



Parental Guidance: Supporting Anxiety in Neurodivergent Young People

Anxiety is common among young people, but it may present differently in neurodivergent students. Differences in sensory processing, communication or the need for predictability can make certain environments or situations feel particularly overwhelming. Understanding how anxiety may appear for your child can help families respond in supportive and effective ways.

This guide offers practical advice for recognising signs of anxiety and creating supportive routines and communication strategies that help reduce distress.

How anxiety may present

Anxiety in neurodivergent young people may sometimes look different from typical presentations. It may include:

- Avoidance of certain situations or environments
- Heightened distress during unexpected changes
- Increased sensory sensitivity or overwhelm
- Difficulty explaining feelings or identifying what is causing distress

Recognising these patterns can help families understand when a young person may be experiencing anxiety.

Using predictable routines

Predictability can play an important role in reducing anxiety:

- Maintain clear daily routines where possible
- Provide advance notice of changes or transitions
- Use visual reminders or structured plans to increase clarity

When young people understand what to expect, uncertainty and stress often decrease.



Parental Guidance: Supporting Anxiety in Neurodivergent Young People

Supporting communication

Clear and supportive communication can help young people feel more secure:

- Use direct and simple language where possible
- Allow additional time for processing information
- Check for understanding without placing pressure on immediate responses
-

These approaches help ensure that communication remains calm and manageable.

Practical calming strategies

Different young people benefit from different regulation strategies. These may include:

- Quiet spaces or time away from busy environments
- Movement breaks or calming sensory activities
- Structured routines that allow time to reset

Supporting regulation proactively can help reduce the likelihood of escalation.

Supporting transitions and social situations

Changes in environment, new routines or complex social situations can increase anxiety.

Families may find it helpful to:

- Prepare young people in advance for upcoming events or changes
- Discuss what to expect in new environments
- Break unfamiliar situations into smaller, manageable steps

These strategies can increase confidence when facing new experiences.

Working in partnership with the Academy

If anxiety begins to affect attendance, learning or wellbeing, families are encouraged to share their observations with the Academy. Consistent approaches between home and school can help reduce stress and ensure that appropriate support strategies are in place.