

Naomi

Hi, I'm Naomi (age 12), I have PDA and I recently won a Blue Peter (BP) competition!

The whole filming experience was pretty overwhelming but also gave me some amazing and life-long memories. I think PDAers find it really difficult to experience and try new things as we usually try to avoid change, well I know I do, but I also now know that **even if you may initially think you can't do something, due to anxiety or because you can't predict what's going to happen, with the right support and help you can do it!** Try to tell a trusted person (mine is my mum) what you'd like to do and, like my family, I'm sure they'll help you to do it. Yes it's hard, I had lots of anxiety and worry over things when we were filming but **I did it as deep down I really wanted to**, I just needed someone to help me without it feeling like a huge overwhelming demand that I'd usually avoid.

This is my story ...

In November 2020, Blue Peter announced their new gaming competition to design a character skin for the game Fall Guys. Three years ago I started to collect BP badges and so decided to enter because I really wanted the orange badge, the only one apart from gold that I was missing, but I'd never entered a competition before and find deadlines hard. I enjoyed finding out about the game as I'd never heard of it before and then drawing my competition character for it, although I did get frustrated with my mistakes and tore up quite a few attempts.

My character's called Space Traveller, because I love looking at planets and the stars, and **I included a star called Gerald on his shoulder to light his way and also two magic PanDAs in a rocket backpack, my way of sharing about PDA.** I almost didn't submit an entry because they also asked for a 1 min video about me. I found this really hard to do as I don't like talking about myself or seeing myself in photos or videos, but I really wanted to try to get that badge so, with lots of help from Mum and Dad and over several weeks, I was able to record something and submit this into the competition just before the deadline.



In January 2021, Mum received a phone call as part of the verification process for judging. We were given a date when we'd hear if I'd won, but on that morning Mum gently reminded me that we may not hear anything but that felt ok because I knew there was still a chance of receiving an orange badge! However, after the judging we had a phone call to say that I was their overall winner! It was a really overwhelming feeling, I was happy but also felt very scared as I had no idea what was coming next, I just knew I'd have to meet and talk to lots of people I didn't know, and I had to keep this a secret until possibly June depending upon the pandemic! [Panic started and I just kept shouting that I didn't want to win, take it back!](#) Mum gave me space and time to think about it and started working with Blue Peter on a plan. They knew about my PDA profile of autism as I'd talked about it in my video and Mum had also made sure (without me knowing) that they could accommodate my needs during any filming should I be selected.

Due to Covid and other circumstances it turned out we'd have to do three separate days of filming: one in London at Media Tonic and two in Manchester (the Arcade Club with [EthanGamer](#) and the Blue Peter Studio). London felt OK to me as Mum said we could travel by taxi rather than train, it was only going to take 90 minutes to get there and we'd be home again by dinnertime. But I was very panicked by the thought of two trips to Manchester where I'd have to be in the car for about 4 hours each way, stay in a hotel, eat different food, meet different people, manage a noisy arcade, have an online video chat/gaming session with Ethan, go to a TV studio and stay safe with Covid! [I don't really understand emotions that well but I remember I felt happy and I think proud \(that's what mum calls it\) that I'd won but I was also worried all the time too as everything was still unclear... I decided that not winning was the best option and I just wouldn't do it, but I really wanted to!](#)

Mum knew I was struggling, she can tell either by the little things I do like chewing my biter, playing with slime/putty, being able to make even less choices than usual, or by my physical explosions and when I get even more impatient than usual and shout a lot! [Mum is my really 'safe' person and I trust her with everything. She just knows what to say and gives me time to think or distracts me and then suggests alternative things to try to help me think more clearly and become calm so I can make my own choices again.](#) My teacher at my new school helps me with this too, but she calls it self-regulation. She's helped me to settle in a lot and also kept my Blue Peter secret, so I trust her too (Mum had to tell her about winning as we needed school approval to film!).

Anyway, Mum knows I like a good plan so [she ensured that everything was carefully put together for each filming day.](#) She shared information on PDA from the PDA Society with the Blue Peter team and explained how I might react to different situations, so they were prepared and didn't rush me. She even discussed with them about my clothes, wearing microphones, my badges, food, how we'd meet people, where the loo was, whether they'd talk about PDA, anything and everything I needed to know!

The Blue Peter team were AMAZING, especially Nicola (Producer) and [Lindsay](#) (Presenter) as they helped me to feel more relaxed because they were both so chilled about everything and didn't rush me and talked to me like a grown up. I did do a lot of masking during all the filming and I constantly felt very worried about everything, but Mum knew that and we shared little hugs and squeezes and took breaks so I could manage and I did enjoy it. My two special toys also liked filming and having



them close helped me feel safe! I loved meeting Ethan too, he was so kind and it was hard to stop gaming but at least I forgot about being filmed when we were playing! I also found walking round the Blue Peter garden and along the gold walk helped me feel happy, so I visited those a few times too.

Unfortunately, when both Manchester days were over as soon as I got home I was poorly. Mum said this was probably a stress response and my body's way of getting rid of my anxiety, having had to keep everything secret for 5 months and managing all the new experiences I'd had! Thankfully it hasn't spoiled the wonderful experiences I've been lucky enough to have. I am proud of what I've achieved, and that my Space Traveller is now in a computer game and Lindsay [talked about PDA on national TV](#) during her chat with me after announcing I'd won their competition!

So that's my story... if you'd like to watch the winner's film where I saw my drawing come to life and I played with EthanGamer please watch the video on the [Blue Peter Website](#).

I hope you'll have the confidence to try something new and make amazing memories too!

PDAers are unique and just like pandas need the right help and support. Don't let PDA hold you back, may it instead encourage you to climb ahead!



Some additional info from Naomi's Mum

Naomi's Mum wanted to add a few points about what was done behind the scenes by the Blue Peter team and herself in order to support Naomi and ensure her needs and wishes were kept at the centre throughout this wonderful experience.

From the very first contact with Blue Peter, the team asked about adjustments that Naomi might need and what they could do to help, and this continued at every stage of the process. Examples include:

- consulting Naomi and her Mum on all matters; going through all the small details with Naomi's Mum so that Naomi knew exactly what would be happening when and could feel in control of the process
- showing genuine interest in Naomi, treating her as an adult and building trust (for example, Lindsay shared with Naomi that she keeps a copy of the script down the back of the sofa just in case!)
- communicating any changes well in advance and being very flexible and accommodating in all areas (from providing Naomi's preferred lunch options to responding immediately to Naomi's feeling of overwhelm on the studio floor by removing any superfluous crew and pulling cameras back)
- the opportunity to meet the producers over Zoom so that Naomi would be familiar with them before meeting face to face
- rescheduling things so that Naomi's favourite presenter, Lindsay, could be the main presenter throughout her experience
- ensuring the same camera team were present on both location days
- making sure everyone was aware of PDA and taking on board info from Naomi's Mum and the PDA Society
- finding a role for the family dog 😊