Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Services

Emotional Regulation– how to support neurodivergent children with emotional processing and anxiety.

Developed for the Essex Partnership for Neurodiversity in Schools Project in partnership with Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust

Training approved October 2025

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Emotional Regulation

Supporting neurodivergent children & young people

Essex Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools - Essex
Child and Family Wellbeing Services

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Emotional Regulation

This workshop was developed for the Essex Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools Project 2024-25 by the Psychology In Schools Team at Norfolk & Suffolk Foundation Trust.

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Looking after yourself

- Emotional topics being covered today, including self-harm and suicide.
- Do what you need to look after yourself.
- Slides and resources will be shared with everyone who signed up for the workshop.

Workshop Overview

- What is the prevalence of emotional problems in neurodivergent children?
- Why might neurodivergent children struggle with their emotions?
- How can you help your children manage their big feelings?

Please be aware the next slide involves discussion of self-harm and suicide

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Emotional difficulties in neurodivergent children and teenagers

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Increased risk of mental health problems.

Increased risk of anxiety.

Increased risk of depression.

Increased risk of self-harm and suicide

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What protects against poor mental health and wellbeing?

- Special interests and hobbies.
- Having a sense of shared connection.
- Strong, supportive relationships.
- Self-acceptance (positive self-image).
- Neuroaffirmative approaches and language.
- Nurturing environments.

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Lived experience

We asked some neurodivergent young people ‘what supports your emotional wellbeing?’

- Identifying a support network.
- Having trusted adults to talk to.
- Being able to know and accept difference (education).
- Healthy homes and community environments.
- Having boundaries.
- Implementing sensory activities.
- Understanding our own needs and being able to advocate for them.

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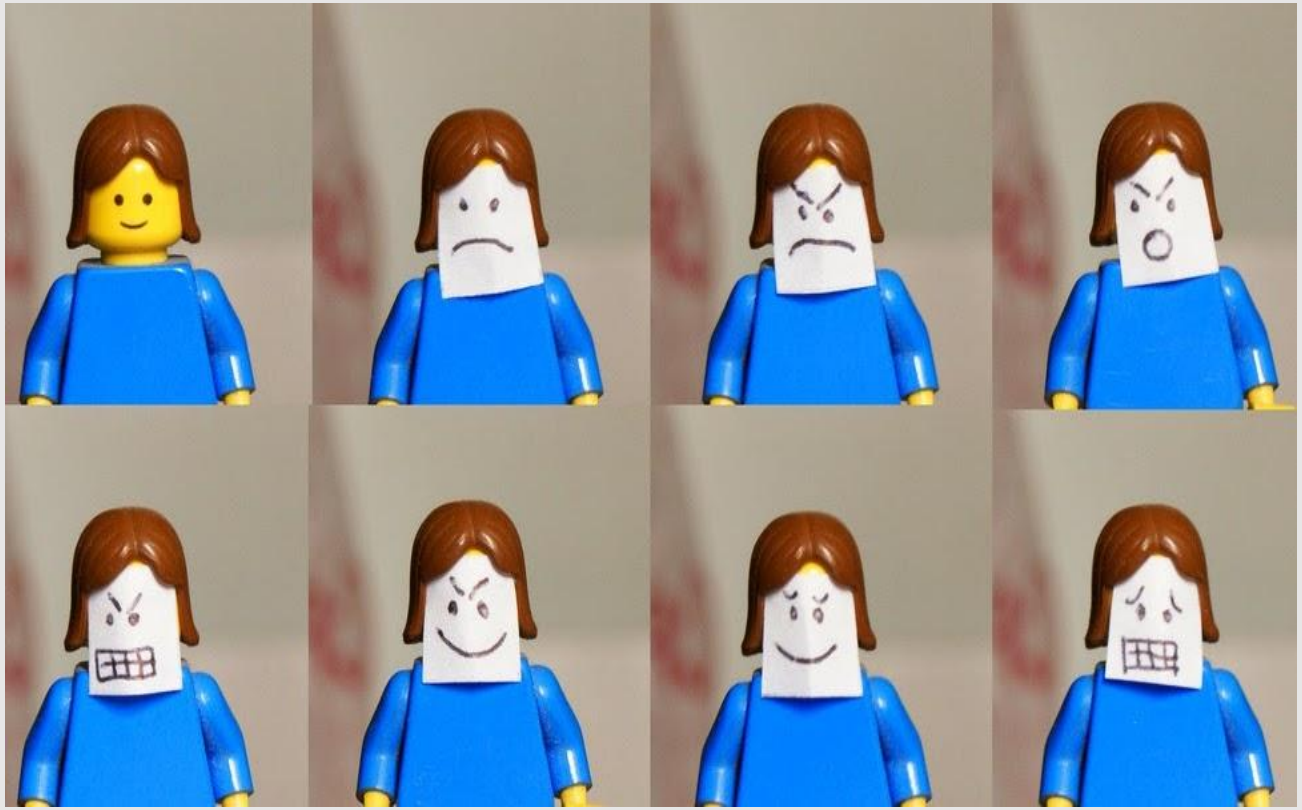
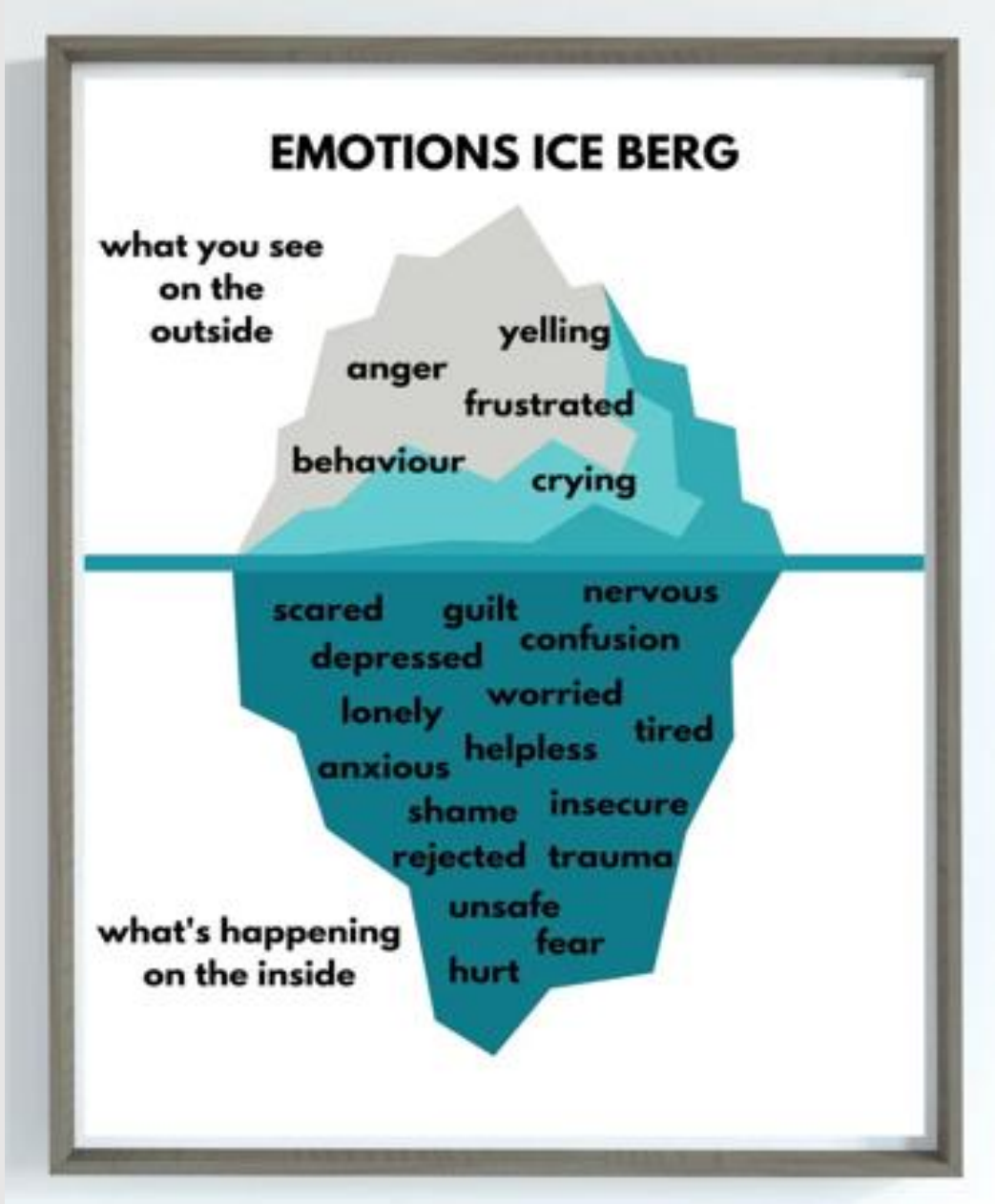
Why are emotional problems more common?

- Emotional literacy.
- Emotion dysregulation.
- Environment and experiences.

Emotional Literacy



- Difficulty with understanding what emotion they are feeling.
- Difficulty communicating to others how they are feeling.
- Difficulty recognising other people's feelings.
- Difficulty asking for and receiving support.



Iceberg idea

- What we see on the surface is just one part of the whole picture.
- Under the surface there may be so much more going on that we don't understand.
- Difficulty identifying and communicating emotions it makes it even more difficult to try to work out what's underneath the surface.
- If your child can't communicate what triggered their big emotion, you need to be the detective to try and help them understand.

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What might trigger your child's big feelings?

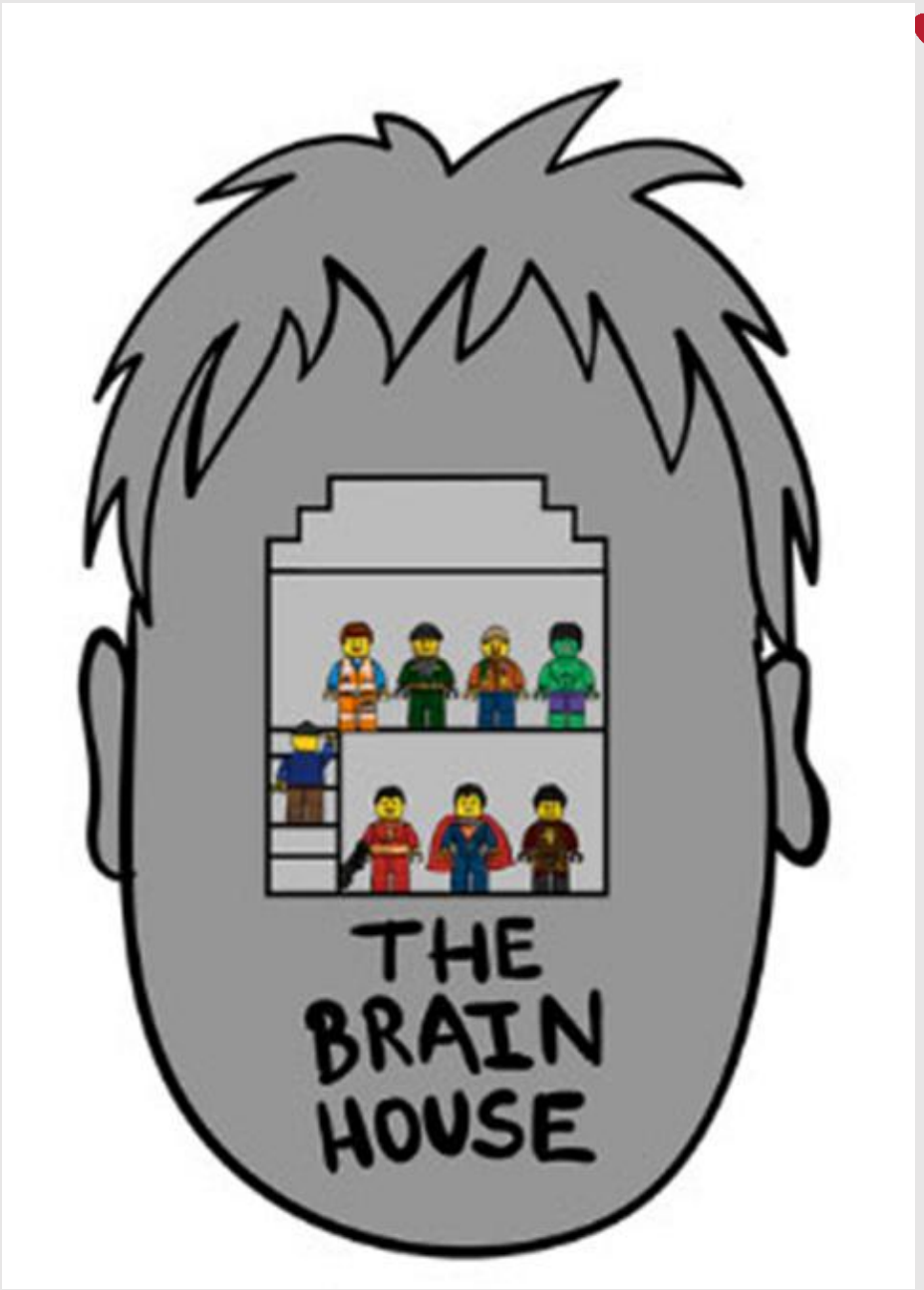
The Brain House

Upstairs brain

- The control tower

Downstairs brain

- The alarm system



Illustrated by Dr Hazel Harrison

Dr Dan Siegel

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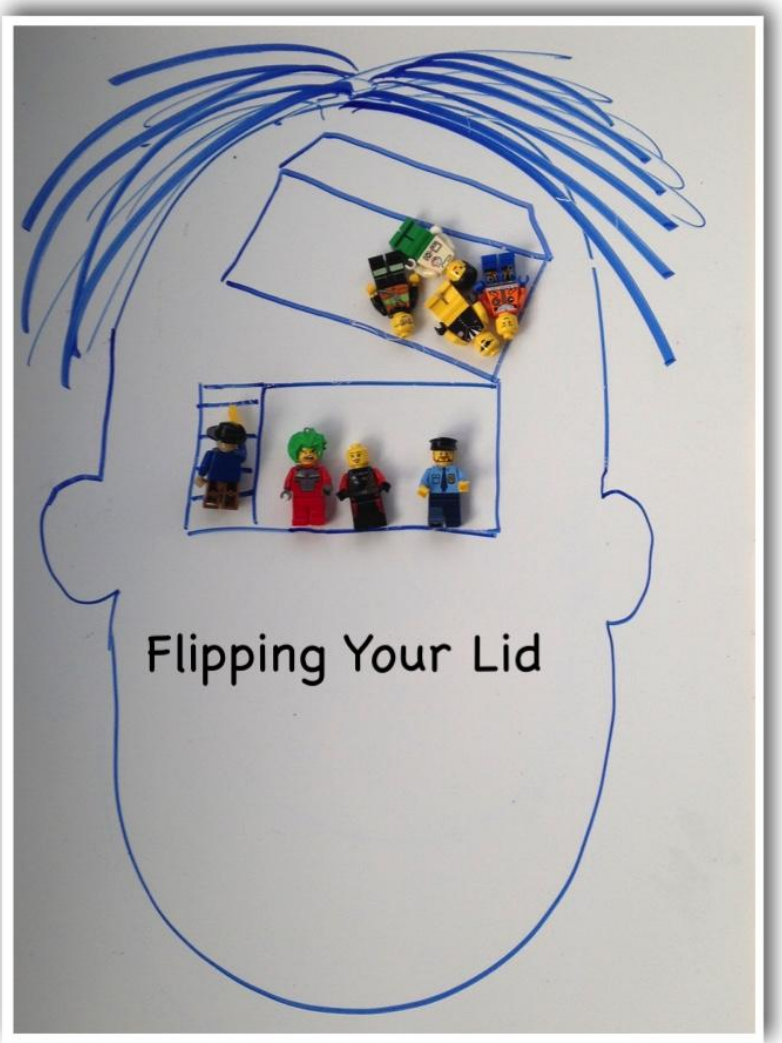
Flipping The Lid

- This is what happens when people get overwhelmed by big feelings.
- We lose access to the upstairs part of our brain.
- When this happens children no longer have access to the part of their brain that helps them to make good decisions.



Dr Dan Siegel

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Brain house in neurodivergent children

More sensitive to some stimuli

Impulsivity

Innate difficulty with emotion regulation

Difficulty understanding big feelings

More frequent negative experiences

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How to help your children manage their big feelings

- Connection before correction
- Building emotional literacy
- Consistent approach
- Calming and relaxation

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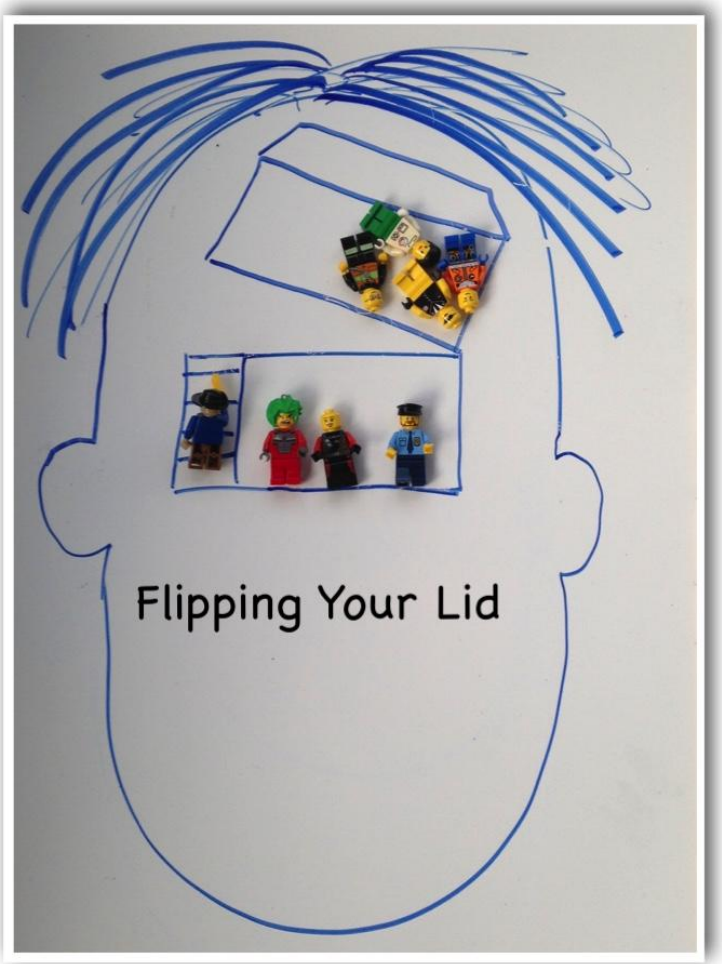
Connection before Correction

- When children are overwhelmed, they will not be able to hear us until the thinking part of the brain is back online.
- We can help with this by prioritizing connection over correction.
- Coming alongside your child to help them regulate, becoming calm before deciding what to do next.



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Connection before Correction

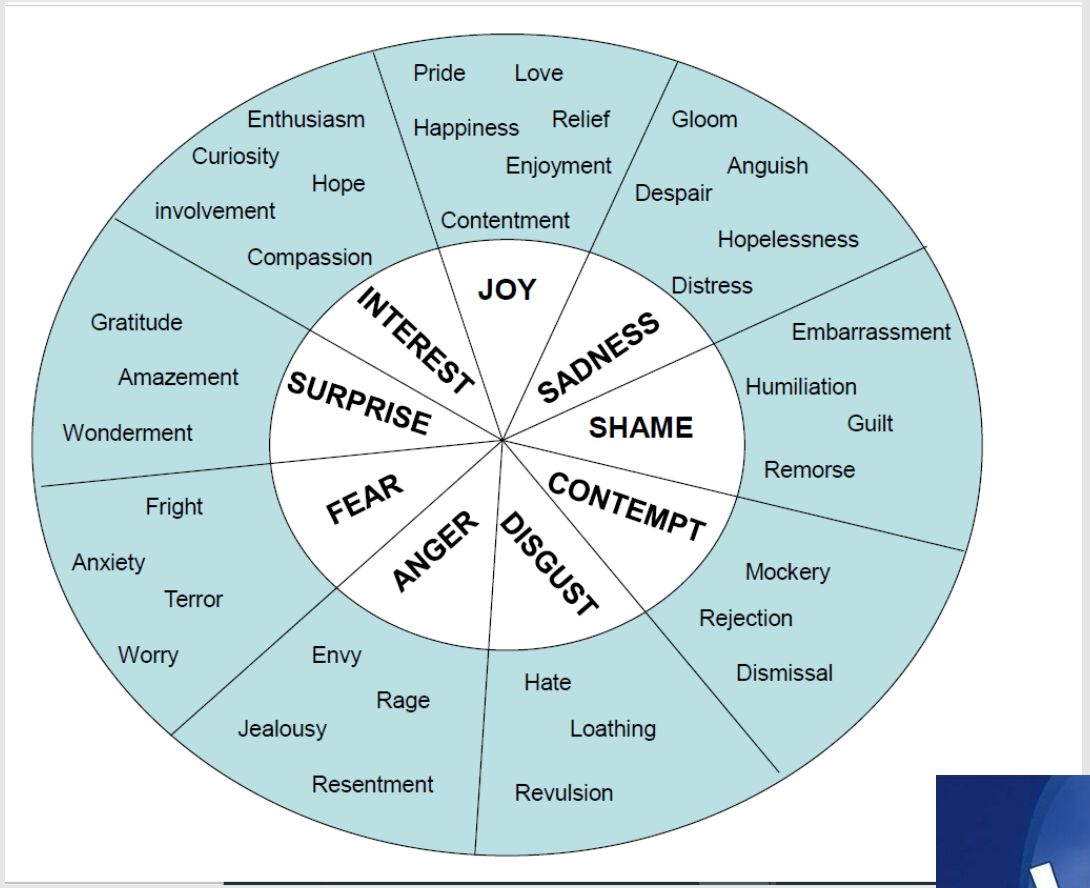
- What can make it difficult for you to do connection before correction?
- What helps you to do this?
- Why might it be difficult for adults to remain calm?
- Why might this be difficult as a parent or teacher?
- What supports you to overcome any of these difficulties?

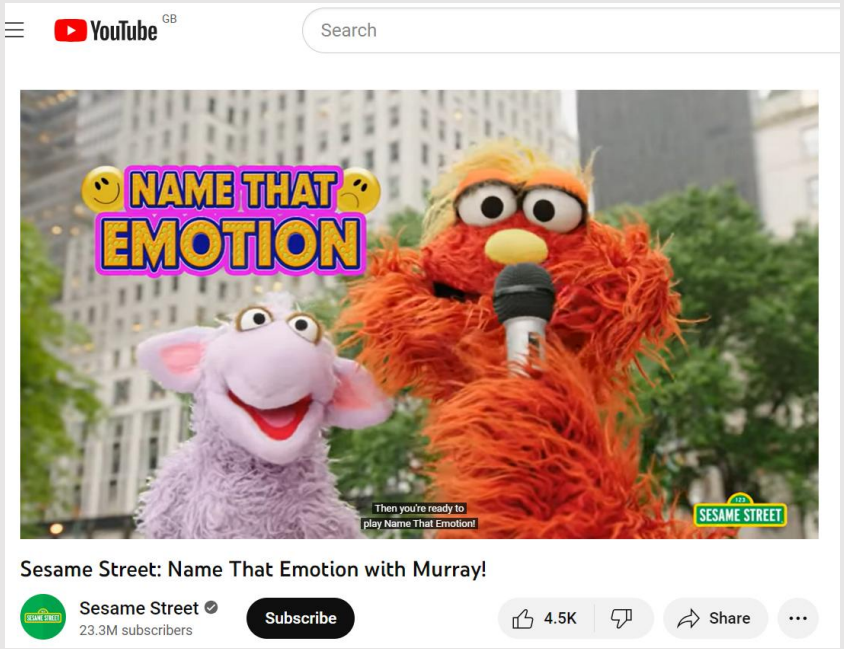
Building emotional literacy

We asked some neurodivergent young people 'what has helped you to understand emotions better?'

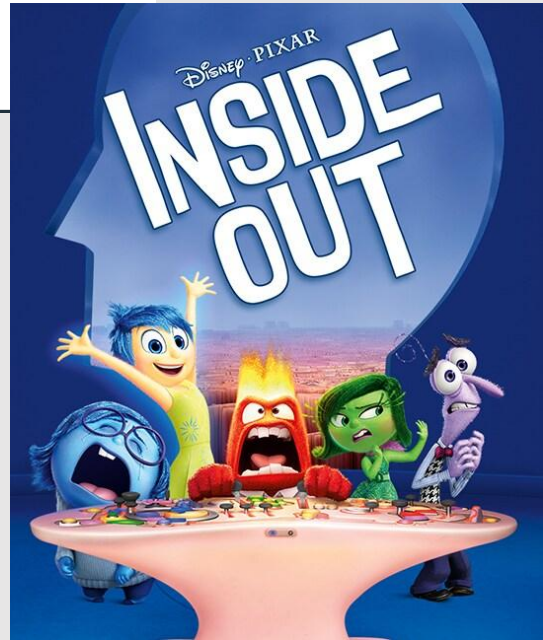
- Adults talking about emotions and helping to identify what emotion we are feeling.
- Having enough space and time to process.
- Mirroring and watching other people's emotions and behaviours.
- Understanding dysregulation.
- Stories and films (e.g. Inside Out).

https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/articles/zd7kd6f





Identifying emotions



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Communicating emotions

- Allow space and time.
- Model talking about emotions.
- Provide non-verbal means of communicating.
  - 5 point scale.
  - Emotion/energy thermometer.
  - 2 colour wristbands

Working together

- Masking at school may mean emotional problems are less obvious.
- Sharing your understanding and strategies.
- Consider reasonable adaptations at school – remember needs-based not diagnosis based.

Calming & Regulation

- Breathing techniques.
- Grounding techniques.
- Sensory strategies.
  - Permission to stim!
  - Music.
- Safe spaces (judgement free zones).

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Looking after yourself

- Emotional contagion
  - If you are feeling dysregulated, it's very difficult to support a young person to regulate themselves
  - If you are feeling calm you can 'share' that calm with someone else
- Fill up your own resource bucket first
- Be kind to yourself

Find an NHS talking therapies services - NHS

MIND websites access Essex:

MN Essex Mind: Mental Health Support Services in Essex

SECE Mind Home - Mind in West Essex

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What are you going to take away from today's session?

What idea are you going to try to use in the next week?

Mental health resources and support

Mental health

- SET CAMHS – mental health support for children and young people in Essex Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) CAMHS | NELFT NHS Foundation Trust
- SET CAMHS - How can I help myself?
- Information about other support available in Essex Mental health | Essex Local Offer
- KIDS Inspire A children's mental health charity offering trauma recovery services for the family
- Kooth free online counselling for ages 11-18 in Essex www.kooth.com
- YoungMinds mental health charity for children and young people www.youngminds.org.uk

Self-harm and suicide

- Information about crisis support is on the SET-CAMHS homepage: Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) CAMHS | NELFT NHS Foundation Trust
- Alumina free online self-harm support group for 11-19 year olds www.selfharm.co.uk
- **Calm Harm** an award-winning app developed to help teenagers manage the urge to self-harm
- Papyrus “Supporting your child: self-harm and suicide” a guide for parents and carers www.papyrus-uk.org

General sources of support and resources in Essex

- Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child Neurodiversity | Essex Family Forum
- Essex Family Forum Home | Essex Family Forum
- Multi Schools Council Home - Multi Schools Council
- Essex Local Offer Roadshows Essex Local Offer Roadshows | Essex Local Offer
- Ordinarily Available Targeted Support Framework What good support in school looks like | Essex Local Offer
- EXTRA Extra Support for Families | Welcome to Extra Support for Families
- MAZE The MAZE Group | SEND Parenting Support Group in Essex
- SNAP SNAP Charity - Registered Charity No.1077787
- Families in Focus Essex Home - Families InFocus Essex
- SPACE Home | Support for Parents And Carers in Essex
- Autism Central Autism Central - England's Peer Education Programme | Autism Central
- Essex Short Breaks What are Essex Short Breaks?
- Essex SEND IASS Essex SEND - Information, Advice and Support Service
- STRM Support STRM Support – Send the Right Message
- PACT Autism Support | PACT For Autism | England

Psychology in Schools' Team Free Workshops

From the childhood neurodiversity series…

- What You Need to Know as a Parent/Carer
- Understanding and Supporting Sleep Difficulties
- Understanding and Supporting Eating Difficulties
- Understanding and Managing Behaviour
- How the Brain Develops
- The Impact of Early Life Stress
- Supporting Social Relationships
- Supporting Language and Communication
- Understanding and Supporting Sensory Needs
- The Benefits and Problems with Using Technology

From the mental health series…

- Understanding the adolescent brain - Supporting our teenagers with emotions
- Building Understanding and Supporting Your Child with Tourette's Syndrome/Tics

Upcoming live parent/carer workshops:

www.nsft.uk/workshops
Eventbrite page

Parent workshops | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS

NHS
Norfolk and Suffolk
NHS Foundation Trust

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