



'Ask the Expert' Event notes: 21 May 2024

Event hosted by Julie Furney Director of FASD & Clinical Psychologist Dr Naomi Fisher

Julie welcomed all, where she introduced Dr Naomi Fisher, a clinical psychologist author of ['Changing our Minds'](#), 'a Different way to learn', and has a new book being released in October called ['When the naughty step doesn't work'](#); this will be all about an out of the box type parenting called 'low demand parenting' which supports many FASD strategies very well. Naomi will be back to speak to us in November to talk more about this book.

A different way to learn is available to us currently at the discounted rate of 20% with the discount code NFISHER20 via the publisher linked [HERE](#)

This books contain a lot of powerful information that can help carers/parents and schools see education through a neurodiversity lens.

Julie said her grown up daughter refers to Naomi as a 'celebrity' as in their household a celebrity is someone who makes a huge difference to someone else, which she has to many people.

She introduced Dr Fisher as opening up conversations about neurodiversity and making a real change.

Julie asked how she started working in this field.

Naomi replied it was a long and complicated story starting with how much she struggled in school, she was moved around a lot and went to all kinds of different schools, some worked and some didn't. She attended a formal girls grammar school, a comprehensive, a Steiner School. All of them had different rules of things you 'must do' to succeed in life and she started to question that if they all said different things then how can that be right.

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For example one of those things was you must complete year 7, year 8, then year 9 etc but she missed year 7 altogether so she started to think differently.

She was also seen differently at each school. She started to notice that in every school, every year, every class there was the child that no one wanted to be friends with, and suddenly at age 14 that was now her but she hadn't been that person before.

Dr Fisher did her PHD in Autism and as a Clinical Psychologist she always had an interest in learning disabilities but she then specialised in trauma and she always thought that neurodiversity and trauma were two specialisms but is now seeing that both come together and a lot of children with neurodiversity have PTSD.

Thinking about trauma and what we put our children through and having the added trauma of being different.

Dr Fisher's children also don't attend formal education settings.

Julie: In your summing up in the books *changing minds* you state '*nothing is forever*' which is really important to remember when looking at stages of development (not chronological age) and parenting neurodiverse children.

When you are doing things differently as parents you need to remember you are doing them that way for now and having to do it that way in order to survive but it doesn't have to be forever.

Julie: Naomi you gave an example about choosing to do things differently around eating and choosing your battles, can you talk to us about that?

Naomi: Yes my own children really didn't want to eat at the table, they wanted to be on the table, under the table anywhere but at the table.

There is a huge pressure on parents about what the children eat and where they eat and that you must get this in place now and develop good habits because how awful would it be if you were still doing this in 10 years. You must form these habits early but by that rationale why would we ever put children in nappies because what if they never come out of them?

The priority here is the food, not stress not to have a fight but to get them to eat. If they are eating on the sofa with the cat then fine we are not stuck here forever. I never believed my children would be where they are now based on where they were but kids change all the time. We need to ask how can we make life work for now and how can we make that easier.

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Julie stated that children can trigger each other if you have lots of different neurodiversity's in a household.

Naomi: Yes absolutely if they are very different they can absolutely set each other off but are at the **same time magnetically drawn to each other!**..... so if you have very very different needs how do we make it ok for everyone, it's very hard work.

Julie added it's about parenting in the way that it works especially when giving choices can make things worse and also when dealing with something that changes, what works today won't work tomorrow.

It's about how to minimise battles and don't use choices if it makes things worse.

Naomi: Yes that's it exactly, there is a movement to make everything more child led and an impression that that is better but often child led mean more choices, give a child too many choices and they get overwhelmed and go into a tailspin.

You need to ask would you like to do this and then give them time to process that question before asking another not ask would you like to do this, this, this or this?
That will overwhelm them.

1 choice with a yes or no answer and wait for them to answer, a bit like swiping right this no, this yes.

Julie: **For many parents things go very wrong in education where asking them to give limited choices would be the idea.... so how do we get them to understand?**

Question 1 How can we get school to see that they need to do things differently?

Naomi: Something I'm asked so often. It very much depends on the school. Some are not at all open and you MUST conform and some are really open minded and will bend over backwards to support its all about flexibility.

If they are closed minded and rigid, research will not convince them. Collect evidence, make a diary of daily meltdowns that are happening and triggers if you know them and then evidence that doesn't happen over half term.

If they are not interested and not listening and not keen on working together collaboratively and you aren't getting a good vibe from them then it's time to move schools.

You need your time and energy spent on the children not wasted banging your head against a wall.

I talk about the load of parenting in my new book.

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You need to ask how important are the people if its education then very important
How much influence do they have
How open to change are they

Julie: I know a lot of parents feel a huge amount of guilt when they can't make Schools change as it is exhausting to keep fighting and they might feel bad about possibly impacting the children's friendships, parents don't want to change the child's school and disrupt them etc

Naomi: yes and many children will say when asked that they don't want to change, fearful of change, they would rather be where they are now as the fear of the unknown is far greater than anything they are suffering at the time.

It is important to collect evidence for yourself too as quite often you can question yourself especially if the school keep saying they are 'Fine in School' and where they don't see a problem.

[Is the child masking to blend in or to keep safe?](#) Beacon House describe why this happens in the 'Chameleon that blends in to keep safe'.

Julie said its like being and FASD detective where she describes how it can help to write things down in a diary to be able to identify a pattern ie every Tuesday and Thursday they come out of School with their lid off ready to blow, literally like a grenade going off....

Could there be a reason for this?

By noting this in the diary there might be a pattern emerging so where going into School and asking what has been happening on these days that they have a meltdown after School so it might be traced to a trigger....

For example every Tuesday and Thursday they have a maths test or there is a visitor in the classroom etc. This is the trauma response where they hold themselves until they feel safe. Then once the pattern has been found then an adjustment can be made in School to support the trigger.

Naomi: Yes, for example it is a PE day and they need to change and find that difficult. Get as much information about their school day/week as you can and imagine yourself going through that day and how each bit would feel to them.

Do they have to line up in assembly?

Have they got PE that day and you can mark it into red, orange and green sections, is the playground hectic and busy etc.

If there are red sections then what can you do to make those easier, can they go in later to avoid the playground or not do assembly.

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It should be for the parent to make suggestions, you want to believe that the professionals have the answers but they often don't, parents need to own it, you know best!

Julie : Often parents are blamed and shamed.

Naomi: The child is shamed and then the parents are shamed for their parenting, we are often judged by our child's behaviour if we have a badly behaved child then you must be terrible parents, often the compliant child parents are ones that are on the PTA and run sessions and think they know everything but they really don't.

When parents make decision like "we are not eating at the table", or flexible bedtimes we are shamed to admit it but this needs to change to been seen as flexible and responsible parents who are praised.

Julie added yes YOU are the expert in the room, hold that.

Within education they are not the expert on your child... supporting complex needs is really challenging and they can't be expected to know all of the complexities of every child where they are curriculum experts that is what they are trained in, teaching the curriculum.

Supporting Schools to become FASD Informed is the ideal way forwards but given what Naomi says its about choosing a School that have listening ears.

Julie: **Moving onto exam time of year how can we, with the professionals and school do things differently to make them realistic and manageable?**

Naomi: Talking specifically GCSE's hold tight onto the thought that 30% don't pass and they are far less essential to life than people tell you. People say you must have GCSE's to succeed but it really isn't the end of the world if you don't get them. People can do exams at any stage of life when they are developmentally ready.

You need to think about that 'is it important for your child?'

If you have a flexible school some will allow you to take 2 GCSE's this year and 2 next year. Some will take your child out of exams all together.

EXAMS: For guidelines on applying to School / College for adjustments for example: extra rest breaks, extended time, a scribe (writer) or someone to read out the questions, to take exams in a separate room see guidance [HERE](#) & guidelines for support for specific learning disability [HERE](#)

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Question 3 What is self – directed education?

Naomi: For some it is transformational.

Self-directed education is really important, this is where you start with something the child is interested in for example minecraft, horses, sports etc find their passion and take it from there.

Not to keep doing things you don't like or cannot connect to BUT to tune into the things that you are good at or have an interest in.

Julie said for example if a child are passionate about road signs for example how would you direct that.

Naomi: There is so much scope for road signs, what do they mean, what signs do they have in different countries. You can use google maps and actually zoom in on a street in Japan and see their signs, you can design your own signs. You can then learn about traffic calming measures, look into speed bumps, make your own speed bump, design your own traffic calming measures you just follow them down the rabbit hole as an interested adult and use the internet!

Julie: Many worry about a hyperfixation on technology for example Minecraft or Roblox?

Naomi: The first thing to do is play with them. Show an interest, find out about what about it interests them and gently expand it gradually. Find a game similar to Minecraft but different. Independent gaming is great but better if you can join in and learn with them. Find a connection!

If it was football or reading you would take them to matches or the library but Minecraft some parents aren't interested and just leave them to game alone.

Minecraft is now developing so you can create mods and code within the game, try to hook in at the start and join in rather than pull away from it.

You can design houses, cities etc

Julie added that computer games can be one of those things parents are made to feel very blamed and shamed about, comments like 'oh you let them play it for hours' etc

Its like the food example where you are making it work for your family now and supporting a hyperfixation doesn't make it forever.

Naomi: Yes exactly this, being on tech is what they can manage its about learning to value the things that they value.

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My daughter went through a really intense stage around age 7 to 8 years where she was really into a game called terraria, she would talk at me for 2 hours about every character and detail and I wasn't remotely interested but I learnt to play it so that I could engage with her!

Julie said that often the parent isn't seen as good enough at the game to be allowed to play!

Naomi said yes but that's brilliant!

If it makes the child feel competent and clever and an expert in their field which they aren't often given opportunities to do in life.

Naomi is happy for her role in life to be a game loser!

Question 4: How can we create an environment with less demands, he is diagnosed with 'Demand Avoidant' where pushing him to do anything is a firm "no" or where we face a meltdown?

Naomi replied to create an environment with less demands you have to think about what is really important. If you think of the child only having a certain amount of capacity for managing a day and they use it all up by putting on their shoes they will run out of capacity for important stuff like putting on seatbelts in cars for example.

Julie: So maybe don't eat at the table or move to a room that's separate to everyone else as its too triggering. It might not be forever but if it works it works!

Naomi: Exactly!

Things like toothbrushing is important but maybe don't brush your hair.

What can we drop to lessen the demands on that person.

Can you make the route into school as easy as possible.

A parent Naomi has worked with's child used to sleep in their school uniform, they were pre pubescent so not smelly and it worked for them. They were ready for the morning!

It's about saving energy for the important stuff.

Schools tend to keep on top of the little things and ignore the big stuff which I think is the wrong way around, if you reduce the little demands their bucket is full for the big stuff.

Julie added that toothbrushing is so difficult especially if there are sensory issues.

Naomi agreed and added that you can buy online the chewable toothbrushes you can find in service stations.

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You can have non flavoured toothpastes and tri head toothbrushes that mean if you only get the brush in it gets more surfaces in one go.

Also if they find going to the bathroom is too much, pre-load the toothbrush and have them brush their teeth in the lounge.

Julie: **Give yourself permission to be more flexible when the kids are less flexible.**

Question 5: My child is not progressing in School, we think he cruises from one lesson to the next, how can I get support for my son?

Naomi if a child is cruising and school aren't noticing, then collect evidence.

Go in with a collaborative stance that you want them to work with you to help the child do better there is no magic way to make them listen sadly.

Julie: If a child has been excluded and working with the school has broken down completely but home educating isn't an option what can a carer/parent do?

Question 6 What can we do, he just won't go into School, his anxiety is overwhelming him? I cant home school as I have to earn money. What support can I get?

Naomi said if you de-register the child then you aren't entitled to any money or support from the local authority at all but you can come away from the stress and pressure.

If you keep them in school then they should be assessing (Educational Psychologist) to see what is needed, but you do need school to make those referrals or pay privately.

Julie: Ask other parents for recommendations locally or through the support group.

Naomi: Sadly there is a lot of pressure on the schools not to refer to and Educational Psychologist as there is limited funding in the Local Authority.

You can go to the local authority if there is a case for SEN needs, the school may need extra provision from the LA but they have to assess to access those.

It tends to be mainstream or home education. There are Education Other Than School (EOTAS) packages that are funded through an EHCP but you really have to fight your case for that and really show how school has not met needs. This will allow you to access forest school, tutors, locals groups, therapies these are all funded through the EHCP.

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Julie unfortunately most educational psychologists are not trained in FASD and don't understand the complexities of a child with it. It is sometimes best to get a private FASD Informed Ed Psychologist and then the LA then have to consider those reports.

Naomi: Yes agree, you can also get private Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), Occupational Therapist (OT) and Educational Psychologist reports and the LA have to consider those and include them in the EHCP. You can also add in any reports from therapy sessions they have had.

Ask parents on message boards or support groups locally to see what is strong and helpful with EHCP or applying for alternative provision, EOTAS or Specialist Schools. As long as they state they are NHS compliant and registered clinicians they should be accepted.

Question 7: I can't get my child out of the house, we are always late for everything, he refuses to put on a coat, everything is a struggle, how can I support these type of needs?

Julie: Remember that its not forever.

Naomi: Take away the demand leave the house holding the coat, socks, shoes and they can put it on when they are ready and when they ask for it.

Also make your peace with being late for everything and take the pressure off yourself.

If you feel pressured they will feel pressured.

If you have a child who doesn't like you talking to other people and can become very stressed or worrying about eating at the same table as others you can message people to help you relax.

Explain you will probably be late and not be offended if you walk in the other direction and don't talk to them, your child may be successful if there is less stress or if not maybe they will be next time and congratulate yourself at least you got out the house.

Question 8: School sees a child who is 'awkward', who is 'running off', who is getting in trouble for 'acting inappropriately' but she doesn't know what inappropriate means! How can we support School in supporting her?

Naomi: **This is where the school are missing information about the child where they see 'the behaviour' but don't see or understand the reasons.**

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This can be a conversation with the school where you sit them down and explain these are things my child struggles with and when they are struggling you will see these behaviours, ie if they struggle with large groups of people you will see them run off.

They are only seeing the physical manifestation and not why they are doing that.

Some schools will be up for learning and understanding the behaviours.

You can also share what you would do at home that would work better. Show school where the problem is and show strategies I know its putting alot on the parents but school aren't trained to know these things they are trained in curriculum.

Julie: Its helpful to explain to schools that FASD is a brain injury that it is complex and children/young people are easily triggered into flight/flight; they are not awkward behaviours they are a response.

Naomi shared a story of a child that was kicked in the head at the age of 8 by a horse, it left them with a fractured skull and a 'brain injury', the child was completely different from before the accident to after and it was such a straightforward case but school still saw it as behavioural.

The child physically looked the same so they saw it as bad behaviour. You have to ask 'are the school open to change?' and 'are they putting in the effort?'if not leave.

Question 9 With neurodiversity we hear about tuning into their superpowers, could you give a few examples of doing?

Naomi replied she doesn't like the superpowers language ie autism is my superpower as it certainly doesn't feel like it to the child when they are struggling and under pressure.

Julie added that yes to clarify she meant the activity they are good at for example her son and his ability to stack logs into big piles, he sees this as his super power, he is also amazing at bowling where he is able to hyperfocus.

Naomi: Within education you are often told not to do the things you are good at for example we cut out music and art because English and Maths is too important.

You need to tune in and value the things that are valuable to the child even if you think it is a waste of time ie watching youtube videos, praise them for their ability to navigate youtube, watch it with them, they could be watching certain videos they are passionate about that you can find a way to expand.

Remember that going your own way is a strength in itself. This is not forever.

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'I'm doing what's right for me'.
Most adults are trained out of that honesty.

The child often shows us that things need to be different and shines a light on those things, its learning to value them for being disruptive.

Naomi does appreciate that it is not easy to live with!

Julie: Remember to focus on things you need to do with the lessening demands approach.

Naomi: If you push things too early then they learn they can't do it and it will lead to a block later.

For example learning to tie your shoelaces, if you push it before they are ready developmentally to learn it they will find out they can't and then refuse.

You can buy books to help but if they are blocked they won't learn.

Naomi's daughter was 13 years old before she decided to teach herself to tie her laces, she refused to listen to her Mum but instead taught herself by watching youtube videos.

Again it feeds into the shaming of parents, good parents will teach their children to do up their buttons. You don't even need to as there are velcro shoes, slip ons etc it is not an essential skill.

Julie: **To sum up, it's ok to think outside of the box and challenge those trying to keep you in the box.**

[Webinar links to all of Naomi Fishers courses including 'not fine in school' and 'demand avoidance' webinars](#)

[Date of next 'Ask the Expert' 26th JUNE EVENT 8:15 - 9:15pm](#) with Dr Cassie Jackson Clinical Psychologist who will lead a presentation with questions and answers around FASD, Learning Difficulties and Learning Disability.... this will be a bespoke session drilling down into Learning Disability.

We will unpick the importance of getting a 'learning diagnosis', where we hope the session will give you tools in your FASD toolbelt to enable you access a broader range of services to support this need.

1. How is a learning disability diagnosed and does this differ in FASD?

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2. Why is dyslexia and dyscalculia often misdiagnosed in FASD?
3. How does intellectual disability equivalence apply to FASD?
4. Why might a child with FASD collect a number of labels before they find FASD?
5. Does every child with FASD have Learning Disabilities?
6. What is a spiky cognitive profile?
7. What is executive functioning and how does it relate to learning disability?
8. Why is it important to understand learning needs in FASD?
9. How can we support Learning Disabilities in FASD?

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