**Information for parents / carers of children on the Autistic Spectrum**

The following animation might be worth a watch:

“Amazing things Happen” by Alexander Amelines; a useful animation for children with AS, or their siblings

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbwRrVw-CRo>

**Why might children on the autistic spectrum display anger more often?**

* Feeling vulnerable and confused by daily events.
* Feeling afraid of being judged for any difficulties or differences they may have.
* May perceive other peoples’ actions as a personal attack.
* A stored-up response to negative incidents through the day.
* May feel angry about being on the autistic spectrum.
* Un-communicated health problems causing pain.
* Lack of sleep.
* Difficulties processing sensory information.
* Find it hard to express more complex feelings (e.g. Jealously, worry).
* Emotional immaturity – not learnt skills to manage their feelings.

**Proactive:** (for use all the time)

* Ways to help your child relax and stay calm
* Use a low arousal approach (see notes later on)
* Use safe ways to ‘release’ anger physically
* Work on building your child’s self esteem
* Help children understand their feelings and express their feelings
* Use visuals e.g. reward charts

**Reactive:** (for use when your child is in highly emotional state)

* Use a low arousal approach (see page 3 for more information)
* Use a meltdown safety plan

**Ways to help your child relax and stay calm (before any signs of anxiety/anger)**

* Being alone in their room
* Listening to music
* Relaxing, calming music in the background
* Time on their favourite hobby/special interest
* Having sensory needs met, e.g. deep pressure massage
* Wrapping self in sleeping bag
* Self-massage arms, temples, etc.
* Hiding in a ‘den’ made of sheets, pillows etc.
* Time on repetitive behaviours, e.g. flapping, spinning, making noises
* Chewing gum, drinking cold fizzy water, playing with blue-tac
* Time on trampoline or rocking chair
* Ear defenders
* Time with pets
* Aromatherapy, lavender oil
* Controlled breathing exercises
* Reading/puzzles/crossword
* Heated vibrating pillows, hot water bottles or chillows
* Foot spa
* Playing with bubbly water/a warm bath
* Visual stimuli, e.g. a lava lamp
* Snacks, especially protein
* Calming exercise e.g. yoga, walking, swimming, walking or a bike ride
* Playing with tactile things such as moulding clay, or bread dough

**How to use a low-arousal approach**:

* Avoid confrontation
  + This stops anger getting worse and helps the child de-escalate
  + Aim for win-win situations through compromising and choice (e.g. ‘Let’s do the shopping then we can go to the park after’, ‘Do you want to come around the supermarket or stay in the car?’)
  + Try non-verbal communication as this may feel less confrontational (words can increase anger) e.g. Symbols, PECs, post-its, texts, house agreements, behaviour contracts or reward charts
  + If you need to say no to something try to say why first (especially with older children)
  + Choose your battles! Reserve standing your ground for when you really need to
* Think about the child’s sensory needs
* Provide structure: make sure your child pretty much knows what is going to happen every day, use visual supports or timetables e.g. for who has the remote control when
* Avoid shouting and getting angry (easier said than done!) Some disadvantages of shouting are:
  + Child may mirror the emotional atmosphere; they may pick up on your anger and ‘throw it back’ at you
  + Child may not recognise your anger, they may just see the wild face and gesturing as quite amusing!
  + Shouting could really hurt if a child is hypersensitive to sound
  + Being shouted at may reinforce a negative self-image
  + Be prepared to apologise if you lose your temper as this sends the message that it is a mature thing to be able to say sorry and teaches a valuable social skill
  + Try to sound calm when you really don’t feel it! Hard to do but very helpful
* Use clear communication
  + Use fewer words
  + Give child space and time to process your requests (at least 6 seconds but see how long your child needs)
  + Repeat requests in exactly the same way
  + A child with sensory integration disorder will take longer to follow a request
  + Use reward charts or behaviour contracts; you can even use a reward chart where you tick off whenever your child uses strategies to prevent meltdowns

**Look after yourself – you are your child’s most important resource!**

**Safe ways to ‘release’ anger physically**

* Vigorous cardio-vascular exercise e.g. running, rowing or exercise machines; swimming; bike-riding; trampolining; punch-bag; tug-of-war; chasing games
* Heavy ‘work’ that burns off energy e.g. pushing the vacuum cleaner around, carrying heavy things around
* Listen while they have a ‘rant’
* Punching soft things like a pillow or teddy
* Listen to loud music (limited time?)
* Allow child to have a rant in their room
* Blow into a balloon
* Carry around a de-fizz bag to help the child calm down.

Watch your child to see what they seek out to do and add similar things to the bag.

* + Things that meet sensory needs
  + textures
  + Food (protein) and drinks (cold water to drink)
  + tactile things (chewing gum, blu-tac, hang grip exerciser)
  + sounds (music, ear plugs)
  + favourite toy or game
* Things that will provide a distraction

**What to do if your child starts to lose it – some things to try**

* Stop arguing – as it can make things worse
* Lower your eye contact
* Use a quieter, deeper voice so they have to shout less to hear you
* Use as few words as possible and long pauses between what you say – go at your child’s pace
* Remind yourself that you can ‘pretend to be calm’
* Agree some simple signs or gestures in advance to replace words e.g. a sign for time to relax in your room
* Avoid standing in a confrontational way e.g. side-on rather than facing – work out if your child is better if you keep a distance and don’t touch
* Remove any ‘audience’ e.g. siblings – have a code ready for this if necessary
* Listen to your child without interrupting – if a child feels listened to it may help them not to escalate
* Suggest time alone
* Suggest a walk together – but really limit talking
* Give them time on their favourite interest or topic
* Talk about something they enjoy or are good at
* Offer a quick snack
* Tell them you can see they are upset and suggest a calming strategy. Don’t blame anyone or analyse the situation.
* Do a distracting physical activity together e.g. cooking or tidying
* Remove yourself from the situation (so they have time on their own to calm down) e.g. some washing up that needs doing

**What to do when a child goes into meltdown**

* Whilst very upsetting for all those experiencing it, it is something that is unavoidable by this stage and your role now is to let it happen as safely as possible
* Some children do not remember the experience after the meltdown has finished
* Create a ‘meltdown plan’ for at home:
  + List what things cause stress, anger or anxiety
  + List the signs of a build-up in stress, anger or anxiety
  + List what things work to reduce stress, anger or anxiety
  + List what things NOT to do i.e. things that increase stress, anger or anxiety
  + Agree in advance who will do what e.g. Will siblings leave the room or remove the child who is in meltdown? Will someone need to stay in the room with the child?
* You may need to think in advance about ways you can make your home safer to minimise injury
  + Remove breakables where possible
  + Add soft edging to tables etc.
  + Use curtain rails that don’t come away from walls (see NAS website)
  + Use plastic instead of china or glass
  + Tie a towel around door handles so they can’t be slammed
  + Use lockable cupboards/doors to keep things safe
  + Lock away sharp, dangerous things that can be used if a child becomes violent