

# JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

## Coping with Change and New Things

For autistic people dealing with change and new things can have a huge energy cost. Even contemplating change can be painful.

The feeling of newness can be so loud and overwhelming that it obliterates all our other thoughts and internal signals.

Also with the feeling of newness there might be other things happening:

Fear of the unknown

Change to existing routines, which provide support

Lack of clarity, and then overthinking to fill the gaps

It might bring up past trauma

Not being understood by others that this is harder for you

It sets off negative talk and ableist thinking when you can't do it

Here are some tips and strategies which might help to reduce some of these costs:

### NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

When you hear a negative internal voice saying things like "*why isn't my life easier*" or "*you're so lazy*" is there a reply you can say back?

One suggestion is "*I'm doing really well for an autistic person.*"

### ABLEIST THINKING

I've found it useful to notice and label ableist thinking so that I can put it to one side.

For me ableist thinking is '*whenever there's a demand for compliance without first seeking understanding.*'

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The next time a voice says "you should be able to ..." you get to ask "why don't I want to?"

## IS AUTISM A DISABILITY?

For some people autism is a superpower, for others it's a social disability and for some it's Disabling with a capital D.

I tend to switch between all three. They are all valid viewpoints. The problem I have is when someone else tries to tell you it's a superpower on a day when you're struggling.

## UPDATE A SCRIPT

If you need to do something new, can you include it in an existing routine that you have? That way instead of feeling that you are doing a completely new thing, you are updating an existing pattern or script.

## CAN YOU ATTACH IT TO SOMETHING YOU ENJOY?

When I have to do physiotherapy exercises I play my favourite piece of music at the same time.

I found that music works really well if I have to do something that's timed.

## MORE INFO, LESS UNKNOWNNS

What can you find out before you have to do the thing?

*Can you read the instructions, without worrying about having to go any further?  
Can you ask someone else who's done this what it was like?*

For example, I like to use google street view to check out a new area before we go on holiday.

The more you know, the less there's a cost of unknownns.

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## **OVERTHINKING/ CATASTROPHIC THOUGHTS**

An autistic trait is overthinking situations, especially if we don't have clarity on what's going on.

One technique to help with catastrophic thoughts is to ask yourself three questions:

*What is the most positive outcome I can imagine?*

*What is the worst outcome I can imagine?*

*Then what's the most likely?*

The first two answers provide "handrails" as guides for your brain to help answer the third question.

Often we're very good at catastrophizing and imagining the worst outcome, so this exercise helps you balance that trend by also picturing a positive outcome.

## **SOOTHING YOUR SENSES**

Your body will still have a reaction to something new, even if your brain has been reassured.

Make sure you do things that soothe your senses so that you don't feel jangled or carry trauma in your body.

If you don't know what would work, take a few minutes to make a list of things that you really like to touch, smell, see, hear and taste. These are things that can help calm your body and make transitions easier.

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## CHUNK IT DOWN

If a new task seems overwhelming what's the smallest step you can imagine doing?

Someone recommended *Goblin Tools* which uses A.I. to break tasks down into steps: <https://goblin.tools/>

## IT WON'T ALWAYS BE NEW

If something is good for me I remind myself that it won't always be new. That helps me keep going until the newness fades.

## MORE TIPS AND STRATEGIES

The autistic community is full of hacks and workarounds. I like following some people on YouTube and Instagram who give good ideas, such as

Autistic youtuber "Yo Samdy Sam": <https://www.youtube.com/@YoSamdySam>  
and Becky Ellis on Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/neuro\\_divers](https://www.instagram.com/neuro_divers)

I hope that helps. Please send me a message if you'd like to chat further or there are other ideas you'd like me to add.

Best wishes,

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