





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

December 2024 Newsletter



Some refer to this time of year as 'silly season'. It certainly can feel that way when you have school aged children who may also be neuro-divergent. School structure and routine goes completely out of the window. It can feel like a full-time job for parents to coordinate everything.....learning songs or lines for Christmas performances, Christmas jumper day, Christmas school lunch, gifts for teachers, helping your child to write 29 Christmas cards; the list goes on. So, if we find it hectic, how are our children feeling? This festive season which should be full of joy and laughter can also be a really stressful time for our children because of all the excitement, change, anticipation and expectation. As a parent, how can you help them to navigate this time of year as well as keeping your own heads above water? Whether you celebrate Christmas or not, you and your children, are likely to feel the effects of the holiday season.



This month's newsletter includes:

- **Some Dates for your Diary**
- **Schools in December**
- **Festive Food and Eating**
- **Our Upcoming Courses**
- **Holiday Activities**
- **Family Action Website and FamilyLine**
- **About our Service - contact details**

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.

Drop-In Support Groups



We have a reduced number of drop-in support groups running in December. We know you are busy at this time of year. See details below of our groups in Gorleston, Lowestoft and on ZOOM.

Our Drop-In Groups are friendly and informal. No need to book. They are a chance to meet our knowledgeable team as well as other parents and carers who are facing similar challenges.

See below ALL our drop-ins in DECEMBER. Just click on a card to enlarge.

Meet our team and other parents in...
GORLESTON

We meet at.....
GORLESTON LIBRARY, FAMILY ACTION OFFICE,
GORLESTON-ON-SEA, NR31 6SG

Wednesday 4TH DECEMBER 2024
from 10:00am to 11:30am

No need to book, friendly and informal,
but if you do want more information then
please
RING 01493 650220 or EMAIL
gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more
information.



Why not join us in LOWESTOFT?

We have a regular drop-in support group....

AT THE RIVERSIDE FAMILY HUB, 6 CANNING
ROAD, LOWESTOFT, NR33 0TQ

Come along and join us on Thursday 5TH
DECEMBER 2024 from 10:00am to 11:30am
NO NEED TO BOOK

RING 01493 650220 or EMAIL gorleston@family-action.org.uk for more information.



Join us Online in December



If you have a child with a diagnosed or suspected neurodivergence...	...we would love you to join us online on ZOOM. No need to book, just come along if you can.	NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY 11 TH DEC 10 TO 11AM
JOINING DETAILS Meeting ID: 924 2603 1911 Passcode: 999725	A chance to meet other parents who 'get it', to meet our team and ask for advice or resources.	For more info you can ring Family Action on 01603 972589

If you sometimes attend our drop in group at Dobbies, next to Tesco, Hardwick, King's Lynn, please note that Dobbies is closing down and so we will be using Costa Coffee, next to Boots the Chemist, Hardwick, King's Lynn for the time being. Our first drop in at Costa Coffee will be on Tuesday 14th January 2025. Drop in anytime from 9:30 to 11am. We look forward to seeing you there.

Schools in December



Surely the build up to the holidays is a great time to be in school? Lots of fun activities are happening and special meals and the normal lessons are being kicked to the kerb to make way for other, more exciting things. What's not to like?

School staff work really hard to make December fun and different for pupils but it can be very difficult being in school at this time when you are neurodivergent. Christmas itself is not the problem, it is the way schools DO Christmas in such a full on way which creates the difficulties. You know your own child's differences, so think for a moment about:

- All the last-minute changes to routine and timetables.
- Decorations everywhere, changing the look of classrooms and dinner halls, and possibly feeling quite oppressive and overwhelming to some children..
- The pressure to perform in a school Christmas performance of some kind.
- Dressing up in what are sometimes scratchy, musty costumes and coping in a crowded hall for rehearsals.
- The number of craft activities which all seem to include GLITTER.
- School discos, parties, nativity plays and carol services.
- Possible 'treats' such as a trip to a pantomime.
- The complete stranger in a red suit and a scary beard who wants to shake your hand.
- The school Christmas dinner and the pressure to join in with this.
- Increasingly excited children who will be louder and more hyperactive than usual.



WOW, that is actually a lot to deal with. And be aware also that when your child is not able to 'deal' with it they may beat themselves up afterwards for their differences, for not being able to engage in the way the other children do and see themselves as a failure. Every child is an individual and will need that individual approach but here are just a few things to think about which might help to avoid this negative cycle at what should be a positive and happy time?

- Don't be embarrassed or feel like the Grinch. It is okay to tell the school what you know will be difficult for your child and to ask for a few adjustments.
- And ask to be kept updated about changes which will be happening in school so that you can help to prepare your child.
- Scaffolding in class such as visual timetables will be even more important so should be kept updated and not overlooked. An agreed symbol for change on the timetable allows your child to feel more prepared
- Social stories about the school play or Santa's visit for example, are quick and easy to write and a copy can be provided also for use at home so that you can reinforce what the school is doing.

- Preparation and repetition - your child will need to be told in advance, more than once, about when the Christmas tree is being put up, what kinds of decorations are going on it, when Christmas crafts are replacing Maths and so on.
- There should be an awareness of the sensory overload - lights, smells and loud music could all be turned down from time to time..
- A safe, calm, quiet space to escape to, and kept decoration-free, will be even more important than usual.
- Your child doesn't have to be kicking the tables over to be finding things tough. School should look out for very quiet, shut down behaviours or other alternative signs of distress.
- The classroom could be decorated in a balanced way with some areas looking much as before.
- Choices should be offered - your child might prefer to make a Christmas tree out of Lego when others are using glue and glitter which sticks to hands in an unpleasant way. And do they have to take part in every one of these activities? If they love Maths let them do a little Maths activity.
- It should be possible to find a role in the school play or nativity which is acceptable to your child. If standing on the stage is too difficult, they could be a prompter, a set changer, a lighting engineer, show parents to their seats or hand out programmes.....and be credited in the programme!
- But don't *presume* they cannot manage a speaking role. Talk to children about what would be involved and what they would like to do. Perhaps arrange an understudy in case they feel too overwhelmed on the big day. Or maybe they could dance but not speak.
- If eating is an issue, make that clear in advance of the Christmas lunch and get involved in preparing some foods for the Christmas party so that you know your child will have something familiar to eat.
- Can they bring a favourite toy to school or a sensory or fidget toy, anything which helps them to feel calm?
- An adult might be able to collect your child's gift from Santa and take it to them.....all that ho ho ho-ing can be a bit scary!

Schools do strive to be inclusive all year round and every child deserves to feel loved, valued and included at Christmas time.

Festive Food and Eating



Food and eating can be an ongoing, all year round challenge for parents of children with autism or traits of autism. This could be down to a number of factors:

- Rigid thinking can create a connection to only a certain brand.
- Sensory processing differences can make certain textures, tastes or smells strictly no-go areas.
- A tendency to anxiety leads those children to seek routine and predictability in order to control this.

It would be nice if these differences could be put aside for Christmas but of course unlikely. In fact, the festive season may lead to an escalation of the usual difficulties with food. Think about the holiday season for a moment from your child's point of view.

There is extra pressure, however subtle this may be, to try to fit in and eat the traditional Christmas fayre. Their usual routine is all over the place, no school and friends and family 'popping in' sometimes with little notice. And things have been moved around in the house to make way for the Christmas tree and other decorations. Their senses will be somewhat overwhelmed by noise and laughter, smells of cooking, bright decorations and of course twinkling lights. All this will make Christmas a time when anxiety is on the rise and a feeling of being slightly out of control. No wonder they want to at least be in control of what they put in their mouth.

Understanding this does not mean that Christmas is cancelled. It is about creating a Christmas which everyone is able to enjoy and engage with and beginning to create your own Christmas traditions as a family. You might want to think about:

- Preparing them in advance with a plan of activities, planned menus and pictures to remind them of what the house looks like decorated.
- Talking to your child about what those plans should be. Everyone is an individual and there will be aspects of Christmas your child loves and hates.



- Taking a more minimalist approach to decoration generally and perhaps keeping their safe, quiet space free from decorations and change altogether if that is what they prefer.
- Letting them spend time in their safe space when they need to and perhaps even opening some presents there without being watched.
- Making the Christmas tree lights more special by being on only for a set time in the evening and giving lots of preparation for the big switch-on. And actually trees can look great with no lights at all.
- On the quieter days when not much is planned, keeping as much as you can to the routine and structure your child is used to.
- Having plenty of their trusted foods available during the festive period.
- Wrapping some presents in clear cellophane to reduce excitement anxiety.
- Planning carefully when you will be catching up with friends and family to avoid unexpected visits.
- Putting a time limit on family visits and sticking to this. A fun hour is better than three unhappy hours.
- Try to get outside as much as you can, walks on the beach or through the woods can be very regulating.

By doing some of the above you may create a bit of space in your child's 'bucket' enabling them to join in with the family at some of the key moments of the holiday season, but you will still need to be adaptable and accepting. So let's think specifically about how to make Christmas dinner a more inclusive experience:



- Sitting at the table for longer than usual might be difficult. Let them know that it is okay to have five minutes in a quiet space between courses or to get up and walk around whenever they want.
- You could try to incorporate their hobby or special interest with characters on plates or themed decorations on the table. Ask questions about these if they appear anxious.
- Allow noise cancelling headsets or fidget toys if it helps them.
- Crackers can have their 'bang' removed or disappear from the table altogether.
- Don't be afraid to put your family first. Maybe Christmas Day dinner could be just the nuclear family round the table and you can catch up with wider family on another day which is less pressured.
- Buffet style which means they choose what goes on the plate may reduce a lot of anxiety. And make sure there are some favoured options available. Who cares if there is pizza on the table?
- Talk about the menu in advance and let them come up with an alternative to Christmas pudding for example. Involving children in planning and preparing meals can reap benefits and is often worth the extra effort.
- If chicken nuggets need to be included, you could make them more special by making your own with your child's help. But make sure to try them out before Christmas to be absolutely sure your child likes them.
- Celebrate what they do eat – pigs in blankets with roasties and veg is very nearly a traditional Christmas dinner, isn't it?

- Think about your own plate of food - we do all enjoy a good splurge at Christmas - but think about how plates overflowing may make your child with eating sensitivities feel. Put a sensible amount on your plate, and then go back for more!
- Plan some downtime after dinner or something they enjoy like a favourite board game.

However you celebrate Christmas this year, we wish you a very happy and calm festive season.

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.

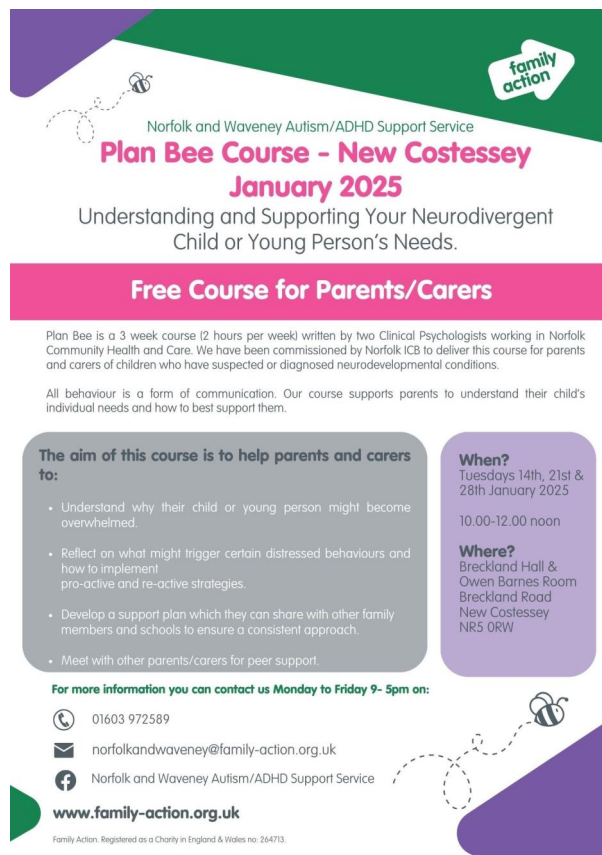
SEE BELOW FLYERS FOR A JANUARY NEW COSTESSEY COURSE AND A MARCH KING'S LYNN COURSE. [Click to enlarge.](#)

IN FEBRUARY WE WILL BE IN ACLE BUT STILL SECURING A VENUE.

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.

You can still access the online videos of our Positive Behaviour Strategies course (now Plan Bee) on the NHS for Norfolk website, Just One Norfolk. [Just click here:](#)

<https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/norfolk-positive-behaviour-strategies-pbs/>



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Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

Plan Bee Course - New Costessey

January 2025

Understanding and Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child or Young Person's Needs.

Free Course for Parents/Carers

Plan Bee is a 3 week course (2 hours per week) written by two Clinical Psychologists working in Norfolk Community Health and Care. We have been commissioned by Norfolk ICB to deliver this course for parents and carers of children who have suspected or diagnosed neurodevelopmental conditions.

All behaviour is a form of communication. Our course supports parents to understand their child's individual needs and how to best support them.

The aim of this course is to help parents and carers to:

- Understand why their child or young person might become overwhelmed.
- Reflect on what might trigger certain distressed behaviours and how to implement pro-active and re-active strategies.
- Develop a support plan which they can share with other family members and schools to ensure a consistent approach.
- Meet with other parents/carers for peer support.

When?
Tuesdays 14th, 21st & 28th January 2025
10.00-12.00 noon

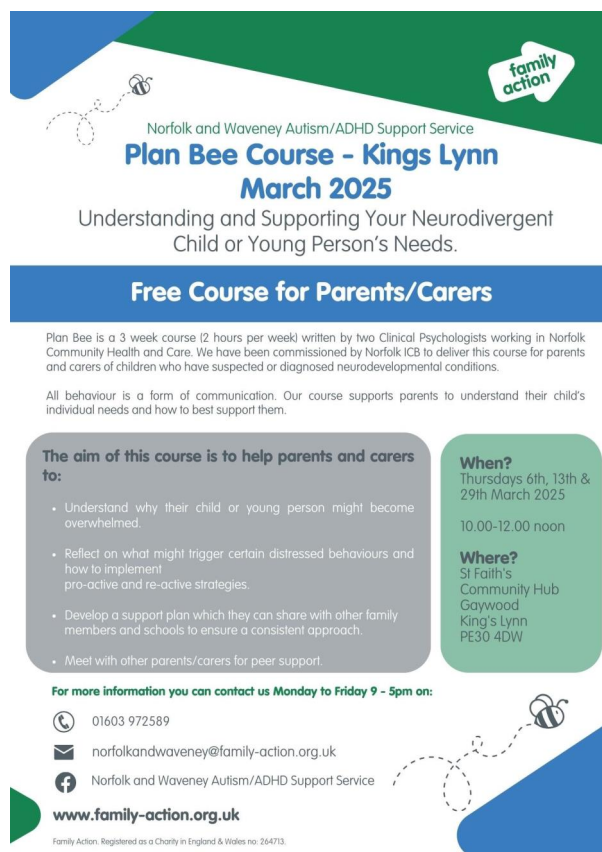
Where?
Breckland Hall & Owen Barnes Room
Breckland Road
New Costessey
NR5 0RW

For more information you can contact us Monday to Friday 9 - 5pm on:

01603 972589
norfolkandwaveney@family-action.org.uk
Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

www.family-action.org.uk

Family Action. Registered as a Charity in England & Wales no: 264713.



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Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

Plan Bee Course - Kings Lynn

March 2025

Understanding and Supporting Your Neurodivergent Child or Young Person's Needs.

Free Course for Parents/Carers

Plan Bee is a 3 week course (2 hours per week) written by two Clinical Psychologists working in Norfolk Community Health and Care. We have been commissioned by Norfolk ICB to deliver this course for parents and carers of children who have suspected or diagnosed neurodevelopmental conditions.

All behaviour is a form of communication. Our course supports parents to understand their child's individual needs and how to best support them.

The aim of this course is to help parents and carers to:

- Understand why their child or young person might become overwhelmed.
- Reflect on what might trigger certain distressed behaviours and how to implement pro-active and re-active strategies.
- Develop a support plan which they can share with other family members and schools to ensure a consistent approach.
- Meet with other parents/carers for peer support.

When?
Thursdays 6th, 13th & 29th March 2025
10.00-12.00 noon

Where?
St Faith's Community Hub
Gaywood
King's Lynn
PE30 4DW

For more information you can contact us Monday to Friday 9 - 5pm on:

01603 972589
norfolkandwaveney@family-action.org.uk
Norfolk and Waveney Autism/ADHD Support Service

www.family-action.org.uk

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Puffins Autism Programme - for parents or carers of children or young people with a *diagnosis* of Autism



PLEASE SEE BELOW DETAILS OF COURSES PLANNED FOR 2025. JANUARY IN NEW COSTESSEY NORWICH, FEBRUARY IN THETFORD AND MARCH IN KING'S LYNN. PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION ON 01603 972589 OR EMAIL Sue.Killick@family-action.org.uk.

Click to move through the flyers below and click on the arrows bottom right to enlarge.

Puffins ASD Programme

The **Puffins Programme** is a FREE, four week programme designed by Norfolk Community Health and Care's Neurodevelopmental Service for parents and carers of children and young people **with a diagnosis of ASD**.

Family Action are working in partnership with NCHC and EPSS to deliver the programme to families in Norfolk.

Week 1 – Introducing ASD and Understanding Behaviour (Family Action)

Week 2 – Communication – (NCHC Speech and Language Therapy Team)

Week 3 – Understanding Sensory Processing (NCHC Occupational Therapy Team)

Week 4 – Autism in Education (NCC EP & Specialist Support – Autism Support Team)

NB: Session 1 only in each course is just a little longer, 9:30am to 1:00pm

Norwich 2025

Thursdays 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th January
9:30am to 12:30pm (apart from 1st session – see above)

Queen's Hills Community Centre,
Poethlyn Drive, Queens Hills, NR8 5BP

To find out more or book a place, please contact:

Family Action on 01603 972589 or email sue.killick@family-action.org.uk

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Week 4 – Autism in Education (NCC EP & Specialist Support – Autism Support Team)

NB: Session 1 only in each course is just a little longer, 9:30am to 1:00pm

Thetford 2025

Mondays 3rd, 10th 24th & 27th February
9:30am to 12:30pm (apart from 1st session – see above)

Charles Burrell Centre, Staniforth Road, Thetford IP24 3LH

To find out more or book a place, please contact:

Family Action on 01603 972589 or email sue.killick@family-action.org.uk

Puffins Autism Programme

The **Puffins Programme** is a FREE, four week programme designed by Norfolk Community Health and Care's Neurodevelopmental Service for parents and carers of children and young people **with a diagnosis of Autism**.

Family Action are working in partnership with NCHC and EPSS to deliver the programme to families in Norfolk.

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Week 4 – Autism in Education (NCC EP & Specialist Support – Autism Support Team)

NB: Session 1 only in each course is just a little longer, 9:30am to 1:00pm

Kings Lynn 2025

Mondays 3rd, 10th, 17th & 24th March

9:30am to 12:30pm (apart from 1st session – see above)

**St Faiths Community Hub, Church Drive, Kings Lynn
PE30 4DZ**

To find out more or book a place, please contact:

Family Action on 01603 972589 or email sue.killick@family-action.org.uk

Holiday Activities in Norfolk & Waveney



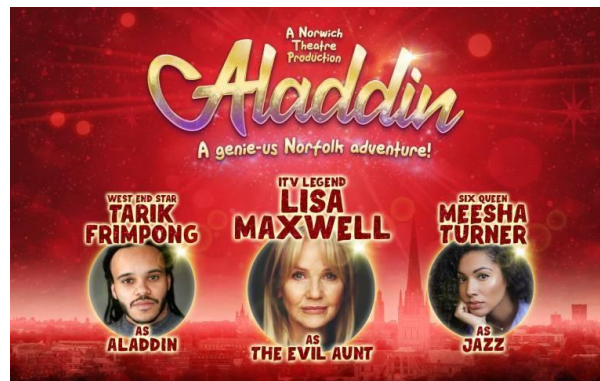
Thetford Garden Centre – Sensitive Santa – 13th & 20th December: [Thetford Garden Centre Home](#)

Thursford – Relaxed sessions for Santa’s magical journey: [Santa's Magical Journey In Thursford | Christmas Events](#)

Winter Wonderland Norwich SEND sessions- 4th Dec, 9th Dec, 18 Dec, 2nd Jan: [Winter Wonderland Norwich | 22 Nov 2024 - 05 Jan 2025](#)



Marina Theatre Lowestoft – Panto-Beauty and the Beast – Accessible performances and relaxed performances: [Beauty and the Beast 2024/25 | Marina Theatre, Suffolk](#)



Alive Corn Exchange, Kings Lynn- Accessible performances, audio described performances, relaxed performances of Panto- Cinderella: [Cinderella | King's Lynn Corn Exchange](#)

Dereham Windmill- Santa visits – SEN Sessions- 7th, 8th, 14th, 15th Dec: [Visit Santa at Dereham Windmill | Dereham Windmill](#)

Topcats SEN Charity, Pakefield near Lowestoft- Christmas Party -18th Dec 6pm-8pm. To book, email: ella@topcats.org.uk [TOPCATS – supported activities for young people with disabilities](#)

Luminate Sandringham sensory sessions- 3rd and 10th Dec- [Luminate Sandringham Light Trail at Sandringham Estate, Norfolk](#)

Norwich Theatre Royal – Panto- Aladdin – Accessible performances: [Aladdin - Pantomime 2024](#)

Empowering ND tweens teens group January 2025 - click the document below to enlarge.



Empowering Neurodivergent tweens/teens

Are you feeling misunderstood?

Are you struggling to adapt to Secondary School?

Are you Neurodivergent e.g. Autistic/ADHD, or wondering if you might be?

Are you age 11-14?



If so, you're invited to join this wonderful weekly group
We will be using creative ways to help us find our:



VOICE - expressing ourselves through art/writing/other ways



CALM - exploring things that help us feel calm



POWER - exploring ways we can speak up for our needs



JOY - sharing what makes us happy/brings us joy



LOVE - celebrating ourselves and how well we are doing

5 x group sessions, every Wednesday starting 15th January 2025

5.30pm-6.30pm

at The Ash Tree, 90 Plumsted Road, Norwich

£60 for the full 5 sessions

6 spaces available

**For more information or to book - please email
vikki@divergentskies.co.uk
www.divergentskies.co.uk @divergent_skies**

Meet Norfolk SENDIASS



Upcoming Outreach Events

- Monday 9th December, SEND Café, Dereham Library (1:30 – 2:30pm)
- December, Gorleston Library Drop-in (12:30 – 4pm)thMonday 9
- December, Downham Market, Library drop-in (10am – 1pm)thThursday 12
- December, Caister Library Drop-in (11:30am – 4pm)thThursday 12
- Thursday 19th December, Hingham Library Drop-in (2-5pm)
- Wednesday 18th December, Long Stratton Family Fun Day, Long Stratton ECFA, Manor Road (2-6pm)

Local Authority Phone line and Norfolk SENDIASS Helpline

On Monday 23rd September the Local Authority launched their new SEND and Inclusion Support line. This phone line is intended for parent/carers and professionals to support with discussions around those considering an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment application, preventing exclusions and if you can't find what you need on the Local Offer. The new phone line is available on weekdays from 9am until 5pm and can be contacted on 0333 313 7165. We here at SENDIASS just want to make clear that the SEND and Inclusion Support line and SENDIASS Helpline are **two separate lines**. We are still here to help in providing impartial, confidential, arms-length, legally based information, advice and support to parent/carers and professionals on a wide range of things related to SEND in education and health and social care where it impacts on education. For more information on what we can help with please see our website [Norfolk SENDIASS Home Page](#).

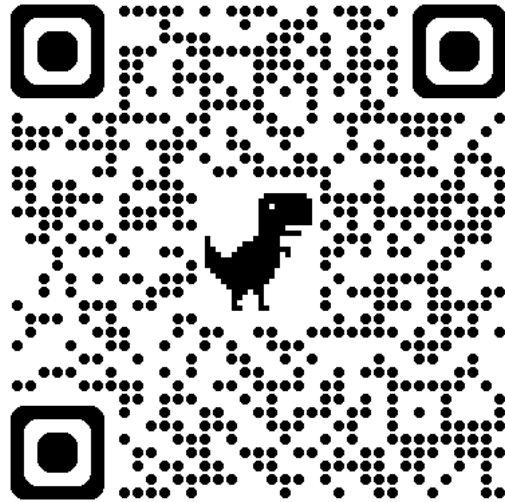
Family Action Website



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. Have a look for example at a number of [self-help resources](#) around the return to school and preparing your child for the school day, linking nicely in with the topic of our September newsletter.

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



Family Action also serves families in West Suffolk





For more information about what the West Suffolk team can offer, and to read their December newsletter. just click the link below.

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allow-orientation-lock allow-popups allow-same-origin allow-scripts" scrolling="no"
style="border: none; max-width: 100%; max-height: 100vh" allowfullscreen
mozallowfullscreen msallowfullscreen webkitallowfullscreen></iframe>

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

Family Line

-  0808 802 6666
-  07537 404 282
-  familyline@family-action.org.uk
-  Online Chat



Family Line

☎ 0808 802 6666

💬 07537 404 282

✉ familyline@family-action.org.uk

💬 Online Chat

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.