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AHEC

Treating Individuals with ASD and Co-Occurring Anxiety: A Structured TEACCHing Approach

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
TEACCH Autism Program
Services Across the Lifespan



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Overview

- ▶ Vulnerability to Anxiety in ASD
- ▶ Benefit of structure for anxiety management and skill development
- ▶ Cognitive-Behavior Therapy for Anxiety in ASD

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Anxiety Among Individuals with ASD

- ▶ Four times higher than typically developing children
- ▶ anxiety occurs in approximately 30 to 80%
- ▶ Younger children often experience milder anxiety
- ▶ Social anxiety increases among children and adolescents with higher IQ/Verbal ability due to greater awareness of differences

(van Steensel, & Heeman, 2017; Vasa, Keefer, Reaven, South, & White, 2017; White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scahill, 2009)

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Why vulnerable to Anxiety?

- ▶ Executive function (poor organization, sequencing)
- ▶ Core difficulties in social interactions
- ▶ Difficulty regulating and managing emotions

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Prevention & Management through Structure

- ▶ **Increase predictability**
- ▶ **Improve organizational skills**

Structure to Implement

- ▶ *Promote communication skills*
- ▶ *Enhance social understanding*
- ▶ *Improve coping skills and stress reduction*

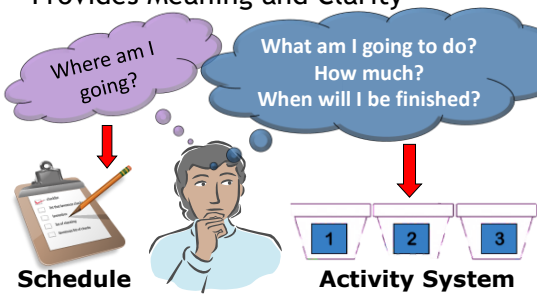
Skills to Teach

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Structured TEACCHing: Provides Meaning and Clarity

Where am I going?

What am I going to do?
How much?
When will I be finished?



Schedule

Activity System

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Prevention & Management through Structure

- ▶ Increase predictability
 - ▶ Improve organizational skills
- } **Structure to Implement**
- ▶ *Promote communication skills*
 - ▶ *Enhance social understanding*
 - ▶ *Improve coping skills and stress reduction*
- } **Skills to Teach**

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Promote Communication Skills

Selecting Conversation Topics

- ▶ Use concrete visual reminders to prompt conversation.
- ▶ Personal experiences
- ▶ Current “hot topics”



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Taking Turns During a Conversation

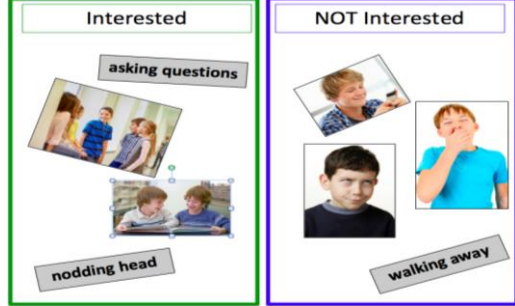
CONVERSATION TOPICS

1. Pick a topic card and turn it over
2. Pick a pink card
 - If TELL – Tell all something about the topic, this is called a **comment**
 - If ASK – Ask all something about the topic, this is called a **question**
3. Take turns with all picking pink cards.
4. We will talk about 6 topics



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Enhance Social Understanding (Non-Verbal Cues)



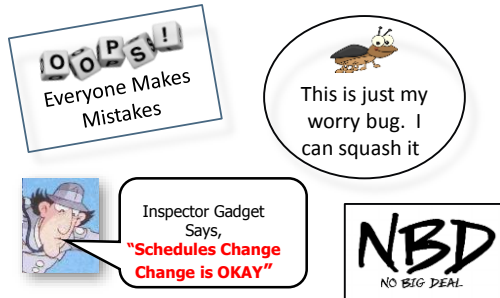
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Teach Coping Skills and Stress Reduction

- ▶ Sensory
- ▶ Yoga
- ▶ Enthusiasm
- ▶ Physical Exercise
- ▶ Screen Time
- ▶ Music

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Positive Self-Talk/ Mantras



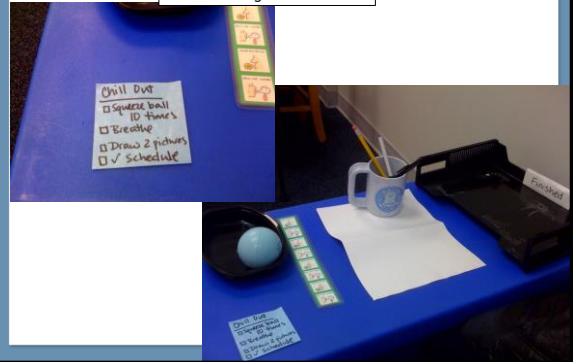
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Physical Structure:
Provide a Calming or Relaxation Area



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Activity System:
Provide a "to do" list of relaxing activities



Create Calming Routines



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Visual Routine 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. Stretch 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. Stretch orange band 10 times.
6. Take 5 more very slow deep breaths. □ □ □ □ □

Calming helps me stay calm.

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

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Schedule and Practice

- Social Group
- Work with Jenny
- Relaxation Exercise
- Office Job
- Pack up
- Bus at 3:05



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Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- ▶ CBT an umbrella term for a number of psychological techniques that share a theoretical basis in behavioristic learning theory and cognitive psychology
- ▶ Primarily developed through a merging of behavior therapy with cognitive therapy

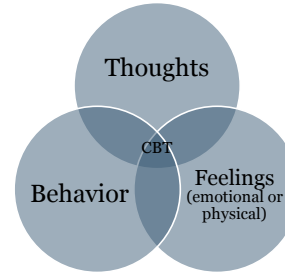
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ASD & Anxiety Treatment

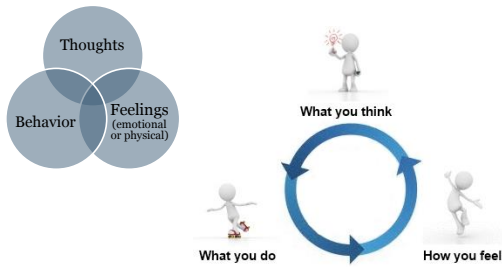
Sofronoff, 2005 Ages 10-12 yrs	Manualized, group, compared to group w/parent	6 sessions (2 hours)	Improvement of parent reported anxiety; parent involvement beneficial
Chalfani, 2007 Modified "Cool Kids" Ages 8-13 yrs RCT	Manualized, group, parent component	9 weekly & 3 monthly booster sessions	71.4% no longer met diagnostic criteria for anxiety per parent report
White, 2009 Multi-component integrated therapy(MCIT) Adolescents	Manualized, parent component, group social skills	12-13 sessions w/parent at end, 5 session social group	3 of 4 reduced anxiety 4 of 4 improved social skills
Wood, 2009 Modified "Building Confidence" Ages 7-11 yrs RCT	Manualized,, parent component, school consult	16 session	78.5% in CBT anxiety improved, compared to 8.7% waitlist – maintained 3 mo follow up
Reaven, 2012 Face Your Fears Ages 7-14 yrs RCT	Manualized, group, parent component	12 sessions (90 min)	50% positive treatment response compared to 8% in treatment as usual per parent report

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In a situation/event...



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Main Components of Anxiety Treatment in ASD

CBT

- ▶ Psychoeducation & Affect Recognition
- ▶ Identify Intensity
- ▶ Externalize Emotions
- ▶ Cognitive Restructuring
- ▶ Graded Exposure

Characteristics of ASD

- ▶ Visual learning/Poor Auditory Processing
- ▶ Executive Function
- ▶ Social-Communication
- ▶ Emotion Regulation/Coping

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People with ASD are Visual Learners

- ▶ Temple Grandin "Thinking in Pictures"
- ▶ Individuals with ASD learn more from what they see than what they hear
- ▶ CBT needs to be supported:
 - ▶ Visual supports during treatment
 - ▶ Visual reminders for ongoing use

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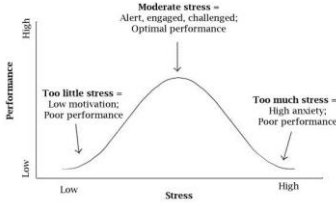
Psychoeducation & Affect Recognition

- ▶ Psychoeducation
 - ▶ Address why we have emotions, advantages/disadvantages
 - ▶ Recognition of intensity & Interference
- ▶ Affect Recognition
 - ▶ Shared vocabulary - identify how learner labels their emotions

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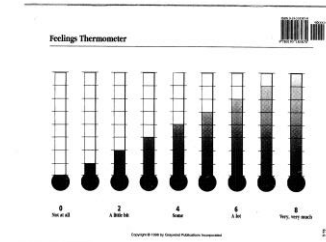
Psychoeducation

Why do we have emotions
Advantages & Disadvantages



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Identifying Intensity and level of Interference



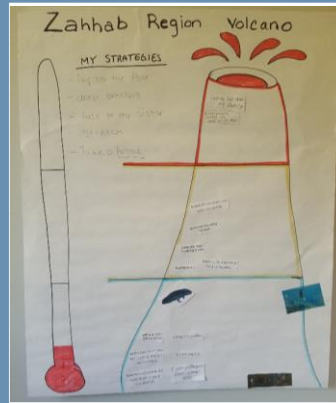
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Measuring Intensity

Someone touching my things
Getting lost from my family
Being around a lot of noise



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Incorporating Interest



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Affect Recognition

Words for Worry
Word Search

Someone's about worry in different ways. Find the 12 words below that describe how people feel.

Shared Vocabulary

Did you find all the words?
What words do you use to describe how you feel sometimes?

Did you find all the words?
What words do you use to describe how you feel sometimes?

DO V E R W
F E A M G R
E R I T U P
A T C E Z H
R S O T S I N E R V O U S H O
F C M D B K C P B E R E A T F
U A F E V A F R A I D I G E J
L R Q L R N I P G V O R N A
C E W K T F X X W P Z A E G
B D H O F S D B I T S Z T D I
L B Y R A G T O V O E F L Y T
R K E R B Z T M W R U A M J
A G F Y E C S K N L S J
L M R G J K W J E T R O C E
F R E A K E D O U T O L E T D

Reaven et al. (2011). Facing Your Fears: Group Therapy for Managing Anxiety in Children with High Functioning ASD

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Externalize the Anxiety

Worry Bug

Worry Bully



Reaven et al. (2011)



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Externalizing Anxiety in Adolescents and Adults

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Cognitive Restructuring

- ▶ Identify Automatic Thoughts
 - ▶ Negative Thoughts/ Thinking Errors (“Thinking Traps”)

e.g., Mind Reading

- ▶ Generate Alternatives

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Generate Alternative Thoughts

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The process of facing fears is called: “Exposure”

- ▶ Step 1: Make a list of anxiety provoking situations
- ▶ Step 2: Build a Fear ladder - least scary to most scary
 - ▶ Length of time
 - ▶ Time of day
 - ▶ Environment
 - ▶ Who is with you
- ▶ Step 3: Face fears (exposure)
- ▶ Step 4: Practice Exposure
 - ▶ Generate strategies for facing fears
 - ▶ Self-Evaluate
- ▶ Step 5: Reward brave behavior/ use of coping strategies

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#1 When I feel bad, I can try:

Take a walk 	Prayer 	Talk to someone I trust 	Listen to music
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#2 Do I feel better?

1 Great 2 Good 3 Okay 4 A little sad 5 Very sad

#3

Yes? Great, Back to work!

No? Try again!

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How does this apply for children under 6 years of age:

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3 year old girl

- ▶ 1-2 word phrases, echolalia, poor articulation
- ▶ Fear: Things being out of place
 - ▶ Water getting on her or her clothing
- ▶ Behavior:
 - ▶ Meltdown if water spilled,
 - ▶ Upset if drool on her bed sheets
- ▶ Parent response
 - ▶ Change clothing or bed sheets, wait out upset and restart activity or routine

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Case Example: 3 year old girl

Structured TEACCHing & CBT

Object Schedule/ Sequence

- ▶ **Schedule & Activity System**
- ▶ Psychoeducation & Cognitive Restructuring
- ▶ Teach calming activities
- ▶ Graded Exposure



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Case Example: 3 year old girl

Structured TEACCHing & CBT

Teach child new concept

- ▶ Same vs Different



- ▶ Schedule & Activity System
- ▶ **Psychoeducation & Cognitive Restructuring**
- ▶ Teach calming activities
- ▶ Graded Exposure

Teach the parent new response

- ▶ Keep Calm
- ▶ Mantra: "Its ok, its just different"
- ▶ Redirect to calming routine

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Case Example: 3 year old girl

Structured TEACCHing & CBT

- ▶ Schedule & Activity System
- ▶ Psychoeducation & Cognitive Restructuring
- ▶ **Teach calming activities**
- ▶ Graded Exposure



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Case Example: 3 year old girl

Structured TEACCHing & CBT

Increased size of water droplets

- ▶ Schedule & Activity System
- ▶ Psychoeducation & Cognitive Restructuring
- ▶ Teach calming activities
- ▶ **Graded Exposure**



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Treatment Outcome

- ▶ Practice: Implementation in home environment
- ▶ Outcome: reduced negative response to water
- ▶ Generalized process to other fears (e.g., bugs)

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