Cygnet Evaluation 2025-26

Cygnet is a parenting support programme for parents/carers of autistic children and young people aged 5-18 years of age. The courses run over six sessions, aiming to support parent/carers understanding of autism, offer practical strategies to support their child and the opportunity to meet with other families in similar positions to share experiences.

Swindon Educational Psychology Service, along with Swindon SEND Families Voice (SSFV), ran five main Cygnet courses during the academic year 2025-26. A total of 33 parents/carers attended the training (at least 4/6 sessions) across the five courses and responded to the main Cygnet course evaluation. 6 parents/carers also attended the 'Siblings' course.

Attendees were asked to rate their confidence in understanding and responding to their child's needs linked to autism. This was completed at the start and end of the course, as seen in the table below. 0= not at all, 5= very confident

Statement	Pre-course rating	Post-course rating
Understanding your child's need for routines and to engage with special interests	3.5	4.7
Supporting your child's need for routines and to engage in special interests	3.1	4.5
Understanding that your child may experience their senses differently	3.3	4.6
Supporting your child with their sensory experiences	3	4.3
Understanding that your child might have difficulties with social interactions and social situations	3	4.6
Supporting your child with social interactions and social situations	2.8	4.2
Recognising how your child understands and receives communication	2.7	4.2
Understanding that your child might have differences in how express communication	2.8	4.5
Selecting and using resources to support your child's communication, e.g. visual supports, social stories	2.7	4.7
Understanding that your child might have difficulties planning ahead and predicting outcomes	2.4	4.8
Recognising and understanding why your child might become overwhelmed and/or emotionally distressed	2.9	4.4
Supporting your child when they are overwhelmed and/or emotionally distressed	2.6	4
Knowing where to go for support either locally or nationally	2.1	3.6
Recognising your own needs and looking after yourself	1.8	3.3
Supporting your child with their needs around sleeping	2.5	4
Supporting your child(ren) and helping them to understand and support the needs of their sibling who is autistic	2.5	3.4
Supporting your children's development around puberty, sexual wellbeing and relationships	2	2.9

There was an average increase in confidence ratings across all statements. The largest increase (2.4) can be seen in 'Understanding that your child might have difficulties planning ahead and predicting outcomes'. Other significant increases included 'Selecting and using resources to support communication' (2), 'Understanding differences in expressing communication' (1.7) and 'Understanding difficulties with social interactions and social situations' (1.6).

Two groups completed the post course evaluation, a separate evaluation which focused on course content and delivery. Five responses were gathered. Participants were asked how relevant they felt the sessions were to them on a scale of 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = essential). They gave an average score of 8.8.

An average score of 9.4 was given for the usefulness of the Barnardo's materials. Parents/carers were also asked to rate how helpful the trainers were (1 = very poor, 10 = excellent) and they gave an average score of 9.8.

When asked what they found most useful from the course, two main themes emerged:

A shared understanding

"Being with other parents/carers who understand."

"A far better understanding of autism and the varying factors that may affect my child."

Useful tools

"Lots of approaches and concepts to think about."

"Tools to help manage behavioural situations."

Parents/carers rated the ability to share experiences with other parents/carers 9.6 out of 10 (1 = not helpful at all, 10 = extremely helpful).

When asked to provide details on what differences had been noticed for parent/carers and their families as a result of completing the course, participants responded:

"I started the STAR analysis straight away, this has helped me show school a clearer picture of what is happening."

"I feel more patient and listen more to try understand. I explain the reasons why now instead of saying just 'no that's not ok''."

Other comments from the parents/carers:

"The trainers are kind, caring and understanding."
"This course will definitely be positive for our family."
"The in person facilitators and email support team were all super."

Parents and carers were also asked what improvements they thought could be made to the course:

"Sessions felt a bit too long."
"The first two sessions spent a lot of time getting to know each other but throughout the course there was not consistent attendance so that time could have been reduced."

2 sessions were run for the ‘Siblings’ course and 6 parents/carers attended.

Question	Pre-course rating	Post-course
I understand how children's development stages can affect sibling relationships	3.2	4.2
I understand areas of communication which include successes, thinking, social interaction and communication can impact on sibling relationships	3.6	3.6
I understand why thoughts and feelings children have affect sibling relationships	3.4	4
I understand why children experience the thoughts and feelings about their siblings	2.8	4
I understand the parent/carer role in shaping sibling relationships	3.4	4
I understand how eye care or eyesight as a parent/carer will benefit the children's sibling relationship	2.8	3.4
I understand the benefits of talking with children about autism to support sibling relationships	3.4	4
I am confident talking about autism with my children	4	4.2
I understand the benefits of supporting my children with their difficult feelings to support sibling relationships	3.4	3.8
I am confident supporting my children with their difficult feelings	3.4	3.8
I am confident supporting my children with their friendships	2.8	3.4
I am confident supporting my children with their sibling relationship	3.2	3.6

There was an average increase across almost all of the questions (with only Question 2 with no increase). The largest increase (1.2) can be seen in ‘I understand why children experience thoughts and feelings about their siblings’. Other areas of improvement include ‘Understanding how children’s development stages can affect sibling relationships’ (1) and ‘Understanding why children’s thoughts and feelings affect sibling relationships’ (0.6).

A ‘Sleep’ and ‘Puberty’ course were also delivered with 7 parents/carers attending the ‘Sleep’ course and 9 parents/carers attending the ‘Puberty’ course however pre and post questionnaires were not accessed for these courses.