

# The overwhelming importance of happiness and emotional wellbeing in autistic students: what should special schools do to ensure this?

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# Context

This presentation does mainly focus upon observations based on our experiences, however:

- It will not be a story of what has happened at Freemantles but more an exploration of possible ways to support children and young people with autism to have positive well-being.
- What do we really mean by happiness?



# Roots of anxiety

Key triggers appear to be:

- Difficulties with social understanding.
- Social communication skills.
- Reduced ability to moderate senses.
- Lack of self esteem and self confidence due to these challenges.



# Additional Factors

- Anxiety creates anxiety.
- Parents, families, peers and staff can be affected.
- Anxiety may create greater sensory processing difficulties.



# Impact of anxiety

- Parents / Siblings anxiety issues spiralling down.
- Staff / school place breakdown.
- Parental relationship breakdown.
- Inability to process and learn.



# Impact of anxiety

- Child to residential school.
- Overprotection potentially increasing anxiety and other MH difficulties.
- Reduced participation by all in the community.



# First priority

- For these reasons Emotional Well-being has become the first priority underpinning all of the work that we do.



# What basics help positive well-being for most human beings?



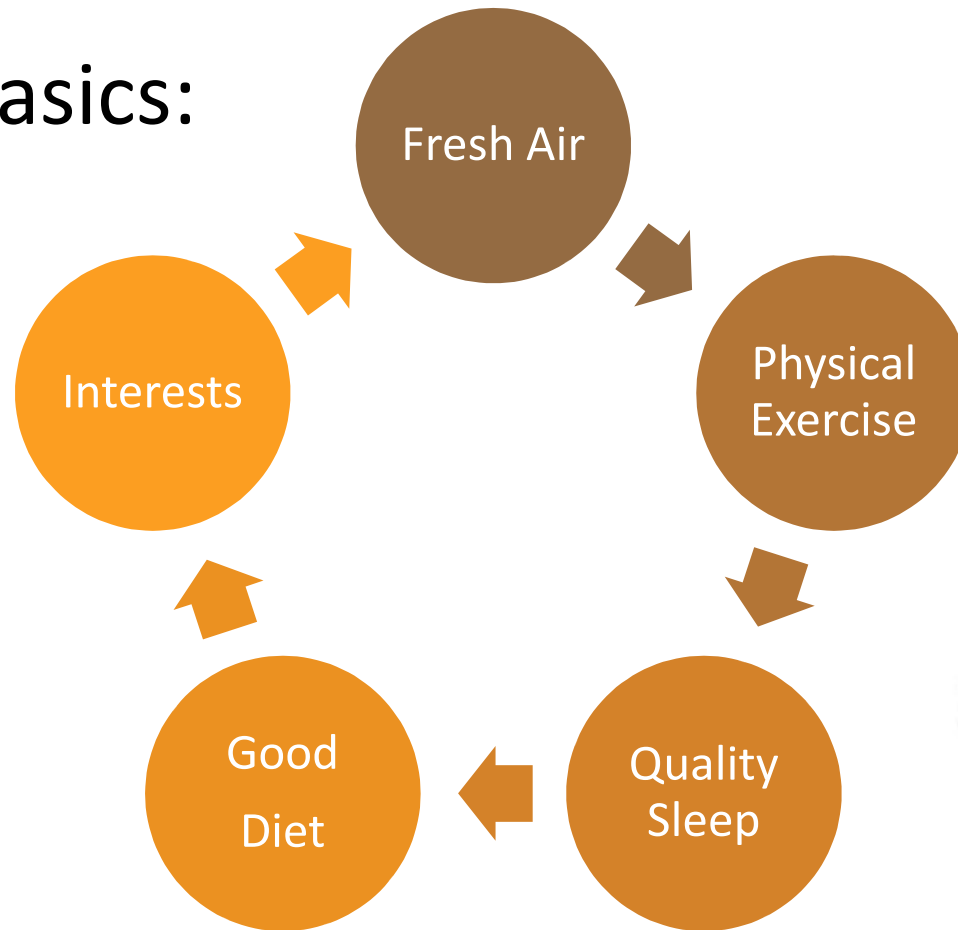


# A three pronged approach

- Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being (in the here and now).
- A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety .
- A holistic approach to promote emotional wellbeing in families and the staff – across the whole community.

# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

The basics:



# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

Others:

Build trusting relationships to enable asking for help / advice.

Staff / adults respond consistently to all behaviour calmly with care.



# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

## Others

- Deep breathing strategies.
- Yoga, Pilates.
- Mindfulness.



# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

## Others

- Animals.
- Horticulture.
- Exercise.



# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

## Others

- Guided meditation.
- Choice boards of relaxing activities.



# Promoting techniques to manage Emotional Well-being.

Being able to know which of these helps to manage your own anxiety and the best strategy to be used in different contexts.



# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety – Social Understanding

- Use strategies that aid effective social understanding: Social Stories™, comic strip conversations, individual tutorials.





# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety - Communication

- Teach that communication and interaction with others is fun using intensive interaction, attention autism.



# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety - Communication

- Teach the basics of communication  
PECS , AAC's, Speech.



# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety - Communication

- Teach social communication with support of Comic Strip Conversations.



# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety – Self Esteem

- Gain the appropriate balance of challenge with support to ensure success.
- May need to vary!



# A long term approach to address the roots of anxiety – Self Esteem

- Give responsibility with visual support.



# Promote emotional wellbeing in families and the staff

## Families

- Support families with issues.
- Offer advice and training.
- Enlist help in teaching as a team.



# Promote emotional wellbeing in families and the staff

## Families

- Raise awareness of the anxiety cycle
- Model strategies
- Support referrals
- Offer siblings events



# Promote emotional wellbeing in families and the staff

## Staff

- Effective training and advice on strategies.
- Develop knowledge of behaviour, anxiety and the appropriate responses.
- Empathic listening / coaching.





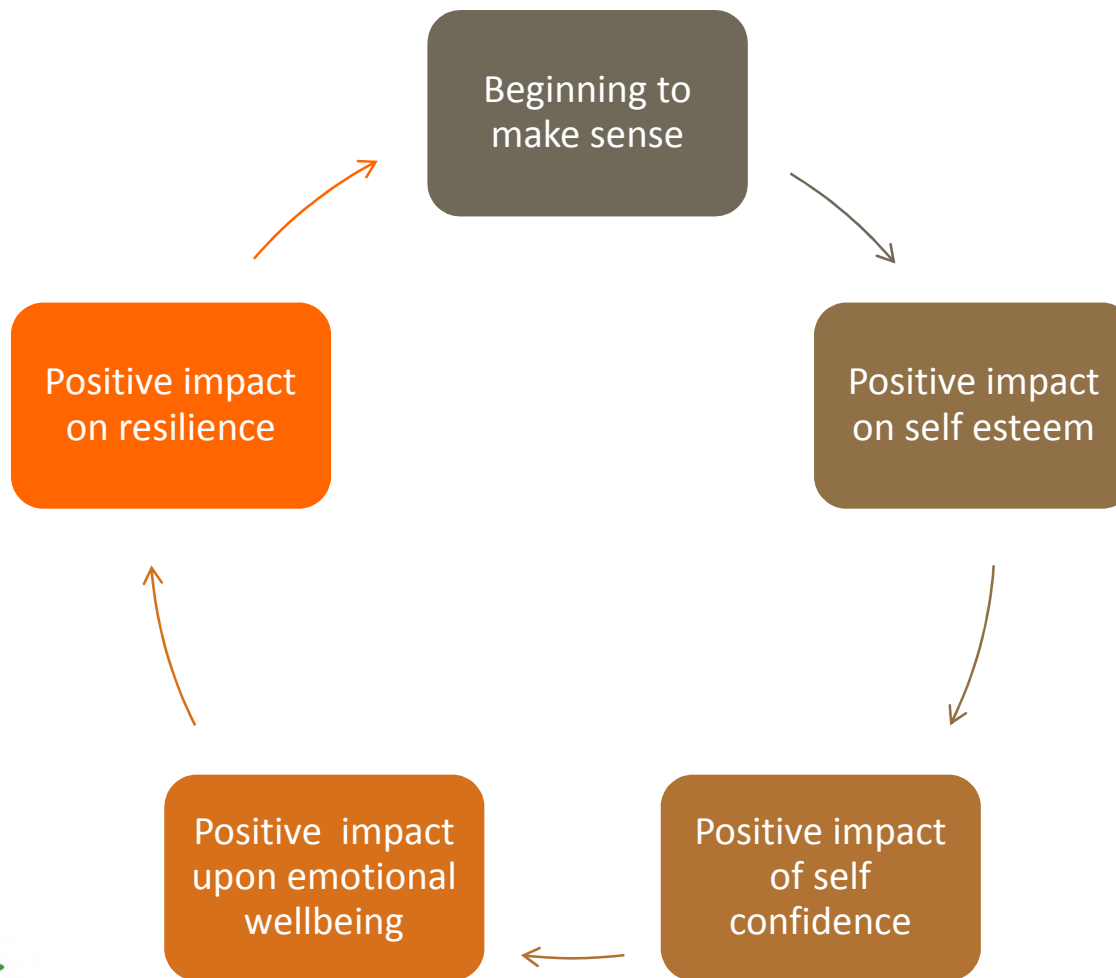
# Promote emotional wellbeing in families and the staff

## Staff

- Reduce and focus workload.
- Focus on wellbeing and fulfilment.
- Frequent and regular meetings.



# Through these approaches:



# Questions

