

Youth & Children: Autism & Autistic Traits

CONVENTION KIDS & YOUTH TEAMS

(Do look at the main information sheet about autism too.)

THE ENVIRONMENT AND VENUES

For some children and young people who are autistic, have lived through trauma or struggle with anxiety, the environment of the Convention can be difficult.

Everything is new and unknown – even if they have been before there will be differences that can cause anxiety.

Many of the rooms in the Pencil Factory have windows on both sides which makes those rooms very, very bright on sunny days – it can reflect off different things in different ways causing flickering, shimmering and flashing, which can also be difficult. If you have a lighting rig in your venue, it can cause the same issues.

There are different smells too – air fresheners, perfume, clothes that have that smell from laundry products – especially those that boast about the ability to make clothes ‘smell fresh 4 time longer’! These can add to sensory stress. For children and young people who have experienced trauma, some smells may bring back memories of that trauma.

Where these children and young people are staying and the journey onto the site can also make them anxious.

UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS AND RESPONSES

Some can be ‘rule keepers’, and time where rules are broken can impact them significantly. This is often not just about themselves but about unfairness to others too and can lead to outbursts. An example might be the rule ‘no running in the venue’ and then doing a running game... this means the rules are being broken. The nuances may not be seen or understood. Instead, this rule should be ‘no running unless an adult says you can’.

Many need time to process information and will still be processing the first bit when others have moved on having processed another two bits of information in the same time span. Not being able to process quickly and being left behind can lead to misunderstandings and frustration. In talks, this can lead to just switching off and sometimes disruption. It’s good to give information simply and give instructions one at a time.

If you think of a pop bottle that has been shaken, you will know what happens when you open it – it sprays the pop everywhere in an explosion of froth and stickiness!

For these children and young people, the different aspects of the programme and being away from home can each represent one shake of the bottle. Each uncomfortable sensory experience adds more shakes to the bottle. Being rushed, not understanding what's needed and changes of rules also add to an over-shaken bottle.

At some point, the top will come off. It may seem a small thing that causes the 'explosion' (meltdown) in the end, but to that child or young person, in that moment, it will be huge.

Other children may not 'explode' or meltdown but instead shutdown. For each child or young person it will look different; going quiet, pulling clothing over the head to hide away from the issue, rocking or stimming (flapping, fiddling, tapping, repeating words to help regulate emotions etc.)

Meltdowns and shutdowns are a fight, flight or freeze response. Have a look at [this helpful video](#) from Through the Roof for more advice.

All this and more can mean a child or young person may struggle with even the most basic of instructions given.

Some will need time to 'buffer' and process an instruction, many will need instructions one at a time, with plenty of encouragement and praise.

For some, how we say a request or instruction is important. Try not to make it sound like a demand or confrontational, as for some, this raises stress and anxiety levels ('I might do it wrong' 'I don't think I can do that' etc.) and result in avoidance of the demands on them. This can seem like bad behaviour, but it isn't. Preparation before the request by way of a visual timetable is very helpful, but in some instances, so is giving a choice: 'Would you like to go outside with the others or after?' 'Would you like to watch the activity and then join in or help me do it?'

AT THE CONVENTION

Beth Diaper will be chatting to the parents of children and young people with additional needs and disabilities before the event and will be passing on information to those who need to know, including team leaders.

Some of the children or young people will be given a leader from within the programme to work with them – depending on their need.

For those who need more support, we are trialling having a central team who will be allocation a child/young person to work with within their age group. This will only be for weeks 2 and 3.

For week 1, Beth will not be with us. She will still be talking to the parent for that week and passing on information. Kay Morgan-Gurr will be on hand for week 1 for any advice (and around for weeks 2 and 3), but support will be allocated from within the teams as we have done before.

Just a note to close with: For children and young people who are adopted and fostered, the effects of any childhood trauma won't go away at the point of adoption or fostering – it will continue to have a significant impact on them in different ways.