



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The Cygnet Group is a training programme for parents and carers of children aged 5-18 who have a diagnosis of autism.

The Cygnet Group was developed in Bradford, as a collaboration between the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Barnados. Parents and carers who have attended the Cygnet Group in Bradford have given very positive feedback about the programme.

The programme consists of 6 group sessions, each lasting 2½ hours. Each session covers a different module, each building on the one before. Therefore parents and carers are strongly encouraged to attend all 6 sessions. The sessions are led by a STARS professional with experience of working with children with autism and their families, but the personal experiences brought by parents and carers are an essential component to the sessions.

Module 1: What are Autistic Spectrum Disorders? Feelings after diagnosis

- Introduction to the group
- Background to the group
- Aims and content of programme
- Introduction to ASD's
- What is it like to be autistic
- Experience of the diagnosis and ways of coping

Module 2: Communication and social stories

- Why and how do we communicate
- Communication in ASD's
- Strategies to aid communication:
 - Social Stories – what they are, how to use them
 - Comic Strips – what they are, how to use them

Module 3: Sensory issues

- What are the senses?
- What do we use them for?
- Types of sensory issues seen in ASD's
- Associated behaviours
- Strategies to help

Module 4: Understanding behaviour

- Types and functions of all behaviour
- Behaviour and Autism
- Underlying difficulties behind the behaviour (Iceberg principle)

Module 5: Managing behaviour

- Using the information (Iceberg principle)
- Analysing and managing behaviour (STAR analysis)
- Key management strategies

Module 6: Choice decided by parents/carers e.g.

- Looking to the future
- Issues in adolescence/puberty
- Contacts
- Siblings
- Sleep
- Go over previous work

Follow-up Meeting

A 3 month follow up meeting will be arranged at the last session, to give the group members an opportunity to meet up again with the group leaders to reflect on using the ideas and strategies learnt during the programme in everyday life.

Why Might I be interested in coming to a Cygnet Group

Parents have a lot of involvement with professionals up to and around the time of diagnosis, however they can feel that there is little available to them after diagnosis – at a time when they have a lot of questions about their child and what can help them. Attending the Cygnet group gives parents an opportunity to better understand autism. It offers practical strategies that you can implement at home, gives you a chance to meet with others in a similar position and hear about their experiences.

The training is presented quite informally. The materials are flexible and can be altered to suit the needs of particular groups of parents and carers.

When/ Where does the Cygnet Group run?

The group will run in Leeds 6 times per year and will avoid school holiday times. Locations and times may vary for each programme.

Problems attending a Cygnet programme because of work commitments?

Under the Employment Act 2002 (parental leave) parents of disabled children are entitled to 18 weeks unpaid leave to care for their children. Parents must have worked for their employer for at least 100 days prior to taking leave and give 21 days notice of leave.

If you would like to attend a programme and are currently in employment, you may wish to talk through this legislation with me or your employer, to enable you to have time off to attend Cygnet.

For further information please refer to the Working Families website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk or Tel 0800 013 0313

Do I have to attend all sessions?

YES. You will gain a lot more from coming to the group if you come to all the sessions. This is because each session builds on the one before. Please do not accept a place in the group if you are only able to attend one or two sessions – you will not benefit from coming and may take the place of someone else who is able to come to all the sessions.

How do I make a referral?

Firstly your child must have a diagnosis of autism. Contact STARS for a referral form.

For further information or if you cant attend, please contact

THE STARS TEAM

0113 3368287

STARS Cygnet Programme Admin Team, Penny Field School House, Tongue Lane, Meanwood, LS6 4QD.

Or email to: STARS@nwsilc.org