TOM TOM UNIVERSE

The Four Pillars Home Resource Pack

A practical, flexible introduction for neurodivergent homes

Brian’s • Waves • Circles • Bridges

A free family resource by Counsellor Tomass J. Wood

www.tomtomuniverse.co.uk

A gentle starting point for understanding thoughts, feelings, routines, communication, interests and connection at home. Use the parts that fit your child and leave the rest.

This is an educational resource and a developing framework. It is not a diagnostic tool, a clinical treatment or a substitute for a child’s communication system, health care, education plan or safeguarding support.

Welcome to the Four Pillars

The Four Pillars give families a shared set of ideas for noticing what may be happening inside and around a child, making everyday life more understandable, and finding ways to communicate and connect. The aim is not to make a child behave in a particular way. The aim is to help adults listen, adapt and respond.

> **“My system is everything I wish I would have had at that age.”**

Tom Tom grew from Counsellor Tomass J. Wood’s own childhood experiences and his work in mental health. In Tom Tom’s stories, Brian’s, Waves, Circles and Bridges help make big inner experiences easier to talk about. At home, a child can use the pictures, words, characters, objects, movement or routines that make sense to them. They never have to use the metaphors themselves.

What is inside

- A plain-language introduction to each pillar and how they work together.
- Suggestions for different communication, sensory, learning and support needs, including a dedicated non-speaking section.
- A four-week, low-pressure home introduction with everyday examples.
- Printable family tools: a choice and needs board, routine strip, wave check-in, bridge planner and reflection sheet.
- Tom Tom Universe character examples and notes on using books, stories and play.
- A short review log to help a family notice what is useful and what needs changing.

The four pillars at a glance

Pillar	A family question	What adults can do
Brian’s	What might my mind be doing?	Wonder about thoughts, ideas, worries, curiosity, safety and needs without guessing.
Waves	What is changing in my body, feelings or surroundings?	Notice demands and signals; offer support, space, time or a different way.
Circles	What helps me know what is happening next?	Make routines, transitions and changes understandable and flexible.
Bridges	What helps me connect, communicate or take part?	Build from interests, trusted relationships and accessible ways to join in.

Start with your child

There is no single autistic experience. Children differ in how they communicate, learn, sense, move, play, manage change and show distress. The same child may need different support on different days. A diagnosis label does not tell you which strategy will help.

Begin with these principles

- **Presume competence.** A child may understand more than they can show in a spoken answer or familiar activity.
- **Keep communication accessible.** Keep the child's AAC, communication book, signs, gestures, writing, pictures or other established method within reach and charged/ready as appropriate.
- **Offer real choices.** Include "no", "not now", "not sure", "something else" and a way to stop or leave where safe.
- **Allow processing time.** Ask once, wait, and avoid filling the pause with repeated questions.
- **Notice before interpreting.** Describe what happened; treat your explanation as a possibility to check.
- **Adapt the environment.** Reduce barriers, demands, noise, light, touch, uncertainty or time pressure where possible.
- **Respect regulation.** Harmless movement, repeated play, quiet, stimming and time alone can support wellbeing.
- **Repair when you get it wrong.** Say so simply, restore access and try again.

A simple adult sequence

1. Make access ready	2. Invite, do not test	3. Wait and notice	4. Respond and review
Put communication and useful supports within reach.	Offer one meaningful invitation or option.	Look for the child's own response; do not infer consent from silence.	Acknowledge, act where possible, then notice whether it helped.

Important: Do not use a pillar label to explain away pain, illness, bullying, abuse, unmet care needs or a safeguarding concern. Follow the appropriate health, education and safeguarding routes.

1. Brian’s: thoughts, ideas and inner voices

In Tom Tom’s world, “Brian’s” is a friendly way to talk about the different thoughts and inner messages a person may notice. A Curious Brian may ask questions; a Worry Brian may imagine what could go wrong; an Imagination Brian may invent a whole new world; a Safety Brian may look for what feels safe. These are story metaphors, not separate brain parts or fixed personality types.

At home

- Use a character or thought name only if your child enjoys it. They may prefer “my thought”, a drawing, a character, a colour or no label.
- Talk about thoughts as experiences, not as the child’s identity: “A worry thought has arrived” rather than “You are a worrier.”
- Make space for mixed thoughts: “One part wants to go and one part wants to stay.” Do not force a positive answer.
- Ask what might help instead of correcting the thought: “Would information, time, a plan or someone nearby help?”

Try this

> **“I can see it is hard to decide. Would you like to show me, tell me, write it, use your device, or leave it for now?”**

Example: Tom Tom is worried about a new club. Nanny Jax does not tell him there is nothing to worry about. She asks whether he wants to see a photo, know who will be there, take a familiar object, or decide later. His choice shapes the plan.

2. Waves: feelings, body signals and demands

Waves describe experiences that rise, fall, change or arrive unexpectedly. A wave might relate to sound, tiredness, excitement, worry, pain, hunger, social effort, a change of plan or several things at once. A child does not need to name a feeling before receiving support.

- Notice what changed just before the child seemed overwhelmed, withdrawn, restless, unusually quiet or unable to continue.
- Offer concrete supports: quieter space, less light, movement, water, food, rest, time, help, fewer words or a change of activity.
- Do not insist that the child calm down, explain themselves, make eye contact or stop harmless movement before receiving support.
- If pain or illness may be involved, check health needs and seek appropriate medical advice.

> **“Your wave looks big to me, but I might be wrong. Would help, quiet, space, time, or something else be useful?”**

Tom Tom and his Pound Pups might show that a wave is growing through a story or play. The child can watch, change the story, walk away or use another way to communicate.

3. Circles: routines, predictability and change

Circles represent familiar patterns, routines and the comfort of knowing what comes next. A routine can make life easier; it can also become too rigid or stop fitting. Circles should offer predictability with room for the child's needs, choice and changing circumstances.

- Show "now / next / later / finished" in the child's accessible format.
- Give notice of changes in a way the child can use: a visual, written note, object cue, calendar, timer, model or short spoken message.
- When plans change, state what changed and what is still the same. Offer a revised plan and time to process.
- Keep routines supportive rather than using them as a reward, threat or compliance test.
- If a routine cannot happen, acknowledge the disappointment and help build a manageable alternative.

> **"The park is closed today. We can show the new plan. Would you like the garden, a walk, or to choose another time?"**

In Tom Tom's world, Nanny Elcy and Pops can help make family routines warm and familiar. The family still adjusts when Tom Tom needs more time or the plan changes.

4. Bridges: connection, interests and participation

Bridges are ways into communication, relationships, learning and shared activity. A bridge may be a favourite subject, a trusted person, parallel play, a shared joke, a song, a book, a game, a walk or simply being nearby without pressure.

- Follow the child's interest before inviting them into yours.
- Offer ways to join that do not require speaking, eye contact, touching or group participation.
- Let watching, listening, side-by-side activity and leaving early count as valid ways to participate.
- Use trusted relationships while respecting the child's boundaries and privacy.
- Build a bridge both ways: adults can learn the child's interests, and children can choose whether to explore something new.

> **"You can play, watch, tell me about it, or have your own space. I'm here if you want me."**

Tom Tom might connect through a marching-band rhythm, his Pound Pups, a carnival, a music box or a question he cannot stop exploring. Follow what matters to the child in front of you; do not assume every child will like Tom Tom's interests.

Different autistic experiences need different routes

These are prompts for adapting the adult response, not categories children have to fit. A child can match several descriptions or none. Ask the child and family what works, then keep reviewing.

If your child speaks fluently but finds feelings hard to name

- Offer concrete choices, body maps, drawings or “something else”; do not require precise emotion words.
- Allow private or delayed communication, such as a note, text, message or conversation later.
- Talk after recovery, not during overload, and ask whether the child wants a solution or someone to listen.

If your child has strong sensory differences

- Look for environmental patterns and make practical adjustments before asking the child to tolerate more.
- Offer access to preferred sensory supports and movement. Do not introduce sensory techniques as treatment without qualified guidance.
- Use the child’s own words for sound, light, texture, smell, taste, temperature, pain and body signals.

If change, uncertainty or transitions are difficult

- Make the plan visible and specific. Include when the plan may change and how the child can ask for more information.
- Use a flexible preview: show, practise, read, visit, map or describe only as useful to that child.
- Keep an honest “change of plan” option. A visual schedule should not promise what adults cannot guarantee.

If demands can feel overwhelming or unsafe

- Reduce unnecessary instructions and time pressure. Offer collaboration, choice over order, or an invitation to pause.
- Avoid power struggles, surprise demands, threats, forced eye contact or withholding needed support.
- When something must happen for immediate safety, use the least distressing approach, explain accessibly and reconnect afterwards.

If your child has a learning disability or needs substantial daily support

- Use short, concrete language and familiar objects, photos, symbols or demonstrations where these are already meaningful.
- Break activities into manageable parts and allow the child to respond through their established method.
- Do not assume a child cannot understand because they do not speak or complete a worksheet.

If ADHD, anxiety, trauma, sleep difficulty or health needs overlap

- Plan for attention, energy, recovery and competing needs. Offer movement, breaks and fewer simultaneous demands.
- Use the child’s existing clinical, educational and family support plans. The Four Pillars do not assess or treat these conditions.

A child’s age, culture, language, family situation, identity, sensory profile and access to support all matter. Use age-respectful materials and the child’s preferred words.

A dedicated guide for non-speaking children

Some autistic children do not use speech, use only a little speech, or cannot rely on speech in every situation. “Non-speaking” does not mean non-understanding, and speech may vary by context, stress, fatigue or health. Use the word your child and family prefer.

Keep the child’s communication available

- Keep their established AAC device, communication book, symbols, signs, gestures, writing or other system available, charged and within reach as appropriate.
- Do not remove, hide or restrict AAC to encourage speech or cooperation. The Four Pillars never replace a child’s existing communication system.
- Do not change a familiar AAC layout or vocabulary without the child and relevant communication professionals.
- Allow the child’s usual processing and message-building time. Do not assume a response from a movement unless its meaning is established for that child.

Talk with the child, not only about the child

- Speak naturally to the child. Use clear, respectful language and give time for a response.
- Offer a way to say yes, no, stop, not now, not sure, help, pain, break, more, finished and something else, using the child’s established access method.
- Make choices balanced and genuine. Include a real option to refuse; avoid asking questions when only one answer is acceptable.
- Check ambiguous messages neutrally. “I’m not sure I understood. Can you show me another way?” Accept correction.
- Do not ask another person to speak for the child unless the child chooses that support. A communication partner must not supply a preferred answer and attribute it to the child.

How each pillar can work without speech

Pillar	Accessible home practice
Brian’s	Offer pictures, objects, writing, typing, AAC vocabulary or quiet observation for ideas and preferences. Do not expect the child to identify a thought label.
Waves	Make “help / break / quiet / space / pain / not sure / something else” accessible through their established system. Notice context and act on the message.
Circles	Use a familiar visual, object cue or written sequence if the child already understands it. Show changes honestly and provide a way to object.
Bridges	Share an interest through play, music, a book, parallel activity, a favourite object or AAC. Let the child lead, pause or leave.

About picture boards and this pack

The printable boards later in this pack are optional conversation prompts. They are not an AAC assessment, a complete communication system or a replacement for personalised communication support. A child may not understand these symbols or may access them differently. Use only what is meaningful and accessible to that child; ask their speech and language therapist or AAC team when appropriate.

> **Silence is not consent. An unclear response is not a confirmed choice. Keep listening, make access easier and give the child another route.**

A gentle four-week home introduction

This is an optional starting sequence, not a treatment schedule. Move at your family's pace. One meaningful moment is enough. Skip a week, repeat a week or stop if the activity adds pressure. Your child can watch, participate another way or decline.

Before week one

- Choose one everyday moment where support might help: getting ready, mealtime, a change of plan, homework, play, bedtime or leaving home.
- Ask yourself what communication and comfort supports are already useful. Make them available.
- Pick one child-led way to introduce the ideas: a Tom Tom story, a drawing, a conversation, a toy, a family example or a simple poster.

Week 1: Brian's - what might be on my mind?

Share a low-pressure example from a character or adult. Invite the child to add an idea, choose a picture, use their communication method or pass. Try: "Tom Tom has a Curious Brian asking about the parade. What might your mind be thinking today?" Do not require a personal disclosure.

Week 2: Waves - what support might help?

Notice one change in the environment or demand and offer a practical choice. Try: "It's noisy in here. We can stay, move, use your headphones or take a break. What works for you?" A child can receive support without naming an emotion.

Week 3: Circles - what helps me know what is next?

Make one routine clearer or one change easier to understand. Try a small now-next strip or written plan. Include a way to say "not ready", "change" or "more time" if meaningful to your child.

Week 4: Bridges - what helps us connect?

Spend a few minutes alongside the child's chosen interest without turning it into a lesson. Ask whether they would like you to join, watch, help, or give space. Follow their answer.

At the end

Ask one simple question in an accessible way: "Was any part useful, not useful, or are you not sure?" Record what adults learned and one adjustment to try. A child is not responsible for making the framework work.

Tom Tom Universe characters at home

Characters can make an abstract idea concrete, give a child distance from a difficult topic, and create shared play. They are invitations, not teaching requirements. Use a story only when it is enjoyable and accessible to your child.

Character examples

Character or story element	Possible Four Pillars moment	Home invitation
Tom Tom	Noticing several thoughts and feelings at once.	“What might Tom Tom be wondering? Do you want to guess, add to the story, or just listen?”
Nanny Jax	A trusted grown-up who listens and adapts.	Model asking once, waiting and accepting the child’s answer or refusal.
Amy and Alic	Siblings with different ideas and ways to take part.	Show that family members may choose different activities and still belong together.
Nanny Elcy and Pops	Familiar routines, memories, family connection.	Share a story, recipe, song or object if the child wants to join.
Firefighter Ben	Safety, help-seeking and a reassuring adult response.	Talk about asking for help in general terms. Do not use a character to investigate disclosures.
The two Pound Pups	Play, comfort, imagination and a shared bridge.	Use a plush toy or chosen object to let the child lead a story or communicate indirectly.
Friends and community characters	Different ways to connect, communicate and join a group.	Use a fictional example to explore options without implying one social style is best.
Mrs Matthews, Kiaron, Richard, Maria, Hue and Siena	Familiar people and relationships from the wider Tom Tom world.	Use only the story context that fits; let the child choose whether to include or change a character.

Using the books

- Read a short section, look at an illustration, listen to audio, act out one moment or use a child-selected page.
- Pause to wonder together; do not quiz the child or expect them to explain what the story means.
- Let the child alter the plot, choose a different character response, repeat a favourite part or stop.
- Books are not required to use the Four Pillars. The home pack is free to use without buying materials.

The Four Pillars were created by Counsellor Tomass J. Wood from personal childhood experiences and professional work in mental health. Individual responses and examples in this resource are educational suggestions, not claims of tested outcomes.

Printable 1: My way to communicate today

Use this page as a conversation prompt only. Keep the child's established communication system available. The child may use a different method in different situations.

I can communicate by	Today I might want
Speaking / writing / typing / AAC / pictures / signs / gestures / pointing / objects / eye gaze / movement / another way	Help / break / quiet / space / more time / food / drink / toilet / rest / movement / pain help / something else
I can show "yes" by: _____	I can show "no / stop" by: _____
Please wait this long or check this way: _____	If you are unsure, please: _____

YES • NO • NOT SURE • STOP • HELP • BREAK • MORE TIME • SOMETHING ELSE

Only use a selection method that is known to be reliable for this child. A printed choice is not automatically accessible.

Adult reminder

Keep the communication route close. Wait. Check without leading. Respect the answer. If the message is unclear, say so and try another accessible route.

Printable 2: A wave check-in

A child can point, speak, move a marker, use AAC, draw, ask an adult to read the options, or skip this. It is always okay not to choose a feeling.

What might be happening?	What could help?
Something feels okay / unsure / too much / different / hard to explain / I do not want to say	Help / quiet / space / movement / less noise / less light / break / food or drink / rest / more time / change the plan / someone nearby / something else
What happened just before?	A demand / a noise / a change / tiredness / hunger / pain / social time / excitement / not sure / something else
What I want the grown-up to know:	What the grown-up can change:

Waves are not a score. Do not rate the child, compare children or use this sheet to reward calmness. Ask about body comfort and health when needed.

Printable 3: My Circle - now and next

Fill this in with the child in a format they can use. Keep it short and honest. “Change” and “not ready” are useful messages too.

NOW	NEXT	AFTER / LATER
_____	_____	_____
What stays the same?	What might change?	How can I ask for help?
_____	_____	_____
My choice / break / stop / more time:	The plan if something changes:	Who can help me understand?
_____	_____	_____

Ideas: use a photo, drawing, object cue, timer or written note only if it is meaningful for your child. Avoid promising a fixed time when you cannot keep it.

Printable 4: Build a Bridge

A bridge is a way into connection or participation. It can be small, quiet and led by the child.

The child is interested in…	They might like to…
_____	watch / listen / show me / play beside me / ask for help / do it alone / invite someone / try something new / stop
A person, object or place that feels comfortable:	A boundary or access need to remember:
_____	_____
How I will invite without pressure:	How I will know to pause or stop:
_____	_____

Examples: Tom Tom shares a rhythm with Firefighter Ben; Amy watches Alic build; Nanny Jax sits nearby while Tom Tom plays with the Pound Pups. No one has to join in the same way.

Printable 5: Family support snapshot

Complete only what is useful. Keep personal information private and share it only with people who need it to support the child.

What helps my child feel understood?
_____ _____
How my child shows yes / no / stop / help / pain / not sure
_____ _____
Changes or sensory conditions that may make things harder
_____ _____
Useful supports and where to find them
_____ _____
What adults should do if unsure
_____ _____

Everyday examples

Getting ready to leave

Notice: The child has stopped dressing after a change in the plan. **Possible Brian's:** uncertainty, worry, a competing idea, or nothing the adult has guessed. **Waves:** check comfort, noise, clothing, time pressure, pain, fatigue. **Circles:** show the actual plan and what changed. **Bridges:** offer a preferred way to move through the transition, such as carrying a chosen item or walking beside a trusted person. Make "not ready" meaningful.

After school or a busy day

Notice: The child is quiet, moving more or wants to be alone. Do not assume they are angry or being rude. Offer food, drink, quiet, movement, company or space without requiring conversation. A later text, note or shared activity may be a better bridge than a face-to-face question.

Sibling conflict

Describe the specific event, check immediate safety, and give each child a fair way to communicate. Do not use "Brian's" to decide who is telling the truth or Waves to excuse hurtful behaviour. Support repair, boundaries and different needs without demanding identical responses.

A plan changes

Say what changed, what remains the same, and what the choices are now. Acknowledge that the child may be disappointed. Do not call flexibility a success if the child had no real choice or needed support was withheld.

When an activity is refused

Treat "no", turning away, leaving, freezing or not responding as a reason to pause and check access and willingness. Do not assume all actions have one meaning. If the activity is optional, allow refusal. If safety or essential care makes something necessary, explain it accessibly, reduce distress and seek appropriate professional support where needed.

Making home routines supportive

The Four Pillars can sit inside ordinary family life. You do not need a special lesson, dedicated room or purchased kit.

Morning

- Show a short, realistic sequence and leave room for more time.
- Offer a choice about order, clothing options, breakfast or how to receive reminders.
- Keep sensory and communication supports where the child can reach them.

Mealtimes

- Offer safe, familiar foods and respect sensory needs; do not use the pillars to pressure tasting.
- Make a way to ask for more, less, different food, a break, water or to finish.

Homework and learning

- Agree a start point, a manageable amount and a break route. Consider whether the barrier is uncertainty, effort, sensory load, fatigue or something else.
- A child can show learning through their accessible communication and chosen format.

Bedtime

- Use familiar cues and allow for different settling needs. Do not require a feelings conversation at bedtime.
- Offer a simple “tomorrow” preview if it helps, and note what is not yet known.

Family connection

- Create optional shared moments around interests: music, animals, stories, a walk, a game, drawing or quiet company.
- Do not make connection conditional on eye contact, conversation, hugs, sharing or staying in the room.

For parents and carers

Supporting a child can be demanding. The Four Pillars include adults too: grown-ups have thoughts, waves, circles and bridges of their own. If you are overwhelmed, focus on immediate safety and one small next step.

A quick adult reset

- Pause and describe what you observed without judging the child or yourself.
- Check whether the child can communicate and access needed support.
- Reduce words and demands. Make one clear offer and allow time.
- If you need another adult, ask for help. Repair the relationship when everyone is ready.

Family reflection

What helped today?	What was hard or unclear?	What will we change?
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

When the child is overwhelmed

Use fewer words and protect access to trusted supports. Reduce avoidable sensory and social demands. Allow the child time and space if safe. Do not block an exit, touch without need or demand an explanation. Check health and immediate safety. Revisit what happened only when the child is ready and the conversation is useful.

When you are unsure what a behaviour means

Write down what you saw, what was happening around it, what you tried and what changed. Keep interpretations tentative. Ask the child in their most accessible way. Consider whether pain, illness, fatigue, fear, sensory load, communication barriers or unmet needs require attention.

A simple family review log

This optional log helps adults learn which adjustments seem useful. It is not a behaviour chart and should not become a test for the child. Keep it private and record only what you need.

Date / routine	What I noticed	What support changed	What happened next / child's view
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Review these questions

- Was the child's communication route available and respected?
- Did adults change anything that made the moment easier?
- Could the child refuse, pause or choose another way?
- Did the activity help, do nothing, or add pressure? What evidence makes us think so?
- What does the child want us to keep, change or stop?

About evidence and research

The Tom Tom Four Pillars are a developing educational framework. The existing intervention and research materials describe proposed practices and ways to evaluate implementation; they do not establish that the framework is effective. Families may use this pack for ordinary home support without taking part in research. Do not send identifiable child information or completed logs to the project unless a separate, clear, approved research process has been explained and freely agreed.

Use existing professional advice and statutory support as appropriate. This resource does not replace an EHCP, communication plan, medical advice, therapy, school provision or safeguarding action.

ONE PAGE HOME QUICK START

The Four Pillars

Notice • Make access easy • Offer choice • Respond • Review

BRIAN'S	WAVES	CIRCLES	BRIDGES
Thoughts, ideas, worries, curiosity and needs. Wonder without guessing.	Changing feelings, body signals, demands and surroundings. Offer support.	Routines, predictability and change. Make what happens next understandable.	Interests, relationships and participation. Invite connection in the child's way.

Ask yourself

- Can my child communicate right now, in their usual way?
- Have I allowed enough time and included a real "no" or "not now"?
- What changed around the child? Could pain, tiredness, sensory load or uncertainty be involved?
- What can I adapt? What does my child want me to know?

You do not need to complete all four pillars. One accessible change in an ordinary moment is a good place to begin.

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About this resource

Created for families who want a practical, low-cost way to explore Tom Tom's Four Pillars at home. It is designed to be adapted around the child and family, including the child's preferred language, communication methods, age, interests and support needs.

Existing Tom Tom work informing this pack

- Tom Tom Four Pillars Intervention Manual: proposed adult practices, accessibility, adaptation, refusal and implementation boundaries.
- Tom Tom Four Pillars Research Development Framework and Research Measures and Coding Manual: emerging status, proposed implementation and evaluation approach.
- Tom Tom Four Pillars Accessible Research Participation Pack and My Voice printable boards: accessible participation, communication options and safeguarding boundaries.
- Tom Tom Universe stories and characters: Tom Tom, Nanny Jax, Amy, Alic, Nanny Elcy, Pops, Firefighter Ben, the two Pound Pups, and friends and community characters.

Use and sharing

This resource is offered free for home use through Tom Tom Universe. Families may print pages for their own use. Please keep the author credit and website with the resource when sharing the complete pack. Do not alter the content in ways that remove its communication, refusal, safety or research-status guidance.

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