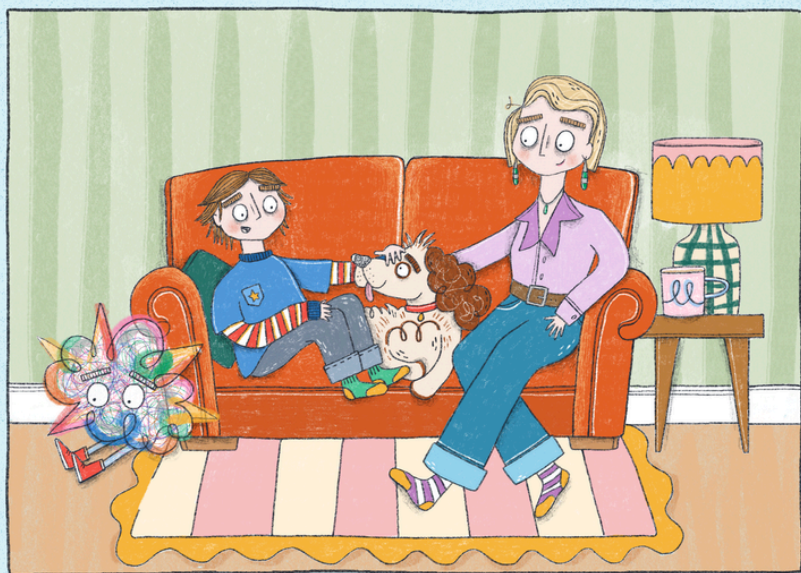


Reconnecting after a flare

Dr Vicky Queralt, Clinical Psychologist



'A quiet moment of comfort and connection. Nearby, 'the flare' rests on the floor; present but no longer in the centre of things.'

Illustration and quote by Anna Edgell

Reconnecting after a flare

PANS and PANDAS are conditions characterised by sudden, unexplained neuropsychiatric symptoms. 'Flares' are periods of time when these symptoms are heightened; an experience which can be exhausting and isolating for the whole family.

Finding ways to reconnect after a flare can help restore balance and create a sense of safety for everyone. Vicky Queralt, Clinical Psychologist, suggests a variety of reconnection strategies to support you and your family.

Restoring the balance

"As a parent, you are not only trying to stay afloat yourself, but also support a child in distress, reassure siblings and keep the family functioning. It's a lot.

Whatever symptoms your child is experiencing, know that you are not alone and that there is hope."

Vicky

Taking care of yourself

Caring for a child during and after a flare takes an immense amount of energy, and parents often prioritise their child's well-being over their own. While this is understandable, remember that you matter too. Taking care of yourself is essential for supporting your family through tough moments.

Self compassion: kindness toward yourself

You are doing an incredible job. Flares are unpredictable and overwhelming, and none of this is your fault. Practicing self-compassion means treating yourself with the same kindness you would show a friend in a tough situation. It's about giving yourself permission to have hard moments without judgment and allowing yourself to rest or ask for help when needed. Try and remember that healing takes time - for your child, your family, and you.

Small acts of self-care

Finding small ways to care for yourself, even for just a few minutes, can help you keep going.

Whether it's stepping outside for fresh air, listening to your favourite song, taking a short walk or connecting with someone who understands, these simple acts can bring a sense of steadiness.



Helping your child reconnect

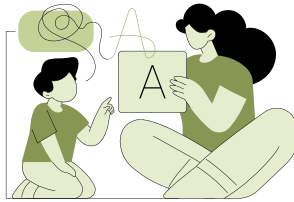
After a flare, your child might feel confused, overwhelmed or guilty. Reconnecting with them requires patience and understanding, and sometimes a bit of creativity.

Making space for emotions

Your child may be feeling many different emotions, but might not know how to explain them. It is important to give them space to express whatever they might be feeling or thinking without pressure or judgement. Sometimes, simply listening and validating their experience can help them feel heard and this in itself can be healing.

Some children and young people may not want to talk, or find it hard to express how they feel, and that's okay. You could consider alternative ways of helping them express themselves, such as through playing, writing or drawing.

For older children, who may not want to talk to a parent, suggesting they can talk to a trusted family member, teacher or friend can be comforting. However they choose to express themselves, know that simply being present, calm and acknowledging that they've had a difficult time can help them feel cared for, safe and not alone.



Maintaining stability

When life feels unsure or unpredictable, small routines can offer stability and comfort.

Simple, predictable moments like bedtime stories, eating at the same time, going for a short walk at the same time, or a nightly check-in can help your child (and family) feel safe and grounded.

Reconnecting through small activities

Reconnecting with your child doesn't have to be a big effort and doesn't need to involve deep conversations. It is about finding familiar, low pressure, moments, such as cooking or eating a comforting meal, watching a favourite film, playing a simple game, looking at a book, doing a craft activity, building a Lego model or going for a gentle walk together.

These small moments of connection can help to rebuild a sense of normality and belonging.



Reconnecting the family unit

Flares can take an emotional toll on everyone. As your family recover together, it is important to fully recognise the full spectrum of feelings.

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Containing difficult emotions

After a flare, each member of the family might feel a mix of exhaustion, confusion, upset or even resentment. Once you've had a moment to breathe, acknowledge these feelings.

Remind your family that, even in tough times, they are loved and safe. Phrases like, "I know it was hard, but you were incredibly brave" can help to foster understanding and healing within the family.



Recognising strengths

It's tempting to want to quickly forget about a flare and move on. However, reflecting on moments of strength and resilience can be empowering. Take time to notice and acknowledge small acts of bravery. This could be the effort it took for your child to come out of their room, a sibling showing patience in a tough moment or a small act of kindness within the family.

These moments of courage can help rebuild a sense of pride and connection as a family.



Reconnecting with friends

Flares can often lead to social withdrawal, maybe extended family and friends do not fully understand what you're going through. Sharing resources from PANS PANDAS UK can help others to understand the conditions, and what support you may need.

Reconnecting with the important people in your life, in your own way, can help you feel less isolated and more supported during these times.

Supporting siblings

Flares can feel unpredictable and confusing for siblings. They might experience a mix of emotions and be unsure how to reconnect.

Acknowledge their experience

Siblings may feel overlooked or forgotten, and it's important to acknowledge their feelings, or wonder with them how they might be feeling. Let them know it's okay to feel how they feel, and remind them that the flare is not anyone's fault. Simply acknowledging their experience helps them feel seen and valued.

Help siblings reconnect

Rebuilding sibling bonds can't be forced. It's about offering opportunities for connection through shared activities that both siblings enjoy.

Whether it's baking, watching TV or playing a game together, keep the pressure low and let them reconnect at their own pace. Sometimes even playful or silly moments can break the ice and bring them closer.



Building resilience

The strong connections that come with reconnecting can help you and your family build resilience and manage any future flares together.

Personalise your reconnection

The suggestions above are all based on clinical experience, but every family will navigate flares and recovery in their own unique ways.

Reconnection doesn't look the same for everyone, so choose the strategies that might work best for you and your family.

Preparing everyone for future flares

While it's hard to predict if, or when, there might be another flare, having a plan in place can make future challenges feel more manageable.

Reflect on what helped you during the flare and think about what could ease things if there is a next time. This sense of preparedness can provide comfort during uncertainty.

Our family connection plan

Ideas we can come back to when things feel difficult

After a flare, family members often need extra time and care to reconnect. It is also common to feel worn out, and it may not always be easy to think clearly in the moment. Use this page to add ideas and reminders that might help you and your family, and return to them whenever you need.

Things that help our family stay connected

- A routine we want to protect:

- Activities we enjoy together:

- People we can ask for help or support:

Things that help our family feel safe

- Familiar activities:

- Comforting things in our home:

- Words or phrases that feel reassuring:

Your space

Supporting a family during and after a flare can be exhausting. You can use this space to write, draw or doodle anything that comes to mind, things that can help you relax and find a moment of calm.

Things that help me take care of myself

- A reminder I need in the moment

- Ways I can care for myself

- Someone or something that helps me feel supported

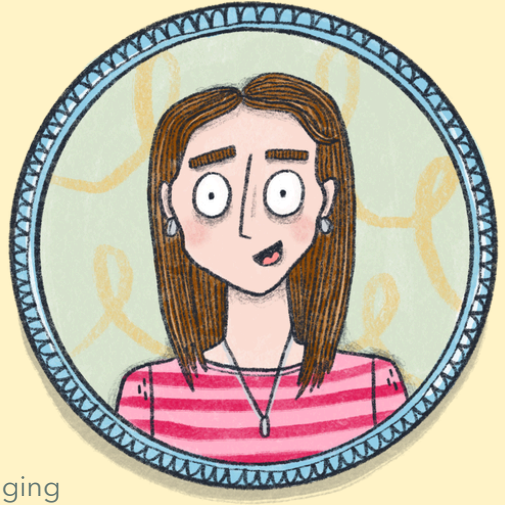


Dr Vicky Queralt

Dr Vicky Queralt is a Clinical Psychologist and Trustee for PANS PANDAS UK.

She has extensive experience in supporting children, young people, and their families.

Vicky is passionate about creating compassionate, accessible, and engaging resources that help families navigate life's challenges and support every family member's emotional wellbeing.



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printed booklet
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We hope you have found this resource useful. If you have developed other strategies that work well for your family, please consider sharing them with PANS PANDAS UK:

info@panspandasuk.org

Your experiences could help others in the PANS and PANDAS community.

