# Educators Guide to Executive Functioning:

How it Impacts on Learning and Behaviour & What You Can Do to Support Neurodiverse Students (ASD, ADHD, PDA, ODD)

**Sue Larkey Presents** 

Dean Beadle

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# Course Content

Lesson 1: What is Executive Functioning and Autistic Inertia

Lesson 2: Myths and Misconceptions about Executive Functioning, ADHD & Autistic Inertia

Lesson 3: Time Management in the Classroom: Why it's so difficult and how to make it easier.

Lesson 4: Key Strategies for Supporting Executive Functioning at School & Home

Lesson 5: Classroom Strategies for Building Executive Functioning Skills

Lesson 6: Understanding Autistic Inertia and ADHD Paralysis

Lesson 7: Emotional Regulation and the Importance of Safe Spaces

# TERMS USED IN THE COURSE

**Autistic inertia:** The difficulty in changing states, starting or stopping tasks

Co-regulation: Staying calm to help regulate others' emotions.

**Executive functioning:** The "brain's admin team" responsible for planning, organizing, and executing tasks.

Masking: The act of hiding autistic traits, which can be exhausting.

**Mode shifts:** The difficulty in transitioning between different environments or activities.

**Object permanence anxiety:** The worry about forgetting tasks or items when they're out of sight.

Power of nope: Giving permission to opt out of overwhelming tasks.

**Power saving mode:** A state of conserving energy before or after overwhelming events.

**Prefrontal cortex development:** Understanding the biological basis for executive function challenges.

**SafeSpeak:** A communication protocol for sharing concerns without fear of consequence.

**Spiky profile:** The uneven distribution of skills and challenges in autistic individuals.

**Sensory processing:** How autistic individuals might experience sensory input differently.

Time blindness: Challenges with perceiving and managing time.

**Visual mapping:** A technique for validating and visualizing students' concerns.

What is Executive Functioning and Autistic Inertia



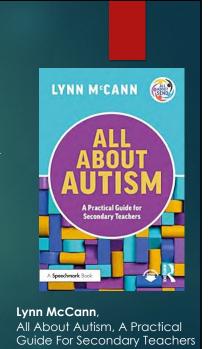
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"There will be times in your teaching career...where you will hear from parents that their child is having meltdowns at home almost every day before or after school, and they will want to know what is happening at school to cause these.

However, to your eyes, there will not be a problem at school...to you they are 'fine in school' and therefore it is easy to assume that the problem is that the parents are doing something wrong.

This is a common problem for autistic children who have learned early on to **mask** their difficulties and autistic characteristics. It's more than just trying to fit in, it's often driven by huge anxiety and rejection sensitivity; this causes panic and trauma at the hint of getting anything wrong or being 'found out'"



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# So called "school-refusal"

"For many children and young people, such as the autistic adolescent girls who participated in a study with me, they are not rejecting learning, they are rejecting a toxic environment"



narrative" workhttps://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/resourc es-from-rewriting-the-narrative-webinar)

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## **EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING**

"Executive Functioning is the skills a person uses to figure out:

- what they have to do now or in the future
- when they have to do it
- what order they have to do it in"



Robyn Steward, The Autism Friendly Guide To Periods



### **Emotional Regulation**

Struggle with emotional regulation, often have trouble accepting negative feedback. May overreact to little injustices. Often struggle to finish a task when something upsets them (i.e. mistakes).

### **Impulse Control**

Calling out, rushing through activities without checking, inconsistency with following rules.

### **Planning & Prioritising**

Difficulty deciding the steps needed to reach a goal order of importance. May not know how to start planning a project and become easily overwhelmed trying to break tasks into smaller chunks.

### Organising

Ability to keep track of information and things. Organisational issues are constantly losing or misplacing things.

### **Task Initiation**

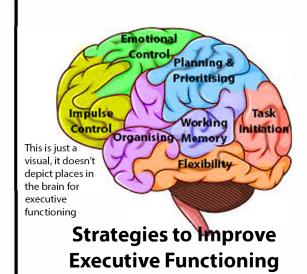
Struggle with issues with planning and prioritising too. Without having a plan for a task, it's hard to know how to start. Can come across as lazy or as simply procrastinating. But often they're just so overwhelmed they freeze and do nothing.

### **Flexibility**

Inflexible thinking in very concrete ways and take things literally. They don't see other options or solutions. They find it difficult to change course.

### **Working Memory**

Inability to hold information in their mind and use it to complete a task. Struggle with multi-step tasks, remembering directions, taking notes or understanding something you've just explained to them.



# Visuals

Colour code, visual plans for assignments, mind maps, take photos to show them how their desk, locker should look.

### **Transition Supports**

Pre-warn about change using a timer, use transition cues like a bell or announcement.

### Modelling

Show and use assistance to support the child to do the actions of what is required.

### **Routines**

Packing bag, pencil cases, book marks in books, diary for homework.

### Systems

Put notes in plastic sleeve in same part of bag every time.

### **Minimise**

Reduce clutter by having containers, drawers, extra shelving. Ensure labelled so return to correct place.

### **Time management**

Time Timers, Digital Schedules, scheduling with a timer – break routines into steps or tasks to complete in certain times.

### **Social Scripts**

Give clear descriptions of what is going to change and what they need to do.



# LESSON 1 Summary



- 1. Remember the equation: Autism + Environment = Outcome Focus on changing the environment, not the student
- 2. Shift persepctive from "won't" to "can't"

  Avoid labeling executive functioning difficulties as laziness
- 3. Understand executive functioning as the brain's 'admin team'

Consider how this impacts planning, organisation and task completion.

- 4. Recognise masking behaviours, especially in autistic girls Look for subtle signs of anxiety or distress.
- 5. Understand that calm behaviour doesn't always mean lack of anxiety

Be aware of potential delayed stress reactions.

6. Consider how school environments might be 'toxic' for some students

Look for ways to make the classroom more inclusive.

7. Reframe 'school refusal' as an indicator of environmental mismatch.

Focus on adapting the environment rather than forcing attendance.

8. Recognise the safety and familiarity needs of autistic students

Consider how to make new activities feel safe as familiar ones.



#AccessibleAcaclemic about us about us Who: Buckle & colleagues Journal: Frontiers in Psychology Title: "No Way Out Except From External Intervention": First-Hand Accounts of Autistic Inertia "autistic inertia" is a widespread & debilitating difficulty acting on Inertia might be an intention. It is discussed in umbrella term, where the autistic communities but inertia has different has not been researched. causes. It might be due to socio-emotional factors, executive dysfunction, movement differences, or something we are yet to identify



# LESSON 2 Summary



- 1. Understand executive functioning as the brain's "admin team" Recognise its role in planning, organisation, and task completion.
- 2. Recognise the impact of autistic inertia on daily tasks Understand it affects both starting and stopping activities.
- 3. Be aware of the high energy cost of everyday tasks for autistic individuals

Recognise that seemingly simple tasks can be overwhelming.

4. Consider the overlap between autism and ADHD in executive functioning

Be mindful of how this might compound executive functioning challenges.

- 5. Provide visual supports and written instructions Reduce reliance on verbal instructions alone.
- 6. Offer alternatives for communication Consider emails or voice notes as less stressful options.
- 7. Allow extra time for transitions between activities Accommodate the challenges of shifting between tasks.
- 8. Be mindful of how anticipation of tasks can be paralysing Recognise that thinking about a task can be as exhausting as doing it.
- 9. Understand that executive functioning abilities can fluctuate Don't assume that success one day means equal ability every day.
- 10. Provide clear task completion criteria Help prevent perfectionism and reduce anxiety about expectations.
- 10. Consider implementing "safe spaces" or communication protocols Create opportunities for open communication without fear of judgment.

Lesson 3

Time Management in the Classroom:
Why it's so difficult and how to make it easier.



I'll be frozen on B until I do A.
The minute A is done, B suddenly seems possible.

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<u>Notes</u>		
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# LESSON 3 Summary



1. Understand that autistic individuals may have a different perception of time

Be aware that concepts like "5 minutes" can be abstract and challenging

2. Recognise the challenges of transitioning between "home mode" and "school mode"

Consider strategies to help bridge these environments

- 3. Be mindful of the impact of homework on executive functioning
  Understand the multiple steps and planning required for homework completion
- 4. Recognise the concept of "modes" and the difficulty in shifting between them

Plan for smoother transitions between different activities or environments

5. Understand the challenges of task sequencing for autistic individuals

Be aware that difficulty with one task can impact the entire sequence

6. Consider implementing a "one day at a time" approach for planning

Recognise that planning too far ahead can be overwhelming

7. Use visual timers to help make abstract time concepts more concrete

Implement strategies to show time passing during tasks

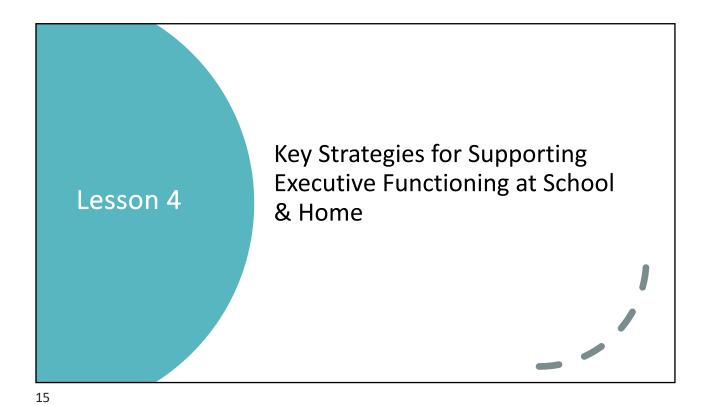
8. Create consistent routines for transitioning between home and school activities

Help reduce anxiety associated with environmental changes.

- 9. Be aware of how new or uncertain tasks can dominate thoughts.

  Provide clear information and support for upcoming changes or new activities.
- 10. Understand that autistic individuals may struggle with planning ahead

Offer support and strategies for breaking down future tasks.





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# **Executive functioning hacks for at home**

- Water bottles
- Toothpaste by the bed
- Having clothes in same place so you don't have to hunt for them
- Laying clothes out in order
- Keeping a bag packed
- ▶ What stages can be skipped?
- Making a list makes it tangible
- Retrospective to do lists

https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/autism-space/health-and-lifestyle/autism-and-executive-functioning-skills/

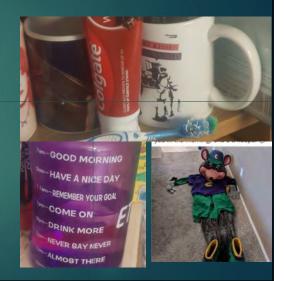


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# Executive functioning hacks for at home

- ► How far away is school?
- ▶ Choose your battles- sometimes it's a choice between washing and cooking
- Reminder apps and alarms on your phone
- ▶ Wet wipes
- Reminder alarms/apps
- Voice-note reminders
- Putting instructions in a WattsApp etc

https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/autism-space/health-and-lifestyle/autism-and-executive-functioning-skills/





# LESSON 4 Summary



- 1. Implement the use of large water bottles with time markers.

  Reduce the need for multiple trips and aid in hydration tracking.
- 2. Consider keeping essential items (e.g. toothbrush or pen) in easily accessible places.

Simplify routines by reducing the number of steps required.

- 3. Establish a consistent storage system for belongings. Create predictable routines for finding and organising items.
- **4. Lay out clothes in order of dressing the night before.** Reduce decision-making and planning in the morning.
- 5. Create visual guides for daily routines.

  Use step-by-step images to support independence in tasks.
- 6. Implement strategies to reduce unnecessary planning. Consider what stages of tasks can be skipped or simplified.
- 7. Use lists to make tasks tangible and manageable. Break down activities into smaller, achievable steps.
- 8. Utilise reminder apps and alarms on phones.

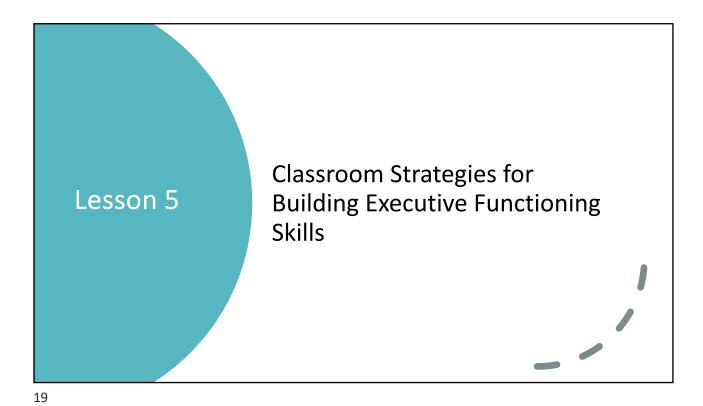
  Support memory and time management with technology.
- 9. Provide information through multiple channels (e.g. voice notes, written notes).

Accommodate different processing styles and reduce reliance on memory.

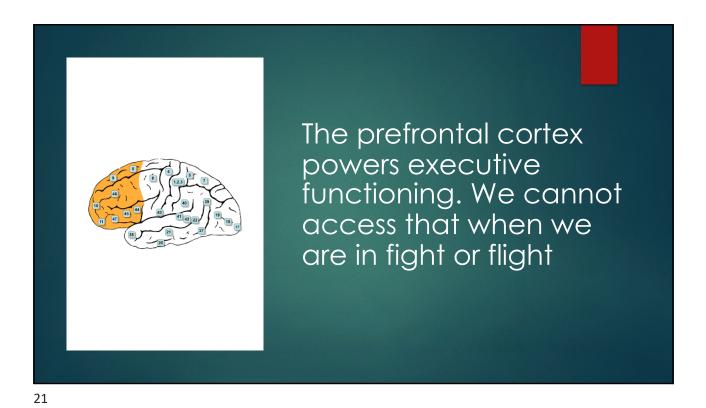
- 10. Encourage the use of "could" instead of "should" language.

  Reduce pressure and promote a more flexible approach to tasks.
- 11. Recognise the importance of recovery time and "power saving mode"

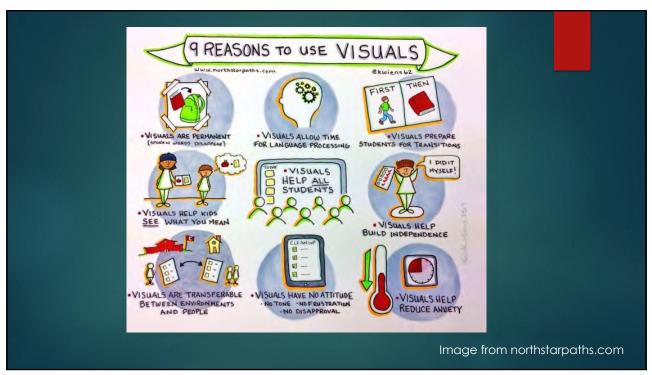
Understand that apparent inactivity may be necessary preparation or recovery.



Advice for supporters looking to scaffold and support these skills ▶ MODEL IT- "I had a terrible night's sleep last night, so **Executive Function Skills and** Neurodiversity Traits with Victoria Bagnall will you help me to remember XYZ?" ▶ Honour how they are feeling "I can see this is hard for The SENDo 7 Sept 23 - 52 mins you"- co-regulate ⊕ ⊕ % : what will I need on my holiday, shopping lists, helping with laundry ▶ Metacognition isn't fully possible until adulthood-so we need to scaffold reflection- "that was tricky wasn't it, what would make it easier tomorrow"- much more likely to want to try it if they came up with it Remember any new skill needs 60 iterations to become habit ▶ Lack of project work in curriculum- this utilises EF skills Q







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<u>Notes</u>			
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# LESSON 5 Summary



- 1. Model executive functioning strategies for students.

  Demonstrate how to manage tasks, time, and organisation.
- 2. Practice co-regulation techniques.

  Offer calm, reassuring support during challenging moments.
- 3. Recognise students' efforts in executive functioning. Acknowledge progress and improvements, no matter how small.
- 4. Understand that metacognition is not fully developed until adulthood.

Adjust expectations for younger students' self-reflection abilities.

5. Implement games and activities that practice executive function skills

Use engaging methods to develop planning and organisation skills.

- 6. Provide clear, specific task requirements.

  Define what "good enough" looks like to prevent perfectionism
- 7. Use Visuals to break tasks into smaller, manageable chunks
  Use visual aids to separate tasks and reduce overwhelm.
- 8. Implement time framing for tasks.

  Use visual timers or progress bars to show time passing.
- 9. Create online resources for homework information. Provide accessible reminders of assignments and due dates.
- 10. Allow students to take photos as memory aids.
  Support recall of important information or instructions.
- 11. Use colour-coding systems for different subjects or task types. Aid in organisation and recall of information.
- 12. Implement visual supports throughout the classroom Use relevant visuals to reinforce key concepts and instructions.
- 13. Consider how classroom design impacts focus and attention.

  Minimise visual distractions around key learning areas.



Ways to support learners through autistic inertia

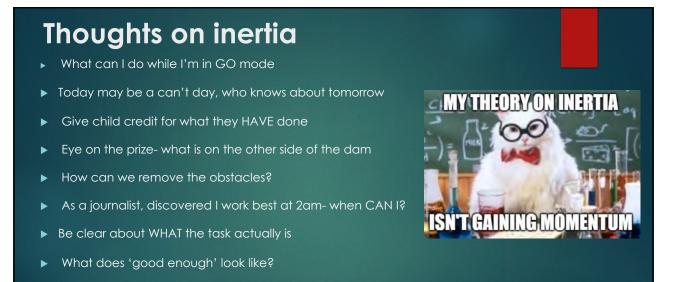
All I have to do is...

"No Way Out Except From External Intervention":
First-Hand Accounts of Autistic Inertia
KL Buckle, 2021

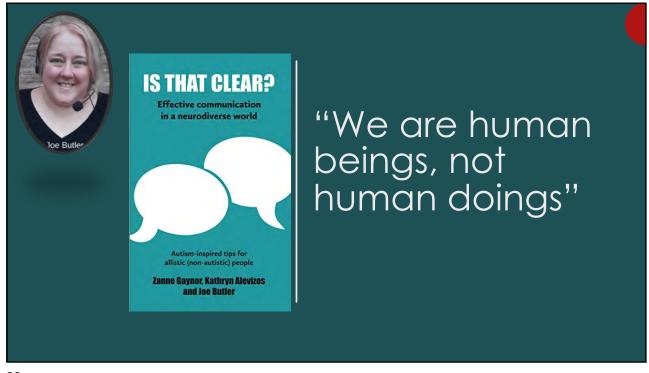
Trust your process- it got you to today

Start with what feels possible-low demand tasks

Celebrate the wins



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# Summary



- 1. Understand autistic inertia as difficulty in changing states. Recognise challenges in both starting and stopping tasks.
- 2. Implement the "All you have to do is..." approach. Break down overwhelming tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
- 3. Identify what "freezes" individuals and plan around it. Develop strategies to work through or avoid common sticking points.
- 4. Lay out clothes in order of dressing the night before. Reduce decision-making and planning in the morning.
- 5. Allow flexibility in when tasks are completed. Recognise and accommodate individual work patterns and energy levels.
- 6. Start the day or lesson with low-demand tasks. Build confidence and momentum with achievable activities.
- 7. Be clear and specific about task requirements. Reduce anxiety by providing detailed expectations.
- 8. Define what "good enough" looks like for tasks. Prevent perfectionism by clarifying acceptable completion standards.
- 9. Celebrate small wins and progress. Acknowledge efforts and achievements, not just final outcomes.
- 10. Implement the "power of nope." Allow students to temporarily opt-out of overwhelming tasks
- 11. Remember "power saving mode" can be effective tool Understand that apparent inactivity may be necessary preparation or recovery.
- 12. Validate and believe students' experiences of inertia. Offer support and understanding, even if you don't fully comprehend their struggle.
- 13. Consider implementing "safe spaces" or communication protocols. Create opportunities for open communication about struggles without fear of judgment.



Resources

Lynn McCann's Visual Mapping (a way of helping learners to feel that their concerns are heard)

\*\*Visual Mapping and Trainers.\*\*

\*\*Probable\*\*

\*\*Probable\*\*

\*\*Visual Mapping and Trainers.\*\*

\*\*Probable\*\*

\*\*Visual Mapping and Trainers.\*\*

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►Instagram: deanbeadlespeaker
 ►Facebook: Dean Beadle Speaker
 ►Twitter: @deanbeadleuk
 ►Youtube.com/deanbeadleuk



# LESSON 7 Summary



# 1. Recognise the link between executive functioning and emotional regulation

Understand how executive function challenges can impact emotional control.

- 2. Implement safe spaces in educational settings.

  Create designated areas where students can retreat and self-regulate.
- 3. Consider using recording devices in safe spaces.

  Allow students to express concerns without immediate face-to-face interaction.
- 4. Implement "SafeSpeak" or similar communication protocols.

  Establish clear guidelines for sharing concerns without fear of consequences.
- 5. Use visual mapping techniques.

  Help students process and validate their concerns through visual representation.
- 6. Be mindful of object permanence issues.

  Understand how "out of sight, out of mind" can increase anxiety for some students.
- 7. Be clear and specific about task requirements.

  Reduce anxiety by providing detailed expectations.
- 8. Provide clear information about changes or absences. Reduce anxiety by explaining when things or people will return.
- 9. Offer alternatives to eye contact during conversations.

  Reduce sensory overload and increase comfort in communication.
- 10. Recognise that autistic brains may process more information at rest.

  Understand the increased cognitive load in everyday situations.
- 11. Implement strategies to reduce sensory overload in classrooms. Consider lighting, sound, and visual stimuli in the learning environment.
- 12. Encourage self-advocacy skills.

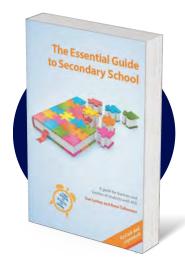
  Teach students to recognise and communicate their needs effectively.
- 13. Foster a classroom culture that values neurodiversity.

  Celebrate different thinking styles and problem-solving approaches.

# **Notes** Armed with the tools of understanding and confidence much can be achieved. www.suelarkey.com.au

# Sue's Top Pics for **EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING RESOURCES**

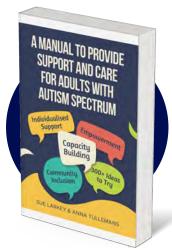
# **Sue Larkey Books**



The Essential Guide to Secondary School



The Ultimate Guide to School and Home



A Manual To Provide
Support and Care for Adults
with Autism Spectrum



MEGA BOOK of Timesavers

# **Timers**



Time Timer PLUS



**Liquid Timers** 



Portable Schedule Timer

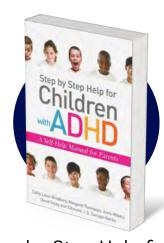


**Time Timer** 

# **Executive Functioning Books**



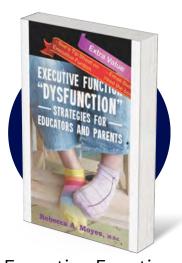
Organize Your ADD/ADHD Child



Step by Step Help for Children with ADHD



Autism and Everyday Executive Function



Executive Function Dysfunction

# REFERENCES MENTIONED IN COURSE

# Research / Studies / References

Dr. Luke Beardon "Avoiding Anxiety in Autistic Children"
Jo Butler "Is That Clear?"
Buckle et al. (2021) "No Way Out Except for External Intervention: First-Hand Accounts of Autistic Inertia" published in Frontiers in Psychology Journal Dr. Catherine Crompton's research at Edinburgh University on autistic communication styles

# **Organisations/Institutions**

Scottish Autism (mentioned regarding Charlie Tate, former deputy CEO)
Sheffield Hallam University (where Dr. Luke Beardon worked for 30+ years)
Edinburgh University - Department of Autism Research and Technology
Leicester NHS Trust (UK)
AT Autism (autistic-led research organization, directed by Dr. Ruth Moyse)
AutScape Autistic Research Convention

# **Notable Researchers/Experts Mentioned**

Dr. Luke Beardon

Dr. Ruth Moyse

Dr. Catherine Crompton

Victoria Bagnall

**Charlie Tate** 

Robin Stewart (autistic advocate, wrote "The Autism Friendly Guide to Periods")

# **Podcast Mentions**

Executive Function Skills and Neurodiversity Traits with Victoria Bagnall Discussing Executive Function Skills and Neurodiversity Traits

# **MORE TIPS & IDEAS**

LISTEN TO MY FREE PODCAST AVALIABLE ON ALL PLATFORMS

# **Episode 275**

**Executive Functioning Skills** for Neurodiverse students: "Beyond just try harder." with guest Dean Beadle

# **Episode 241**

Have You Heard of Time Blindness? Did You Know It Can Cause Behaviour in **Neurodiverse Students and** What To Do?

# Episode 269

**Regulation of Emotions a Teachers Guide to Support Student's** 

Episode 234

The Overlooked Tools of Learning: Importance of Routine & Repetition for Neurodiverse Students

# **Episode 235**

Behaviour Solutions for Setting up your Classroom for Success

Episode 189

Social Scripts: The Essential Tool for Improving Social **Understanding** 

# **Episode 145**

Time Management = Anxiety Management



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**Dr. Tony Attwood (Psychologist)** 

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**6 WEEKS** 

### Spectrum Disorder and/or for Neurodiverse Students Classroom: Understanding COURSE Other Neurodiverse Strategies for Educators Disorders HE EDUCATOR Sue Larkey (Teacher) Laura Kerby (Teacher & PRESENTER Sue Larkey (Teacher) **Grad Dip Psychology) EARLY YEARS** PRIMARY SECONDARY POST-SCHOOL What, How, & When to Introduction to understanding **Understanding of** teach Social Skills diverse learners, key supports **Pathological Demand** IN THIS / Myths & and strategies. Avoidance (PDA) √ How to help children identify What are Demands and How **COURSE** Misunderstanding. and label emotions in to Avoid √ How to make and keep YOU themselves and others **PDA & Anxiety: Key** friends. Helping children connect Strategies √ Impact of Executive WILL emotions to events Difference between PDD, Functioning. A range of strategies to ODD, and ASD **LEARN** √ 4 Steps to Create Social regulate emotions and **Practical Approaches and** Skills Program. behaviours **Strategies to Support** Lived Experience of Social Activities to do with the Learning ✓ Learning. whole class, small groups & Supporting and **Creating Inclusive Understanding Behaviour** individuals PDA and Education: How to ✓ What, How & When to teach Playgrounds. emotional regulation Make it Work AUSTRALIAN **PROFESSIONAL** STANDARDS (ALL STATES) **NESA** ACCREDITATION TOI **ACCREDITATION** COURSE 3 HOURS **3 HOURS** 2 HOURS DURATION COURSE

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