



‘Autism and the Predictive Mind: Absolute Thinking in a Relative World,’ A Full-Day Seminar with Dr Peter Vermeulen



Wednesday 11th December 2024 | 10am – 4pm GMT



Birmingham City University, City South Campus, Westbourne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 3TN

Studio 3 are hosting a live in-person conference day on Wednesday 11th December 2024. This is open to family members, individuals with lived experiences, practitioners and professionals in the field of psychology, autism, and mental health. This will be held at Birmingham City University, and will feature autism expert and public speaker Peter Vermeulen. The aim of this event is to share information and ideas to enable professionals and families alike to better support autistic adults and children.

This event is being organised and promoted by Studio 3. There will be a book stall available at the event with Studio 3 publications available to buy, and members of the Studio 3 team on hand to discuss our work and how we could support individuals and organisations who enquire following the event.

The venue will be open to delegates from 9am, and will finish at 4pm. Refreshments (tea, coffee, water) will be provided by the venue, as well as lunch for all delegates. If attendees have any dietary restrictions or allergies, please contact us at admin@studio3.org. There will also be a breakout room available for quiet reflection.

About the Speaker



MSc and PhD in Psychology and Educational Sciences. Peter has worked with people with ASD and their families for more than 30 years. He is the founder of “Autism in Context”, where autism is understood in context. As a Senior lecturer at Autisme Centraal, a training and education centre for autism spectrum disorders, Peter is also an internationally respected lecturer/trainer and he presents all over Europe and beyond. Peter has written more than 15 books and several articles on autism.

Event Description

This full day seminar with renowned autism expert and neurobiologist Peter Vermeulen will focus on the pivotal role of uncertainty in autism, and why predictability and clarity can help to make autistic people feel safe and supported. Exploring the science behind the predictive brain, Peter will provide an in-depth exploration of autistic thinking styles, and how we as supports can implement core strategies to help families better support autistic loved ones, and practitioners such as psychology workers, residential carers, and support workers to support the individuals they work with.

This event will expand and provide a greater level of insight into the topic discussed at our 24th October online web event, which will take place online in collaboration with Kelly Mahler, Rachael Thompson, and Professor Andrew McDonnell entitled 'Making Sense of Chaos.' This in-person follow up will offer more audience interaction and a broader scope in terms of understanding what the predictive coding theory means for individuals and organisations striving to create autism friendly environments, and the importance of supporting overall well-being. This session is open to families, people with lived experience, professionals, and practitioners in the field of autism, and promises to be highly engaging with lots of practical examples and strategies to implement. Peter is an inspirational and emotive speaker, whose passion and humour shine through in all of his work.

Seminar Outline

Many ideas about autism are based on outdated conceptions about the human brain. The computer as a metaphor for the brain - with input, processing and output - has been very useful in the past, but seems to be incorrect in the light of recent discoveries in brain science. The brain is not a computer: the brain is guessing more than it is computing. In order to make these smart guesses, the brain has developed a unique characteristic - contextual sensitivity. The brain uses context to predict the world. This is known as predictive coding.

But what if your brain is not so talented in interpreting context? What if your brain thinks in absolutes? This is the case for autistic people. Difficulty seeing and understanding context can explain why autistic people often have difficulties with communication, social interaction, sensory stimuli, and flexible thinking and behaviour in daily life.

In this exclusive one-day seminar, Peter will explain the concept of absolute thinking, which is defined as reduced contextual sensitivity in predicting the world. The predictive coding perspective offers some thought-provoking new ideas, such as why traditional emotion recognition and social skills training are not a good idea for autistic people, and why autism-friendliness does not have to mean eliminating or reducing stimuli.

This course will look at:

- The iceberg of autism - looking beyond behaviour
- Copernican revolution in brain science - the predictive coding framework
- Predictive coding and context

- Autism as a reduced contextual sensitivity in predicting the world and coping with prediction errors - Absolute thinking in a relative world
- Absolute thinking and sensory issues in autism - Pushing the context button creates an autism friendly sensory world
- Absolute thinking and communication issues in autism - Pushing the context button makes your communication autism friendly.
- Absolute thinking and social difficulties in autism - Pushing the context button helps autistic people to navigate the social world.

Learning Outcomes

You will learn:

- Why the traditional model of understanding the brain (the stimulus-response model) is not correct
- What predictive processing is, and what role context plays in predicting the world around us
- The effects of reduced contextual sensitivity in predicting the world on social interaction, communication, theory of (own) mind, and sensory processing
- What 'pushing the context button' means, and how it is pivotal for communicating with autistic people and for teaching social cognitive and social behavioural skills
- To identify strategies to help autistic children and adults to cope with the sensory environment
- The ingredients of autism-friendly communication
- What is lacking in traditional interventions which seek to help autistic people navigate the social world
- To reflect on the extent to which your own practice (teaching, counselling, caring, supporting) supports autistic individuals to predict the world around them

Ticket Information

Early Bird Rate (Available until 28th August): £75

Full Rate: £95

Purchase your ticket now via the Studio 3 website: www.studio3.org/news/events. At Studio 3, we are passionate about supporting parents and carers. Families can access an exclusive discount by contacting us directly at 01225 334 111. For more information or to speak to a member of our team, contact us at admin@studio3.org.

Event Schedule

9am – 10am	The venue will be open to delegates from 9am for welcome and refreshments.
10am – 12pm	Peter will speak for 2 hours about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The iceberg of autism: looking beyond the behaviour • Copernican revolution in brain science: the predictive coding framework • Predictive coding and context • Autism as a reduced contextual sensitivity in predicting the world and coping with prediction errors: absolute thinking in a relative world
12pm - 1pm	Buffet Lunch
1pm - 2.30pm	Peter will speak for 1hr 30mins about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute thinking and sensory issues in autism. Pushing the context button creates an autism friendly sensory world. • Absolute thinking and communication issues in autism. Pushing the context button makes your communication autism friendly.
2.30pm - 2.45pm	Refreshment break
2.45pm - 4pm	Peter will speak for 1hr 15mins about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute thinking and social difficulties in autism, and how pushing the context button helps autistic people to navigate the social world.
4pm	Conference End

Travel Information

The venue is located in the city centre of Birmingham and has various transport links. Enter through the main door at BCU City South Campus. Delegates will be met there by a member of staff and guided to the event room.

Parking is limited on site with the exception of Blue Badge holders, but there are public transport options available at a low cost, as well as park-and-ride facilities at local train stations. We would encourage people to use public transport options such as the local Tram, Bus and Train.

For Drivers:

The nearest car park is Broadway Plaza Car Park, B16 8LP (a 10 mins walk away from the venue). Please follow this link for maps and directions: <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/about-us/maps-and-campuses/city-south-campus/map-and-directions>. An hourly parking fee applies here - you can pay online at YourParkingSpace in advance, or when you leave. Discounted parking is available for BCU students.

Please note that Air Zone regulations apply in Birmingham City Centre to some vehicles. Check if you are eligible, and pay in advance using the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/clean-air-zones>.

Park and Ride options are also available on the Cross City Train Line.

Public Transport:

The nearest train station is Five Ways Station, located on the Cross City Birmingham Train Line, which is a 15 minute walk from the event. There are also transport links available from Birmingham New Street Station to Five Ways (1 stop).

The tram network (West Midlands Metro) is also available, which runs throughout Birmingham City Centre.

From Birmingham New Street, the 23 Platinum and 24 Platinum bus will take you straight outside the BCU building.

Accessibility

This is an autism-friendly event. Quiet rooms will be available for delegates to access.

Disabled parking is available at the venue, and there is lift access to all floors and accessible toilets on all floors. There is a designated area within the lecture theatre for wheelchair users - please get in touch with us so we can ensure that sufficient space is provided for you.

If there is anything we can do to make this event more accessible for anyone wishing to attend, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at admin@studio3.org or by calling 01225 334 111.