

# AATS Update



A half termly newsletter for by the Autism Advisory Teacher Service for Peterborough's Neurodiversity community

## UNDERSTANDING WORKING MEMORY

**Rob Emery** (*Autism Advisory Teacher*)

**Working memory is vital for everyday functioning. It allows us to hold information in mind while we use it such as remembering instructions, solving problems, or following a sequence of steps. For many children and young people, working memory feels almost invisible, yet it plays a central role in classroom tasks, organisation, and emotional regulation.**

### What is Working Memory?

Working memory is the mental "workspace" that helps us keep track of what we're doing. It has a limited capacity, meaning there is only so much it can hold at once. Children may use working memory when they:

- Remember a sentence long enough to write it down
- Follow multi-step instructions
- Keep track of whose turn it is
- Solve maths problems in their head

When working memory becomes overloaded, information simply "falls out", leaving a child unsure of what to do next.

### Neurodivergence and Working Memory

Many autistic or ADHD learners experience working memory differences. ADHD can make it hard to hold onto information due to attention shifting quickly, while autistic learners may become absorbed in detail or overwhelmed by sensory input, reducing the mental space available for working memory tasks.

Common signs of working memory challenges include:

- Forgetting instructions soon after hearing them
- Losing track of tasks or steps
- Difficulty copying from the board
- Struggling to start or finish activities without prompting

These are not always signs of laziness or lack of ability—they reflect a cognitive load that is simply too high.



### Developing Working Memory Skills

While we can't dramatically "increase" working memory capacity, we *can* strengthen the strategies children use to manage it. Here are simple, playful activities that support development:

- **I Went to the Shops...**  
A classic memory chain game that encourages children to hold and update information.
- **Kim's Game...**
- Show a tray of objects, cover it, and ask children to recall them. This supports visual working memory.
- **Number or Word Sequences...**  
Say a short sequence and ask the child to repeat it forwards or backwards. Start simple and gradually increase difficulty.
- **Spot the Difference...**  
Encourages attention to detail and mental comparison skills.

### Helping Children Day to Day

Break tasks into smaller steps, provide written or visual instructions, and allow extra processing time. Most importantly, celebrate success—every small improvement builds confidence and reduces frustration.

Working memory grows best through gentle practice and the reassurance that it's okay to forget. With consistent support from home and school, children can develop effective strategies that help them learn, organise, and thrive.

# The Sensory Corner

## PROPRIOCEPTION

Your proprioceptive sense relates to your body's ability to sense movement, action and location. Muscles and joints provide information to the brain about our body position and movement. It is the sense that regulates movements and posture and enables you to use the appropriate pressure for tasks. Hyper-sensitivity (over-sensitivity) and Hypo-sensitivity can present itself in many ways:

Pinpoint Cambridgeshire have a range of webinars and talks from guest speakers that are free to access. Here are some of their upcoming events:

Hyper-sensitivity		Hypo-sensitivity	
Difficulty knowing body position in relation to objects	<b>To help:</b> Dexterity activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jenga</li> <li>Move a ball around obstacles with feet/hockey stick</li> <li>Kerplunk</li> <li>Balance ball on a tennis racket</li> <li>Balance book on head</li> </ul>	Sometimes seeks feedback for this sense	<b>To help:</b> Deep pressure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weighted blanket</li> <li>Carrying/pushing heavy objects</li> <li>Bear-hug jacket</li> <li>Squash with a gym ball</li> <li>Massage</li> <li>Resistance band</li> </ul>
Appears clumsy/knocks objects over		Stamping, jumping, banging objects	
Issues with pressure when writing		Chewing or biting on objects.	

**Stronger Parenting Through Connection**  
25th March

**PDA – Supporting your Child Through Declarative Language**  
8th April

**Emotional Regulation 101: Big Emotions, Better Tools**  
13th April

For more, [click here](#).

## Out & About

## Rainy Days

**Nene Park**  
lots of activities including the Easter Activity Trail [Click Here](#)

**Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery**  
Easter Egg Trail and more!  
See what's on: [Click here](#)

**Showcase Cinema**  
Autism Friendly Screening on the 2nd Sunday every month. [Click here](#) for more.

**Peterborough Cathedral:**  
Titanosaur! Dinosaurs at the Cathedral!  
[Click here](#) for more.

**VIVACITY**  
Short breaks for children and young people aged 7-19 with SEND.  
[Click here.](#)

**RAILWORLD WILDLIFE HAVEN**  
Garden railway and modern railway in the heart of Peterborough.  
[Click here.](#)

### Try these...

**Easter Hunt Tips:**  
Create the perfect Easter Hunt!  
[Click here](#)

**Easter Treat Recipes:**  
Bake some Easter treats!  
[Click here](#)

Egg Decorating Ideas:  
[Click here](#)

**Easter Activities:**  
Easter Egg Pebble Crafts.  
[Click here](#)

Egg Boats:  
[Click here](#)

**Chocolate Playdough:**  
Great for Easter themed sensory play!  
[Click here](#)

## With sadness...

It is with great sadness that I write to tell you that Clare Ferguson who worked within our team for many years died last week following a period of illness. Clare was one of those teachers we all wished we had at primary school. She made time to listen and be interested in everyone. She was a very dedicated teacher always making activities fun and appealing, always reflecting on what worked and what didn't for the children and young people she supported. I know many children, young people, schools and families are grateful for Clare's support and expertise over the years. As a team we will miss Clare, but we are very grateful that she was part of our 'work family.' We pass on our condolences to her family and friends at this difficult time. May she rest in peace.

## PARENT AND CARER PHONE CONSULTATIONS

Advice and support at home.

To book a phone call with one of our Autism Specialist Teachers please email [SEN.Inclusion@peterborough.gov.uk](mailto:SEN.Inclusion@peterborough.gov.uk)