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Engaging with reluctance

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Autism Advisor (West Berkshire CC)

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Introduction

- ❑ My role and West Berkshire Autism Team
- ❑ Supporting autistic young people who (appear to be) resisting support
- ❑ What is behind it?
- ❑ How do we work with it?



Resistance is more than just resistance

Try seeing resistance as a clue to what is really the matter.

- ❑ 'I just can't'
- ❑ 'You don't understand'
- ❑ 'I don't understand'
- ❑ 'I have lost trust'
- ❑ 'I just want to fit in' (invisibly!)



'I just can't'

When you are met with total non-engagement



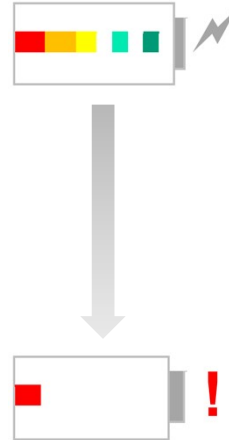
'I just can't'

- ❑ It seems (to us) as if a child should be able to engage
- ❑ That does not mean they *can*
- ❑ Invitation to engage is a *demand* some young people will struggle with
- ❑ At some points in their life, it can be hard for a child to engage in anything
- ❑ This doesn't mean they don't want to engage



'I just can't'

- ☐ Over time, as a child is managing with stressful environments/triggers the *energy* they have to cope can dwindle.
- ☐ They may use more energy to cope each day than they regain
- ☐ Useful way to conceptualise this is energy accounting.
- ☐ If a child's energy level is very low, their ability to learn a new activity may also be low

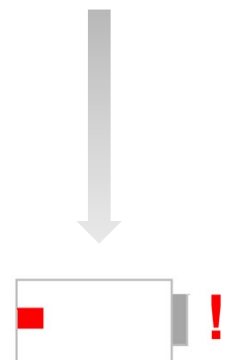


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'I just can't'

Signs of 'empty battery' can include (for example):

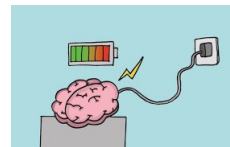
- ☐ Increase in meltdowns/shut downs
- ☐ Decreased ability to engage (may look like lethargy) ~ chronic exhaustion
- ☐ Reduced ability to cope with stressors (e.g. sensory stressors, demands)



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‘I just can’t’

- ❑ A child may *genuinely* not have the ability (right now) to learn a new strategy.
- ❑ If we keep pushing, we may make the situation worse, or risk unfairly labelling them as ‘not engaging’.
- ❑ This is why it is important not to wait until a situation is at crisis before learning the strategy to cope
- ❑ We can energy account *for* a child
- ❑ Build their energy levels up
- ❑ We can start a strategy *for a child*

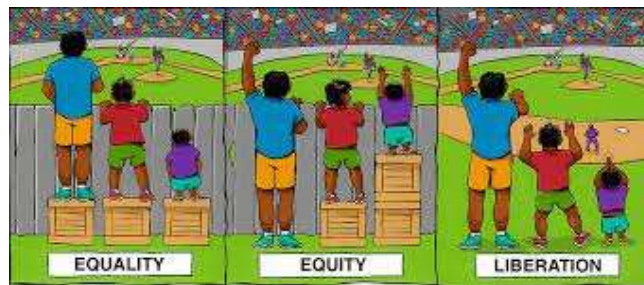


‘You don’t understand’

When you have met one autistic child you have met one autistic child.



'You don't understand'



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Active Listening

- ❑ Remember: if you are talking you are not listening!!
- ❑ Completely focusing on the child while they communicate
- ❑ Taking the time
- ❑ Going beyond words
- ❑ Positive body language
- ❑ Show you are listening – repeat back
- ❑ *Non judgemental*
- ❑ No assumptions



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‘You don’t understand’

- ❑ Do we *really* know what this autistic child has experienced, is experiencing each day?
- ❑ Are we trying to bring down the right barriers?
- ❑ Do we really have the right strategy?
- ❑ Importance of listening to parents
- ❑ Taking the time
- ❑ Being open to changing our approach and *personalising*



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‘I don’t understand’

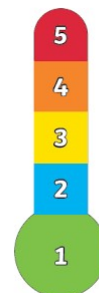
It is hard for some children to know what they are feeling, or why they are feeling it. Sometimes they can't answer our questions...



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'I don't understand'

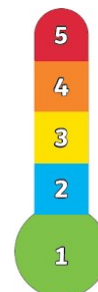
- ☐ 'How do you feel at a 3?'
- ☐ 'What helps you to feel calm?'
- ☐ ???!??
- ☐ Some children don't know
- ☐ Some children are too stressed to know



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'I don't understand'

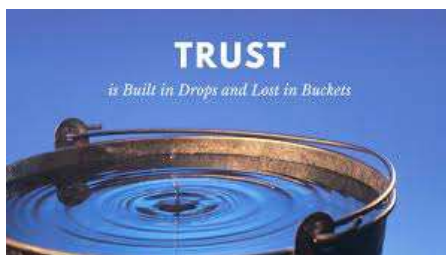
- ☐ 'Lets try and work out how we can tell you are at 3...'
- ☐ 'Lets experiment with what helps you feel calm?'
- ☐ 'Lets just focus on helping you feel calmer' (leave the strategy for a while)



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'I have lost trust'

Trust in strategies, trust in others, trust in self



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I have lost trust

Past experiences where:

- ☐ They felt let down
- ☐ They feel they let themselves down
- ☐ It didn't go as planned
- ☐ It just didn't work

apart. The time the
the time I didn't understand
colours flipped and fragmented
turned upside down. The time it
I couldn't. The time When they didn't
stand. The time everyone laughed. The
was so overwhelmed I couldn't breathe
I was just fascinated. The time I felt
The time they promised. The time the
The time Mum cried. The time I cried
I just gave up. The time I got it re
the time I felt like I was the only
no one understood The time when
go. The time it just went
ng, curl up in a

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I have lost trust

I just don't believe this is going to work

- ❑ Unhelpful past experiences may not have been anyone's 'fault'
- ❑ May relate to previous settings
- ❑ Child's perception may not have been accurate, but it is still their perception (e.g. 'she shouted at me and said I couldn't leave class')
- ❑ Child may have more support/more capacity to use strategy now but not know this



I have lost trust

- ❑ *Listening* to the child (what has their past experience of this been? Where are the potential problems now)?
- ❑ *Building trust through relationships* (not feeling offended if we are not instantly trusted).
- ❑ *Building trust* in the process
- ❑ Careful planning for success (and predicting/planning for difficulties)
- ❑ 'If..... Then.....'



'I just want to fit in'

"Camouflaging is often about a desperate and sometimes subconscious survival battle"

Kajsa Igelström



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'I just want to fit in'

- ❑ Many autistic young people mask to try to avoid a feeling of alienation, to fit in with their peers, be accepted, avoid bullying and teasing for e.g.
- ❑ Autistic people should not feel the need to mask.
- ❑ But for as long as they do, strategies and interventions can be a problem for them to take up.
- ❑ Working with the child's preferences
- ❑ Personalising



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'I just want to fit in'

5	I am yelling and this is too loud.	
4	I am using an outside voice.	
3	I am using my normal talking voice.	
2	I am whispering or using a quiet voice.	
1	I am not talking.	



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Conclusions

- ❑ If an autistic young person is struggling to engage there may be one (or more) good reason for this.
- ❑ If we see resistance as a clue to what an autistic child is thinking and feeling, we open the door to finding out what they really need
- ❑ This can lead the way to building the very best support



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