

A Day in the Life Series.



Visiting the Doctor

Finding the courage and determination to visit your doctor to talk about a problem that you're facing is difficult. However, it's incredibly important not to put off going to see a medical professional when you need to. In serious cases, it can be the difference between sorting out a problem before it becomes really dangerous and delaying so long that nothing can be done. Doctor's surgeries are stressful environments for most people, but particular for autistic people. These sorts of places are often not designed with autistic people in mind.

In this handout, you'll read about two versions of a trip to a doctor's surgery. The first version doesn't go very well, and highlights some of the common problems that an autistic person might face on such a trip. The second goes much better, and might give you some ideas about things you could do to make your visit less stressful.

Some of the solutions are things you can do yourself while there, or prepare beforehand, and some of them are things your doctor, a friend, a family member, or a carer can help you with. Not every solution will work for every person, or even necessarily be achievable in your particular circumstances. Remember, these are just suggestions. Every experience will be different, and sometimes despite your best planning, your visit might still be difficult.

Don't blame yourself if things go wrong on this sort of trip. Even the best planned and prepared trip in the world can still go off the rails if something unexpected happens. Self-compassion is a useful practice when things go wrong. (There is a self-compassion handout available that you might find interesting if you want to know more about this.)

The story is illustrated with colourful frogs that represent energy levels, and you can learn more about this in the frog system handouts.

Green Frog



Yellow Frog



Orange Frog



Red Frog





Visiting the Doctor - A Negative Experience

Today, you have to visit the doctor. Unfortunately, no one is available to come with you, so you have to go alone. This makes everything a little bit more stressful, since you don't have anyone to rely on for support. In fact, you've been quite stressed about this appointment all week, so you haven't had any time to charge up your internal energy battery.



You wake up a little bit later than intended because you didn't sleep very well, and this means you're rushed all morning as you get ready. By the time you leave the house, the traffic is worse than you had expected. You haven't had time to think about where to park your car, and the carpark at the doctor's surgery is full, so you end up driving around the nearby streets, looking for a free space.

You finally get to the doctor's surgery just a few minutes after your appointment is due to start. The surgery is running a little bit behind schedule, so luckily you haven't missed your appointment. There are lots of people in the waiting room, coming and going, and talking to each other and the receptionist. It's all a bit too busy and noisy. Also, the lights are really bright and harsh and one of them is buzzing in a distracting and annoying way.



You end up waiting quite a while. You didn't bring anything to occupy your attention, so you just have to sit and hope your name is called soon. You've not really prepared what you are going to say to your doctor, but you should be able to remember all the things you think you need to bring up.

The appointment is very stressful, and you're not sure you explained your problem correctly. You manage to find your way back to your car. It's not a relaxing environment, and you have to drive all the way back home now too. It's all been a bit much, and you're not certain your problem is going to be resolved. You'll probably have to come back again.





Visiting the Doctor - A Positive Experience

Today, you have to visit the doctor. Luckily, a trusted family member is able to come with you, which will make everything a little bit easier. Knowing that you had this stressful appointment today, you've taken a number of steps this past week to make sure your internal energy battery is as fully charged as it can be.



You've given yourself as much extra time as you possibly can. You might get to the doctor's surgery very early, but it's worth it to compensate for any unexpected delays, which will only stress you further. Indeed, whilst you've planned where you are going to park, in the surgery carpark, when you get there, it's full. Luckily, you have a backup plan and plenty of time to put it into practice. You find another parking space and get to the surgery with plenty of time.



You've explained about how stressful you find waiting rooms, and your doctor has put aside a small room for you to use while you are waiting. There is no one else in there besides you and your family member, and it's very quiet. You can control the lights too. Since you knew you might be waiting a while, you've brought some things to do. You have a magazine to read, and a sensory fidget to keep yourself occupied.



Over the last few days, you and your family member have rehearsed what you might say to the doctor. You give the script in your head one last read-through. It's ok if you forget one or two things, because you've brought a letter to hand to your doctor which will clearly explain your problem in full detail. (There is also a handout about writing to your doctor to explain medical problems.)

The appointment is very stressful, but you feel like it went well, and with the help of your letter, you're sure the doctor understood exactly what was wrong. You and your family member head back to the car, where you've prepared a few things to help recharge and feel less stressed. You have something to drink and a snack that you really like, as well as some music to listen to on the drive home. You feel much better having started on the path to sorting out your medical issue, and you feel more confident about returning to the doctor in future.

