



## Inside This Issue

8 Tips to Help Your Child's Auditory Working Memory	2-3
What is a Decodable Reader?	3
Ways Children Might Express Anxiety Without Explicitly Saying So	4-5
Four Steps Parents Can Take if You Think Your Child has ADHD	6
Copyright Notice	6
Helping Young People Use Self Compassion to Manage Self Criticism	7-10
Successful Transitions from One Activity to Another for Individuals with ASD	10-12
Why Children Exhibit Challenging Behaviour	13
For Your Diary	13
Too Scared to Learn	14
Loving Holiday Tips for ADHD Kids	14
Managing Sensory Sensitivities Through The Festive Season	15
@ the Office	15
Christmas Song	16
LDC Management Committee	16

## Term 1 Online Seminar

### **Behaviour Support for Students with Learning Difficulties: Using function based thinking**

**Presented by  
Kristin Bayley**

*Speech Pathologist &  
Board Certified Behaviour Analyst*

**Tuesday 5th April 2022**

**10am - 12.00pm**

**Watch Live or On Demand**

## From the LDC President

Dear Members,

This has to be the most long-awaited summer break in a while, after another challenging year and possibly one that has seemed particularly interminable because of the repeated lockdowns and need for remote learning. Oh no, haven't we been through this movie before...and before.... For a good chuckle, read the Covid Christmas song that Wendy's popped in on page 16!

Some of us have just enjoyed a wonderful and highly informative seminar given by Pamela Snow on the science of language and literacy, and those of you who have signed up for the recording are in for a real treat. Don't forget that you have till the end of February to access the recording: this decision was made as we know what a particularly crazy time it is right now and we wanted to make sure you could watch this when you have a bit more time on your hands.

Coincidental with this seminar's 'hot topic' has been the release of the up-dated NSW K-2 Maths and English Curriculum, now available on <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/home>. With the new English curriculum emphasis on the teaching of phonics from school entry we can be cautiously optimistic that ALL students will be taught how to decode print following the latest science of reading guidelines. As Pamela Snow put it in her seminar "Decoding is a non-negotiable skill!" Of course, top quality PD for teachers is now as essential, and we would urge our teaching members to consider these online courses provided by Pamela Snow and her colleague Tanya Serry: <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2020/release/la-trobe-launches-solar-lab>

Wishing you all the best for the upcoming season, may it be full of good cheer with family and friends.

Julia Starling  
LDC President

Why can our children sometimes tell us all about a movie they've watched but can't seem to remember that we've asked them to put their washing in the laundry? Do they have a problem with their memory? What about us? Is it a problem when we have heard some information only to have it slip from our memories moments later?

Remembering and acting on what we hear requires us to use our auditory working memory. Auditory working memory can be described as a mental sticky note, where you jot down the information you have heard. You keep the note handy while you are doing something with that information. This could be remembering instructions that you have been given or a word or sentence you need to write down. Auditory working memory plays a crucial role in learning. Those who have a poor working memory may find it difficult to:

- Follow instructions
- Learn new words, how they sound and what they mean
- Pull apart words to spell them
- Remember lists
- Link new information to what they already know
- Develop reading comprehension

The great news is that we can do a lot to support our auditory working memory. We know that it's easier to remember what we hear when

- We pay attention to the information
- The information has personal relevance to us
- It triggers an emotion in us
- We can quickly link it to something else we already know

[Here are 8 tips on how to support your child's auditory working memory](#)

**1 Make sure you have your child's attention** before giving them a task or important verbal information. You can use the acronym BEES to prepare them to listen. Teach your child how to respond when they hear you call out the word "BEES.

- **B** - Be still - turn your body to face me
- **E** - Eyes - look at me with your eyes
- **E** - Ears - turn on your ears, ready to listen

- **S** - Say it back to me - repeat what I have said so I know you have understood.

- 2 Give information in small chunks.** This may mean that you only give your child one step at a time.
- 3 Give tasks in a clear sequence.** It is much easier to remember "first unpack your bag then put it in your room", than "before you put your bag in your room, make sure you take out your lunch box and all of your homework".
- 4. Put it on paper.** If you find yourself frequently reminding or nagging your child to complete tasks, you're probably both getting frustrated. Try writing or drawing a picture of each step you need them to complete. If the list is long, fold it over so that only one or two steps are visible. Children who are overwhelmed with auditory information can also be overwhelmed with a visual list. Keep it short. When your child has finished a step, they can look for the next one.
- 5. Make a video.** An alternative to putting your information on paper is to make a short video on your phone. List out the steps, tasks or instructions you need them to remember. They can watch and rewatch the video to make sure they have heard and completed each part.
- 6. Use a calendar.** Write or draw pictures for upcoming events on a calendar, and keep a visual schedule for each day. This will help your child remember what you have told them is happening in the day and cue them to prepare for the upcoming activities.
- 7. Play games like**
  - *Simon Says and the shopping list game* (I went shopping and I bought... when each player repeats the list then adds on a new item). Gradually increase the amount of information players need to remember.
  - *Expanding Sentences*  
Take turns adding to a sentence, e.g. I went for a walk. I went for a quick walk. I went for a quick walk to the park. I went for a quick walk to the park and went on the swings.
  - *Shopping list*  
Before you go to the shops, ask your child to remember several things on the list. Rehearse these

on the way to the shops, then ask your child to recall them once you get there. They will be very excited to go and find the items you've asked them to remember.

- *Treasure Hunt*

Hide an object, then give instructions on where to find it, e.g. "go to the kitchen door, take 5 small steps, then look under the cup."

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<https://www.newcastlespeechpathology.com.au>

These activities are loads of fun and will increase your child's confidence to remember longer pieces of information.

**8 Be patient.** We know that some days our auditory working memory is more efficient than others. If we are in a noisy environment, we're tired or hungry, or just feeling overloaded or stressed, it is harder for us to remember those facts, sounds or words that we hear. As with all things, some days, our auditory working memory will be better than others.

## What is a Decodable Reader? Why are Decodable Books Important?

by Victoria Leslie

There are so many beautiful books on library and classroom walls that are designed for emergent readers. Sadly, very few of them contain a cumulative phonic progression that allows every student to actually read them. This is the value of a decodable reader.

### Decodable Books For Measurable and Pleasurable Progress

A decodable reader or novel is one where the phonic rules and patterns of the English language are pre-learned and introduced sequentially. These rules and words build upon each other as the levels ascend and progress can be both measurable and pleasurable! When a student uses fully decodable texts, the reading process should give power and confidence to that reader, and a sense of predicable accomplishment.

Going back to those beautiful books I mentioned above, many of those don't have this progression. They do often have beautiful pictures and interesting typeface designed to engage emergent readers but they fail for many students because they introduce sounds and words a child hasn't yet been taught.

### Essential For Learners With Dyslexia, ADHD, ASD

For some learners this is okay and they muddle along with a splattering of phonics and many more of what schools often incorrectly term 'sight words'. However, this is not the optimum way to learn to read. For the 10% of the population who are dyslexic learners or who have other specific learning difficulties like ADHD and ASD, this is disastrous.

A student with dyslexia who struggles with phonemic and phonological awareness, working memory and/ or

RAN (rapid automatic naming) issues will very quickly begin to flounder and fail in a system where sequential phonics is not taught explicitly. They will create false mythologies about the rules of reading based on their own observations and not based on the rules so they often won't progress to reading fluency. All of this is bad enough but, for me, the real catastrophes are the multiple anxiety-related conditions that these learners can often subsequently be diagnosed with as a result of this avoidable failure.

### Teach the Code, Gain Confidence, Repeat

When a student begins to read they should be taught the code. We would never ask a child to take part in a competitive sport without first making sure they have the correct equipment and know the rules that they will need for that particular level of competition. It is the same for reading.

Decodable books allow students to read using the level of phonic code they already know. This brings confidence. When confidence is gained, more code is explicitly taught and new books are introduced. This pattern of explicit teaching and appropriately introduced texts is the key to confident and empowered readers who, when ready, will be able to read any book they might desire!

*Reprinted with permission by the author Victoria Leslie, [www.focusontap.com](http://www.focusontap.com) TAP is a Teen and Adult Phonics Library App. TAP offers a series of decodable novels for teens.*

#### Further links:

<https://www.speldnsw.org.au/literacy/decodable-book-selectors/>  
<https://www.spelfabet.com.au/2018/05/what-is-a-decodable-book/>

Anxiety is a silent condition, meaning there is not one obvious sign that screams 'this is anxiety,' it can appear in a range of ways, often unique for each individual. This is especially true for children, who may not be able to identify that what they're feeling is anxiety. This can make it really difficult, as parents, to be sure of what's bothering our children, especially when anxiety can often present as a physical ailment. Although every child can experience anxiety slightly differently, there are some signs you can look out for. Here are seven common ways your child might be expressing their anxiety.

## Stomach Ache

Feeling sick is a common way children feel their anxiety, especially younger kids who can't necessarily express how they are feeling in words. This can be a difficult situation for children who then may start to feel stressed about feeling sick or sore, on top of their original



worry. Before you decide that anxiety is the cause of the stomach ache, start by ruling out other possible reasons, just in case there is something else at play. One way to do this is to track when the stomach aches are taking place. Are they appearing in similar situations? Are there any triggers, like words or people, that could be inducing anxiety?

Discovering if there are triggers for stomach aches is the first step in effectively dealing with your child's pain and anxiety. You can help them identify when a stomach ache is caused by anxiety and when it may be from something else.

## Anger

Anxiety often presents as anger in children, teens, and young adults. This may include yelling, unfriendly responses, shutting down or ignoring people. Sometimes with little ones and teenagers, anxiety can present as

agitation, oppositional behaviour, naughtiness and playing up at home or at school. Children are often misdiagnosed with oppositional defiance, when, in reality, they are actually experiencing anxiety.

Children and teens with a more sensitised amygdala (a key part of the limbic system, responsible for anxiety) may feel emotions like worry, guilt, sadness, and empathy far more deeply than others. So it is understandable that an exacerbation of these feelings can present as anger. Similarly, adolescents often feel misunderstood and alone, and they may express this through angry responses.

Dealing with anger can be really tough, especially when it seems to be directed towards you. It can be hard as a parent to know how to best approach and manage the situation. However, the good news is that simply allowing time for your child to speak, and listening to them is a helpful strategy for reducing anxiety.

Take time to converse with them in a calm manner when you're in the car. You can work with them to unpack the reason behind their anxiety, helping them find a solution. Simply having someone to talk to about their feelings might be all your child needs to help ease their worry.

## Appetite Loss

"I'm not hungry" is another way anxiety can present. When we are anxious, our fight-or-flight response kicks in, and the energy that is usually used for digestion is reallocated to generating cortisol and other anxiety-inducing hormones. This is why when we're anxious, we often don't feel hungry. Frequently this lack of hunger can come with feelings of dread or nausea, caused by fear or worry about an upcoming event or encounter.

It's important to consider your child's normal response to food and mealtimes: ensure you contextualise their usual reaction before deciding this is due to anxiety.

## Headaches

When we are stressed we often tense up our muscles or clench our jaw and this can cause headaches. We also get headaches from focussing on one issue for an extended period.

To help your child alleviate stress-related headaches, try to get them to take some time out. If they have been doing homework for hours, encourage them to take a walk or have a conversation about something unrelated. This will distract them from their worries and will help to reset the hormone levels in their brain and deactivate the limbic system.

## Avoidance

Avoidance is a common way kids deal with anxiety, whether this is avoiding a place, a person, a topic, or even an animal. However, avoidance is one of the worst things you can do when it comes to anxiety. While it may alleviate worry in the short term, it will increase stress in the long run by fuelling a negative feedback loop of worry and limited relief.



The best thing you can do for your kids when they start avoiding something is to sit down and talk to them.

Approach the topic in a calm and supportive way, without letting any frustration you may be feeling intervene. By giving your child the opportunity and encouragement to

speaking about their worry you may be able to find the cause of the problem, which takes you one step closer to the solution.

## Crying

Crying is one of the toughest parts of anxiety, for people of all ages. Often, nothing bad or sad has happened, but the increased activity of the amygdala and the presence of hormones means we feel overwhelmed and emotional.

If your child is crying and you think it could be related to anxiety, it is important to comfort them. Allow them to confide in you and provide them with the support network they need to feel safe. Breathing techniques can be helpful for crying-related anxiety, as by distracting the

brain with a focus on breathing patterns, the panic and distress are eased.

## Insomnia

Getting enough sleep is one of the most important elements of maintaining wellbeing. Not sleeping is one of the most difficult byproducts of anxiety, and the vicious cycle of insomnia (not sleeping because you're anxious, and then becoming anxious about not sleeping) can be particularly tough to manage. However, one thing to keep in mind is that your body's fight-or-flight response is what causes this reaction, and in and of itself, this is not a negative thing at all. The fact that you can't sleep when you are worried means that your responses to danger or threat – when there truly is something to fear – are working properly, and that's something we can thank evolution for.

Explaining this science and cause of anxiety to your child (in a simplified way) can be really useful when easing the worry about not sleeping. Once they understand this, it can make it easier to drift off to sleep. Similarly to managing crying or anger, breathing exercises can be useful for helping kids get to sleep. They may find the 7-11 technique useful, where you breathe in for 7 beats and out for 11. Listening to meditation music can also help to ease worry and calm your child's mind.

There are many more scientifically-proven treatment methods to use, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, to reduce anxiety. If you have any concerns about your child experiencing anxiety, please don't hesitate to visit your General Practitioner or make an appointment with a psychologist.

If you would like to hear more about this topic, make sure you listen to Dr Jodie Lowinger on the [No Filter podcast](#) where she has an in-depth conversation with Mia Freedman about anxiety.

*Reprinted with permission by the author Dr Jodie Lowinger, [www.sydneyanxietyclinic.com](http://www.sydneyanxietyclinic.com) Dr Jodie Lowinger's book is 'The Mind Strength Method'.*

If you are concerned that you or your child may have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), it can be a minefield to know where to start! Who do I see? How do I get answers?

To help guide parents through the process we have outlined the “typical” path parents take below. You may feel strongly or there is an urgency in the matter and jump straight to Step 3! That’s fine. But any thorough assessment for ADHD should encompass all these elements at some stage.

### Step 1: Talk to Your Child’s Teacher

Teachers should be your first port of call. They are often able to tell you if the concerns you have around your child’s attention and concentration are significant when comparing them to 25 other children of the same age! That is valuable information and a logical first step. Teachers can also tell you if they have had similar concerns or noticed any impact on their academic progress which might suggest attention and concentration difficulties. If your child’s teacher is concerned, it might be time to follow the next steps.

### Step 2: Check Your Family GP

Sometimes there are other health or medical reasons that can impact your child’s attention and concentration. If your family GP gives your child a full bill of health, then you might ask for a specialist referral.

### Step 3: Schedule a Clinical Assessment or Interview

Specialists mental health centres are able to diagnose ADHD by conducting a thorough, formal assessment. Typically, this assessment will involve a clinical interview and administration of a series of standardised tests/rating

scales. Information from this assessment is then compared to specific diagnostic criteria in order to determine whether a diagnosis of ADHD is appropriate. But the first step would be an appointment with a child Psychologist or Psychiatrist to gain a history and more detail of your concerns. They may then recommend testing for ADHD.

### Step 4. Testing for ADHD

Psychometric assessments are a method of measuring psychological qualities, for example personality traits, cognitive abilities, academic abilities, certain behaviours etc. The word “psychometric” simply means psychological measurement.

Psychometric assessments can be used to guide decisions about whether an individual may have Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). A psychometric assessment for ADHD will be “multi-modal” and multi-informant”, meaning that it will collect information in many different ways from many different people. A comprehensive assessment of ADHD will typically involve a measure of cognitive functioning, a measure of academic achievement and rating scales to assess specific behaviours associated with ADHD. This broad range of standardised measures can contribute to a diagnosis of ADHD by providing information that may rule in or out other possible explanations for difficulties with attention, concentration and hyperactivity. Results from standardised assessments are considered alongside other information obtained from clinical interviews and through clinical assessments in order to inform decisions about diagnosis and intervention planning.

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Many years ago I was mid session with a bright and engaging 5 year old when he looked me in the eyes and tearfully said the following:

*"I'm so ugly. That's why no-one wants to play with me".*

As an early career psychologist working with children at that stage, it was a confronting moment. Like many adults, I'd believed (or perhaps just hoped) that children of this age did not have excessively critical thoughts about themselves the way many adults do. Sadly, as my working life progressed, I've come to realise this is not true.

Many children and teens are absolutely capable of - and frequently do - view themselves in harsh and negative ways. Although some young people do this less than others, and some not until they are older - eventually almost all young people berate, criticise or feel negatively about themselves at least on some occasions during their childhood and adolescence.

As a parent/caregiver, you've quite possibly seen evidence of this in your own children. Here are some of the common refrains you might have heard:



There are many different ways we can respond as parents/carers to young people when they express self criticism. These include listening carefully, expressing care and concern, helping them notice other more

positive parts of themselves and helping them redirect their attention to more positive activities instead of being stuck in a negative loop of self criticism.

However in the longer term, we want to help young people build a skill of generating *self compassion* when they feel critical towards themselves.

Self compassion as a concept is key in many major religions, including Buddhism and Christianity, and many different psychological treatments including *compassion focussed therapy*, an approach developed by Paul Gilbert in 2009, which is associated with promising improvements for a range of psychological disorders. A self compassionate response to self-criticism means talking to and treat ourselves in kind, loving and understanding ways when these critical thoughts occur.

There are a number of varying strategies psychologists use for developing self compassion, but there are four particular ones I use with children and young people. I'll discuss these below – first in the context of how we might use them as adults, and then how we can support young people to use these themselves.

## 1. Mindfully notice self criticism and its effects

Mindfully noticing self criticism and its effects means stopping to notice the thoughts we are having and acknowledging the pain and sadness which it brings. In other words, it is labelling specifically what is happening in our minds rather than just being lost in the experience itself.

For example when we are thinking "I'm so stupid" we might say to ourselves: *"I'm feeling dislike for myself right now and that hurts a lot"*. When we are thinking "I'm ugly and fat" we might say to ourselves *"I'm have lots of critical thoughts about my ability in this and that feels lousy"*. Labelling and noticing self criticism in this way provides some distance from the experience and is more likely to help us feel kindness towards ourselves.

We can help our young people to do this too. When they tell us self critical thoughts, rather tell them they are being silly, ignoring them, telling them to stop thinking those thoughts or immediately denying their perception (that's not true!) we might say sentences like:

- *I'm sorry your mind is telling you that and making you feel so sad about it.*
- *That sounds like a really painful thought for you to think.*
- *It must be tough when that feeling comes up.*
- *I'm sorry that's the thought you are having.*

If it feels more natural, we can add a statement that we feel differently about them to this kind of labelling, for example:

- *I don't think that's true, but I'm sorry your brain tells you that.*
- *I think entirely differently about you, but I know self criticism like that hurts a lot and I'm sorry that's in your head at the moment.*

Sometimes it can be helpful to gently classify or name self criticism – for example some kids relate to the idea of "bad me" thoughts, ie *"Oh those "bad me" thoughts - they can hurt a lot"*

## 2. Reminding ourselves that many of the behaviours and characteristics we dislike about ourselves are normal and naturally arise from the way brains/bodies are designed or from experiences we have had.

We often believe that our so called flaws, failings or aspects of ourselves we don't like are more unusual than they actually are. We also often believe that they occur because of something within our "personality" rather than noticing any biological factors which might contribute. Finally we also are likely to under-estimate outside (past or present) factors which have contributed to them occurring.

It can be useful instead to remind ourselves that many of our so-called short comings and failures are very common, might simply result from *having a human brain with biological drives or instincts or from having certain experiences*. In other words, to think: "Normal", "Biology" and "Outside Causes" when evaluating why we have done certain things. For instance, a self compassion responses might be saying to ourselves:

- *"Of course I get angry sometimes, it's what human brains do" (Biology)*
- *"It's not easy to stick to exercise, my brain is designed to try to keep me feeling comfortable" (Biology)*
- *"Most people have things they've done they are ashamed of" (Normal)*
- *"It's no wonder I struggle with doing this as I never really had any training in it" (Outside factors)*
- *"Most people have parts of their appearance they don't like" (Normal)*
- *"My own childhood never really prepared me for this, it's not surprising I'm finding it hard" (Outside factors)*
- *"I've had a long and tiring day, it's understandable I didn't understand that idea" (Outside factors)*

We can help young people do this too by providing them with information about what is normal, how brains work and how experiences affect us as humans. For example we might say sentences like:

- *Everyone has done that (example of their mistake), including me.*
- *I know lots of people struggle with that issue, for example.....*
- *Everyone lies or loses their temper, it's normal to get angry.*
- *Have you noticed that XX (example) also does/has/did...(helping them notice others with the same perceived "flaws")*
- *Your brain is designed to fight for what it wants, so of course you are going to feel like wanting to...*
- *You've had this experience, which makes it hard to do....*
- *Our brains are designed to keep us safe and stay away from things it thinks are scary - it's no wonder you feel nervous.*



### 3. Treating self kindly

Another aspect of a self compassion response is to give ourselves good things and experiences when we are finding life difficult. It also means putting ourselves in situations in which we are more likely to experience kindness, pleasure and gentle experiences.

For example, as adults this might mean we let ourselves have a sleep, ease up on trying to get everything done, take a break from situations we find hard or reducing our standards for some things for a certain time period.

For children and young people, we can encourage them to find ways to be kind to themselves by saying things like:

- When I feel sad, sometimes I find it helpful to read a book/do something fun..would you like to...
- May I give you a hug?
- Your job right now is to be kind to yourself. It doesn't help to hurt yourself and you don't deserve to be hurt.

### 4. Bringing our attention to our strengths and potential for change and growth

When we are self critical or negative about ourselves, all of our attention is on our perceived flaws and challenges. A final component of self compassion is to instead deliberately remind ourselves of and shift our attention on to our strengths, areas of improvement or growth, and the potential for future change and growth.

This is tough to do (remember our brains are designed to focus on problems and areas of weakness). It takes gentle years of practice to redirect our attention onto these things when self criticism occurs. However, we can get better at doing this if we practice. For example, we might say to ourselves:

- *I'm struggling with X, but I am good at Y*
- *I have come a long way compared to where I was previously in this area*
- *I will be able to keep improving in this way*
- *I should remember A and B about myself*

Sometimes it can help us to have written lists of our strengths, put ourselves in situations where we notice or be with friends/family who can remind us of these things.

We can help our kids learn to focus on their strengths too. or example, we can say things like:

- *I see you doing so well in....*
- *You have a special skill in...*
- *I love watching you do...*

Many parents/caregivers find it quite easy to comment on our children’s strengths in this way. However what can be even more powerful than just listing their strengths ourselves is to instead help young people to start to notice their *own* strengths and improvements. This will help them believe and remember them more powerfully than if they just hear us describe them. To help them do this, we can ask questions to help them reflect on their own skills and growth – for example:

- *What are your strengths?*
- *What is something you like about yourself?*
- *What are you proud of about yourself?*
- *What area have you improved in recently?*

### Will developing too much self compassion mean children and teens lower their standards? (aka Is a little guilt a good thing?)

Here's a common concern parents have – “*If I tell my child that everyone loses their temper, or tell my teen to be kind to themselves when they've acted badly - will they think it's okay to act in unhelpful ways?*” In other words, parents/caregivers are asking me – isn't self criticism useful in helping young people make (needed) changes?

There are two points I'd like to make in response to this:

**First**, helping our young people to be self compassionate towards themselves does not mean we don't work very hard on helping young people reduce their unhelpful behaviour, especially that which hurts

them or others. For example, it's possible to encourage young people to be kind to themselves during and after we've enforced a family rule or consequence for a challenging behaviour.

**Secondly**, there is no evidence to suggest that encouraging self compassion in ourselves or our children leads to a lowering of moral or behavioural standards. In fact, there is evidence that the opposite is true. For example, studies have shown that people with a higher degree of self compassion are more likely to act compassionately towards others, those with lower levels of shame and guilt are more able to change and that self criticism is associated with worse behaviour – not better.

**Practice and Modelling**

Teaching children and teens to be self compassionate of course starts with being self compassionate ourselves as parents. Here's an exercise you could do now if you like – say the following sentences out loud to yourself:

*Sometimes I criticise myself as a parent for..... (labelling self criticism). However this parenting business is hard, long work, it's normal for us to do it well sometimes - and not well at other times (normalising "flaws" ). I'm going to let myself take a break for a moment by.....(treating self kindly). I have many areas of strength as a parent such as.....(noticing strengths).*

How does this feel? Do you think developing self compassion for yourself as a parent will also help you support your child to be self compassionate when they are critical of themselves?

All the best in developing self compassion for yourself as a parent and helping your young person to develop self compassion for themselves.

*Permission granted by the author Kirillie Smout (Clinical Psychologist) to reprint this article. <https://www.calmkidcentral.com> [www.developingminds.net.au](http://www.developingminds.net.au)*

Successful Transitions from One Activity to Another for Individuals with ASD by Maureen Bennie

*Transitioning from one activity to another is a part of life at home, work, school and in the community.*

Transitions involve stopping one activity and starting another or moving from one location to another one to begin something new. Studies have shown that up to 25% of the school day may be spent in transition activities such as changing classrooms, going outside for recess, lunchtime, putting items in lockers, or getting materials for a task. There are similarities in the workplace and at home such as moving from one task to another, attending meetings or social events, eating meals and leisure breaks.

Without preparation or support for transitions, many people with ASD find them stressful or anxiety provoking. Challenging behaviour may happen at this time.

Transitions are difficult because:

- there is a strong need for predictability

- there may be a lack of understanding what activity comes next
- they may feel upset moving from a preferred activity to a non-preferred one
- a pattern of behaviour may be disrupted
- a change in environment may be disconcerting (going from indoors to outdoors, moving from a quiet place to a noisier one)
- multi-step directions for the next activity may not be understood
- transition cues are not recognised (eg. students putting on their coats means recess is starting)
- the activity they are transitioning to is more demanding or not liked
- there is difficulty sequencing information and recognising relationships between steps of an activity
- a person may have higher levels of anxiety which impacts behaviour during moments of unpredictability

## Preparing for Transitions

There are a number of preparation strategies to use that help create predictability for transitions.

### Visual Timers

A visual timer helps a person to see how much time is left before an activity ends and a transition will begin. Time is an abstract concept so make it as concrete as possible. A time timer has a section of red that disappears as time passes.

For shorter time periods that only last a minute or two, consider using a sand timer. Sand timers come in a variety of sizes and time duration like 1 minute, 3 minutes, and 5 minutes.

These can be great to use for quick tasks like brushing teeth, getting on a coat, or putting something away.

When the sand runs down to the other side, time is up.

For older children and adults, there are a number of timer apps now available including the Time Timer. Have a look [here](#) for time apps as well as other types of timers.

### Using Visuals to Count Down

Using visuals to count down is a way to be flexible with increments of time. The visuals can be things that appeal to the person and is meaningful to them, like a favourite colour, shape or character. For example, there can be 5 cards numbered 1 to 5 and placed vertically from 5 to 1 with the end of the task at the bottom. You would start removing the #5 card, moving all the way down to #1. Some examples of what visual countdowns look like can be found at: <http://autismcircuit.net/tool/visual-countdown>

I used to make some of my own time tools to have manual control of time. If a task was going well, I could extend the time using my own tools.

How I did this was to make a cardboard strips and put a piece of Velcro across it. I then took poker chips and put

Velcro on the back of those. I would then remove the chips off the strip as time was passing to show that a task was progressing.

Another tool I used was the sit wheel. It's a wheel on top of a circle that has a picture of someone sitting down. I would then move the top circle along to cover up the sitting pictures to show the passage of time.

### Visual Schedules, Different Ways

Visual supports can be used for daily/weekly schedules, showing visual blocks of time. A visual schedule is also a great way to show the passage of time throughout the day.

When a task/activity has passed, take it off the schedule and put it in an envelope, signalling that the time has passed and the task is over.

You can also see what's going to happen next which lessens anxiety by creating predictability.

I used to add a "surprise" card on to my children's daily schedule from time to time to let them know that even with planning, some unplanned things can happen or things don't go according to the set schedule.

This has worked to build flexibility and develop skills to cope with changes because even with great organisation, the unexpected can happen.

Visuals can also be used to show sequential steps in a task such as a bedtime routine or getting dressed.

Showing these steps can help reduce the difficulty sequencing information and support recognising relationships between steps of an activity. Do2Learn is a good website to find visual breakdowns of tasks.

First/Then schedules show two step sequences and can be a good tool to help a child complete a non-preferred activity before moving on to a preferred one. They can also be motivational.

Calendars are a great way to break down the days, weeks and months. My 23 year old son refers to the calendar a lot to understand when something exciting like a concert is coming up. He can count down how many days we are away from the event. He has used the calendar to cope with a family visitor. He counted down the days until they left (luckily, just to me).

My daughter prefers a daily desk calendar. She tears off one page per day. Different days of the week mean different activities and things that need to get done or upcoming transitions that will happen throughout the month.

### Using Objects, Photos, Icons or Words

Research has shown that providing visual supports during a transition can significantly decrease the latency between the time children are given instructions and the time they begin the next activity.

Photos can be taken of places or areas where the child will transition to, increasing predictability and familiarity. For example, at transition time a photo can be given to the child to show where they are going next.

The photo can be carried en route to the next location to provide a continuing reference point. When the child has arrived to the spot, there can be a place like an envelope, tray or box to put the photo to show that they have arrived at the right spot.

Use the written word with all visual supports (line drawings, cards, photos) because no one can predict when understanding/comprehension of the written word will begin.

Reading is a gradual process that involves years of skill building so it's important to provide as much exposure to the printed word as possible. Some children read before they can speak.

*Permission granted by the author Maureen Bennie to include this article, Autism Awareness Centre Inc.*  
[www.autismawarenesscentre.com](http://www.autismawarenesscentre.com)

Concrete learners or young children can be given an object that represents the next activity such as a book for reading time or a mat to sit on for circle time.

Music, such a simple songs, can be a way to signal a transition. Different songs can be associated with certain tasks like cleaning up, starting the day, or ending the day.

My son still sings the national anthem every Monday morning to mark the start of the new week. He has been out of school for several years, but this musical cue still helps him to know that a new week is starting.

Transitional themes could also be dancing, stories, recorded music, rhythms, or call-and-response which can provide a chance for movement (body break) and repetition. Everyone feels more secure in a routine.

You can change the supports that you use as a child ages because they may no longer be appropriate. A teenager using a Velcro strip visual schedule taped to his desk may make him stand out from his peers, but an iTouch helps him be like everyone else.

### Signalling "Finished"

When a task or activity is done, there should be a concrete place to put the item or finished task to let a person know it's over. This can be a tray or box to put the items into. This provides a clear, visual cue that an activity is done and are moving on to something else. If there was not enough time to complete a task and it has to be finished later, consider having a specially marked box for it.

Being able to transition successfully is an important skill to have to increase independence, reduce challenging behaviour, foster flexibility, and lessen anxiety.

There are many tools that are simple to make and easy to use to support transitions. Remember to tweak tools and visuals as a child grows and develops to ensure they remain effective and age appropriate.

# Why Children Exhibit Challenging Behaviour

by Alithea Taylor

When a child is engaging in challenging behaviour, they are not just a bundle of naughtiness – although it may feel that way at times!

Children are highly complex beings with emotional, physiological and psychological needs that they do not necessarily have the maturity to communicate effectively.



*Which of these six common causes of challenging behaviour do you recognise?*

## Reason 1: Tiredness and Hunger

Sleep deprivation destabilises mood and intensifies negative emotions. Hunger causes anxiety and agitation, while low blood sugar leads to disinhibited behaviour.

## Reason 2: An Undeveloped Brain

Sometimes children are too immature to behave better. In young children, the higher brain is still very underdeveloped, which means they can't naturally inhibit primitive impulses when activated.

## Reason 3: Psychological Hungers

*Under-stimulation.* The brain registers under-stimulation as stress. Because children have fewer resources than adults, the stimulation they choose may be aggressive, noisy, or destructive.

*Recognition Hunger.* Children have a genetically programmed need for attention. If they don't get enough loving attention, they will settle for negative attention.

*Structure Hunger.* Without rules and routines, children (like adults) descend fairly quickly into anarchy.

## Reason 4: Needing Help with a Big Feeling

Children may discharge tension from painful emotions they are unable to express in words. Or, as a signal that they need help managing their distress.

## Reason 5: Picking up on Your Feelings

Children (like dogs) are great barometers for how you are feeling – the more stressed you are, the more likely your child is to behave in challenging ways.

## Reason 6: Activating the Primitive Brain

The way you interact with (or react to) your child (e.g. shouting) may be activating primitive rage and fear brain systems.

*Reprinted with permission by the author Alithea Taylor and Q-Psych. [www.qpsych.com.au](http://www.qpsych.com.au)*

## For Your Diary....



### Transition to High School

Presented by: Hopalong  
Location: Peakhurst or Newington  
Date: 10th to 14th January  
Contact: 1800 809 552

### Autism Camp

Presented by: ACA  
Location: Tweed/Byron Hinterland  
Date: 16th to 21st January  
Contact: [https://www.autismcampaaustralia.org/camp\\_nsw](https://www.autismcampaaustralia.org/camp_nsw)

### Handwriting Program for Kindy and above

Presented by: Hopalong  
Location: 17th to 21st January  
Date: Peakhurst or Newington  
Contact: 1800 809 552

### Play in Schools for Teachers and Therapists

Presented by: Learn to Play  
Location: Online  
Date: 19th January  
Contact: [learntoplayevents@gmail.com](mailto:learntoplayevents@gmail.com)

### Basecamp Term Program

Presented by: Quirky Kid Psychology  
Location/Date: Woollahra from 8th Feb, Wollongong from 9th Feb.  
Contact: 9362 9297

### Sounds-Write Workshop

Presented by: SPELD  
Location: Online  
Date: Starts 12th February 2022  
Contact: 9739 6277

### Mastering Multiplication

#### Facts

Presented by: Learning Links  
Location: Online  
Date: Self-guided  
Contact: 1300 003 900

Sasha is an 8-year-old in Year 3 at school. It has never been easy. She has tried. Many times. When she first started school at the age of 5 she was excited but also terrified. She was excited because she was going to be starting at 'big school' and her older siblings had told her so many great things about school. She had loved going to pick them up when she was in preschool. But no one had told her about the work and the way that her work would be marked, scored, judged, and then displayed with everyone else's, displaying to the world that she was not very good at it. So now Sasha mostly feels terror. With every new learning task she grits her teeth and prepares for another experience of failure and exposure.

'you need to focus on your work'  
'you can do better'  
'practice makes perfect'  
'I know you can do it'  
'just do your best'  
'we don't care about the marks'  
'I showed you this yesterday'  
'go and try it yourself first'  
'less talking and more working'

Sasha has been hearing these comments since she started formal schooling but the truth is that even when she tries, she doesn't get it. And whenever she is asked to 'go and try' she begins to panic as she knows the outcome before she starts – another example of not being good enough. And she is not sure that she can actually do it...

Working with both children and adults has given me the amazing opportunity to repeatedly see the link between early learning experiences and the development of sense of self. The more I have worked with adults who

are daring to believe maybe they aren't unworthy or incapable, the more passionate I have become about advocating and intervening for children. Some children are naturally built to succeed in schooling. And some children will have to fight to survive schooling. As adults, we know that formal schooling eventually ends, but our core beliefs and the way we see ourselves continues.

Sasha was eventually diagnosed with a learning disorder later in Year 3. While this didn't provide a 'cure' for her learning, what it did allow was for the system to be pushed to change for Sasha. It also provided insight into Sasha's schooling experience. She was bright and so she understood how the system worked. It helped us to understand that whenever Sasha was given an academic assessment aimed at grading her against others, it was taking another piece of her self-confidence and sense of self, and beginning to grow and develop a stronger sense of 'not good enough'.

I have worked as a school teacher and in my current work as a clinical psychologist, I often have the opportunity to meet and work with some amazing and dedicated teachers. But the system is not perfect, there is no perfect system. And so there are Sasha's who sometimes need us to listen and understand, to change the goal posts, and to help them find their amazingness. To walk very closely with them as they navigate an imperfect system so that they are able to continue to be life-long learners.

If you have a child who, like Sasha, is finding formal school challenging, then can I encourage you to continue to listen and to seek answers. To ask questions and to continue to strive to create the space where your child will flourish.

*Permission granted by the author Greg Powell to include this article.*  
[www.themindspace.com.au](http://www.themindspace.com.au)

## Loving Holiday Tips for ADHD Kids

by Jackie Schell

1. Love, love, love, them and their difference!
2. Let your child's spirit un free (safety first).
3. Don't sweat the small stuff.
4. Get them out and exercise every day.
5. Limit screen time to 2 hours per day max!
6. Set meal times and stick to them. Limit grazing!
7. Use timers to signal the end of screen time.
8. Build in self-care for parents/carers.
9. Use *when...then* directions: when you shower, then you can go back on your screen...
10. Love, love, love, them and their difference!

*Permission granted by the author Jacqueline Shell, Hornsby Kuringai Psychology to include this article* [www.kuringaipscychology.com.au](http://www.kuringaipscychology.com.au)

Christmas is a time for gathering together family and friends, enjoying delicious food, and celebrating both the traditions and spontaneity that come with the holidays. However, for both children and adults who experience different sensory sensitivities, Christmas can quickly become an uncomfortable or overwhelming time.

People can be hypersensitive to sensory inputs; bright lights, too many or loud noises, strong smells and taste aversions, or from increased physical touch. Especially with COVID restrictions this year, 2021 has meant less exposure to large groups, unpleasant sounds, and an increased capacity to control one's environment (with work and study from home). This can make Christmas a more difficult time, not only for those with sensory sensitivities, but also for those who experience anxiety, or find extended social activities difficult.

While we may not always be fully aware of those around us who have sensory sensitivities, there are various ways to make Christmas gatherings sensory-friendly for everyone;

Reprinted with permission by the author Emily Bemmer, Centre for Effective Living, [www.effectiveliving.com.au](http://www.effectiveliving.com.au)

## 1. *A quiet space*

Ensure people are aware of quieter spaces they can retreat to if Christmas events start to become over-stimulating; such as an outdoor space, or a quiet room to sit and recharge.

## 2. *Stretch it out*

Try to spread out Christmas activities over multiple days and with clear breaks within and between days for down time, instead of a single jam-packed day with multiple environments, people and situations to adjust to.

## 3. *Accept 'no'*

Even if you're sure they'll love a certain tasty food, fun activity or new song, allow others to say no to your requests and engage with Christmas in the ways they're most comfortable.

## 4. *Tell someone*

If you, your child, or someone you know has clear triggers or sensitivities, it can be helpful to let a host know beforehand, just as you would if you had an allergy.

## @the Office



Dear Members,

Well here we are at the end of another 'unprecedented' year. With all of NSW spending part of the year in lockdown it has been difficult, frustrating, lonely and isolating for many students, families and teachers. We hope that now we are past this term that none of us have to experience this disruption to learning again and that the year ahead is truly a positive one.

Our Term 4 Seminar presented by Professor Pamela Snow "The science of language and reading is for everyone" was very successful, with her passion for language clear for all to see. Professor Snow's generosity in sharing her wealth of information was greatly appreciated and we know that all attendees found her talk very beneficial.

Our 9th Tool Kit on "Executive Functions" will be officially launched at the start of next year. Due to the disruptions this term we have delayed the launch however we will have some fabulous publication sales to kick off the New Year at the start of Term 1, so keep an eye on your emails.

Just a reminder that the LDC office will close on Thursday 16th December and will reopen on Monday 31st January 2022. We wish all of our members a very safe, healthy and Covid-free Christmas and New Year. We look forward to continuing to support you next year through our helpline, our seminars, our publications and more.

Cheers, from Wendy

## Covid Christmas (sung to Rudolph)

*Learning this year with Covid  
has been hard for everyone.  
No band, no sport, no friend time  
made us all feel pretty glum.*



*Backpacks were barely unpacked,  
sport shoes hardly used at all.  
Special events were cancelled,  
no big groups in the school hall.*



*Who would have thought all the kids,  
and the teachers too.  
Would just wish they could go back  
and spend their days at school!*

*Now we are back in classrooms.  
six feet apart my dear.  
Let's hope that online learning  
isn't here again next year!*

*Christmas is getting closer,  
holidays are near again.  
Just when we got back to school  
Term 4's coming to an end!*



*Time for the tree to go up,  
kids are pumped on Christmas cheer.  
Planning the celebrations  
with everyone you missed this year.*



*Just in case you didn't know,  
and you hadn't thought.  
The best gift that you'll get this year  
is not something that's bought.*

*After a year like we've had,  
everyone wants just one thing.  
Christmas spent with our fave peeps,  
hoping that's what Santa brings!*

*We wish all our members a very Merry  
Christmas and a Happy New Year.  
From the LDC Management Committee  
and Office.*



## LDC Management Committee

2021 - 2022

*President:* Dr Julia Starling

*Vice-President:* Annette Guterres

*Treasurer:* Elizabeth Burns

*Secretary:* Natalie Miller

*General Committee Members:* Paul Briggs,  
Christine Goddard, Andrew Greenfield, Mary  
Kerba, Saba Nabi, Elizabeth Singhi, Natalie  
Smith and Caroline Zambrano.



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Website: [www.ldc.org.au](http://www.ldc.org.au)

The LDC is supported by the NSW Department  
of Education and Communities.

## Membership provides:

- ✓ A Quarterly Newsletter
- ✓ Fortnightly "Member Updates" on current news/articles relating to Learning Difficulties.
- ✓ A discount on LDC resources
- ✓ A discount on entry to LDC seminars
- ✓ A parent voice to media
- ✓ Active contributions to consultations/inquiries
- ✓ A voice on government committees





# Behaviour Support for Students with Learning Difficulties:

## Using function based thinking

Presented by Kristin Bayley

Speech Pathologist and Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA)

### Watch Online or On Demand

Tuesday 5th April 2022

10am - 12pm

Kristin is a strong advocate of a student-centred and function-based approach to positive behaviour support. Effective, appropriate support for behaviours of concern can only occur once there is a clear understanding of what that behaviour achieves for the student. In this talk, you will learn about:

- The fundamentals of function based thinking when understanding and developing strategies for behaviours of concern for primary and secondary students with learning difficulties.
- Some tools you can use to identify the 'why' of behaviours that occur across environments such as school and home.
- Identifying preventative strategies and replacement skills: matching the 'Why do they do it?' with the 'What do we do about it?'
- Strategies for teaching replacement skills.



### Prices

- \$35 LDC Member
  - \$70 Non LDC member
  - \$350 School Video Link\* (Member rate)
  - \$68 Seminar + NEW Individual Membership (until 31.5.23)
  - \$85 Seminar + NEW School/Organisation Membership (until 31.5.23)
- \* School Video Link option enables schools to show staff the video link in a staff meeting situation for one viewing only. For further details about this option please contact the office.

### Select Option (tick one):

- WATCH LIVE VIA ZOOM (zoom places are limited so register early)
- WATCH LATER VIA VIDEO LINK (link expires after 30 days)
- SCHOOL VIDEO LINK (link expires after 30 days)

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School Name (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Payment Details

Purchase Order No (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment due by 29th March** (please note - EDConnect payments accepted 30 days from registration)

2 registrants @ member rates per Individual M'ship (Member + Guest), 6 staff @ member rates per School/Org M'ship

- PayPal OR PCard OR credit card (go to [www ldc org au](http://www ldc org au))
- Cheque (Made out to "Learning Difficulties Coalition"), Post to: LDC Office, PO Box 140, Westmead, 2145
- Direct Deposit (St George Bank, BSB 112 879, A/C: 044 050 245 Please insert your surname as the reference to verify payment

Refund of fees, less 30% administration, will be available up to 14 days prior to conference commencement. No cancellations accepted later than 14 days to conference. Substitute delegates welcomed at no extra charge.

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Register online [www ldc org au](http://www ldc org au) or send completed form with payment to the LDC