



Welcome!

We are Southend City Youth Council; we are improving our local area and making young people's futures brighter.

We created this pack to get people talking about Neurodivergence and helping them to understand the needs of Neurodivergent community.

In this pack you will find

Information about our
neurological conditions, personal
experiences, some helpful
strategies for self-regulation
and resources to help you
manage school stress and have
important conversations!



Contents

Autism - What is it?

The Autistic Brain

The 8 Senses

A Day in the Life of Rachel

Darragh's Synaesthesia

ADHD - What is it?

Ollie's Experiences with ADHD

Ollie's Message to You

Tics & Tourettes - What is it?

Campbell's Story

Dyslexia - What is it?

Angie's Story

How to Support us

Big Chats - The Game

Spoon Theory

Self-Regulation Strategies

Useful Resources

Thank You to Our Partners

Get In Touch

Helpful things to do and say

The neurotypical world can feel overwhelming, so we may need support from trusted people. Give us space and understand that we don't mean to sound rude. Help us regulate, share your interests, and take an interest in ours. Be kind—our differences should be celebrated, but sometimes being different is hard.

What is it?

Autism is a Neurological condition, which affects the way the brain processes information, like apple vs android.

Not all autistic people are the same. Some autistic people may be really creative, some might be really good at science and maths.

Role models

Many famous autistic people have achieved great things, such as Anthony Hopkins, Tim Burton, Bill Gates, MoStack, Eminem, Isaac Newton, and Greta Thunberg. They've raised awareness, topped music charts, and created amazing TV shows and movies. If they can do it, so can you!

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)

Unhelpful things to say

"You don't look autistic"—because autism isn't a physical condition.
"I don't care about your special interests"—it hurts, but it's okay if you don't want to hear about them; just be kind.
"Why are you moving like that?"—that's called "stimming," which helps me regulate myself, so please don't draw attention to it.

Myth-Busters

Autism is not a physical condition, so you cannot identify an autistic person just by looking at them.
Autism affects individuals of all genders, not just boys. Boys are often diagnosed earlier due to a historical focus on male-centric autism research.



THE AUTISTIC BRAIN



Remember we said that being autistic is like having a different operating system? Well, Apple and Androids can do most of the same things, but the way they do them is different, which means they gather and process information differently too.

Processing Time

Autistic brains process more information than neurotypical ones, so responding or deciding may take longer. It helps to ask a question once and wait for a reply.

Dealing with Change

Neurotypical people might dislike sudden changes, but for autistic people, even small changes can be overwhelming. Giving advance notice about changes like fire drills, assessments, or trips is very helpful.

Communication Needs

Some autistic people prefer to communicate without eye contact, expressions, gestures, or words. We may not understand tone or facial expressions well, so being very clear helps us.



Social Fatigue

Autistic brains process lots of information all day, which can be exhausting. When it's too much, we might need quiet time away from people, bright lights, and loud noises—or even a nap to recharge.

THE 8 SENSES

The way each of our senses takes in and processes information is different to a Neurotypical brain, and here you can learn a bit more about how this effects us....

Smell

Strong smells, like hot food or scented candles, can be overwhelming or even painful for us. If we cover our noses around your favourite perfume, it's not personal.

Taste

Our sensitivity to tastes like salty, sweet, sour, and bitter can be higher or lower, and it may change depending on stress. Finding safe foods we enjoy is really important, especially when we're stressed.

Sight

Bright artificial lights, like those in classrooms or supermarkets, can be painful for us. We often prefer colored lights, fairy lights, or warm lighting, which are easier to handle for longer periods.

Hearing

Loud sounds can be distracting and even painful for us. We might wear ear defenders in noisy places to block out some of the noise. We're still listening, and it's not because we're being rude!

Touch

Sensitivity to touch and textures can be hard for us. Itchy or tight clothes make us uncomfortable. Having options for what to wear, especially to school, helps a lot.

Proprioception

We may have trouble processing movement, force, and body position. Writing for long periods or neatly can be difficult, and we might use fidget tools to help us focus in class.

Interoception

We may have trouble sensing things like hunger, fullness, thirst, or temperature. Sometimes, we don't feel these things easily, or we feel them more intensely than others, which can make us uncomfortable.

Vestibular

Our sense of balance and movement can be trickier, so we might bump into things or drop items more often. However, we might be great at dodging obstacles or even juggling!

IN THE MORNING

When I wake up, I find it difficult to get out of bed because it means I have to be with people, which I can find terrifying. I have to find things I want to do, so I can find a reason to maintain my basic hygiene, eating and getting dressed.

**Hi, I'm Rachel,
and I am home
educated, but if I
was in school, I
would be in year
10, and I am
Autistic.**

WHILE LEARNING

If it is a subject that I'm forced to learn (English Language or Maths), I find it difficult to concentrate because I hate being forced to learn something I'm not enjoying. But I love to learn about Culture, Science and Art.

AT HOME

I feel safe and scared. Sometimes bad things happen at home and I find it difficult to be around my family, because that's all I can think about. I also feel safe with them because I know I can unmask with them and they won't judge me because they are the same.

**So you can
understand a bit
more about my
condition, I'm
gonna take you
through a day in
my life.**

AFTER LEARNING

When I hang out with my friends it can be so much fun but also horrible. Fun because my friends are interesting people who care about me. Horrible because being social is draining, the unexpected noises, smells and overall surroundings are always overwhelming.
I don't always cope in healthy ways.

AT HOME

I listen to music a lot and this really helps, I also find art has provided a sort of therapy to me as well.

You might like to try out some of the self regulation techniques included towards the end of the pack.

**Hi, I'm Darragh,
I am in year 9,
and I am Autistic
and have
Synaesthesia.**

**So you can
understand a bit
more about my
conditions, I'm
gonna share
some
of my
experiences.**

WHAT IS SYNAESTHESIA?

It sounds super fancy, but it's your classic sensory cross-over. Yes, it can be perceiving sounds as colours (colour grapheme), but it can also be misophonia (perceiving sounds as triggers and painful experiences). Even then, having colour grapheme can be distracting and overwhelming.

AT SCHOOL

It can be very hard to focus with both Autism and Synaesthesia. Both of these conditions distract easily, I also get overwhelmed a lot. Autism also makes it difficult for me to socialise. My friends probably would help, but I'm bad at asking them for help lol

HOW I MANAGE

Synesthesia isn't necessarily 'cool' or 'fun', it can be really debilitating and distracting. It means I have to constantly wear ear covers, even if it occasionally provides a short term party trick!

Helpful things

ADHD can be challenging because it affects how we think, act, and respond. If we're late to class, check in with us privately so we don't feel singled out. If we forget something, help by lending us equipment or writing down important things where we'll remember to look. We can get easily distracted, so kindly redirect us back to the task.

What is it?

ADHD is a neurological condition that affects our ability to control thoughts, behavior, and emotions. It can make simple tasks, impulse control, and memory harder. We might have sudden bursts of energy at inconvenient times, and if we mask our symptoms too long, we can experience burnout, needing rest after doing too much for too long.

Role models

Many famous people have ADHD, including Simone Biles, Michael Phelps, Justin Timberlake, Will.I.Am, Paris Hilton, Emma Watson, Ryan Gosling, Jim Carrey, Will Smith, Mozart, and Thomas Edison. They've achieved amazing things like winning Olympic gold medals, running successful businesses, starring in award-winning films, composing iconic music, and inventing the lightbulb.

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Unhelpful things

"You haven't finished your classwork!" Instead of scolding, remind us how much time is left to complete the task.

"What's the point in inviting them? They'll just cancel anyway!" While we may struggle with sticking to plans, we appreciate being invited. If we cancel last minute, it's because of reasons like feeling overwhelmed, social fatigue, or forgetting.

Myth-Busters

It's a myth that people with ADHD always struggle to focus. Sometimes, we focus so much on a task that we forget everything else, even eating or drinking! Reminding us to take breaks while studying, reading, or playing can really help. People with ADHD are not lazy—they're often brilliant multi-taskers!

MY EXPERIENCES

Read a transcript of my experiences on the next page



Hi, I'm Ollie,
I'm in year 12,
and I have
ADHD, Global
Developmental
Delay and I'm
Autistic.

So you can
understand a bit
more about my
conditions, I'm
gonna share
some of my
experiences.

PEOPLE CAN BE JUDGY

People think ADHD is just not being able to sit still or concentrate, but there are so many positives to the condition too. Like being extra creative, lots of fun to be around, more passionate and empathetic and understanding to others.

SOLUTIONS AT SCHOOL

I learned after sitting my mock exams that in future, I have to start getting on with it, and take responsibility for my own wants to succeed. And for that to happen, I have to give myself enough time to get these things done in a low-pressure environment.

CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL

I'm not a lazy person, but during the lead up to exams, I have a tough time with procrastination, as I believe I have more time to prepare than I do, which leads me to cram in everything into a short space of time, usually leading to a meltdown.

“

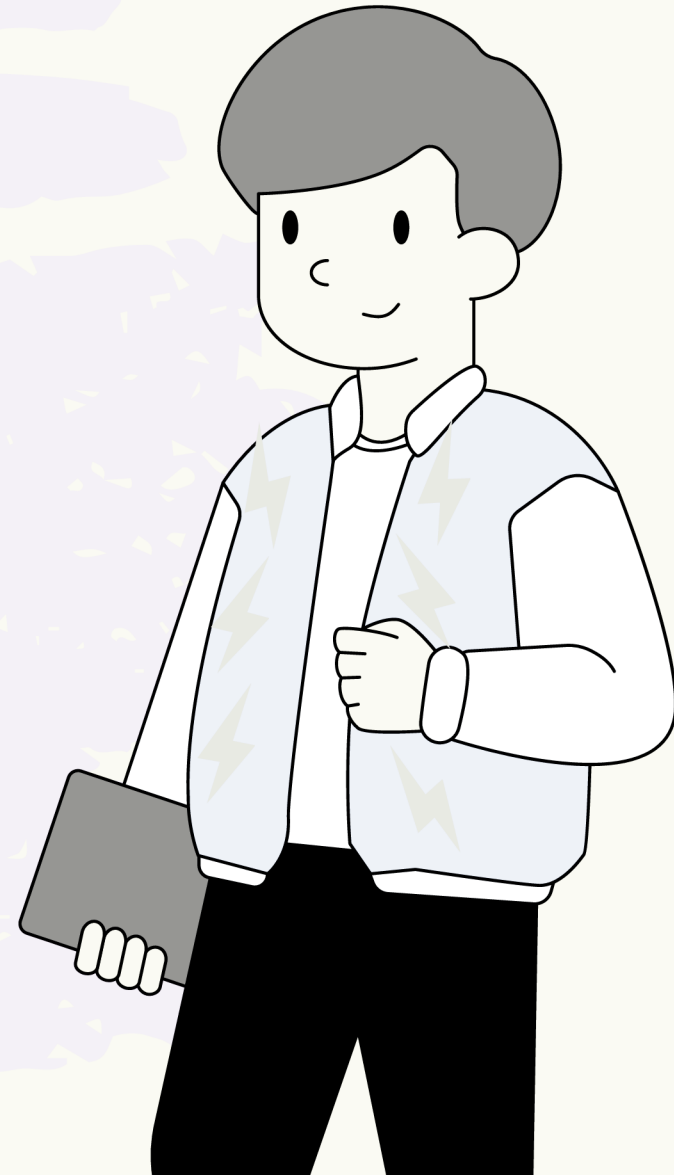
Hi, I'm Ollie, and I have ADHD, Global Developmental Delay, and Autism. Being neurodivergent means my brain works differently, and it affects many parts of my life, like social events and even basic things like knowing when I need to eat. My disabilities don't define me, but they do shape how I navigate the world.

Growing up with ADHD, I was seen as misbehaving, but I was just an energetic child who didn't understand why I seemed different. Later, I learned I also have GDD, which helped explain why I struggled with things like social cues.

I'm still figuring out who I am because people with neurological disorders are often seen as separate from the norm. But our community finds strength in embracing our differences and learning how to navigate the world as neurodivergent individuals.

I want others to understand the impact their actions can have on people like me. Neurodivergent people are often pushed aside because of stigma, which comes from ignorance. That's why I'm actively raising awareness, like helping Southend City Council create a pack about neurodivergent conditions.

I encourage you to check out the pack because understanding what "different" means can help improve our community. Everyone has a voice, and together we can make a difference. Let's embrace differences, break the negative cycle, and create a better future for everyone. ”



Helpful things

When our tics are bad, we need support from teachers, peers, and family to feel safe.

You can help by:

Giving us time outside the classroom to regulate.

Ignoring our tics, especially if we're trying to be quiet.

Letting us listen to music to calm down.

Allowing us to work at our own pace to manage stress.

Asking us how to best handle a tic outburst.

What is it?

A tic disorder involves repetitive, involuntary movements or sounds. Physical movements are motor tics, and sounds like grunting or throat-clearing are vocal tics. Tics can get worse when we feel anxious, stressed, or face a new situation.

Role models

Many famous people have tic disorders, including Seth Rogen, Billie Eilish, David Beckham, and Lewis Capaldi. They've achieved amazing things like starring in movies, topping the charts, and playing in the Premier League. It's important for celebrities to speak openly about their conditions to help people understand, so they aren't surprised when we say random things, like while waiting at the bus stop.

Tic Disorders (Tourettes)

Unhelpful things

"You're so random!"—We may say or do things that seem random, but we can't control it, so please don't comment on it.

"Look at them!"—Don't draw attention to our tics, as it makes them worse.

"Don't say that, that's rude!"—Sometimes we say rude things when we tic, but we don't mean to be rude, so try to ignore it.

Don't mimic our tics—it's frustrating and upsetting when we feel like people are making fun of us.

Myth-Busters

The exact cause of tic disorders is unknown. We don't tic for attention, and even though some things we say may seem random, silly, or even scary, we don't mean it and can't always control it, so please don't be scared. Tics can feel like an itch we can't resist scratching, so telling us off for tics is like telling someone not to scratch an itch—it makes us feel really uncomfortable.

SUPPORT

My tics are challenging for me to control, so to help me do this effectively, it would be a big help if you give me space when I need it, you don't draw attention to my tics, you don't tell me off for my tics, you give others a heads up about my condition so they know what to expect.

TEACHERS

My teachers often see my tics as a bit of a burden on my classmates, it can be seen as me misbehaving for attention, deliberately distracting my peers or choosing to disrupt the lesson. I wish my teachers understood that I cannot control it, and were a bit more understanding of it.

**Hi, I'm
Campbell,
I'm in year 9,
and I have a
tic-disorder.**

**So you can
understand a
bit more about
my condition,
I'm gonna share
some of my
experiences...**

WHAT MY TICS ARE LIKE

My tics are a combination of motor and vocal tics, sometimes I will jerk my head, hit my hand on things, repeat words or phrases and make sounds. These all happen uncontrollably, and at times where everyone is being quiet.

CHALLENGES

When I'm in social settings I find it quite difficult to concentrate because I'm thinking about managing my tics so much. This might mean I struggle to follow conversations, or topics in my lessons. Both of these things cause me to feel stressed which makes my tics worse.

Helpful things

School can be tough for us, so to help:

Give us a heads-up if you're going to ask us a question.

Play calming music while we work.

Let us choose a pastel color for the paper we work on or read from.

Help with our handwriting and build our confidence by practicing together.

What is it?

Dyslexia is a neurological condition that affects how the brain processes information. It can impact memory, comprehension, spelling, and reading. It's a learning difficulty, so intelligence isn't affected, but the way you learn is. Dysgraphia (writing) and Dyscalculia (numbers and math) are other types of the same condition.

Role models

Many famous people are dyslexic, including Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, Leonardo Da Vinci, Keira Knightley, Tom Cruise, Tom Holland, Muhammad Ali, Richard Branson. These people have achieved amazing things, like mastering physics, inventing leading technology, winning Olympic medals, starring in movies, and topping the charts. If they can do it, imagine what you can achieve too!

Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia

Unhelpful things

"Your handwriting is so messy!"—We've heard it before.

It's more helpful if we can use a scribe or technology to assist us.

"Why are you wearing those silly glasses?"—Some of us wear coloured lenses to help with reading, so please don't draw attention to it.

"Don't ask them to read, they're so slow!"—It might take us longer to read, but comments like this are upsetting.

Please don't call on us to read aloud in class—we need time to prepare.

Myth-Busters

Many people think dyslexia only affects spelling and reading, but it can also impact comprehension and understanding concepts. People with dyslexia are not "slow" or "stupid." Dyslexia is a learning-difficulty, not a learning-disability, so we are just as smart, if not smarter, than those without it! About 1 in 10 people has some degree of dyslexia.

MY FRIENDS

I am lucky, I have really supportive friends, and one of my friends is my own personal spell-checker. She will take a look at every piece of work I complete in class, and takes time to make sure I'm on the right track! Friends like this are so brilliant, and make school that little bit less daunting.

**Hi, I'm Angie,
and I'm in year
10. I have
Dyslexia.**

**So you can
understand a
bit more about
my condition,
I'm gonna share
a bit about my
experiences**

SEEKING SUPPORT

When I moved from South Africa to the UK, I basically had to start again with my journey to get support at school and this took time! My teachers didn't have a great understanding of how Dyslexia affects their students, so it was tough at first, asking for help in class.

SUPPORT IN SCHOOL

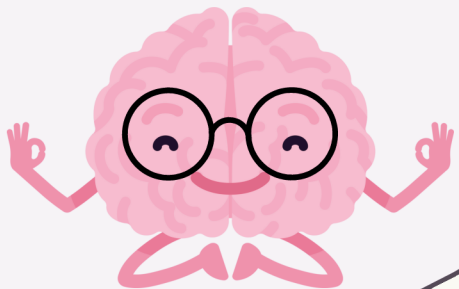
In exams I get extra time, coloured paper, rest breaks, a prompt, a reader, and a scribe to write for me. These things help me to make sure I can do my best. I just wish more teachers understood why these extra things are so important.

MY DYSLEXIA

There are many types of Dyslexia, I have 'Stealth Dyslexia' which can often go undetected. Because of this, I have been called an attention seeker and that I'm faking it. I am neither of those things. I'm just dyslexic. Teachers should know more about how it can affect their students.

How to best support Neurodivergent young people

Every neurodiverse young person is different, so it's important that you ask them what support works best for them and when they'll need it most.



NO SPACE IS ALWAYS A 'SAFE SPACE'

Sometimes, even our usual safe spaces don't help. The best thing for us can be to take a break and rest at home.



SELF-REGULATE WITH US

If we have a strategy that works well, let's use it together. For example, our favourite self-regulation strategy is lazy-8 breathing.



PREPARE US FOR CHANGE

If there's an upcoming change that might affect us, let us know in advance so we can prepare. Let us choose the best alternative.



CREATE A CALM SPACE FOR US

Having a calm space available helps us know where to go when we feel overwhelmed. It helps us re-regulate faster and stay safe. A 'time out' card is also useful, allowing us to take a break whenever we need to step away from an uncomfortable environment.



LEARN ABOUT US & OUR CONDITIONS

To reduce the stigma around Neurodiversity, we need to understand each other better. This pack gives insights from Neurodivergent young people, but everyone's needs are unique. So, take the time to get to know the Neurodivergent people in your life—we're pretty cool.

START

HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?

HOW COULD SOMEONE HELP WHEN YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED?

WHO ARE YOUR ROLEMODELS? WHAT MAKES THEM SPECIAL?

WHAT ARE YOUR GO-TO SELF REGULATION TECHNIQUES?

YOU CAN MAKE ONE NEW SCHOOL RULE! WHAT IS IT AND WHY?

WHERE DO YOU GO WHEN YOU NEED SPACE?

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FIDGET TOOL?

FINISH

WHAT DOES A REALLY GOOD DAY LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN PLANS CHANGE LAST MINUTE & WHY?

WHAT'S ONE HOBBY YOU WISH YOU HAD?

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU WISH YOU WERE BETTER AT?

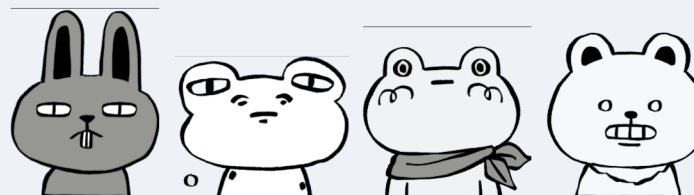
NEURODIVERSE BIG CHATS

GAME BOARD FOR 2 - 4 PLAYERS

This game is designed to spark important conversations between Neurodivergent young people and their friends, families, and teachers.

Our goal is to help you better understand our conditions, so you can provide the best support possible.

TOKENS



INSTRUCTIONS

Players take turns to roll the dice, youngest rolls first.

Play in clockwise order.

Move your token along the path, When a player lands on a square, all players should discuss the question.

The first player to reach the last space wins the game.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU'D LIKE PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

YOU CAN CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE SPACE YOU'RE IN WHAT & WHY?

TELL PLAYERS ONE FUN FACT ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL INTEREST!

WHO CAN YOU GO TO WHEN YOU NEED SUPPORT?

WHAT'S A SPECIAL SKILL YOU HAVE?

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO TO RELAX?

WHAT DAY-TO-DAY THINGS DO YOU DREAD DOING? WHY?

WHAT'S ONE RESOURCE/ TOOL YOU FIND USEFUL?

WHEN DO YOU FEEL THE MOST COMFORTABLE?

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR THE DAY AHEAD?

YOU GET TO BAN ONE THING FROM SCHOOL. WHAT & WHY?

SPOON THEORY



You start the day with a number of spoons. Every day is different, it depends on how much energy you have. Each task takes a different number of spoons, depending on how much effort it needs to complete.

Spoon Theory is a way that you can explain how much energy you use for each every day task.

The spoons represent how much energy it takes to do a task.

If you are faced with a task that needs more spoons than you have, you can say 'I don't have the spoons for that!'

For example, eating breakfast and brushing your teeth might take 1 spoon each. Getting dressed might take 2 spoons. But going to school, where there can be lots of challenges might take 5 spoons.

Resting is the best way to build up your spoons, but if you have a relaxing hobby, like listening to music, watching a movie, knitting or drawing, these can build up spoons too. On the next page you'll see some more ways we like to replenish spoons and self-regulate

Sometimes it can feel like you're running out of spoons. Like if you have a difficult morning, and then an assessment later in the day.

This is where you should think about how to build your spoons back up. There are a few ways of doing this.

Here are some of the strategies we find useful to self-regulate. You might already have your own strategies that work, and that's absolutely fine, but if you want to give ours a go, that's fine too.



On this page you'll see some activities that you can do with your young people that might help you understand us a bit better.

Take 5
Regulation tool



Keep this to use
when you're
dysregulated!



Emotion mapping
tool

Every person feels emotions, but for us these emotions can manifest as big physical feelings too.

To help you understand how this might feel, you can try the following emotional mapping activity.

First, you want to ground yourself in your body, so you're nice and present. We like to imagine a golden thread stretching from the top of our head, up to the sky.

Then warm gold runs over our head, down over our whole body all the way to our feet. Then name an emotion and think of the last time you felt it. Concentrate on where you feel the emotion. Give it a colour and then colour in that part of the body.

Here are some resources we find helpful.
Whether you want to manage your workload at school, practice mindfulness or set yourself a challenge, these apps have it all



Turns any book, photo, or PDF into an audiobook.



Find all the details of the local offer here



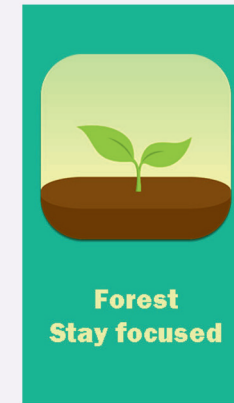
The Calm Zone
Resources to keep young people safe



Calm
Guided meditation to help you relax and sleep



headspace
Helps you meditate to find inner peace



Forest
Helps you to focus while you study



Worry Tree
Helps you manage your worries and thoughts



Here are some additional resources that families, carers, teachers or other professionals might find useful when supporting Neurodivergent young people



The Southend Learning Network offer free courses and training for professionals all year round. Have a look to see what their latest offer is near you!



The SENSational Podcast, created by members of the Witherslack Group are a great way to learn more about neurodivergent conditions and how to offer the best support.



Witherslack Group

Offer free support and training for families and professionals who live and work with young people with SEN. Click the logo to access their sibling support pack.



Thank You!



Although pack has been made by Youth Council members, we have also worked in collaboration with these wonderful organisations and professionals:



SOUTHEND
VIRTUAL SCHOOL
Together We Are Inclusive

With an extra special thanks to Assistant Educational Psychologist, Alice Waters, who believed in this project from the very start.



Get In Touch

From all of us at Southend City Youth Council, thank you for taking time to read, understand and implement the things we've discussed in this pack.

We'd love to hear more about how you're using the pack at home/ school/ your organisation.

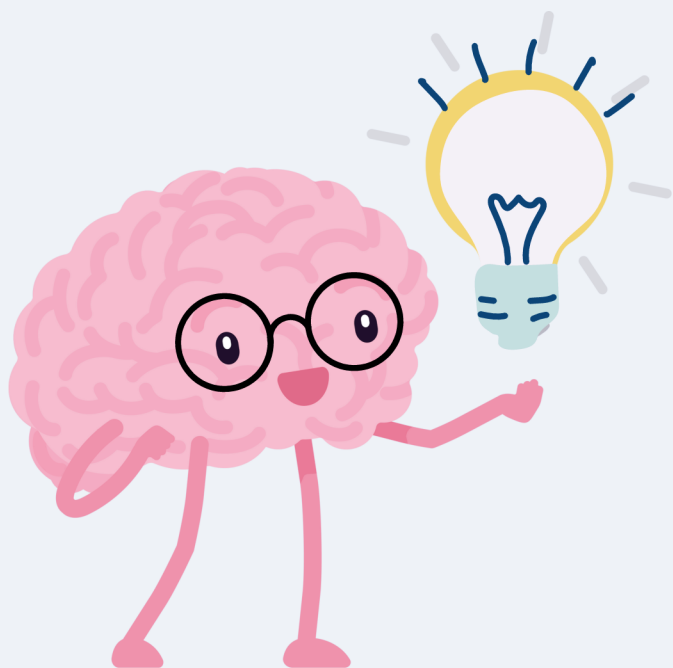
Get in touch with us via email:

✉ YouthVoice@Southend.gov.uk

Visit our website to hear more about the work of Southend City Youth Council



SouthendCityYouthCouncil.com



Cut Outs

You might want to cut out and laminate some of these things to help you engage with the pack

