

The 5 Ways to Well-Being

Information Sheet



Autism and well-being

Sadly, 4 out of 5 autistic children experience mental health difficulties. It is not fully understood why this should be so - poor mental health is not 'part of autism' - but the very fact that mental health difficulties *are* so prevalent means it is always important to focus on the well-being of autistic children.

The 5 Ways to well-being

The 5 ways to wellbeing are an evidenced way to improve well-being. The idea is simple: carry out activities from each of the 5 'ways' as part of daily life and you are carrying out exactly those activities shown to have a positive impact on mental health. Supporting a child to carry out these activities can help them learn to look after their mental health now, and in the future.

The 5 ways to well-being are: **connect**, **be active**, **take notice**, **keep learning**, **give**.



Top tips

The 5 ways can be really beneficial for all children, and particularly autistic children. Remember autistic children often *thrive* on **structure** and **routine**, so it can be helpful to structure some activities from the 5 ways into their daily routines, especially (but not only) at times when mental health seems to be an issue. Focus on the activities which each child finds particularly enjoyable with each of the 'ways'.

A word of warning! Autistic children often find change difficult, so always add changes to daily routines gently and with notice. Allow them some control and plenty of choice. Remember that if an autistic child is struggling with their mental health (e.g. has high anxiety) change is even harder, so go especially gently at this time. This is one of the reasons why it is helpful to be pro-active, and not wait until mental health begins to show signs of suffering to make the 5 ways part of their day.

Use the attached chart to create a daily routine to support each child's well-being!



5 Ways to Well-being *(continued)*

The 5 Ways:

If a child's mood is low, or they are struggling with change, they may find it difficult to engage in the activities at first. Take it slow, and remember that even a very short time attempting an activity (even 5 minutes or even less) is better than none. Engagement often improves with time and routine. Try the following ideas:

Connect with others

This can be hard for autistic children so definitely an area to support. Use special interests to scaffold friendships (try making them a focus for a lunchtime club). Often an autistic child's high level of expertise can be of value to their peers! Lego therapy can also be helpful, as can shared projects. Connections do not have to be face to face and verbal remember, they can be virtual too, with letters, emails and virtual options. They can also be with animals – time with pets or therapy animals are incredibly helpful.

Be active:

Think about favourite *sports* and *time outside* generally (even a daily 5 minute walk around the school grounds). Factor in *heaving muscle work* where you can, (basketball, gym equipment etc) and support self-regulation too. Shared sporting activities can also scaffold connections and friendships between peers.

Take notice,

Mindfulness is proving to be very effective in improving the mental health of autistic adults. Try scheduling in 5 minutes mindful colouring, or in mindful meditation every day. There are plenty of apps that can be very helpful, and can measure progress. Fit the mindful activity to the child, rather than the child to the mindful activity.

Keep learning

Focus on an autistic child's individual interest and goals rather than cajoling them into a new experience they may find difficult. Help them learn more about their areas of special interest – this can be a great source of joy for autistic people.

Give

Give autistic children some concrete ideas on how to give their time, words or presence to others so this idea does not seem to abstract. Autistic children may not instinctively know what non-autistic children and adults value (just as the non-autistic children and adults may not know what the autistic child values – it works both ways!). Try creating a choice board of 'giving' activities for all children and aim for one a day (e.g. give a compliment. Help a peer with their work, hold a door open etc.).