, we are working very hard to meet the needs of children throughout the school if you have any queries or concerns our contact details are below but please be aware that we do have a very high volume of emails coming in so urgent issues should be also raised with Form Tutors, Class Teachers or Year Group Heads.

Thanks for your continued support,

The SEND Team

Mrs. Esther Horner

SENDCo

ehorner@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk

Miss Abby Hiscocks

Assistant SENDCo

ahiscocks@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk

Mrs. Lucienne Mann

SEND Admin

lmann@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk

Mrs. Lene Demmers-Derks

EHCP Coordinator

Hdemmers-derks@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk

A Change of Address



Exciting news! Learning Support is on the move! In the October half term, we will be moving into our newly refurbished block. We will have much more space for interventions, a large outdoor space, which we are looking forward to planting up, and we will be developing a Sensory Room for our children who need time to regulate (remember to go shopping at Tesco in Flitwick and put in those blue tokens for our cause). The site team have worked tirelessly to get this up and running and we are super excited to take possession of our new space. However, we do need a name, so we are running a competition to name the new Learning Support. The winner will be invited to our Grand Opening Party and will win a £20 Amazon voucher. There are runner up prizes too. Please give your entries to Miss Hiscocks by Friday 18th!

Jargon Buster

Ever wondered what on earth your SENCo is talking about? This feature will try to decode some of the language of SEND.

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder.

ASC – Autism Spectrum Condition – Some people in the community prefer this to 'disorder'

Neurodivergent – atypical brain function.

Neurotypical – typical brain function.

Sensory Needs – hypo or hypersensitivity to light, touch, sound etc.

Stimming – repetitive behaviours or actions used to self regulate or control excess energy – can be vocal, auditory or physical (humming, flapping, clicking, tapping, doom scrolling etc.)

Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition

By Esther Horner (SENDCo)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

The National Autistic Society describe autism as: 'a lifelong developmental disability which affects how people communicate and interact with the world.' People with autism can experience challenges with social communication and social interaction. They can have repetitive behaviours, rigid behaviours and special obsessive interests. They can have sensory issues – these can be hypersensitivities (under-responsiveness) or hypersensitivities (over-responsiveness) to light, sound, touch, taste etc. As a result of this, children with autism can also suffer with extreme anxiety and meltdowns/shutdowns.

However, it needs to be understood that every person with autism will have their own unique mixture of these characteristics meaning that they will all need tailored approaches to managing in a neurotypical environment. In this article, I will discuss typical problems I have experienced and observed when the neurospicy and the neurotypical collide. *Please note that I have tried to contain my ADHD side quests to footnotes which are numbered in the text and appear at the bottom.*

Just Because You're Right, Doesn't Mean I'm Wrong.

To begin, let's look at the nature of society itself. A dictionary definition of society is 'the aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community'. The 'order' that society speaks of -and we could get really deep into this but for the purposes of me not writing 10 pages let's generalise- consists of our institutions, which have been developed over time by our shared beliefs and cultural ideas. School for example is one of these constructs, we all agree children should be educated and have placed importance on this so that children attend school.

What does this all have to do with autism I hear you cry....well, when you have difficulties understanding social constructs, this makes it extremely difficult to fit into a social construct. For example, I was talking to a child with ASC recently who did not understand why they couldn't pursue their own interests in a lesson instead of following the curriculum. 'But that's not what I'm interested in!', they protested (there's that rigidity of thought and special interest we mentioned earlier) 'I don't understand why I have to learn about things I'm not interested in'. It was my job to explain why they had to conform, that they had to 'toe the line' but if you really think about it, they have a point. Someone that the child doesn't know has decided that children need to be in school, that they need to sit in classrooms, that they ALL need to learn a prescribed list of knowledge that doesn't take into account their strengths, aptitudes or interests

1. If you really think about it, it doesn't make an awful lot of sense and, for an autistic child with a much simpler more egocentric view of the world, it's incredibly difficult to grasp.

This is an important thing to understand when dealing with neurodivergent people. Just because you're right, doesn't mean they are wrong. From their perspective, it makes sense to get annoyed because they can't pursue their interests. They might not understand why they have to follow instructions that don't make any sense to them or understand why something they said was 'rude' when it was just 'true'. However, in order to survive in a neurotypical world autistic people have to conform to ideologies and expectations that were written for and by people who view the world very differently. I know, it's not fair, and this needs to be acknowledged, but it's also reality and while we work to change perceptions, we need to explicitly teach expectations whilst acknowledging their point of view. Not because they are wrong but because that's what they need to do, at least some of the time, because life will not change the rules for them.

However, it's not all one way and while teaching them social norms 2. impose a neurotypical way of thinking on a person with autism. I've been guilty of it myself. I used to worry to death about this young man with autism who spent every playtime and lunchtime alone walking around the edge of the playground or reading alone. I did circle of friends and group support to help him. Then one day I told him explicitly that I worried about him not having friends. He looked confused and told me he did have a friend and named a child a different school. I explained he needed friends at this school and that I worried when he was alone at lunch he asked 'Why? I'm ok as I am, I have to talk to people in class, I like to be alone at lunch'. I realised that I'd projected my beliefs onto him. I believed that, to be happy, you needed lots of friends, but that wasn't that young man's belief. He liked time alone, he didn't want to be 'social' at lunch and this wasn't antisocial...this young man was just unsocial, he didn't get the dopamine rush from being liked by others and that was ok, because that was his reality and, once I listened with an open mind, I understood.

Another good example of this is some neurotypical responses to meltdown – again, I'm generalising and know some neurotypical parents are great at coping with this. Meltdown is an intense response to a completely overwhelming situation. The person loses control of their behaviours and can't control their emotions due to overstimulation and/or fear. The person may hit out or hit themselves – this is not self-harm in the mental health sense which is a deliberate act this is a hyposensitive response to overstimulation. It is very scary to watch and makes you feel dreadful to do nothing...that's why lots of neurotypical parents have acted with love and tried to help by trying to calm their child 'What can I do?' 'Come downstairs' 'Go to your room and rest'...whatever it is that is said, it doesn't matter, it's another straw on an already broken back. All behaviour is communication. Meltdown is communicating 'ENOUGH'. Like a storm the only thing you can do is remove as much sensory input as you can and wait until the storm blows itself out 4. Once the storm is well and truly over and the person has recovered (meltdowns take a LOT out of you) it's important to look back and look at the triggers to the meltdown. What was the sequence of stimuli that led to the person being overwhelmed and this means trying to see from the Autistic child's perspective.

An example of a possible stimuli is a child being bombarded with questions and demands at home. Sometimes, us parents think we are only doing a good job if we show an interest in our child's day, but is this what they want after masking all day in an overstimulating environment? As a neurodivergent person myself, if I've had a bad day, the last thing I want to do is relive it. In the past, the simplest question from a family member has sent me into a meltdown so now, my family know to let me take the lead, they listen if I talk and leave me alone -usually in a hot bath with a repetitive game on my phone if I don't. Even the slightest pressure 4, will push me into meltdown or shutdown because I'm already overstimulated. My family of largely neurotypicals... don't impose their beliefs on me (that everyone who has had a bad day wants to discuss it or questioned about it) 5.

If you take anything from this, I hope it is that, while it is important to help neurospicy children learn to cope in our society, it is also important to make adjustments to our own way of thinking and respect their point of view, explain why we are doing this, e.g It's ok to be angry, I understand why you are angry (I see how this doesn't make sense to you), but it's not ok to 'swear/disrupt the learning of others/be rude, let's look at this situation and try to figure out what we could do better next time 6.

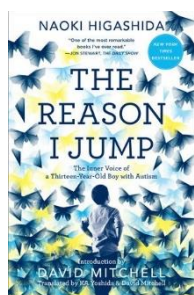
I saw on Instagram (so it must be true 7.) that Takiwātanga is the Te Reo Māori word for autism and it means "in his/her/their own space and time". It takes time and patience –I'm speaking for my neurospicy people directly now- but we can learn to 'fit in' to a neurotypical world and save the dramas and stress. That said, we don't have to be 'typical' ... it's ok that neurotypical rules are weird to us and most of us often feel like we are the only sane people in the world. We have to follow them but we can do so and still be ourselves and neurotypicals can help us with this, even though they too may need a little guidance from us.

If you would like to know more about autism. Please come to my Autism Parents' Event on Monday 14th October at 5:30-6:30. Please sign up with the link that was sent out in a separate communication or contact Mrs. Vince in the office.

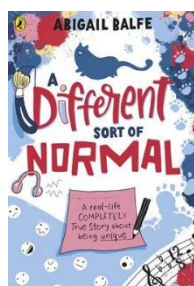
Footnotes

1. Don't get me wrong, we need to know how to read, write, use computers, balance our bank accounts etc...but how much of what we learn in school is actually useful to us in later life? I've managed to get the the dizzying heights of Middle School SENDCo having never used Pythagoras's theory or quadratic equations, so why was I tortured with them at school?
2. i.e not telling Aunt Doris that her new perm looks like a clown wig.
3. Even though you will feel like the most evil parent in the world. Also, meltdown should not be confused with a tantrum which is explosive but chosen behaviour to achieve an end.
4. I once went into meltdown because I was asked to make a cup of coffee.
5. Again, every single neurodivergent person is very different and will need different approaches, but the important thing is this...recognise that and understand them from their perspective.
6. A great resource for parents (and one we use in school) is a consequence map and I will post this on the SEND website.
7. That was sarcasm, lots of things on TikTok and Instagram are untrue but I hope this one is.

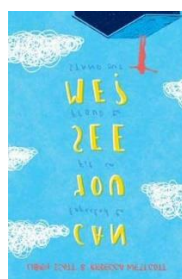
Book Recommendations - ASD Books



The Reason I Jump
by Naoki Higashida
Written by Naoki Higashida, a very smart, very self-aware, and very charming thirteen-year-old boy with autism, *The Reason I Jump* is a one-of-a-kind memoir that demonstrates how an autistic mind thinks, feels, perceives, and responds in ways few of us can imagine



A Different Sort of Normal
(8+)
By Abigail Balfe
Abigail, the author and illustrator of this exceptional non-fiction book, spent most of her life not knowing she was autistic – she just thought she was weird, as that's what people called her. This is an honest, funny and touching story of her childhood, told with a newfound understanding following her diagnosis aged 33 and subsequent research about autism.



Can you See Me
By Rebecca Westcott and Libby Scott.

I've recommended it before, and I will again. A great 'coming of age' with autism book!

Tally knows she's different: she's autistic, meaning she sees and feels everything differently to her friends and family. Now, as she enters this new stage in her life, she is painfully aware of the way she is perceived and feeling an almost unbearable pressure to try to fit in. But what exactly are the rules for being "normal"?



The Space We're In (9+)
Author: Katya Balen
When Frank's younger brother is diagnosed with autism at the age of three, their mum explains that it means he may not always understand the way the world works. Frank, with great perceptiveness, observes that he doesn't understand the world, either. Who really does? Now aged ten, Frank is learning that people can sometimes be cruel. When kids make unpleasant jokes about Max, Frank fails to defend him. Like many older siblings, he is also frustrated at how much of his parents' time and attention his brother now demands. All in all, he's currently wrestling some pretty serious feelings of guilt and resentment. Little does he know, life is about to throw something far, far worse at the family.

Useful websites for parents of children with SEND

For information on what is available in Bedfordshire for children and young people with SEND:

<https://localoffer.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/kb5/centralbedfordshire/directory/home.page>

Advice on young peoples mental health:

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/>

ADHD Information and Support:

<https://adhduk.co.uk/>

<https://www.additudemag.com/>

Autism Spectrum Disorder Information and Support.

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>

Zones of Regulation Information:

www.zonesofregulation.com

www.weareteachers.com/zones-of-regulation-activities

<https://www.theottoolbox.com/?s=zones+of+regulation>

There are more links on the website – SEND tab.