

**Melissa Hutchings, ASD Family Help - Anxiety & Autism
(Neurodivergence Wales Parents & Carers Virtual Advice Session)**

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Presentation transcript

OK, so I'm Melissa. I am the manager of the charity here in Pembrokeshire for ASD family help. We're just a small charity supporting our local community, doing all sorts of great work. I have an amazing team behind me: we do workshops, we do youth clubs. We do parent groups and we do help some of our local community with benefits as well. But today we're obviously going to be talking about autism and anxiety. And often, while the autism community do have a higher level of anxiety and we will be highlighting that today, I've just got to move the slide on. There we go. We're off. OK then. So, what are we hoping to achieve today? We're going to be looking at what is anxiety and what causes it, and how it impacts our young people. We'll be looking at how to keep our young people safe. That's really key for our young people and how to amend and adjust our approach as well. And then within that, we'll be giving you lots of ideas on how to support them. So, this is like a day-to-day approach to work with them. It's like if we do this early, hopefully it won't get to the higher levels of anxiety, which then you would need additional services to step in and support you.

OK, so what is anxiety? Anxiety is something that affects us all. We all experience anxiety. I woke up this morning feeling anxious, thinking, oh my goodness, I've got to go online and talk to lots of people this morning. You may get anxious yourself when you go for an interview. And so, we all get anxious. So, what the Oxford Dictionary says: it's a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. Now, if you think of our autistic community, that part where it says uncertain outcome is what really causes them to become anxious. We know that our autistic community like things to be just so. They like everything to be predictable. They like to know what's coming up. So, the uncertain outcome is what really can drive that anxiety. So, as I said already, anxiety is something that we all experience. But when it becomes a real issue is when it stops our young people from just getting out and enjoying life: being able to go to school, being able to have friendships, relationships, being able to just join in family events. So that's when we really need to step in, and

we need to try and help them. Now there's loads of different kinds of anxiety, but today what I've just picked out - the few that I feel really impacts most of our young people who are autistic. So, the first one is looking at separation anxiety. You know about that fear where they don't want to let you go - where they want, and they need to know where you are. It can be as extreme as, you could be in the house together and they could be upstairs or in another room, away from you, but they still call out and say Mum, Dad, are you there? They need to feel safe. They need to know where you are. If you think right now where your children are, I'm assuming you know where they are, if they're in school at this very moment, you know that they're sat in that classroom. You can visualise maybe their teacher. You may even know what subject they are in. So, you know they're safe. But if you just dropped your children off this morning and they were whisked away, you would become anxious, you'll be thinking, well, where are they? When are they coming back? Are they OK? And that can be the same for our children. They need -It's really nice for them to know where you are and what you're up to. So, tell them this is what I'm up to today. This is where I'm going, and I will be there to pick you up at the end of the day. So, it's a real key part of separation anxiety. And then social anxiety. Now, as we're aware, socialising is a key element that our young people can find very difficult. It's just generally interacting with others. Having communication with other people. Understanding what other people mean, understanding what they say, just being able to join in that conversation, being able to join in the play can all cause high levels of anxiety. And then the biggest area, which often impacts most of our young people, is the generalised anxiety - that excessive worrying sometimes you may hear it saying they catastrophise, they worry about everything. They worry - are they going to succeed? Often with these children 9 out of 10 in their spelling test isn't good enough. They need to achieve 10 out of 10. They put a huge amount of pressure on themselves. Failing is not an option, but they will often think worst case scenario: if I do this, this is what's going to happen. So that can be really, you know, difficult for them. It can be other things like black and white thinking, theory of mind, all those things can impact generalised anxiety.

Now this slide is really just explaining to you what the relationship is between anxiety and performance, and what we're saying here is that a little bit of worry, a little bit of anxiety is really, really good for you, because what happens is it drives you to try a little bit harder. It drives you to practise a bit more. So, if you think of like athletes or people that go on the stage, they practise, practise, practise. They rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

so they can give that perfect performance. So, and they're often driven by the anxiety. Yeah. So, what we're saying here, is, it makes us perform much better. However, where it becomes a huge issue, especially for our young people, is that too much anxiety just engulfs us, and it makes us sometimes fail and not be able to move on. So, an example of that will be: When our children maybe have got their GCSEs coming up and they open up the paper. They look down and they just burst into tears because that anxiety has become so overwhelming it's engulfed them. This is where you might see masking, where you might see meltdowns. Another example is a child will maybe get to the threshold of a door and they just can't cross over. We've seen this when we do our youth clubs. You know, often parents will say they're just not going to come in. They're not going to come in and that's OK. So, we just let them stand by the door and they come in when they're ready. And the good news is often 9 times out of 10, they do come in and before we know a few weeks down the line, they're joining in with the activities, which is so wonderful to see. So why so? Why do children become anxious? So, these are just a few ideas. Back in the day, I used to work closely with Reading University and there was a lovely lady there called Doctor Fiona Knott, you can actually look her up online, and she studied a great deal about autism and anxiety and she's sort of part of research suggesting that there often was a family tie to anxiety - genetically. So, if you're naturally an anxious person, sometimes we can pass this on, and she said there was about 40% of us can pass on that anxiety. However, if you then put autism in the mix, often this can go up to 80%. Then we look at parental anxiety. So, if you're anxious about something, we have to really be careful that we don't pass that on to our children. So, let's just use this spider analogy: So, a spider walks across the room, and you stand on that chair, and you go, Oh my goodness, it's a spider. It's a spider. What are we saying to our young children? What we're saying is that spiders are scary. So sometimes what we have to do, we have to model being really, really brave, and not let them see our own fears. And then we look at temperament, we all handle things in different ways and some of us get more anxious than others. But what we do have to be aware of is that our young people with additional learning needs actually tend to have more anxiety and have greater needs. And we need to be aware of that to support them.

Life events. So, life events can be just general day-to-day events, or it could be a big event like going to school. It could be a family event that's happened. It could be a holiday that's coming up. So, it's just bearing in mind that life events, we need to be

aware of may create more anxiety or it could be that something's happened and then it can create a negative experience, so they will always go back. And we'll talk a bit about that a bit more later. So, thinking styles, which you've already sort of touched on. So, like I said, they tend to think about the worst-case scenario. They can catastrophize. So just to sort of bear that in mind. Learning experiences. So sometimes actually, you know, we do need a little bit of anxiety to help us react. So, if a tiger was to fly into the room now, my anxiety would go up and that would send me into fight/flight mode, so hopefully it would help protect me. Hopefully it would make me maybe run or it'll make me help me fight back. On the other hand, it could cause me to freeze, which often can happen for our young children. This is also linked into sensory, sensory plays a big part for our young people and the environment can have a big impact on our young people as well. OK, indicators of anxiety. So, what are the things that you see when you see our children getting anxious and how can it impact them? So, I'm not going to go through this whole long list. I'm hoping that actually some of you might recognise these and stand out. So, you might like to write in the chat and say, actually, these are the ones that really stand out for me. So, sleep can often be a big issue. Often, we hear parents sharing that their children can't get to sleep at night, because they can't stop thinking. They may use the toilet a great deal more - change can be really massive. When we know that there's sudden change -, we've got a sports day coming up at the moment at schools, so that's a whole different change. The way that school day changes can cause anxiety. At school, you often hear our children saying they mask, or they shut down, or they camouflage, which can then go on to when they come home, causing burnouts and exhaustion. We've already mentioned separation anxiety. Sensory. Often, they may come home and complain of having headaches or stomach aches. OK, because again, this leads to them being exhausted because all day long what they're trying to do is they're trying to please. They're just trying to fit in. They're trying to do their best. When they get home from school like I say, they just need time to relax. Self-harming: we're not really going to be touching on self-harming today. That is a whole different other level, but the reason sometimes our children self-harm is the fact that they're so overwhelmed with this emotion that they can't see a way through it. So sometimes what they do is - creating pain stops that feeling. So, if you feel that your children are self-harming, then I would urge you to seek extra help with that. So, the key thing for our children is they want to feel safe. So, for us, it's important that we try to help them feel safe. If they feel safe, then generally they will have a go at doing something. If they don't feel safe, then

they're not going to step forward to have a go. OK, so how do we look at learning to be anxiety free? Remember, it is normal and that everyone gets to feel anxious, and it's really important that we express that to them. They're not different. They're not strange. This is something that we all feel, but for them, that's hard for them to see that. But it's also important to let them know that we are there to help them and to move forward and guide them. We're in this together because when they do feel this anxiety they often can feel that they've lost control and become very distressed, which can be lonely, which can be a frightening place to be. Let's now look at ideas, tips to sort of think about.

So, the main thing I want you to think about is modifying your expectations and this can be on a day-to-day basis to be honest with you. So, some days they can do really, really well and other days they struggle. So, no one day is the same for our children. OK. So, some days their emotional age say for instance could be 11 years old, but some days they could be 11, but actually at that day, that moment they feel more like an 8 year old. So, every day you've got to look at them and look at where are they? What help do they need that day? What are their needs that day? Because that can change. So, you have to modify your expectations on a day-to-day basis - just because yesterday they managed to get up, get dressed, make their breakfast and walk out the door to school doesn't mean the next day they can do the same. Something may have happened that they haven't shared with you. So, the key is always connecting with them and understanding how they're feeling that day, that moment and supporting them with that. The other area to think about is to modify the environment. So that's very much to do with our sensory difficulties. And if you don't know much about sensory processing difficulties, I would really urge you to go off and learn more and see what other workshops are out there for you to learn more about, because it can have a big impact on our young people. So, the noise or a smell or a flashing light or just being in a crowded room can often have a big impact on our children. School, a lot of the time it can be about the environment. I'm sat on a hard chair all day. There are other people talking all the time and there's things going on outside. A fly might fly into the room. It's all to do with the environment. And then there's the internal environment and them understanding how they feel - and we'll talk about that in a moment. Another area to really think about is how you support their executive functioning skills. And again, that's a whole other area to look at and explore. But executive functioning skills is something that we all need. So, it's all about planning -

organisation skills, knowing where to start, knowing where to finish. How to carry out a task and succeed in a task. Yeah. So sometimes our children, they just need that structure. They just need things like task strips and they need timetables. They need lists. They just need something to be scaffolded, to know where do I start, where's the middle and where do I finish? Now finish is really important to our young people. If they can't manage to finish something again it can create high anxiety. I feel like I'm a failure. I need to be able to finish this. I need to feel like I've succeeded at something. So again, teaching them executive functioning skills, teaching them how to be organised, teaching them how to plan something out, can really help keep their anxiety levels low. So often we ought to say is present it visually, show them, show them, show them. OK. The more you show them, the more they can see it. The more they can link into it. And sometimes parts of the day just do the same way. Keep that consistency. That's why sometimes school can be really good because it is structured. They do know what's going to happen. They have their timetable. I just want to say just to be aware here that I'm aware for some of our young people that a timetable with time on it can actually create more anxiety, and things like timers can also put more pressure on them. So only you know your children individually and only you know what really works. But even for the children with something that's got a time against it, structure can still help. You can still write out a list, but just don't put a time against it. So, you have to know what works and what doesn't work for your young people. But structure and routine I can't express enough is really important. Let them know how long, where and when, but I would have a little caveat here. How long? Just be aware if you say it's only going to be half an hour, it's only going to be half an hour. OK. It's not going to be 31 minutes or 35. It's only 30 minutes. So, you need to be aware of that. So, if you don't know exactly how long it's going to be, then make it a little bit more fluid. It's a bit like they may say, oh, when's grandma coming round and you'll go, Oh, yeah, she's coming round at 6 o'clock. And for those who can tell the time, the expectation is it's 6 o'clock - not one minute past. So, we would prefer you to say she's coming round after tea or she's coming round anytime between 6:00 and half six. That way it makes them feel much calmer. Let them know what to expect, what's going to happen. And be honest, I know some of you might be thinking, gosh, well, if I tell them where we're going, if I tell them, you know, it may hurt, or I tell them that somebody's going to be there they're not going to leave the house. However, if they get there and you haven't been honest, actually it doesn't help with that trust. It doesn't help with that relationship you have with your child. So, it's really important to

be honest about it, and then you can put the plan in. So, work with them, let them know you're on their side and collaborate with them. Yeah. So, try to make time to talk to them as much as you can. And if you think something's going to be problematic, then plan it out. Think ahead. Work out what do we need? What do we need to take? What do we need to say to them? How can we help them?

OK, so this little book was written by two ladies again, who I knew at the Reading University. It's not autism specific, but when they wrote it, they did write it in mind about neurodivergent young people, so I think it's really nice. And it works really well for supporting our young people. So, we're going to look at the book now and how what they do is they break it down into five steps. So, we're just going to look at these five steps now on how you can support your young people and remember what I said at the beginning, this is a day-to-day approach that I want you to think about. So, if we can start to put these strategies in early, hopefully it doesn't get to the stage where our young people can't leave the house or can become too overwhelmed. So, what's the first step? The first step is understanding your child. Remember what I said: It's about connecting with your child and understanding what makes them anxious. So again, what you might like to do is to write in the chat, now to say start showing what you feel makes your child anxious. Yeah, it could be that it could be going to school. It could be crowds. It could be change. Yeah, it could be having to be able to communicate. Friendships could be all sorts of things, but just be aware of what makes your child anxious, and then I want you to start to see/think about what are the signs that you notice? What do they start to do? So again, if you get a chance, write that in the chat. Do they start to bite their nails? Do they start to sort of maybe play with their hair? Do they start to make noises? Do they start to get up and move around? Do they ask lots of questions? Sometimes our children may talk in a baby voice, or they may start to pretend to be an animal. Yeah. So, it really is linking in and going, OK, I know what's going on here. Sometimes these signs are really, really subtle and they're really hard to see. It could be that their hands just start to get a little bit tense. The face may start to get a little bit hot and red. Yeah. But they may not be able to tell you how they're feeling, so that is the next way, the next thing to work on. So, when you start to know what's makes them anxious and you can start to see and notice it the next thing is helping them to understand. How does that feel in their body? So often you know they may get this feeling in their stomach, and they may think it's just because I need to go to the toilet, hence going to the toilet quite a lot. Or they may think that

they've eaten something, and this is what's creating it, to give them stomach-ache, but actually that feeling in their stomach is a feeling of anxiety. Unfortunately, our young people struggle with understanding good emotional regulation skills, so this is something else that we need to help them and teach them about emotional regulation. Just to understand the feelings in their body because once they can understand those feelings in their body, they then can go on to the next stage and know what they can do about it. And again, we talk about that a bit later.

So, if you can make that visual, that really helps as well. I think I've got a slide coming of that as an example for you in a moment. So, talk about their fears and worries. It doesn't make it worse, OK? And remember, be honest and accurate. Talk about when you were anxious when you were younger, or maybe what you're anxious about now, so they know that it's not just them. Often our autistic community think it's just them and it's not. We all feel that way. Ask them sometimes what makes them worry and use open questions. If you use closed questions, they're very good at just saying yes and no. What do they think will possibly happen? And then it's looking at the evidence of this. Well, we know we've been there five times now and has that happened? No. So do you think it will happen again? So, they need to see the evidence sometimes that actually that hasn't happened and it's not going to happen. Use comic strip conversations. I really like comic strips conversations by Carol Grey and you can easily look that up on the Internet. So basically, stick men that you write speech bubbles and think bubbles. So often if we just say it, they can't link to it. They don't. They can't see what you're saying. So, the lovely thing about comics conversations is that you can draw the think bubble and you can see what people are thinking because that's the bit that they struggle with. That's the bit that we often call theory of mind. They find it hard to put themselves in somebody else's shoes. They find it hard to understand what other people are thinking or feeling. So, if we don't know what someone else is thinking or feeling then they then go to that generalised anxiety and they go to that worst case scenario that they don't like me. I'm not doing this right. OK, so by drawing it out it can really help. And then we've got social stories like I said, or just general drawing - doodling on a page can just help express how they're feeling because I'm very aware sometimes they find it really hard to talk. So, when you do choose your time to talk, make sure it's the right time. OK, so I'm hoping most of you've heard about the traffic light system. So that's the green, the yellow and the red. So, when they're in the red zone, that's just not the time to sit down and have a conversation.

You know, they're overwhelmed, they're not in control, they're not thinking straight and at that time they just need your support and love. They just need space. They need silence. But they do often need you there. If they're older, then may take themselves off to their room and they're quite content to have some space on their own. OK, when they're in the yellow zone, that's when we're noticing when they're rumbling. OK. And that's what we were just talking about. Are they starting to make noises? Are they starting to play with their hair? What is it they're doing when they're starting to rumble? OK. And then that's when often you can then go in and you might be able to say that or you might be able to notice that they're rumbling and identify that to them, or you might start using some distraction techniques. But you are going to be slowly backing off. But when they're in the Green Zone and they're relaxed and they're OK and that's the time when you can have those conversations, OK, and often what will work is if you're having a conversation with them rather than just sitting face to face, sit beside them, and maybe you might play some Lego with them, you might do some doodling with them. You might do some drawing or some arts and crafts. It gives them something else to focus on while you're just having that general conversation with them. Yeah, it may be that you might give them some fiddle toys to fiddle with as well, so they've got something else to focus on. For older children, feelings journals are really nice to give them, where they can write how they feel, and they can draw pictures in there. But what I would say to you, if you want to have a look at that feelings journal, you know, please ask their permission and that's what's really important to build up that really good trust relationship with them. So they feel they can share anything with you and that's OK. OK. And you're always going to have a positive approach with them. Other ways to help them express how they're feeling music and the lyric of music for older children. You might like to say "I think you really connect with that song". Poetry images that you might find in books or on Google. It's a way of how can you show them to help them express how they're feeling? So, we've already talked about timings, so I'm very aware that often our children like to offload just as they're about to go to sleep. So, I think at that moment in time, I think you can only judge that moment, you know, is this an OK time to be able to offload this, or shall we try and park it? And they might want to say, do you know what? What we'll do is we'll just write that down. We're going to write that down on a post it note, we're going to write it down in your journal and in the morning, if you want, we can then talk about it. So that may or may not work. But if you feel it at that moment in time, it really needs to be spoken about, then that's fine. But then before they go to sleep, make sure you've had a laugh and a giggle

about something that they really enjoy. So, at the bottom here, I just got so I can't read/ see it all because it's the things covering up. But basically, it says your empathy will increase the chances that your child will accept your guidance and so you discuss their fears with you and there in the future.

So, try not to be too critical, OK? Sometimes we might just say, oh, yeah, but you don't need to worry about that because you know it's not really going to happen. OK? Don't be silly. Sort of save that sort of attitude. Accept their worries are real for them. However, I want you to realise sometimes we don't always have the answer and that's OK. I think sometimes as parents we put a huge amount of pressure on ourselves, don't we? That we feel we have to fix this, we feel that we have to make it right for them and sometimes we can't always do that. And sometimes we don't always have the answers. But what you can always do is acknowledge their fear, acknowledge their pain and say, do you know what? I don't quite know what to say to you right now. But what I do know is that I love you and I'm here for you. OK, so this was just an example of drawing it out because like I said, if you just use only your words, they find it really difficult to connect it. So, the more that you can draw out, the more they're going to connect with it. This is just what we call a gingerbread man, and you may be if you want to, you could actually lie them on a big piece of paper and draw around it and put that up on the wall. You can get some great wallpaper lining paper from Home Base, B&Q and other places. So, you just write down where maybe it affects you or where it affects them. Yeah. And what kind of things can make them anxious. So again, it just makes it visual for them so they can see it and then it's there. Thing is with a conversation, once you say it, it's gone quite quickly. And we don't always remember it. But the more you draw out using comic strip conversations, drawing pictures, they can go back to it. And they can relook at it and you can revisit it. You can say, oh, remember we talked about this last week. Let's just get our comic strip conversation strip. And let's just revisit this. So, it's that's why it's really good to put it down on paper. And then sometimes some of them, they might just be happy to look at it by themselves. Your language is really key of everything when it comes to supporting your young people. But this is just some of the phrases you might like to think by saying when you're with them. I'm here, I've got you. You're OK. You're safe. I'm going to stay with you. It's OK to cry. You're not in trouble. And then when you're validating those feelings: That must be really hard. I'm sorry that 'x' is making you anxious. Let's begin to unpick your worry, OK, you're worried. How can I help? You're not being silly. So, you know if they've come out of

school, and you know they've had a bad day. You know, it's that saying do you know what? Gosh, that was a really hard day for you today. Let's go home and let's just relax. And then if you want, we can talk about it. It's so important that they know you're on their side. So autistic people often seek tangible answers because they lack the executive functioning skills, and the immediate need is not an emotional one. So often what we do is we often give an emotional response first. You're fine. You're OK. You're going to be good at this. OK. And that they can't always connect to that. They often need a practical one. Once the solutions or choices are a backup plan sort of thing, we're going to go. I'm going to be there and we're going to do this, this and this. And if you want to leave, we can leave. So, it's a lot more tangible.

OK. So, Step 2, as she looks in her book, is looking at limiting your reassurance. OK, so too much reassurance can lead to more anxiety. OK? And what reassurance only really relieves in that one moment. But it's something that, again, sometimes we do without thinking. We say too much. We offer too much and some of you may have found yourselves that you start to sort of give this reassurance, you start to say it's going to be OK and we're going to do this and we're going to do that. And next thing you know, the next thing you know, they're worrying about that and they're worrying about this. And what started off as being a small anxiety has turned it into a much bigger thing. So just be really careful how you say things, give yourself time. It's OK to think. OK, pause. Give yourself a few seconds. Think about how you're going to approach this, then speak. It's OK. Sometimes we jump in too fast, so just give yourself a bit of time. How are you going to say it? How you're going to approach it. OK. And it's OK to say, do you know? I'm not sure how we're going to approach that one today. You know, let's have a little think and I'll come back to you, if that's OK as well. OK, try not to say things like don't worry, it'll be fine. How often do we say that? And how often do we hear that? OK, but actually does that really, really help. It doesn't always help, does it? Because we don't know if it's going to be fine. OK, so it may comfort someone just for a shorter moment of time, but it doesn't always fix it or solve it. So other things you might like to try: As I mentioned before, when you see that rumbling coming, see if you can distract, see if you can redirect them if you can, you know, talk about things, about their, their special interests or try and bring some humour in if you can to take their mind away from it. See if you can then start to look up producing an answer for them. Thinking about a plan you know, put it in place thinking about possible solutions. Yeah, it may be that you might come up with three solutions together and

then together decide. OK, which one should we try first? OK, think about what really works for your children and what doesn't work for them, OK? So, present things as suggestions rather than questions. Sometimes we ask too many questions, and they find it really hard to come up with the answer. So given suggestions they may be asked to then say well yes, that's going to work. That's not going to work. And as I said already, write things down. Remember to use your social stories in comic strip conversations or post it notes. Post it notes are really good actually, because sometimes when they're trying to explain to you a situation, they can maybe start at the end or that they may give you a little bit in the beginning or you'll get a little bit in the middle and then they've gone back to the beginning and it's all over the place. And in your mind, you're trying to picture this and put it in some sort of order to understand them. And if they feel you've not connected with them and you're not understanding them, that can cause them to get distressed. So, by writing down the snippets of information they give you on a post it note, you can then put the post it notes in order and if anything's wrong, they can see it and you can change it so it gives you a sequence of events then. It shows you where they are, what's happening, and then you can rewrite it and again write it out and post it notes and chuck it down for them. So, it's really good to for them to know that you've understood.

So, step three is about encouraging them to have a go. OK, encouraging, like encourage them to have a go, it builds on self-esteem. It builds on their confidence. The ideal scenario that we're hoping our children to do is to grow up and to be and feel that they're independent. To feel that they are safe and to feel that they have autonomy, that they can make their own choices. OK, so the idea really is - remember, you can't fix it all and you can't do it all for them because that wouldn't help them, OK? Because someday they're going to be out there on their own and they're going to turn around and you're not going to be there. OK, so the idea is that you do it with them. You walk alongside them, and you show them, so eventually they get this, and they know that they can do it. So, it always is just baby steps. And we'll talk about a bit more about that a bit later. But it is about breaking the task, and making sure they can achieve it, try never to set them up to fail. So yeah, because if they can be very negative in the way they look at things, if they feel that they felt that something before or something has not gone well, then they think that will always happen going forward. So, the more that we can help them succeed, the better that is for them. Well, I'll also say is by getting them to have a go, the more that you can get them to do things on

the outside, the better that makes them feel on the inside - it helps lift them, helps lift their moods. We can all relate to that, can't we? Maybe sit down on our own and we end up over thinking we start to become more anxious. We start to feel more down, but the more we get up and maybe we go for a walk, and we try new things, the better we feel for it to try to get them out there and have a go if they can. So, believe in them and praise them for small attempts. And again, I'm very conscious of the fact that for some of your children, big open praise will not work. So, you may stand around and say, do you know you were amazing today? That was brilliant. And I go. No, I wasn't. I didn't do well at that bit. I didn't do good at this. That bit there or you may show a picture and so and you might say that's a beautiful picture and I'll go. No, it's not because that bit there is rubbish. So, when for some of your children big open praise won't work, you've got to be a bit more specific. You were really great today when you did this. Gosh, I really like that part of the picture. That you've drawn out there and coloured that in. They'll handle that a lot better. So big open praise doesn't always work for them. And if you like giving rewards and your children like receiving rewards, rewards are always good. So, to think about what was, but we will try not to use the rewards for bribery, because otherwise they're quite clever, our children, and they'll soon be going saying, OK, well, I'm only going to do that if you give me this. OK. OK, so where are we - so lead by example. OK, so we have to model being brave. OK, we have to show them the way we have our children learn by watching and copying. So, the more that you demonstrate how you handle things and how you model being brave, the more they will pick up on this. They're very good at listening in the conversation. So sometimes you might talk to a friend. You might talk to a partner or one of your parents. You may talk about a situation and say, gosh, I went, I was feeling really anxious about something. However, before I did it, I practised it more. I did some breathing exercises, and I got a lovely hug from somebody. So, you have to model and show them because the more they see it, the more they will pick up on it, OK? OK, so try and discourage avoidance. OK. And I'm very aware that our children will often avoid, avoid, avoid if they can. It's like a natural reaction to a threat to get away from it. And that may be OK in the short term, but actually what we want to try and do is we need to teach them to face their fears. The more that we can get them to experience it, the better that is - often they say I'm not going, I'm not going, I'm not going. But once you get them there, and you often find that once you get them there and they can see it, they feel yes, this is great. I'm OK, he said. Would you want to go home? No, I'm having a wonderful time, but they have to see it and they have to feel it to be OK, you know,

we had our youth club last night and a young girl came in and she was very overwhelmed, and mum was about to take her home. But we were just about to go out the door and go down to into the Meadow and look for bugs and have a wonderful time. And I'm very aware that when we're outside in big open space, open spaces, they feel a lot more comfortable, so I encourage us to stay and say, look, if we get down the Meadow and you need to turn around and come home, that's fine. But once you got out in the Meadow and she was free to run around, she had a wonderful time and she stayed for the whole session. But that's because she couldn't see it and she couldn't feel it. So sometimes we have to give our children a go. We have to let them have a go at something. So, you may say that we're just going to go, we're going to park up, you know, and then when you're ready, we'll get out of the car, and then we'll look through the door. And if you're happy, then we'll go inside and we'll stay for just five minutes. And if after 5 minutes you really want to go, then that's fine. So that's the plan that you've put in place beforehand. And if after 5 minutes they want to go, that's fine. You go home. OK, but often you will find that they will stay a little bit longer. So, it is about taking teeny tiny steps. It is about, you know, building their confidence and building their self-esteem. But if they do get scared or if they do get anxious, then we acknowledge that and go. OK. Today's just not your day and we don't have to try this if you don't want to. Because we all have good days and bad days, don't we? We all have days where we go. Do you know what? Today I don't feel I can do this. But I will try again tomorrow. OK. And this really helps building their independence.

OK. Within step five, she talks about the step ladder approach, the step ladder approach is part of something called the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which I'll imagine most of you are aware of. So, this really is like it says on the tin. Really. It is taking a step-by-step approach. So, looking at this slide, so sometimes what our children find difficult is maybe they find it difficult to go upstairs and sit on their own. OK, so what we do is we draw out this sort of diagram for them. So, what we're saying here is, first of all, is that mum stands at the bottom of the stairs and the child only goes halfway up. And then you ask them to scale that maybe from one to five. OK, so one. Nope. That's really scary. I can't do it. OK, 5 is - Yep. This is amazing. I'm brave. I can do this now. So, the mum stands, the child goes halfway up and comes back down again. And then when they're ready at four or five, we go on to the next stage. So, mum stands at the bottom of the stairs and the child goes to the top, stays. Now it could be on the stairs you might put little post it notes. You might put smiley faces,

something on the stairs to distract them and help them get to the top of the top of the stairs. OK, so when they're ready, eventually they walk up the top of the stairs and mum's just hiding around the corner, OK? And they can't see Mom. Then eventually we're going to go upstairs and I'm going to go into my own room and I'm going to pick something up, and then I'm going to come back downstairs again. Then the last stages I can go upstairs, and I can stay up there for five minutes. And as I've said already, eventually that 5 minutes turns into 10 minutes turns into 15 minutes, turns into - actually I feel really comfortable. You just need to be aware that it maybe they may get to this stage where I can get upstairs and go into my own room, but some days could be a bad day and we need to just step down a step. But that's OK. OK, so sometimes we may need to come down, wait a few days and then go back up again. This does work. I've done this with a few young people who were frightened to go upstairs, and once we did this and we took it and they felt they were in control, because that's really important to them. And we took it slowly and we took it step by step. Eventually they were able to go to their own room and they felt safe. OK, even though she still calls down and says mum, are you there and mum was there. She still was able to stay upstairs in her own room and you can then adapt this technique for everything going forward, you know breaking things down on a step-by-step approach, you know, just throwing them in the deep end just doesn't work. We have to remember what I said, what we're doing is we're setting them up to achieve OK and we're not setting them up to fail.

So, the last section of the book is about Step 5, and it's learning how to problem solve and basically just putting everything together. So, the idea is help your child recognise anxiety so they've got to become good detectives. But most importantly, you've got to become good detectives. OK, so what makes them anxious? How does that look? How does that feel? Yeah. And then together, what you're doing is you're looking at possible solutions. You're encouraging them to have a go. You're making a plan. And you're doing it on a step-by-step approach and you're working with them. When you can teach them, like I said already, self-regulation skills. Teach them about emotions and feelings. Teach them how their body feels inside, because once they can see and understand this - I'm feeling anxious, and I know this because my hands are getting tense. My head's starting to hurt. They can then go to what do I do next? OK. And we've got some list of ideas coming up in a moment. For some of you, it may really help to teach if your child has a diagnosis to teach your autistic child what it means to

be autistic. Many an adult who have had a very late diagnosis and all their life, they felt they were weird. They were strange, they just didn't fit in. And maybe they've been misunderstood for a very long time, but once they know they're autistic, it's like a light bulb moment. They start to realise that actually, now I know why I find it difficult. This is because I'm autistic and this is how my autism impacts me and that's OK. So, at some point, you know, talk to your child that they're autistic. Explain why. Because it can be really helpful for them to know that this is why they find things difficult, and this is the extra support they need. And then later on, as adults, they can express that to other people. Do you know what: I find it really difficult walking into a crowded room, and I may just need you beside me. That bright light's really hurting me, my eyes, would you mind just dimming that down for me? So that's something to think about moving forward. There isn't an age limit on this to be honest with you. Normally I would say you're looking at least seven or eight years old onwards, but it's when they start saying to you mum, I don't feel I'm different or dad, I don't feel like I fit in. OK. That's the time to say actually, let's talk about this, OK? And we've got some really good resources. If you wanted to reach out to us and we can send you. We said already use the five-point scale. Use zones of regulation. Those are like similar to the traffic light. So, scales OK, so just remember they're in the Green Zone. It's OK to talk to them, ask some questions. Are they in the yellow zone? Do I need to distract? How does that look? Are they in the red zone? I just need to give them space. OK. I just need to make sure they're OK and just dip in and say I'm here. I love you. If you need a hug, I'm here for you. Learn about how to use comic strip conversations, social stories and make things visual so the visuals can be like task strips can be, schedules can be white boards at home, or you're just writing things down can be timetables, could be for older children. You could be putting things on there on their phones so they can - you look at those and connect with those when they need to. And remember model being brave yourself and sometimes before you're going in a situation you might want to role play it with them. I remember when my autistic son went for job interviews, we practised, practise, practise and we role played a lot to help him, which luckily worked at the end of the day for him somewhere that we were really pleased for him. So, when they start to feel anxious, what do we need to teach them to do? Teach them relaxation techniques to help them manage the physical symptoms that they're feeling. There's a really nice website called Action for Happiness, so I definitely would say, look that up and they do nice little calendars and little quotes that you can try every day and they've written a book on 50 things to make you feel happy with lots of lovely children's activities in

it. Teach them - this is linked to mindfulness - teach them breathing techniques. Teach them about body scanning. You can do things like mindful eating. You can go for mindful walking, so there's lots of things that you can do that can take their mind somewhere else and help them feel relaxed.

There's five ways to well-being so you can go out on a fun walk, and you can go, OK, let's find five things that you can see, or you could do this in your home, actually: 4 things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one deep, lovely cleansing breath. Again, it just helps them relax. Exercise is really good to get out there and go for a walk or digging in the garden or going on a trampoline or going on their scooters. What you may like to do is put a scrapbook together. I know that might be a bit old fashioned, but your scrapbooks or you can put together on PowerPoints or on the phone memories of exciting things that you can look back on for them to help them feel more positive about life. Listening to music as we said, spending time with our close friends and family and pets. If you haven't got a pet, I don't need to rush out and buy a pet, but pets can be really intuitive with our children and they're really great for cuddling and stroking. And the lovely thing about pets, they don't ask me any questions and they don't make any demands on me. So that's why often our autistic community connect with pets really nicely. And often what you might have to do is do things together. OK, we're nearly there. We're not long, not much longer to go. What you might want to do is put together a happy box or a soothing bag, or a calming bag. It doesn't matter what you want to call it. So, when you see them in that yellow stage, when you see that they're rumbling and they're noticing, actually, I'm starting to feel a bit anxious here, you can give them their happy box. And what I want you to do is I want you to make your own happy box. Remember your modelling this yourselves, so make your own happy boxes. Make your own calming bags and bring it out and say gosh, I'm feeling a little bit anxious. I'm really struggling today. I'm just going to get my bag out and I'm going to just read this nice magazine. I'm going to make myself a cup of tea. And if it was my bag, there'd definitely be some chocolate in there. So, you can put some snacks in their bags as well, so it's there ready for them to have and you can then take this out with you if you're going out on a day trip or something. So, and they can be anywhere they can be at home. They can be, maybe school will allow you to have one or and you can take them out with you, but it it's a visual thing. For them to know if they're much older, what we used to do for my son is that we would have a list on his phone. So, if he

started to become anxious, he knew that he'd go to his mobile phone, and he could see his list. And then on his list would be I can breathe. I can count to 10. I can phone someone, I can just go for a quick walk. So, it gave him an idea of things that he can do.

Other ideas is a hug. If your children like hugs, and I realise not all of our children like hugs, but a hug is amazing. So, if you do reach out and give them a hug, give them a hug for 20 seconds and you'll feel them sometimes just relaxing. OK, so big, strong, firm hug. OK, every household should have a chill out zone somewhere they can go. Whether that's behind a settee, in a cardboard box, behind a curtain, or dedicated space that you've made for them. Allow older children to have time alone if they need to, and to keep younger siblings away if you can, OK. So, there's lots of other things that you can do if they want to try to express themselves, you can use colours and numbers or you can do rating scales, but generally basically get them out there and do physical activities, talk things through. So, sensory snacks. When I first heard that term many, many years ago, I thought it was food, but it is about again, when you start to explore what sensory is, that is about doing deep pressure, going outside and running around, going on the trampoline, maybe pushing against the wall, you can do simple things like you can put some hands on the wall in your house and you can just say, let's push the house down. Just so that proprioception - that deep pressure can really help. You can have fiddle toys; you can have Thera-bands; you can have Thera-putty. So, there's lots of fiddle toys and gadgets that you can do that can help them calm down - control breathing. So deep pressures obviously connected to the sensory. Listen to music. Now music: I was once told that music that 60 beats a minute actually matches our heartbeat. OK so it can actually help them calm down. So, we had one little girl, that every day when she came out of school, she got in the car and the first thing that her parents would put on is classical music, because generally most classical music is 60 beats a minute. So, it just helped her calm down and breathe. But there's, I'm sure there's lots if you googled it, you'll find other more up to date music, but it's just calming, calming her down. And as I said already, make it visual. These are just a few nice resources so you can go to The Works and you can buy things like worry monsters so you can write the worry down and the monster can eat it up and take it away for you. Or you can just create worry boxes and put things in worry boxes and these books here are really nice as well if you're looking for something visual to talk about anxiety and worries to make it easier to explain to them, and then worry, dolls

are usually for older children. They tell the worry to the worry doll, and then the worry doll just takes it away for them and at the bottom here we have the five ways to well-being I love five ways to well-being. And so, every day I would encourage you to build in the five ways to world building way. And when we're working with young people and we're looking at putting well-being plans together for them, often we incorporate the five ways to well-being, we'll get them every day to try and connect, whether that's connecting with themselves or a family member or friends. We'll get them to sort of give a bit of time with somebody. We'll get them to get out and notice something. We'll talk about learning, and we'll talk about being active because remember what I said, the more active they are on the outside, the more that helps their mood in the inside. So that's a really nice thing to sort of build on them on a day-to-day basis.

OK, I think we're almost there. So, I just want to highlight that if you're really concerned about your young person, then I would always encourage you to go to visit your doctor, your GP first or, I'm hoping most of you will be aware of this now you can call 111 and then press for option two and then when you do that you will get a professional and guidance from someone who understands mental health. A professional who works in that area. So, you - and then you can talk to them and then they will guide you and then help you and support you in the right direction. Mind UK is an amazing organisation, and they do lots of great work and they do lots of great work with young people as well so that I would definitely say look them up and then online you can look at Young Minds. Charlie Waller actually is a really nice one to go to and they do loads and loads of free resources that you can download. So, I do visit Charlie Waller, and then there's always ChildLine. We forget ChildLine, there's lots of great stuff on ChildLine and there's lots of great stuff for your young people to actually look at as well.