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**Support in Wiltshire: Autism Parent Programme (SWAPP)**

**Information Sheet: March 2018**

**What is SWAPP?**

SWAPP is a partnership programme between parents and their child’s setting or school that aims to build an understanding of autism and the challenges and delights it can present.

The programme aims to empower families and staff who are closely involved in supporting a child or young person on the autistic spectrum.

Sessions cover all aspects of autism including communication, sensory issues and behaviour.

**Who is SWAPP for?**

SWAPP is for families of children and young people with autism from preschool age to school year 13. Families must be Wiltshire residents i.e. live in areas governed by Wiltshire Local Authority. A member of staff from the child or young person’s setting/school is encouraged to attend whenever possible to develop a consistent approach around the child or young person. Children and young people themselves do not attend sessions.

SWAPP 1 is for families of children in early year’s settings and reception classes and uses a programme designed by professionals who are experienced with supporting children in this age group.

SWAPP 2/3 targets families who have children in primary school or early secondary school. The core course was designed by professionals in the Local Authority with extensive autism experience and aims to give an understanding of the behaviours seen in autism, why they occur and some basic strategies. Families will be offered a course according to the age and needs of their child and the availability of courses. The content is the same on both courses, but examples used are appropriate for the age range.

SWAPP 4 is aimed at families of older pupils, in school years 9 –13, looking at how puberty impacts upon autism and covering communication, behaviour, independence, sex and sexuality and mental health and wellbeing. This course has been designed by professionals in the Local Authority with extensive autism experience with older young people. Usually we expect families who have attended a SWAPP 2/3 course to wait for 2 years before applying for a SWAPP 4 course in order to prioritise families who have had no recent autism training.

**Does my child have to have a diagnosis of autism?**

Yes, SWAPP is only for families with children on the autistic spectrum. The child or young person must have a formal written diagnosis before a family can attend the programme.

**Is the course relevant for all families?**

SWAPP courses are most relevant for families whose children attend mainstream schools. This is because many of the strategies require the child to have a good understanding of verbal communication and primarily use verbal language to communicate.

Families whose children have more significant learning disabilities in addition to autism, are welcome to apply, however they may find some of the course content is not applicable to their child.

**How long does the programme last?**

SWAPP 1 involves group sessions and home visits and runs over 8 weeks.

SWAPP 2 and 3 involve four group sessions; there is usually one session each week for 4 weeks.

SWAPP 4 involves six group sessions usually one each week for 6 weeks.

Each group session lasts for approximately 2½ hours. Families and school staff will normally be expected to attend all sessions. Sessions are held in the morning, usually from 9.30 – 12.00 or 10-12.30.

**Where does SWAPP take place?**

SWAPP is held in different locations across Wiltshire such as a school, civic centre or community room. The main locations are in Chippenham, Trowbridge, Devizes and Salisbury and families are asked to indicate which location(s) they could attend. Courses may be offered in other areas if there are sufficient numbers and if an available venue can be found. Offers of places are made for the most convenient location (based on home/school address) depending on availability of courses.

**Who delivers the sessions?**

The sessions are run by two professionals: Specialist Advisory Teachers, Educational Psychologists or Speech and Language Therapists. For SWAPP 1 courses Early Years Inclusion Officers are also tutors. All professionals have training and experience in supporting children and young people with autism.

**Who attends the sessions?**

Each family is offered two places for family members and a third place is offered to the child or young person’s setting or school. There are usually about 8 families on each course, sometimes more families on SWAPP 4 courses.

The family members attending may be parents, carers, grandparents, other relatives or, occasionally others who are closely involved in supporting the child/young person. Grown-up siblings are welcome but children do not attend.

School staff may include key workers, teaching assistants or teachers; they should be someone who has a key role in supporting the child or young person in their setting or school.

Due to the nature of the course only those directly involved in supporting the child or young person attend and the group remains the same throughout. We occasionally have a professional colleague observing a course as part of their professional development.

**What happens in a SWAPP session?**

Each session explores an area of autism such as communication or behaviour. It involves information, ideas and discussions. You will meet other families and be able to share experiences over a cup of tea or coffee.

SWAPP sessions are intended to be informal, interesting, interactive and enjoyable. People can opt out of anything they are not comfortable with – no one will be ‘put on the spot’ or asked to contribute verbally if they do not wish to.

**What do I need to bring?**

SWAPP facilitators will bring everything needed for the course. You may want to bring a pen but everything else you need will be provided.

**What does it cost?**

SWAPP is funded directly by Wiltshire Council. Neither families nor school staff will be charged to attend the programme.

**What if I have additional needs?**

SWAPP facilitators are skilled at supporting all participants to get the most out of the programme. If you have additional needs – for example, if you find it difficult to read, or to speak English; if you yourself are on the autistic spectrum or if you have learning difficulties let us know and we will be able to support you. Alternatively, you may choose to bring someone with you to help, for example an interpreter.

**How do I get a place?**

Families who would like a place should contact Wiltshire Council on **01225 718095** or email TSLS.OperationalOffice@wiltshire.gov.uk for an application form.

Details of forthcoming courses and an online application form are available on the Wiltshire Council website [www.wiltshire.gov.uk/swapp](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/swapp)