

**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

1

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.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

2

Coping with Anxiety and Stress

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

3

Preventing and Managing Stress

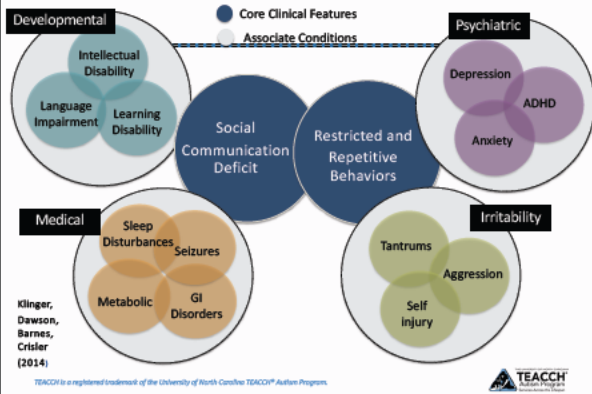
- Need predictability- when, where, how, who, what
- Need social communication skills
- Need skills for coping with our emotions

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



4

DSM-5: Core Symptoms & Associated Conditions



5

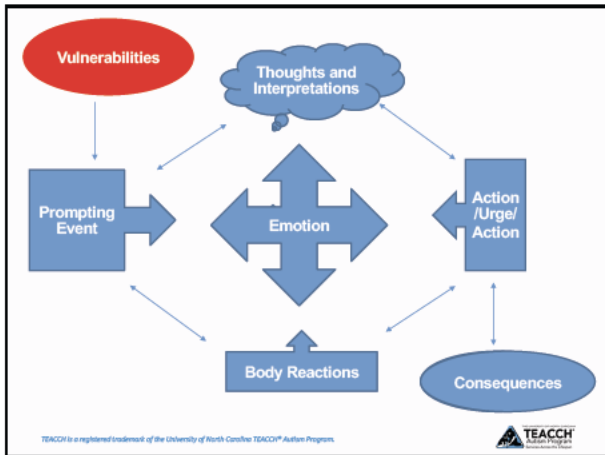
Comorbidity in Youth: Autism, Anxiety, and Mood Disorders

- 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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



6



7

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

8

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

9

Why Vulnerability to Anxiety in Autism?

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



10

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



11

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*

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



12

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



13

Build Resiliency/Happiness/ Sense of Wellbeing

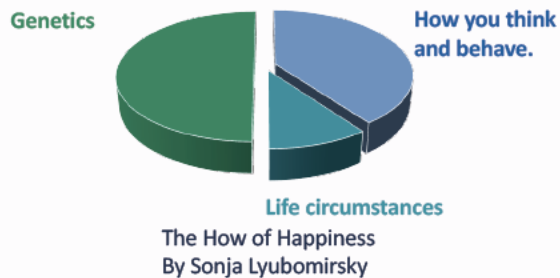
- Build on strengths and interests
 - Doing things that make us feel happy
- Build into the schedule positive/success experiences
- Opportunity to savor positive experiences
- Healthy/ physical exercise
- Emotional understanding and stress reduction

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



14

Increasing Positive Emotions

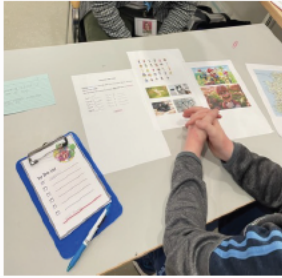


TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



15

Build on Strengths and Interests



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



16

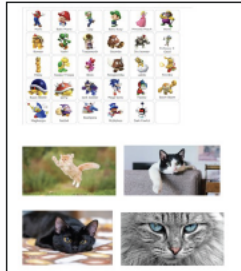
Build on Strengths and Interests

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



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



17

Positive Event Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Volunteer	Massage	Drawing	Yoga	Target

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



18

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!

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



19

Savoring Life's Joys

My vacation at Camp Royal

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



20

Healthy/Physical Exercise

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



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



21

Stress Reduction

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



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



22

Treating Anxiety: Adapting Cognitive Behavioral Intervention Strategies

- Teach stress reduction routines and coping strategies

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



23

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.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



24

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



25

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?

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



26

Teaching Stress Reduction Routines and Coping Strategies

- Assessment
- Teach a variety of stress reduction routines

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



27

Teach a Variety of Stress Reduction Strategies/Routines

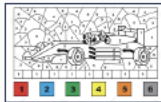
- Include activities that engage the mind and the body
- Use visual cues to support routine
- Clear beginning and end
- Incorporate special interests
- Incorporate mantras or self instruction

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

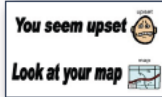


28

Engaging And Calming Activity Interests, Enthusiasms and Obsessions



plus Humor



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



29

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



30

Visual Cues to Support the Routine

Chair Yoga

Knee Squeeze

SEAT: Sit on the edge of the chair for 30-45 seconds and breathe in and out. Hold for a few seconds and then breathe in and out 5 times. Repeat for the same side every day.

This pose releases your lower back, increases digestion and circulation.

Spinal Twist

SEAT: Sit upright and place your feet on the floor. Bend your right knee, place your right foot on the floor. Breathe in and out 5 times. Repeat for the left side. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat for the other side. Breathe in and out 5 times. Repeat for the other side. Breathe in and out 5 times. Repeat for the other side. Breathe in and out 5 times. Repeat for the other side.

This pose increases circulation and improves digestion.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

31

Side Stretch

This pose increases flexibility of the spine, reduces stress, and improves circulation.

Sun Pose

Part 1 - This pose increases circulation to your head, improves circulation to your feet, increases circulation to your hands, improves circulation to your feet, improves circulation to your hands.

Sun Pose

Part 2 - Breathe out while bending forward. Breathe in while pulling back up. Breathe out while pulling back up. Breathe in while pulling back up. Breathe out while pulling back up. Breathe in while pulling back up. Breathe out while pulling back up.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

32

Visual Cues to Support the Routine

Smell the flower

Blow out the candle

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.

33

Visual Cues and Props to Support the Routine

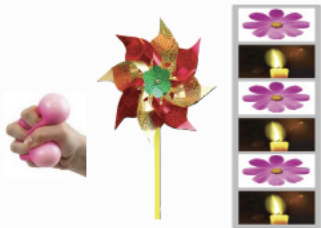


TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



34

Video of student practicing calming routine in play area



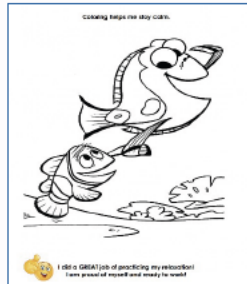
TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



35

Clear Beginning and End

- Practicing my calming routine every day is part of a living a healthy life.
1. I can squeeze my squishy balls 5 times. 1-2-3-4-5
 2. Sketch orange band 10 times.
 3. Take 5 very slow deep breaths. □□□□□
 4. Squeeze my squishy balls 5 more times. 1-2-3-4-5
 5. Sketch orange band 10 times.
 6. Take 5 more very slow deep breaths. □□□□□



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



36

Clear Beginning and End

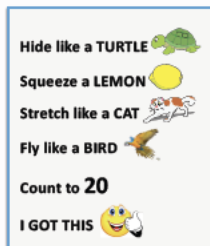


TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



37

Incorporate Special Interests



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



38

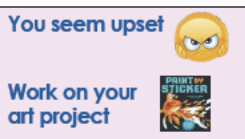
Incorporate Special Interests



However, when they get angry, it makes the other players nervous too and they might not want to play games with the players who gets mad.



When these players feel angry, they can try to calm down. They can use their major person's calm-down power.










TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.




39

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 

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.




40


Mantras and Self Instructions

O.P.S

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.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.




41

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 Folder
8:30-9:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing at Round Table
9:00-10:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Block 1 Math at Mr. Rod'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 at Red Bird Group



RELAX
morning meeting

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



42

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



43

Practice Interrupting a Situation:

Give Cue When Calm at Unannounced Times



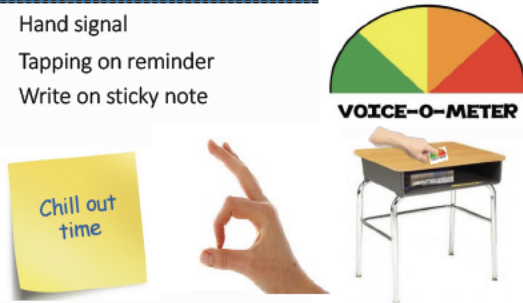
TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



44

Minimally Intrusive Signal from Adult

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



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



45

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



46

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



47

Increasing Self Awareness of Anxiety Symptoms

- Shared vocabulary
- Identify physiological symptoms
- Rate anxiety level

Make it Visual
Write it Down

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



48

Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions



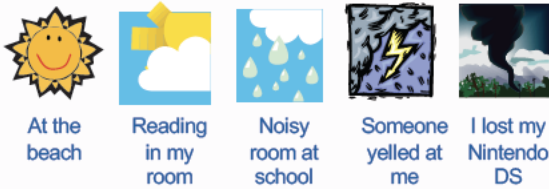
TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



49

Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions

Include interests and concrete examples



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



50

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

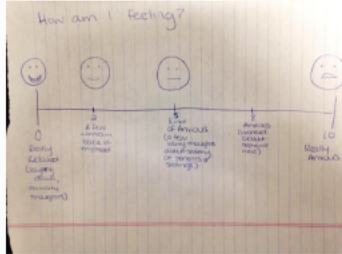
COPYRIGHT © 2011 Think Social Publishing, Inc.
This page may be copied for the purposes of educating students and other professionals.

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



51

Increasing Self-Awareness: Identify Emotions

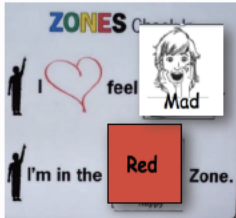


TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



52

Increasing Self Awareness: Identify Emotions and Corresponding Coping Strategies



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



53

Initiating the Stress Reduction Routine



TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



54

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**

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



55

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



56

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



57

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

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



58

Activity

STRESS REDUCTION ROUTINE **Instruction: Use sticky notes or text box to fill in each quadrant**

Activities that Engage the Mind Count to 50 by 5s	Activities that Engage the Body Deep Breathing Chair Yoga Pose
Mantras and Self Instruction I can try new things!	Visual Supports and Props to Support Following the Routine Yoga Pose Cards Thought Bubbles

TEACCH is a registered trademark of the University of North Carolina TEACCH® Autism Program.



59

Stay Connected



Go to www.teacch.com and join our TEACCH Training mailing list to stay current on all TEACCH Training opportunities



60
