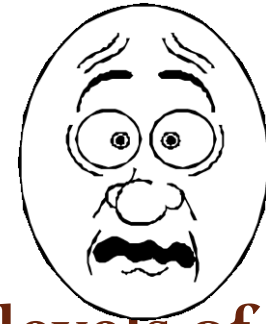


Anxiety and Anxiety Tool Box

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Anxiety



- **Many children with ASD have high levels of anxiety.**
 - 41% of children aged 10 to 14 have been diagnosed with a disorder related to anxiety (Simonoff, et al., 2008)
 - Physical comfort is threatened in unusual ways
 - May not be able to communicate their feelings
 - Hard to handle unknown plans and expectations
 - Do not know how to use social support

Types of Anxiety in ASD

(van Steensel et al., 2011)

- **Specific Phobia: 30%**
 - An overwhelming and unreasonable fear of objects or situations that pose little real danger but provoke anxiety and avoidance.
 - Not brief like nervousness before a test or a speech. Causes intense physical and psychological reactions
 - Not all phobias need treatment. Treat if it interferes with everyday life.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: 17%**
 - Unreasonable thoughts and fears that lead to repetitive behaviors. They interfere with daily activities and cause distress. It is not known exactly where repetitive behaviors seen in autism and OCD begins. It is thought to be on the same continuum. Your child feels driven to perform certain acts and become increasingly distressed and has to perform the acts to ease the stress.

Types of Anxiety in ASD

(van Steensel et al., 2011)

- **Social Anxiety Disorder: 17%**
 - Fear of social situations which causes you to avoid social situations ; again it depends on how much it interferes with life; can cause physical symptoms
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder: 15%**
 - Excessive, ongoing anxiety and worry that interfere with day-to-day activities
- **Separation Anxiety Disorder: 9 %**
 - Separation anxiety as a normal life stage first develops at about 7 months of age, once object permanence has been established. It is at its strongest at 10-18 months of age and usually subsides by 3 years of age.
- **Panic Disorder: 2%**
 - Sudden episode of intense fear that triggers severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause. May think they are loosing control , having a heat attack, or even dying. Everyone has one or two in their lifetime but if they are recurrent and unexpected may have panic disorder.

What to do?



- Awareness and language of feelings
- Help child realize that their feeling are things you don't know unless that tell you and then you can help them. Use speech bubbles and thought bubbles.
 - Talk to them about their feeling in context
 - “You seem frustrated.” “Wow that was very brave.”
 - Use a five could make me lose control. Teach a continuum.
 - Big, little problems, glitch



Suggestions when children are just learning emotions



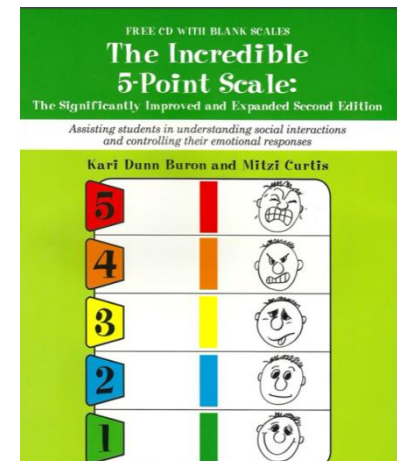
- Put on magnets for refrigeration
- Put in folder with velcro
- Ready and available when appropriate contexts arise

Laying a framework of reduced anxiety









- Give proprioception throughout the day. Don't sit for long periods. Exercise when possible.
- Watch caffeine
- Sleep at regular times with regular bedtime schedules
- Don't overschedule. Give yourself enough time when you can.
- Use a visual schedule. Define transitions. Encourage self management
- Be aware of transitions that might be anxiety producing. Think about using informational powerpoints.
- When promoting flexibility, start with preferred objects and then move to neutral, then whatever comes up
- When transitioning from high energy to low energy use deep breathing or quick yoga transition
- Model calmness; remember it's very hard to move from a high anxiety state and have a different emotion than what's being modeled

Other tools that support framework

- Priming
- Social stories
- Visual modeling
- Incredible 5 point scale
- Zones of Regulation



Combination of Incredible 5 Point Scale and Zones of Regulation

Number	Looks Like	Feels Like	What to do
5		Anger, Terror, Explosive Behavior	
4		Stress, Frustration, Anxiety	
3		Silly, Wiggles, Nervous	
2		Okay and in Control	
1		Great! Happy Calm, Alert	
-1		Bored, Not interested	
-2		Down, Sad	
-3		Sick	

Change negative into positive

- **Things to look for:**

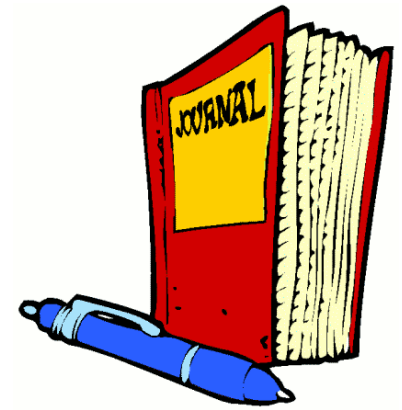
- **Focusing on the negative:** This is sometimes called filtering. You filter out the good and focus only on the bad.
- **Should:** People sometimes have set ideas about how they "should" act. If you hear yourself saying that you or other people "should," "ought to," or "have to" do something, then you might be setting yourself up to feel bad.
- **Overgeneralizing:** This is taking one example and saying it's true for everything. Look for words such as "never" and "always."
- **All-or-nothing thinking:** This is also called black-or-white thinking. Example: "If I don't get a perfect job review, then I'll lose my job."
- **Catastrophic thinking:** This is assuming that the worst will happen. This type of irrational thinking often includes "what if" questions.

McKay M, et al. (2011). Uncovering automatic thoughts. In *Thoughts and Feelings: Taking Control of Your Moods and Your Life*, 4th ed., pp. 15–25. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

Model positive thoughts

Stop your negative thought	Ask what type of negative thought you had	Choose an accurate, helpful thought
"I get so nervous speaking in public. I just know that people are thinking about how bad I am at speaking."	Focusing on the negative	"I'm probably better at public speaking than I think I am. The last time I gave a talk, people applauded afterward."
"I have to be in control all the time or I can't cope with things."	Should	"I can only control how I think about things or what I do. I can't control some things, like how other people feel and act."
"I'll never feel normal. I worry about everything all the time."	Overgeneralizing	"I've laughed and relaxed before. I can practice letting go of my worries."
"My headaches must mean there is something seriously wrong with me."	Catastrophic thinking	"A lot of things can cause headaches. Most of them are minor and go away."

Where to start



- Model two-three things that were positive about your day
- Have child list two good things about their school day
- Write or draw them down in a journal together
- Show genuine interest
- Praise bravery
- Once aware of positive thoughts and negative thoughts, give rubber band or some reminder to help him/her stop negative thoughts
- Talk together about would be good pleasant replacement thoughts

Breathing: Why?



- Breathing exercises can help you relax, because they make your body feel like it does when you are already relaxed.
- Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. This is because when you breathe deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message to your body. Those things that happen when you are stressed, such as increased heart rate, fast breathing, and high blood pressure, all decrease as you breathe deeply to relax.

Breathing



- **4-7-8 breathing**
 - This exercise also uses belly breathing to help you relax. You can do this exercise either sitting or lying down.
 - To start, put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest as in the belly breathing exercise.
 - Take a deep, slow breath from your belly, and silently count to 4 as you breathe in.
 - Hold your breath, and silently count from 1 to 7.
 - Breathe out completely as you silently count from 1 to 8. Try to get all the air out of your lungs by the time you count to 8.
 - Repeat 3 to 7 times or until you feel calm.
 - Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

Guided Imagery Why?



- Mind and body connections allow you to take yourself another place in your head
- Audio recordings and apps
- You use all of your senses in guided imagery. For example, if you want a tropical setting, you can imagine the warm breeze on your skin, the bright blue of the water, the sound of the surf, the sweet scent of tropical flowers, and the taste of coconut so that you actually feel like you are there.
- Imagining yourself in a calm, peaceful setting can help you relax and relieve stress.

Guided Imagery

- Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes.
- Start by just taking a few deep breaths to help you relax.
- Picture a setting that is calm and peaceful. This could be a beach, a mountain setting, a meadow, or a scene that you choose.
- Imagine your scene, and try to add some detail. For example, is there a breeze? How does it feel? What do you smell? What does the sky look like? Is it clear, or are there clouds?
- It often helps to add a path to your scene. For example, as you enter the meadow, imagine a path leading you through the meadow to the trees on the other side. As you follow the path farther into the meadow you feel more and more relaxed.
- When you are deep into your scene and are feeling relaxed, take a few minutes to breathe slowly and feel the calm.
- Think of a simple word or sound that you can use in the future to help you return to this place. Then, when you are ready, slowly take yourself out of the scene and back to the present. Tell yourself that you will feel relaxed and refreshed and will bring your sense of calm with you.
- Count to 3, and open your eyes. Notice how you feel right now.

Freeman L (2009). Imagery. In L Freeman, ed., *Mosby's Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Research-Based Approach*, 3rd ed., pp. 252–282. St. Louis: Mosby Elsevier.

Meditation

- Choose a time and place where you can meditate without being interrupted. Try to find a quiet place, but don't worry if there are some noises, such as traffic.
- When you start, try to meditate for only 5 minutes at a time. Then you can increase the time bit by bit. You can also try meditating for 5 minutes in the morning and 5 minutes in the evening. Sit in a comfortable position, either in a chair or on the floor. Or lie down, if that is more comfortable. You can close your eyes, or you can look down, keeping your gaze a few inches in front of you on the floor.
- Remind child or yourself that you are to focus on present moment or a certain concept like happy places
- As you sit, start to pay attention to your breathing. This is a good way to focus your attention on what is happening right now. Don't try to change your breathing. Just notice how it feels in your lungs and chest.
- If your mind wanders, don't worry or feel bad about yourself. Try to notice your thoughts, such as "I hope I get a 100 that test." Then let the thought go, and bring your focus back to the present moment and your breathing. You may do this over and over again during a meditation session. That's okay.
- During your meditation, you may feel certain emotions, such as anger, impatience, sadness, or happiness. Don't try to hold on to or let go of these feelings. Just notice them. They are part of your experience of the present moment. Keeping your attention on your breathing will help you stay focused and not get lost in the thoughts that your feelings may trigger. For example, if you feel impatient to finish the meditation so you can start the laundry, see if you can focus on the feeling of the impatience rather than thoughts of the laundry. Where do you feel the impatience in your body? Does it feel tight? Does it affect your breathing?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Have you ever had an aching back or pain in your neck when you were anxious or stressed? When you have anxiety or stress in your life, one of the ways your body responds is with muscle tension. Progressive muscle relaxation is a method that helps relieve that tension.
- In progressive muscle relaxation, you tense a group of muscles as you breathe in, and you relax them as you breathe out. You work on your muscle groups in a certain order.
- When your body is physically relaxed, you cannot feel anxious. Practicing progressive muscle relaxation for a few weeks will help you get better at this skill, and in time you will be able to use this method to relieve stress.
- When you first start, it may help to use an audio recording until you learn all the muscle groups in order. Check your local library or a bookstore for progressive muscle relaxation audio recordings.
- If you have trouble falling asleep, this method may also help with your sleep problems.

Progressive relaxation, how?

- You can use an audio recording to help you focus on each muscle group, or you can learn the order of muscle groups and do the exercises from memory. Choose a place where you won't be interrupted and where you can lie down on your back and stretch out comfortably, such as a carpeted floor.
- Breathe in, and tense the first muscle group (hard but not to the point of pain or cramping) for 4 to 10 seconds.
- Breathe out, and suddenly and completely relax the muscle group (do not relax it gradually).
- Relax for 10 to 20 seconds before you work on the next muscle group. Notice the difference between how the muscles feel when they are tense and how they feel when they are relaxed.
- When you are finished with all of the muscle groups, count backward from 5 to 1 to bring your focus back to the present.
- After you have learned how to tense and relax each muscle group, here's something else to try. When you have a very tense muscle, you can practice tensing and relaxing that muscle area without going through the whole routine.

How to go through your muscles

Muscle group

What to do

Hands

Clench them.

Wrists and forearms

Extend them, and bend your hands back at the wrist.

Biceps and upper arms

Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the elbows, and flex your biceps.

Shoulders

Shrug them (raise toward your ears).

Forehead

Wrinkle it into a deep frown.

Around the eyes and bridge of the nose

Close your eyes as tightly as you can. (Remove contact lenses before you start the exercise.)

Cheeks and jaws

Smile as widely as you can.

Around the mouth

Press your lips together tightly. (Check your face for tension. You just want to use your lips.)

Back of the neck

Press the back of your head against the floor or chair.

Front of the neck

Touch your chin to your chest. (Try not to create tension in your neck and head.)

Chest

Take a deep breath, and hold it for 4 to 10 seconds.

Back

Arch your back up and away from the floor or chair.

Stomach

Suck it into a tight knot. (Check your chest and stomach for tension.)

Hips and buttocks

Press your buttocks together tightly.

Thighs

Clench them hard.

Lower legs

Point your toes toward your face. Then point your toes away, and curl them downward at the same time. (Check the area from your waist down for tension.)

Freeman L (2009). Relaxation therapy. In Mosby's Complementary and Alternative Medicine: A Research-Based Approach, 3rd ed., pp. 129–157. St. Louis: Mosby Elsevier.

Yoga

- Yoga is a mind-body practice that combines physical poses, controlled breathing, and meditation or relaxation. Yoga may help reduce stress, lower blood pressure and lower your heart rate. And almost anyone can do it.
- The potential health benefits of yoga include:
 - Stress reduction. A number of studies have shown that yoga may help reduce stress and anxiety. It can also enhance your mood and overall sense of well-being.
 - Improved fitness. Practicing yoga may lead to improved balance, flexibility, range of motion and strength.
 - Management of chronic conditions. Yoga can help reduce risk factors for chronic diseases, such as heart disease and high blood pressure. Yoga might also help alleviate chronic conditions, such as depression, pain, anxiety and insomnia.
- Ansbaugh DJ, et al. (2011). Coping with and managing stress. In *Wellness: Concepts and Applications*, 8th ed., pp. 307–340. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Yoga

- Teach child/children simple yoga poses and breathing exercises with the use of visuals, games, repetition and fun and motivating activities.
- Choose poses and breathing strategies at first that allow the child to feel successful and practice them consistently before adding new poses and breathing strategies.
- Create a yoga schedule with pictures of poses so there is consistency and the child knows what to expect.
- Allow the child to choose preferred poses in order to feel a sense of involvement and control.
- Incorporate “yoga breaks” throughout the day in order to encourage movement, stretching and breathing. This provides an opportunity to reset. Studies show that movement breaks throughout the day increase focus and concentration. Certain poses that cross the midline increase communication between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, which supports learning, movement and coordination and is thought to help develop new neuro-pathways in the brain.
- Set aside a “yoga space” in the setting with visuals of poses and breathing exercises for children to access when needed. Simple yoga stretches and breathing exercises can be done seated in a chair (chair yoga) if desired.
- Encourage children to engage in breathing strategies or yoga stretches when they become upset, agitated or experience anxiety as a replacement behavior or alternative behavior to acting out or exhibiting inappropriate behaviors.