

Family Action's Norfolk & Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

Welcome to our November Newsletter.

One of the topics we talk about regularly with parents and carers is **sleep**. As adults, most of us recognise how much we need a good night's sleep, yet our children and young people can sometimes seem to fight it every step of the way!

We hear about all sorts of sleep-related challenges for children, from difficulties with bedtime routines and getting to sleep, to waking during the night, getting up far too early, or struggling to get up for school because they are still so tired.

Sleep is about so much more than simply feeling rested. It gives our bodies time to repair and grow, and plays an important role in our emotional wellbeing and mental health. When sleep is a battle night after night, it can affect the whole family, leaving everyone feeling less prepared to face the challenges of the following day.

So, in this edition of our newsletter, let's talk about sleep and neurodivergence and explore why sleep can be particularly challenging for neurodivergent children and young people, and share some ideas that may help.

Family Action's Norfolk & Waveney Autism/ADHD Service is commissioned by Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Integrated Care Board.

This month's newsletter includes:

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Just as every child is unique, every family's situation is different. We in the Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service are not health professionals but we do speak to many families with children of differing needs. Some of the information contained in this newsletter is anecdotal and some from respected websites. We hope you find the following interesting and helpful.

NWAASS has a vacancy

Would you be a good fit for our award-winning team?

Are you a caring, empathic person who knows how to listen? Do you have professional or lived experience of autism or ADHD? Do you have good knowledge about SEND and how schools can support children with additional needs? Are you passionate about supporting families?

If so, you may be exactly what we are looking for and we want you to get in touch.

We have a vacancy in our Norfolk & Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service for a part time (15-hours) Family Support Worker to join our central area team. This is a home-based role but there will be extensive travel throughout central Norfolk and Norwich in order to help facilitate our courses and drop-in groups. Access to a car will be essential for this role.

To see full details including the job description and person specification click the link here.

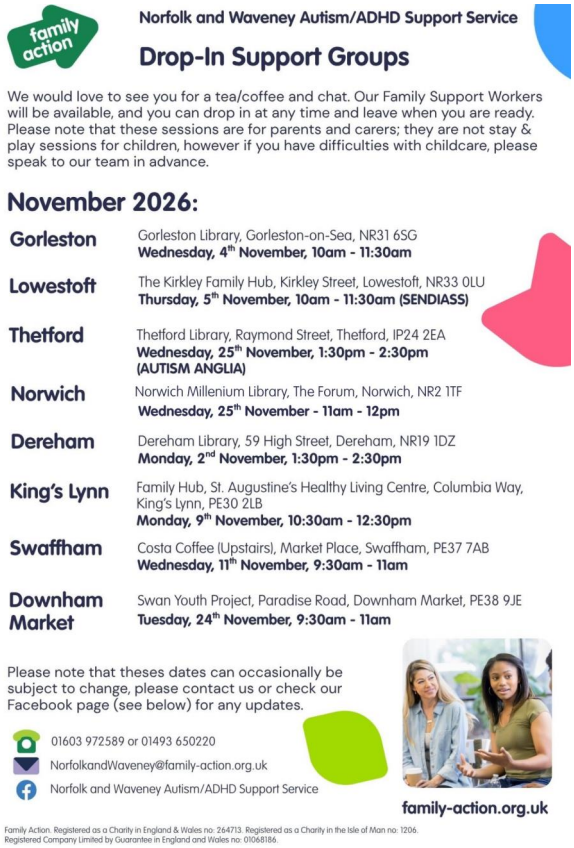
Vacancy ID: 1907

Link to view advert - Info



Our Drop In Support Groups in November click to enlarge flyer.

Our drop-in support groups are friendly and informal and there is no need to book. And you can join us for the whole session or just pop in for a short time, whatever suits you. See our flyer below which lists our drop-ins in November.



And.....If you live in or around Watton

We have just arranged to attend an event in Watton which is not included in the flyer above.

Our Central area team would love to meet you on....

Monday 2nd November between 11am and 1pm

Watton Library, George Trollope Rd, Watton, Norfolk, IP25 6AS

Norfolk SENDIASS Information, Advice and Support Service

This friendly and informal session is part of the **SENDIASS** - Norfolk SEND Information, Advice and Support Service - library drop-in programme and we are happy to have been invited to come along to help with any questions or concerns you have about neurodivergence, autism or ADHD.

We are not often in Watton and would love the opportunity to meet families who want to know more about our service or who would like some friendly information or support.

Let's Talk About SLEEP



Every child is unique, and the way they experience the world can affect their sleep in different ways. Some children find it difficult to settle and fall asleep, while others wake frequently during the night or are up very early in the morning. If this sounds familiar, you are certainly not alone!

For some children with ADHD, for example, their minds may feel as though they are still racing at bedtime, making it difficult to switch off after a busy or stimulating day. For others, the opposite may be true: they may not have had enough of the movement, activity or stimulation they need during the day, so the quiet of the evening doesn't necessarily help them feel sleepy. Some children may also spend bedtime going over every detail of their day, worrying about social interactions, thinking about how they can mask better the next day or worrying about something that is coming up. When your child's mind is busy, settling down can feel like a real challenge.

Sleep difficulties can be hard on parents and carers, too. Being woken repeatedly during the night, or starting the day very early after a broken night's sleep, can leave the whole family feeling exhausted. We know how much effort families put into supporting their children, often while running on very little sleep themselves.

Some children may experience night terrors. These can be frightening for parents to witness, as a child may scream, cry or move around while appearing to be awake, even though they are still asleep and may not recognise you or respond to comfort in the usual way. Night

terrors can affect any child, although sleep difficulties more generally are common among neurodivergent children.

There is also evidence that differences in the body's internal body clock and the production and timing of melatonin may contribute to sleep difficulties for some neurodivergent children. Melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate our sleep-wake cycle, signalling to the body when it is time to sleep. Research is exploring how these processes may differ between individuals, including when melatonin production begins and how the body responds to light and darkness. These differences may help explain why some children feel wide awake when everyone else is ready for bed, or struggle to wake in the morning.

It is also worth remembering that sleep difficulties aren't always related to neurodivergence alone. Physical discomfort, anxiety, changes in routine, sensory sensitivities and worries about school or friendships can all affect sleep. Conditions such as eczema, asthma, constipation and acid reflux may also make it harder for a child to settle or stay asleep.

If you are concerned about your child's sleep you should speak to your GP or another health professional, particularly if sleep difficulties are persistent, your child snores regularly or loudly, or you notice gasping, choking or pauses in their breathing during sleep. These can sometimes be signs of an underlying medical condition, such as obstructive sleep apnoea, which needs further assessment.



There is no 'one size fits all' solution to sleep issues. A number of factors discussed above could be complicating things. You may also have a childwhose body has become quite used to the routine it is already in even if it not a particularly healthy sleep routine. Be kind to yourself and accept that things will not improve overnight..... but there are some changes you can make over time.

A simple, **consistent routine** can help children know what to expect and feel more prepared for sleep. Visual timetables can be particularly helpful, as they show children what is

happening next and make the routine easier to understand. The example included here was created using AI, which can be a useful tool for making timetables and social stories which reinforce what a child should expect as part of their evening routine. Your routine doesn't have to happen at exactly the same time every evening. Work, school activities and family life can mean that timings change, but keeping the sequence of activities similar can still provide familiarity and predictability which is often really helpful.



Small changes to the **bedroom environment** can sometimes make a difference. Consider the temperature, lighting, noise and bedding or curtains, as well as what your child wears to bed. A scratchy label, uncomfortable fabric or pyjamas that just don't feel right can make it harder to settle, even if your child struggles to explain what is bothering them. Experiment with different fabrics and styles to see what feels most comfortable.

Some children prefer snug bedding, while others get too hot, need more room to move or find loose sheets more comfortable. Weighted blankets can provide sensory input which is comforting for some children, but they are not suitable for very young children so take some advice..

It can also help to create a clear distinction between sleeping and other activities. If space allows, you might have separate areas for sleeping, playing and homework. If this isn't possible, a simple visual cue, such as a different-coloured blanket used for reading or other awake-time activities, may help your child recognise when the bed is being used for something other than sleep.

Find activities that help your child **wind down.** Some children benefit from a short sensory circuit or other movement-based activities before bed to help them transition from the stimulation of the day. This should not be a free for all however which would have the opposite effect. Weight bearing exercise using controlled movements works best. Others may find movement too energising, particularly if they are already feeling overwhelmed. Quiet, predictable activities may suit them better.

There is no single approach that works for every child. Notice what seems to help your child feel comfortable and settled, rather than aiming to make them exhausted. You could experiment with gentle movement, stretching, listening to a familiar story or music, or spending some quiet time together. For more information and video resources, visit Just One Norfolk's Sensory Circuits at Home resource.

If your child regularly struggles with sleep, a simple **diary** can help you spot patterns, identify small changes to try and provide you with useful information to share with a health professional. You already have enough to do in the evening, so keep it brief. Note when your child went to bed, how long they took to fall asleep, whether they woke during the night and when they got up.

You don't have to manage sleep difficulties alone

There are so many factors that can affect sleep, and every child is different. We can't cover every possibility in one article, and you may find that some suggestions work for your child while others don't. That's okay! You know your child best, and finding what helps can take time.

If sleep difficulties are affecting your child or family, please don't feel that you have to manage them alone. There is support available.

- Your GP: A good first point of contact if you are concerned about your child's sleep. They can help explore whether an underlying medical condition may be contributing to the difficulties and advise on any further assessment or support needed.
- Nansa's Sleep Service: This service supports families of children and young people with SEND, aged 0–25, who are experiencing ongoing sleep difficulties. Find out more or make a referral via the Nansa Sleep Service website.
- Our Sleep Workshop: Join us on 20 November, 10–11 am, to explore sleep difficulties and ways promote better sleep. We hope this will be an opportunity to learn, share experiences and discover ideas that may work for your family. See flyer below with all the information you need**.**

Online Workshop in November - Promoting Better Sleep

There is no need to book for this online session. Just note the **ZOOM** joining details and come along on the day.

Laura and her team in the east look forward to welcoming you on 18th November. Click to enlarge flyer.



PLAN BEE COURSES



PLAN BEE – Understanding and Supporting your Child or Young Person with Additional Needs.

'Plan Bee' is a FREE 3 week course (2hrs per week) and is aimed at parents or carers of children or young people with additional needs including those with traits of autism or

ADHD. **IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU CONTACT US TO BOOK A PLACE FOR THIS COURSE AS WE MONITOR THE NUMBERS CAREFULLY.**

If your child or young person already has a formal diagnosis of autism, please see the information later in the newsletter about the PUFFINS AUTISM PROGRAMME.

Our Zoom course in November and our face to face courses in Beccles and Norwich in November and December are already full.

See our flyer for an upcoming Condensed Plan Bee in one session. This is being delivered on a Saturday morning in response to requests for a weekend course from working parents. We still have places available.

Keep an eye on the newsletter for new courses which are being added all the time.

Click to enlarge flyer.



Puffins Autism Programme

For parents or carers of children or young people with a *diagnosis* of autism.

Family Action is commissioned by EAST OF ENGLAND COMMUNITY HEALTH AND CARE NHS TRUST Care to to run the comprehensive, free, four-week Puffins Autism Programme for Parents/Carers in *West and Central Norfolk.*



This is a strictly post-diagnosis autism course and includes sessions delivered by Family Action, by Speech & Language and Occupational Therapists from NCH&C clinical teams and by Autism Specialists from within NCC's Educational Psychology & Specialist Services. Do not miss your chance, if you have a child or young person with a formal diagnosis of autism, to attend this well regarded programme.

KEEP AN EYE ON THE NEWSLETTER FOR FURTHER ADVERTISING OF COURSES AS THEY ARE FINALISED OR CONTACT Puffins@family-action.org.uk FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BOOKING A PLACE. Courses up to and including February 2027 are now fully booked. We are waiting to hear whether we will be commissioned to offer these courses from April 2027.

See flyer below for Puffins course available to book now. Click flyer to enlarge.



NEW - Puffins Autism East

Available to parents/carers in east Norfolk and Waveney, who are served by the James Paget Hospital and Newberry Clinic and with a child *recently diagnosed with autism*.

This is a condensed, one-session, online version of a course which Family Action already facilitates in West and Central Norfolk in partnership with clinical teams within the Neurodevelopmental Service as well as the Autism Education team within NCC's Educational Psychology & Specialist Services (EPSS).

Based on the full four week course, this condensed session is designed to be accessible to busy and working families and will be delivered entirely by our highly experienced team..

The first session of this new initiative is available to book now. See flyer below. Click to enlarge.



The Snowdrop Programme



GET IN TOUCH NOW TO BOOK A REMAINING PLACE ON OUR NEW SNOWDROP PROGRAMME IN NOVEMBER WHEN WE WILL BE IN THETFORD. Booking is essential. See flyer below - just click to enlarge.

Snowdrop is currently only available to parents/carers who live in or around King's Lynn, Downham Market, Thetford, Dereham and Swaffham and have a child up to the age of 11 years with *any* kind of special educational need or disability.

The three sessions explore how raising a child with SEND can affect the whole family and allow space for parents/carers to express themselves, share experiences, make connections and build resilience.

Family Action is commissioned to deliver this programme by the Norfolk Community Foundation.

For more information you can contact snowdrop@family-action.org.uk or phone 01760 725801

ASK FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OUR PLANNED COURSE IN KING'S LYNN IN JANUARY.



NEW: SUFFOLK Teen Life Programme for Parents and Carers of Autistic Young People

We are pleased to be able to offer The National Autistic Society's **Teen Life Programme.** A free six-week course designed for parents and carers of autistic young people aged 10–16 years with a confirmed diagnosis received within the last two years, w***ho live in Suffolk.***

The **FREE** programme aims to help parents and carers gain a better understanding of autism and explore practical strategies to support their teenager.

The course is open to parents and carers of autistic young people aged 10–16

See flyer for course available to book. Click to enlarge.

To find out more or book a place, please email **teenlifesuffolk@family-action.org.uk** or scan the QR code on the flyer. Click to enlarge.



What else is going on?

Family Action would like to share this appeal being circulated by Family Voice.

family voice norfolk
together improving services

DfE call for evidence - experience of school exclusion

Dear parents/carers,

Do you and your child, children or young person have experience of school exclusion? Here is an opportunity to input your experiences and thoughts to the Department for Education.

The Department for Education has launched a Call for Evidence on the school exclusion reform proposals set out in the Schools White Paper 'Every child achieving and thriving'. The proposals include a national framework for internal suspension, reintegration support

partnerships following a suspension, and the provision of schoolwork during the first five school days of suspension or permanent exclusion.

They would very much value your contribution to this Call for Evidence to help them understand how these proposals may affect families, including those who have children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Call for Evidence, which has targeted questions for parents and carers, can be found **here** and closes on 19 November 2026.

Evidence gathered from this Call for Evidence will inform any subsequent consultation on the implementation of the school exclusion reforms.

For all enquiries about the school exclusion Call for Evidence, please email: exclusion.cfe@education.gov.uk.

National Autistic Society Campaign

"I am deliberately hiding the current negative media narrative on "autism over diagnosis" from my 11-year-old autistic daughter. I don't want the hard work she and we have done to improve her confidence, mental health and self-worth to be impacted."

We wanted to share with you this recent communication from The National Autistic Society.

We recently asked you how misinformation about autism is impacting you. **Almost 2,000 of you answered and the results couldn't be clearer.** The rise in harmful and inaccurate stories about autism is impacting autistic people's everyday lives.

- **98%** of those who responded to the survey are concerned about the amount of misinformation about autism that they see or hear.
- Almost **8 in 10** autistic people have felt too scared to tell others that they are autistic.
- **More than one in three** respondents, 36%, told us they had experienced negative consequences as a direct result of misinformation about autism in a healthcare setting.

- **Eight in 10** autistic people believe autism is inaccurately represented in the media and online.
- **Most** autistic people **frequently** witness wrong claims about autism they find upsetting or offensive.

Since our survey, we have seen lots of misleading headlines about overdiagnosis following the Government's independent review into mental health, autism and ADHD, despite the report finding no evidence of widespread overdiagnosis.

It will take collective action to turn things around. Telling the truth and stopping the spread of misrepresentations of autism matters to all of us.

Because no one should feel scared to share that they are autistic.

"I am afraid to mention my diagnosis, traits, needs or the provision I require in most social situations because I simply do not know what kind of misinformation that person has been on the receiving end of."

It's time for action.

Our Young Campaigners have been busy filming videos for social media about the reality of their experiences as young autistic people.

Over the coming weeks we will be sharing more of their stories over on our social media channels.

Can you show your support by liking, sharing and leaving an encouraging comment for them?

Misinformation spreads through repetition, but by amplifying the experiences of autistic people, we can help the truth to spread further, and it only takes a few seconds to do!

See the first post here

Did you know about Norfolk MHST?

Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) are an early intervention service across Norfolk and Waveney, working with some schools and their pupils. We can offer support to children and young people, their families, and their school community to help manage emerging mild to moderate mental health difficulties.

What does the MHST service do?

We provide brief, low intensity, evidence-based support for mild to moderate mental health difficulties. We support schools in developing their whole school approach to ensure that all the children, young people and staff work together to understand and support mental health and wellbeing.

You can find out much more on Just One Norfolk including lists of the schools supported by the service.

Focus on the West

Click to enlarge flyers.





New Service for Adults

Norfolk County Council

From the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board newsletter. Could this offer be helpful to anyone you know?

New 24/7 mental health crisis text service

The Mental Health Crisis Text Service offers free, confidential support by text, WhatsApp and webchat, 24 hours a day, for people of all ages across the east of England.

There's no referral process; people contact the service directly. If you work with someone who is struggling, you can encourage them to text SOS to 80899, WhatsApp 0800 884 0655 or visit

https://nxgthrive.co.uk/crisis-text-service/

Family Action Website

Family Action is a national charity, supporting families up and down the country and has recently updated and relaunched its website.

In addition to being able to search for Family Action services and projects in your locality, you can also now access lots of information and resources on a wide range of topics affecting families today.

See also the QR code below which will take you to the home page.

Family Action FamilyLine - for any parenting concerns or crises. We can listen, support, inform and refer to a relevant service.





About our Service - Contact Details



For West and Central Norfolk **01603 972589** or email NorfolkAndWaveney@family-action.org.uk

For East Norfolk and Waveney **01493 650220** or email gorleston@family-action.org.uk

Unsure which area to contact? Use any of the above – we are all here to help you.

If you wish to join our closed Facebook group, go to Facebook and to the Family Action page and then search for Norfolk and Waveney Autism and ADHD Support Service.

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