


# OxPCF & Oxfordshire CAMHS NDC Webinar – Neurodivergent Coping Strategies

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 **Date: 14th February 2025**

 Speakers:

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 Hosted by: Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum (OxPCF) in collaboration with Oxfordshire CAMHS NDC Team

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## Introduction

This webinar focused on coping strategies for neurodivergent children and young people, specifically those with autism and ADHD. It explored how neurodivergent individuals experience the world, the daily demands they cope with, and practical approaches to support emotional regulation, sensory needs, and energy management.

The session highlighted how small, personalised adjustments can help children manage their energy and emotions more effectively, and how parent carers can support and model healthy coping strategies.

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## Key Insights from the Webinar

### Understanding Coping Strategies

- Coping strategies are ways individuals regulate their emotions and manage stress to navigate daily life.
- Everyone uses coping strategies, but neurodivergent children often need more deliberate support due to sensory sensitivities, social expectations, and executive functioning challenges..

### Common Challenges for Neurodivergent Children

*Neurodivergent children are often coping with:*

- **Sensory processing difficulties** (e.g., overwhelming noise, light, touch, or internal body signals).
- **Social communication demands and expectations** that may feel confusing or exhausting.
- **Environmental mismatch**, where surroundings do not meet sensory or cognitive needs.
- **Transitions** – even small changes (e.g., leaving the house) can cause stress.
- **Camouflaging/masking behaviours** – hiding their differences to fit in, which leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

### Window of Tolerance & Stress Buckets

- **Window of tolerance:** the optimal zone where a child can function, manage emotions, and engage. Outside this window, they may become overwhelmed or shut down.
- **Stress buckets:** visualising stress building up and the need to “empty” the bucket through helpful coping strategies (e.g., movement, quiet time, sensory regulation).

## **Practical Strategies for Parent Carers:**

- ✓ Self-compassion – Recognise your own limits and needs before supporting your child.
- ✓ Validate emotions – Acknowledge your child’s experience, even if it differs from your own.
- ✓ Co-create strategies – Be curious and involve your child in discovering what helps them.
- ✓ Energy accounting – Track energy “debits” and “credits” to avoid burnout (e.g., spoon theory, battery visuals).
- ✓ Maintain joy and interests – Prioritise activities that bring happiness and regulation.

## **Practical Strategies for Children and Young People:**

- ✓ Strengths & challenges profile – Help your child identify what they find difficult and what helps them.
- ✓ “This is me” communication passport – A document to share with teachers or professionals explaining their needs and preferences.
- ✓ Sensory & emotional toolkits – Tailored resources (e.g., fidgets, music, comfort items, visuals) to manage sensory overload and emotional distress.
- ✓ Awareness of burnout – Teach your child to recognise signs of burnout and the need for rest and recharging.

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## Q&A Summary – Supporting Neurodivergent Young People Through Puberty, Gender, & Sexuality

*The following questions were submitted by parent carers during the webinar and have been anonymised for privacy. Our CAMHS professionals have provided answers to help address common concerns and offer practical strategies for supporting neurodivergent children and young people with their coping needs.*

### **1 Coping Strategies for PDA Teen Refusing School**

- Understand the underlying anxiety
- Explore reasonable adjustments with the school
- Minimise choices and information overload
- Gradually build tolerable experiences
- Maintain school connections, even if remotely
- Focus on building relationships with key school staff

### **2 Support for Withdrawn Teen Post-Crisis**

- Reintroduce activities in small, graded steps
- Use online/virtual connections initially
- Research activities together using technology
- Provide positive feedback for small attempts
- Use virtual tours and preparation videos
- Break down goals into tiny, manageable stages

### 3 Coping with Separation Anxiety

- Provide a transition object that reminds them of you
- Show reliability by returning when promised
- Use FaceTime to show what you're doing
- Create videos explaining your daily activities
- Ask about specific fears and worries
- Help them visualise where you are and what you're doing

### 4 Emotional Regulation in Young Children

- Refer to NDC's emotional regulation resources which can be found [here](#)
- Watch YouTube channel videos on emotional regulation
- Attend related parent carer events
- Seek additional support and strategies

### 5 Support for Burnout & Masking Exhaustion

- Track energy use with energy accounting
- Identify where masking is most intense
- Adapt environments and reduce demands
- Schedule recharge opportunities during the day
- Work with school on flexible adjustments
- Give permission to rest and opt out of non-essential tasks

## **6 Seeking OT Input for Energy Release Strategies**

- Share ideas with school staff or club leaders
- Explore adaptations in various settings (home/school/clubs)
- Ask school to consult SENSS Communication & Interaction Service
- Use a strengths-based approach to identify safe self-regulation tools
- Support consistent strategies across environments

## **7 Recharge Support in Structured School Days (Deaf + Neurodivergent)**

- Talk with your child about enjoyable, calming activities
- Identify what helps them recharge – small breaks can help
- Involve SENSS Deaf and Hearing Support Team for listening fatigue
- Discuss flexible adjustments with school to support energy regulation
- Incorporate movement or quiet time when possible

## **8 Making Schools Accessible for Autistic Children**

- Share helpful books, webinars, and resources with school
- Provide school staff with insights tailored to your child
- Encourage staff to access SEND training via Local Offer
- Promote flexible, child-centred approaches in the classroom
- Signpost to Oxfordshire SEND Local Offer for further support:

 [Oxfordshire SEND Local Offer](#)

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## Useful Resources

These resources have been recommended by both professionals and parent carers as valuable sources of support, guidance, and information for families raising neurodivergent children. The list includes mental health services, education support, advocacy, sensory regulation, and local organisations that provide free or community-led assistance.

## Online Tools, Platforms & Concepts

These additional resources and concepts were recommended during the Neurodivergent Coping Strategies webinar, offering practical support for daily life, emotional regulation, and energy management.

### Websites & Online Resources

- [NDC YouTube Channel](#) – Features short, accessible videos on:
  - Anxiety
  - Self-harm
  - Aggression
  - Emotional Regulation
- [21 and Sensory](#) (YouTube) – Shares engaging, visual content about neurodivergence and coping strategies.

### Assessment Tools

- [Camouflaging Autism Traits Questionnaire](#) – Helps explore masking behaviours and their impact.

## Online Tools & Apps

- Google Maps – For virtual preparation to reduce anxiety around new places.
- TikTok – Short, mood-lifting content (to be used mindfully).
- FaceTime – Helpful for reducing separation anxiety and staying connected.

## Theories & Concepts

- Window of Tolerance – Understanding the zone where a child can function calmly before becoming overwhelmed.
- Bucket/Battery Theory – Visualising energy depletion and the need to recharge.
- Spoon Theory – A metaphor for managing limited daily energy.
- Double Empathy Problem – Highlights mutual communication difficulties between autistic and non-autistic people, not just deficits in autistic individuals.

## Sleep & Sensory Support

- [Cerebra](#) – Advice on sleep difficulties and sensory processing for neurodivergent children.
- [The Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation](#) – Strategies and resources for supporting sensory regulation.
- [Fledglings](#) – A social enterprise offering sensory-friendly products to help children with regulation and daily living.



## **School & Education**

- [Autism Education Trust](#) – Guidance for parents and schools on supporting autistic children in education settings
- [IPSEA](#) (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) – Free legal advice on EHCPs, SEND rights, and school support
- [SENDIASS Oxfordshire](#) – Independent, impartial support for families navigating SEND services.
- [Oxfordshire's SEND Local Offer](#) provides a directory of SEND services, including education, health, and social care
- [Contact](#) – A national charity supporting families of disabled children with education rights, benefits, and advocacy.

## **Mental Health & Anxiety Support**

- [Oxfordshire CAMHS](#) – The main mental health service for children and young people in Oxfordshire
- [Living Well with Neurodivergence](#) – A service from Oxford Health CAMHS in partnership with Autism Oxford for those open to Oxfordshire CAMHS offering courses, peer support, and resources for neurodivergent young people and their families.
- [YoungMinds](#) – A leading mental health charity offering support and advice for young people and parents.
- [The Curly Hair Project](#) - an organisation that helps people on the autistic spectrum and the people around them, founded by autistic author Alis Rowe
- [MindEd for Families](#) – Free online mental health training for parents and carers.
- [PDA Society](#) – Resources for understanding Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) and reducing anxiety-driven avoidance.
- [Oxfordshire Mind](#) – Children & Young People's Services – Support for mental health, emotional wellbeing, and coping strategies for young people.
- [Tellmi](#) – A safe, moderated peer support app for young people struggling with mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression.

- [Supportive Steps](#) – A peer support service run by CAMHS for parents and carers supporting children with mental health challenges.
- [Walking With You \(WWY\) Group](#) – A peer support group for parents and carers in Oxfordshire, offering online sessions via Teams. This group provides a safe space to share experiences and learn strategies for supporting children’s mental health, supported by Oxfordshire CAMHS.

## **Local Oxfordshire Charities and Organisations**

[Oxfordshire SENDIASS](#) (Special Educational Needs & Disability Information, Advice and Support Service) SENDIASS Oxfordshire provides free, impartial advice to help parents and carers understand their child’s rights and access the right school support, EHCP guidance, and dispute resolution.

[Autism Family Support Oxfordshire \(AFSO\)](#): AFSO supports autistic children and young adults through:

- Parent workshops and training.
- Social groups and activities for young people.
- Advocacy services for families.

[Oxfordshire Mind – Wellbeing for Children & Young People](#): Oxfordshire Mind offers:

- One-on-one emotional support for young people.
- Workshops and social groups to develop coping skills.
- Resources for parents and professionals.


[Carers Oxfordshire](#): Carers Oxfordshire provides support for unpaid carers, including:


- Advice and guidance on benefits, wellbeing, and legal rights.
- Training and workshops for carers.
- Peer support groups for parents caring for children with additional needs.


## **Recommended Books: Supporting Neurodivergent Children**


These books have been recommended by professionals and parent carers as helpful resources for understanding and supporting neurodivergent children and young people. They focus on sensory-friendly, practical, and strengths-based approaches, rather than traditional CBT-focused methods.


### **Books for Parents & Carers**


 **Avoiding Anxiety in Autistic Children: A Guide for Thriving** – Dr. Luke Beardon explains how reducing environmental triggers rather than focusing on behaviour changes can significantly ease anxiety in autistic children.

 **The Parents' Guide to Managing Anxiety in Children with Autism** – A parent-friendly guide focusing on sensory-based strategies, emotional regulation, and reducing overwhelm.

 **Self-Reg: How to Help Your Child (and You) Break the Stress Cycle and Successfully Engage with Life** – A non-CBT approach to understanding and managing stress, helping children regulate emotions naturally.

 **Neurodivergent Insights: A Handbook for Autism, ADHD & More** – A strengths-based guide covering anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation from a neurodivergent-affirming perspective.

 **The Big Book of Dysregulated Love** – Explores emotional dysregulation, meltdowns, and burnout, helping parents support children experiencing low mood and anxiety.


 **Can't Not Won't: A Story About a Child Who Couldn't Go to School** – Eliza Fricker shares her lived experience of supporting a child experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), with practical guidance and validation.

### **The Family Experience of PDA: An Illustrated Guide to Pathological**

**Demand Avoidance** – Eliza Fricker combines illustrations and real-life stories to help parents understand PDA-driven anxiety and strategies for supporting children with demand avoidance.

### **Changing Our Minds: How Children Can Take Control of Their Own**


**Learning** – Dr. Naomi Fisher, a clinical psychologist, explores alternative approaches to learning and why traditional education can contribute to anxiety and depression in neurodivergent children.


 **A Different Way to Learn: Neurodiversity and Self-Directed Education** – Naomi Fisher provides insights into how self-directed education can be beneficial for anxious and disengaged neurodivergent children, particularly those experiencing school-based trauma or EBSA.


### **The Compassionate Mind – Dr. Paul Gilbert**


Recommended for developing self-compassion, which is essential for both parent carers and neurodivergent individuals managing stress, overwhelm, and emotional challenges.


## **Books for Children & Young People**


 **All Birds Have Anxiety** – Uses simple language and visual storytelling to explain anxiety in a non-clinical and neurodivergent-friendly way.


 **The Panicosaurus: Managing Anxiety in Children Including Those with Autism Spectrum Disorder** – A story-based approach to helping young children understand and manage anxiety.


 **Braver Than You Think: A Child's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety** – Specifically written for neurodivergent children, avoiding CBT-based techniques in favour of sensory-friendly strategies.


 **My Big Emotions: A Book for Autistic Children About Managing Big Feelings** – Helps autistic children recognise and understand their emotions, including low mood and anxiety.


 **The Awesome Autistic Go-To Guide: A Practical Handbook for Autistic Teens and Tweens** – Provides self-regulation strategies, sensory-friendly coping mechanisms, and emotional support for autistic young people.

 **The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic** – Includes self-care, emotional regulation, and anxiety management strategies for autistic girls and non-binary teens.

 **How to Be Me** – A fictional story about a neurodivergent child navigating social anxiety, emotional overwhelm, and self-acceptance.

 **Drama Queen: One Autistic Woman and a Life of Unhelpful Labels** – A powerful memoir about anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation from a neurodivergent perspective.


 **The Teenager's Guide to Burnout** – A neurodivergent-friendly guide for teens experiencing burnout, exhaustion, and overwhelm, offering practical strategies to recover and rebuild energy.

 **The Teenager's Guide to Life, the Universe and Being Awesome** – Andy Cope & Gavin Oattes – A motivational and neurodivergent-inclusive guide for teens on resilience, self-esteem, and managing pressure.

## Stay Connected and Share Your Voice with OxPCF


Join OxPCF (Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum) to stay informed, connect with other parent carers, and have your voice heard in shaping services for SEND families.

### Links


 Website: [www.oxpcf.org.uk](http://www.oxpcf.org.uk)


 Email: [info@oxpcf.org.uk](mailto:info@oxpcf.org.uk)

 Join our Mailing List: [eepurl.com/dNVTTE](http://eepurl.com/dNVTTE)

 SEND Connect Newsletter: [tinyurl.com/SENDConnectNewsletters](http://tinyurl.com/SENDConnectNewsletters)


 Events: [oxpcf.org.uk/events](http://oxpcf.org.uk/events)

 Volunteer with Us: [oxpcf.org.uk/volunteer](http://oxpcf.org.uk/volunteer)

 Join our Online Peer Support Group: [facebook.com/groups/oxsendroom/](https://facebook.com/groups/oxsendroom/)

 Join our Community WhatsApp Group: [chat.whatsapp.com/  
BRH9Knm8fuNBIFY1OhrZIE](https://chat.whatsapp.com/BRH9Knm8fuNBIFY1OhrZIE)

### Help Us Build Our Resource Page!

We're putting together a comprehensive resource page to support families of neurodivergent children in Oxfordshire. If you have any useful recommendations—whether it's a local support group, charity, website, book, or practical resource—we'd love to hear from you!  Please email your suggestions to: [info@oxpcf.org.uk](mailto:info@oxpcf.org.uk)