

Ethan's Journey*

Oakhurst Lodge, Southampton

Specialist Residential Service for Adults with Autism and Learning Disabilities who May Present with Behaviours that Challenge

Ethan's history

Ethan has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), severe learning disability and behaviours that may challenge. He attended a specialist residential school in his youth as his needs were not able to be met at home.

He had been violent towards his immediate family and they felt he should continue into residential care after he completed his schooling.

When Ethan came to us

When Ethan arrived at Oakhurst Lodge he was extremely anxious, due to these feelings he would often become violent and aggressive towards staff and peers and at times would require physical interventions.

Ethan's anxieties affected all aspects of his life, he was unable to go on holiday or even go out and do activities that he enjoyed. It was all too overwhelming and would lead to him feeling extremely distressed.

Anything new or any changes to his usual routine, including increased staffing would concern him. Even visits from his family made him feel on edge, he would refuse to come out of his room during events that family members were invited to.

Despite the complete change in his world, they have kept him safe and supported. It has been extremely difficult for us not to be able to visit him, however the reassurance that he is happy is enormous. The staff have all worked so hard and definitely go the extra mile. He is fortunate to be cared for by such a caring, professional group of people.

- Family Member



Ethan's care

It was clear to the team at Oakhurst Lodge that Ethan needed lots of reassurance, he would frequently ask lots of questions and they would take the time to answer them to help him feel calmer.

A stable staffing team with a thorough understanding of Ethan's needs was key in supporting him. The more time they spent with Ethan, the more strategies were developed to encourage him to complete tasks or take part in activities. They also began to recognise the more subtle early signs of distress to prevent his anxiety from escalating.

They recognised that he would pick up on staff's anxieties which would cause him to worry, so a very calm, relaxed and happy approach was used. The team learnt about Ethan's likes and dislikes and used positive distractions whilst doing his daily tasks, for example chatting about his favourite things. They also found ways to integrate more exercise into Ethan's day without him feeling like it was a planned activity, like parking a little further away from their destination.

The multi-disciplinary team (MDT) worked closely together to give a consistent approach. The psychology team supported by sharing grounding strategies around times of anxiety and they also supported the implementation of an activity plan, alongside the activity coordinator which would offer him a wide range of activities.

This included accessing sensory strategies and support with communication during the various emotional cycles he may experience.

Due to Ethan's anxiety around appointments, trips out, or any other changes in his usual routine, the team changed their approach and took things step by step. He responded well to this and would be happy to follow the team's guidance resulting in him getting him to where he needed to go.

They wouldn't overload Ethan with information and plans were not shared with him until he was arriving. Through this method, they have managed very successful trips with him to Yorkshire and London, which no-one thought was possible a few years ago.

Ethan today

Overall, Ethan is much calmer and settled now. The staff team now understand that if they remain positive and happy, this is mirrored in Ethan's presentation. With the team's consistent support he has coped incredibly well with the changes that the COVID-19 lockdown has brought. He has adjusted to taking part in more in-house activities and is now happy to have his family visit the home.

His family have commented on how happy and healthy Ethan looks.

Although he still experiences anxiety, the strength and knowledge of the team means that they can communicate well with him to alleviate the negative feelings which has resulted in his incidents reducing significantly. Ethan is looking forward to getting back to his favourite activities; going to the theatre and cinema, but in the meantime, he has been continuing to build his already huge DVD collection.



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*Name has been changed to protect his identity

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