

**INFORMATION**

***Cygnet is a parenting support programme that was developed in Bradford for parents and carers of children/young people aged 5-18 across the country who have a diagnosis of an Autistic Spectrum Condition. This programme has been rolled out, with training, across the country because of the impact and feedback it has received.***

Parenting support exists across the area for parents and carers of preschool children who have been diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Condition via support groups and outreach workers in children’s centers. However, has been a gap in provision for parents and carers of older children/young people (carers can be anyone who has direct involvement with the child, e.g.; Grandparents, uncles, aunts or support workers) Cygnet has been filling this gap for the past few years across the country with very positive results.

The package of training has been developed in Bradford by looking at what is done in existing parent training groups, examining research findings, a pilot training group and from consultations with parents/carers and professionals in Bradford and Airedale. From this, a **six session** parent training package has been developed for parents/carers whose children have been diagnosed with an Autistic Spectrum Condition.

The course facilitators for North Lancashire have received training from Barnardos to deliver this course to parent carers which backs up their previous knowledge and experience of Autistic Spectrum Conditions. The professionals and volunteers delivering this course share a passion to help, empower and enable families with children and young people who have an Autistic Spectrum Condition.

**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. There may also be a group of parents or carers who for a variety of reasons may not have been able to or wanted to access advice or information locally relevant to their child. Children’s needs also change over time so information and advice received when a child was younger may need to be updated to be relevant for the child/young person today. If you have therefore attended Early Bird or Early Bird Plus programs you may still wish to attend Cygnet.

Attending the Cygnet group gives parents and carers an opportunity to better understand Autistic Spectrum Conditions. 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 by a range of Barnardos Cygnet trained facilitators. The materials are flexible and can be altered to suit the needs of particular groups of parents and carers

Current sessions are:

**Session 1: Introduction**

* Introduction to the group
* Background to the group
* Aims
* Content

**Session 2: Autism and diagnosis**

* Introduction to ASC’s
* What is it like to be autistic?
* Experience of the diagnosis

**Session 3: Communication**

* Why and how do we communicate
* Communication in ASC’s
* Strategies to aid communication
* Social Stories – what they are, how to use them
* Comic Strips – what they are, how to use them

**Session 4: Sensory issues**

* What are the senses?
* What do we use them for?
* Types of sensory issues seen in ASC’s
* Associated behaviour
* Strategies to help

**Session 5: Understanding behaviour**

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

**Session 6: Managing behaviour**

* Using the information (Iceberg principle)
* Analyzing and Managing behaviour (STAR analysis)
* Key strategies
* Management strategies
* Looking to the future
* Issues in adolescence/puberty
* Contacts
* Siblings
* Sleeping
* Going over previous work

**We then conduct a 3 month follow up meeting from the last session to evaluate and discuss.**

***Parents comments from previous courses***

* “*Fantastic! Really enjoyable and helpful!”*
* *“Our biggest problems are related to behaviour so understanding our son’s behaviour properly is a very big step!”*
* *“This has given me the tools to help with my child’s communication.”*
* *“I can now identify my child’s sensory issues and have an idea of practical strategies.”*
* *“The support of other group members is really valuable.”*

**Where and When Does the Group Run?**

The group runs in Lancaster and Morecambe 3 or 4 times per year. Day and evening sessions maybe offered dependent on numbers.

Sessions last approximately 2.5 hours each and run on a weekly basis. If parents accept a place in the group, they are expected to attend the majority of the six sessions.

**Attending a Cygnet programme?** NB:***childcare is not available***

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 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](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk) or telephone: 0800 013 0313.

**Do I have to attend all Sessions?**

If possible, 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.

**I would like to come, what do I do now?**

Either a professional working with you can make a referral with your consent or a referral can be made direct by parents or carers. Your child needs to be aged 5-18 and have a diagnosis of Autism. Just complete a Cygnet Group Enrolment Form and return it to the Cygnet Coordinator at the address below and you will be informed when and where the next group is running.

**For further information, please contact:**

Lucy Ellis (Cygnet Coordinator)

Barnardo’s Cygnet Programme

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