

University of North Carolina

TEACCH Autism Program

Interventions to Address

Anxiety and Coping

Autism Independent UK, Kettering 2024

THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL

TEACCH Autism Program

Objectives

- Recognize the reasons individuals with autism are more vulnerable to anxiety.
- Describe strategies for improving the coping skills of an autistic individual that match their learning style.
- Identify strategies for improving the ability of a person with autism to identify and communicate their emotions.

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Coping with Anxiety and Stress

- Everyone experiences stress and needs methods for coping with stress.

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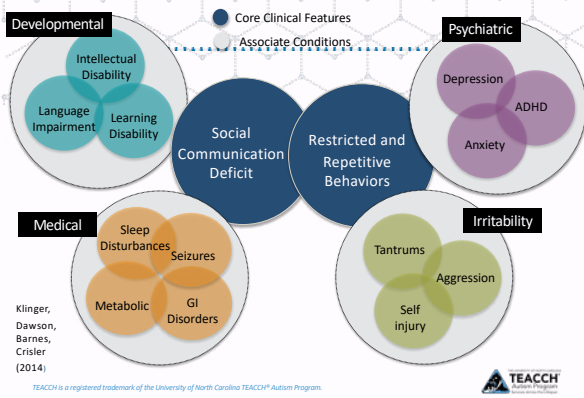
Preventing and Managing Stress

- Need predictability- when, where, how, who, what
- Need social communication skills
- Need skills for coping with our emotions

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DSM-5: Core Symptoms & Associated Conditions

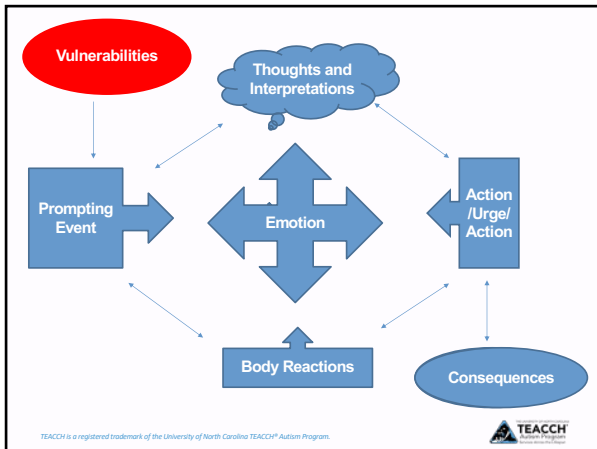


Comorbidity in Youth: Autism, Anxiety, and Mood Disorders

- Four times higher than typical children
 - Ghazuddin, 2002; White et al, 2009
- Most studies show clinically impairing anxiety occurs in 40 to 45% of children and adolescents with autism
 - Bellini, 2004; Simonoff et al, 2008; Sukhodolsky et al, 2008
- Developmental Factors (White, 2009)
 - Younger children experience milder anxiety
 - Children with high functioning autism experience greater anxiety

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Think About It: What factors make you more vulnerable to stress?

1. Hungry
2. Angry
3. Lonely
4. Tired
5. Physical ailments
6. Lack of exercise
7. Stressful deadlines or assignments at work

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Vulnerabilities- Typical Population

| | |
|--|--|
| PLEASE (DBT) | HALT (chemical dependency) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical ailments • Eating a well-balanced diet • Alcohol/ substance use • Sleep issues • Exercise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hungry • Angry • Lonely • Tired |

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Why Vulnerability to Anxiety in Autism?

- Face more environmental stress
 - Difficulty with change and transitions
 - Processing speed
 - Sensory overload
 - Disorganization
 - Uneven development – appropriate expectations

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Why Vulnerability to Anxiety in Autism?

- Core difficulties in social interactions
- Difficulty tolerating uncertainty, coping with change, need for predictability
- Black and white/rigid rule-based thinking
 - e.g. "All dogs are aggressive"
- Difficulty identifying emotions in self and others
- Difficulty regulating and managing emotions

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Social Difficulties Lead to Fear and Anxiety

"I don't think most neurotypical adults appreciate the level of stress that kids with ASD live with on a constant basis. Imagine having never skied before and standing at the top of a triple Black Diamond expert run, one of the most difficult expert ski runs. It's narrow, icy, with huge moguls and a near vertical drop. ...Sheer panic sets in, because you realize there's no way you're going to get down that slope without hurting yourself; the real question is whether or not you'll even survive. Yet, you can't just stand there – you know you have to step off the edge. That's what daily social interaction can feel like for some kids with ASD. Sheer panic and no skill set to handle the interaction."

~ Temple Grandin in Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships

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Prevention: Part 1 Structured TEACCHing.....

- ▶ To address skill deficits that may be contributing to anxiety
- Use structure to increase understanding and predictability, balance the schedule, have reasonable expectations
- Improve organizational skills and communication skills
- Enhance social understanding

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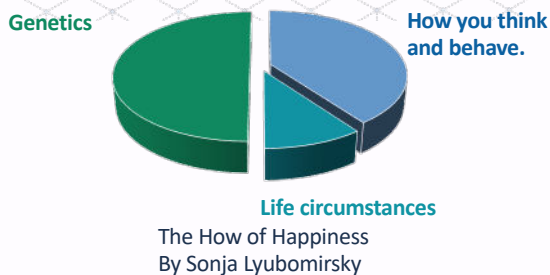
Build Resiliency/Happiness/ Sense of Wellbeing.....

- Build on strengths and interests
 - Doing things that make us feel happy
- Build into the schedule positive/success experiences
- Opportunity to savor positive experiences
- Healthy/ physical exercise
- Emotional understanding and stress reduction

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Increasing Positive Emotions.....



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Build on Strengths and Interests



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Build on Strengths and Interests

Chat time with Lisa

During **chat time**, I can talk with Lisa about cats, Mario, and other topics that I enjoy.

We talk about the topics for 5 turns, then chat time is **FINISHED**.

Turn 1 _____

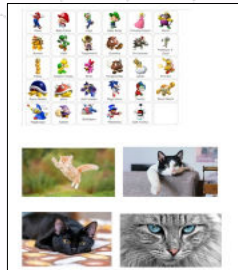
Turn 2 _____

Turn 3 _____

Turn 4 _____

Turn 5 _____

FINISHED



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Positive Event Schedule

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| | | | | |
| Volunteer | Massage | Drawing | Yoga | Target |

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Savoring Life's Joys

- Write down what you enjoy about daily routines and focus on that while doing it
- Celebrate good news
- Be open to beauty and excellence
- Create savoring album



I like watering the flowers each day!

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Savoring Life's Joys

My vacation at Camp Royal

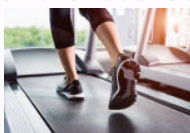


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Healthy/Physical Exercise

- Fast Walking
- Swimming
- Biking
- Skating
- Trampoline
- Weightlifting



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Stress Reduction

- Sensory Exercises
- Yoga
- Enthusiasms
- Screen Time
- Drawing
- Music



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Treating Anxiety: Adapting Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Strategies

- Teach stress reduction routines and coping strategies

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Think About It: The best time to teach a coping skills is...



1. When a person is upset so they understand why you are teaching the skill, and you can see if it is in fact helpful.
2. When they are calm so they can better learn the skill.
3. Anytime as long as you have a visual cue for teaching the skill.
4. All of the above.

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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines
- Schedule it into the daily routine
- Practice interrupting a situation when calm and in response to visual cue
- Teach the individual to identify and communicate emotional (regulation) needs

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Assessment: Which Activities to Incorporate into a Calming Routine?.....

- Observe the individual to determine possible strategies: what does he/she do when upset?
- What does individual find calming
- Have the individual try different strategies
 - Not everyone would find deep breathing to be calming
- Have a series of activities, not just one
- Individual could build own calming routine or use data to build it for them?

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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines

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Teach a Variety of Stress Reduction Strategies/Routines....

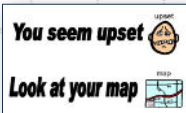
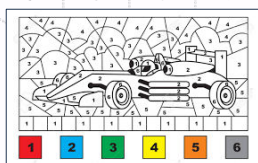
- Include activities that engage the mind and the body
- Use visual cues to support routine
- Clear beginning and end
- Incorporate special interests
- Incorporate mantras or self instruction

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Engaging And Calming Activity

Interests, Enthusiasms and Obsessions



plus Humor

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Engage the Mind and the Body

- Deep Breathing
- Muscle Tense and
- Imagery



Relaxation Exercises

1. Take 3 deep breaths
2. Tense and relax face 3 times
3. Take 3 deep breaths
4. Tense and relax shoulders 3 times
5. Take 3 deep breaths
6. Tense and relax arms 3 times
7. Take 3 deep breaths
8. Tense and relax legs 3 times
9. Take 3 deep breaths
10. Think about a favorite place
11. CHECK your schedule

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Visual Cues to Support the Routine

Chair Yoga

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

Knee Squeeze

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

Spinal Twist

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

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Side Stretch

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

Sun Pose

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

Sun Pose

For each hand, reach one of the chair legs forward. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

This pose increases the lower back, hip, shoulder and quadriceps.

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Visual Cues to Support the Routine

Smell the flower

Blow out the candle

1. Sit on the chair. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

2. Sit on the chair. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

3. Sit on the chair. Breathe and your shoulders on your feet. Hold forward and then slowly pull back. For a deeper stretch, then slowly breathe out while leaning your head back to the chair and holding.

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Visual Cues and Props to Support the Routine

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TEACCH

Video of student practicing calming routine in play area

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TEACCH

Clear Beginning and End

Practicing my calming routine every day is part of a living a healthy life.

1. I can squeeze my squishy ball 5 times. 1-2-3-4-5
2. Stretch my legs and arms.
3. Take 5 deep breaths. □ □ □ □ □
4. Squeeze my squishy ball 5 more times. 1-2-3-4-5
5. Stretch my legs and arms.
6. Take 5 more very slow deep breaths. □ □ □ □ □

Calm helps me stay calm.

I did a GREAT job at practicing my relaxation from proud of myself and ready to work!

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Clear Beginning and End



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Incorporate Special Interests

Hide like a **TURTLE** 
 Squeeze a **LEMON** 
 Stretch like a **CAT** 
 Fly like a **BIRD** 
 Count to **20**
 I GOT THIS 

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Incorporate Special Interests

When Harrison Barnes is upset, he takes deep breaths.



You seem upset



Work on your art project



When you feel others get angry, it makes the other person uncomfortable. They might not want to play with you or talk to you. It's important to learn how to manage your anger.



When these situations happen, they can feel very bad. It's important to learn how to manage your anger.



When you feel angry, it's important to take deep breaths. You can also count to 10 or 20. This helps you feel better and more in control.



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Things that Help Me Calm Down

Deep Breathing



Muscle Relaxation



Talking to Mom or Supervisor



Listening to Music



Picturing something that makes me laugh



Exercise



Writing a Letter



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Mantras and Self Instructions

OLPS
EVERYONE
Makes Mistakes

This is my worry bug,
and I can squash it!



Black Panther Says,
**"Schedules Change
Change is OKAY"**

NBD
NO BIG DEAL

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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines
- Schedule it into the daily routine

Jeremiah's Tuesday Schedule

| Time | Activity |
|---------------|---|
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Unpack Backpack |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Morning Routine |
| 9:00 - 9:00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing on Round Table |
| 9:00 - 10:00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Block 1 Math at Mr. Ross's Table |
| 10:00 - 10:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxation Routine |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Break |
| 10:15 - 11:15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Block 2 ELA or Read Bird Games |



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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

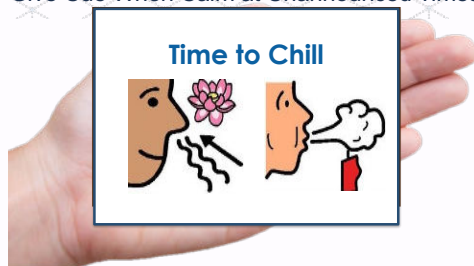
- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines
- Schedule it into the daily routine
- Practice interrupting a situation when calm and in response to visual cue
 - Give cue when calm, at unannounced times

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Practice Interrupting a Situation:

Give Cue When Calm at Unannounced Times



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Minimally Intrusive Signal from Adult

- Hand signal
- Tapping on reminder
- Write on sticky note



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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines
- Schedule it into the daily routine
- Practice interrupting a situation when calm and in response to visual cue
- Teach the individual to identify and communicate emotional (regulation) needs
 - Identify emotions and corresponding coping strategies
 - Initiating the routine or requesting to leave

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Increasing Self Awareness of Anxiety Symptoms

- Identify and teach emotion recognition (shared vocabulary)
 - What am I feeling?
 - What is he/she feeling?
- Teach client/student to identify physiological symptoms
- Teach client/student to rate anxiety level
- Teach communication strategy for emotions

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Increasing Self Awareness of Anxiety Symptoms

- Shared vocabulary
- Identify physiological symptoms
- Rate anxiety level

**Make it Visual
Write it Down**

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Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions



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Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions

Include interests and concrete examples



At the beach



Reading in my room



Noisy room at school



Someone yelled at me



I lost my Nintendo DS

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Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions

The ZONES of Regulation®

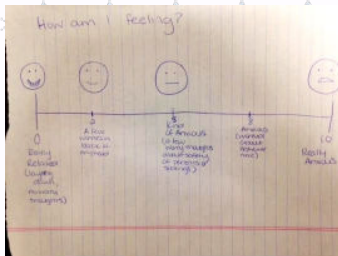
| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | | | |
| BLUE ZONE Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly | GREEN ZONE Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn | YELLOW ZONE Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control | RED ZONE Mad/Angry Terrified Yelling/Hitting Elated Out of Control |

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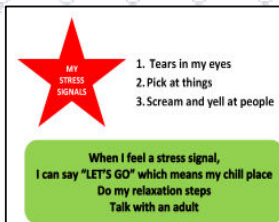
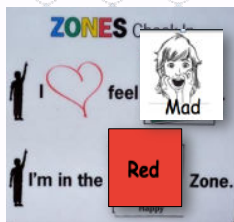
Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions.....



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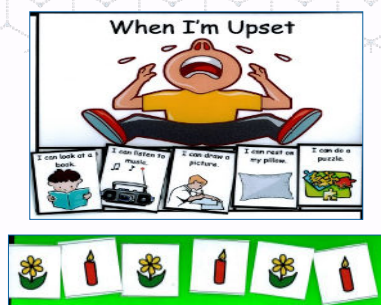
Increasing Self Awareness: Identify Emotions and Corresponding Coping Strategies.....



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Initiating the Stress Reduction Routine.....



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Requesting to Leave

- I need to pace
- I need a break
- I need to talk to Mrs. Jones



****Be Sure to Return to the Original Situation**

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Where to Go: Identify a Safe Place and/or an Emergency Resource Person

- Room/area
- Piece of furniture
- Person



If possible, teach at least one coping routine that does not require leaving the environment.
Minimal to no need of equipment

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Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies - RECAP

- Assessment
- Learn the stress reduction activity
- Schedule it into the daily routine
- Practice interrupting a situation when calm and in response to visual cue
- Teach the individual to identify and communicate emotional (regulation) needs
- **Long Term Goal: for individual to recognize signs of stress and to self-regulate**

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Resources

- 5-Point Scale
 - By Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis
- Navigating the Social World
 - by Jeanette McAfee, M.D.
- Social Thinking
 - Michelle Garcia Winner
- A Boy and a Bear
 - Lori Lite
- Progressive Relaxation
 - June Groden
- Zones of Regulation
 - Leah Kuypers
- When My Worries Get Too Big
 - Kari Dunn Buron

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