





Supporting Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Identity-first language will be used throughout this presentation per guidance from the APA Style Manual.



Objectives:

Participants will learn prevalence rates of autistic students.

Participants will recognize signs of anxiety in autistic students within the school setting.

Participants will learn instructional practices to support anxiety in autistic students within the school setting.

Participants will learn bottom-up and top-down strategies to support autistic students within the school setting.



Prevalence Rates

“The principle emotion experienced by autistic people is fear.”



*Intense Responsivity to
Sensory Stimuli*

Task Frustration

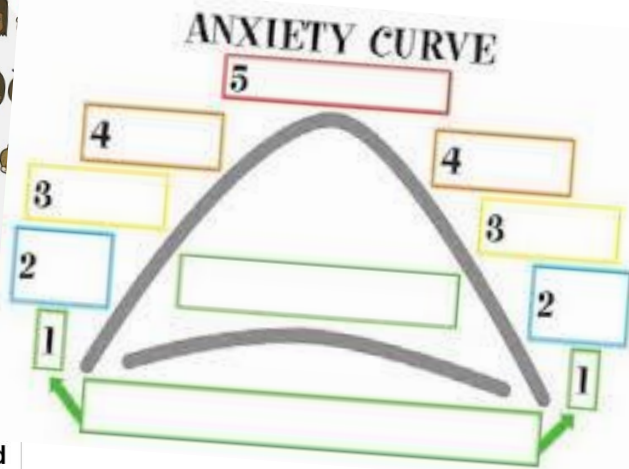
Communication Difficulties

Rigidity

Social Difficulties

Why The Prevalence?

Recognizing Anxiety In Our Students: Why We Need Clues!



Downstairs Brain

Survival focused
Feelings-driven
Fight/Flight/Freeze
Illogical
Concrete



Upstairs Brain

Emotionally regulated
Controlled
Organized
Rational
Logical
Abstract
Empathetic

Unknown	Emerging	Progressing	Partially Known	Flexibly Known	Flexibly Known and Integrated
Is not able to perform the skill yet	Can imitate the skill after practice or modeling	Knows the skill in one context only	Can use the skill in some contexts but not all and not always accurately	Can demonstrate the skill, most of the time, across settings and people when calm and regulated	Can demonstrate the skill across settings and people accurately, most of the time, and when dysregulated

Clues: Behavioral Signs

Perfectionism

Avoidance

Difficulty making mistakes

Negative self-talk

Self-Injurious behaviors

Compulsive behaviors

Increase in motor or vocal tics

Increase in repetitive behaviors

Seeking control over their environment

Social withdrawal

Class/School refusal

Asking more questions or repetitive questions

Speaking fast and loud

Greater focus on passions than usual

Difficulty making choices/indecisiveness

Irritability or low tolerance for agitation

Says no often

Anger/Aggression

Clues: Physical Symptoms

Frequent urination or accidents

Sweating

Muscle tension

Pacing/restlessness/jumpiness

Nausea/stomach pain

Flushed face

Red ears

Extremely still as if frozen

Wide eyes and dilated pupils

Dizziness

Racing heart

Shallow breathing

Trembling

Hot or cold skin

Clues: Signs Of Long-Term Stress

Fatigue

Headaches/migraines

Nausea/stomach pains

Diarrhea

Neck/back pain

Elevated blood pressure

Frequent colds/infections

Constipation

Clenched jaw/teeth grinding

Ringing in ears

Flare ups of eczema

Happy Playing doing things I like to do	Happy / a little worried Playing but may not be what I want	Worried *Pacing *Sucking Thumb *asking lots of questions	Anxious *Crying *Thumb in mouth * Rocking *arms crossed tightly	Very Anxious *Screaming *Crying *Pulling at my Clothes *slapping my face *Vomit
1	2	3	4	5

Rating Scales



Distress Level Rating Scale

Student Form

* Required

My distress level getting ready in the morning was... *

2- Some 3- Stronger 4- A Lot

1 2 3 4 5

None ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Worse

My distress level in the car was...

2- Some 3- Stronger 4- A Lot

1 2 3 4 5

None ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Worse

My distress level during period one was...

2- Some 3- Stronger 4- A Lot

1 2 3 4 5

None ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Worse

My distress level during period two was...

1 2 3 4 5

None ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Worse

My distress level during period three was...

1 2 3 4 5

None ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Worse

My distress level during period four was...

1 2 3 4 5



Instructional Practices To Support Anxiety



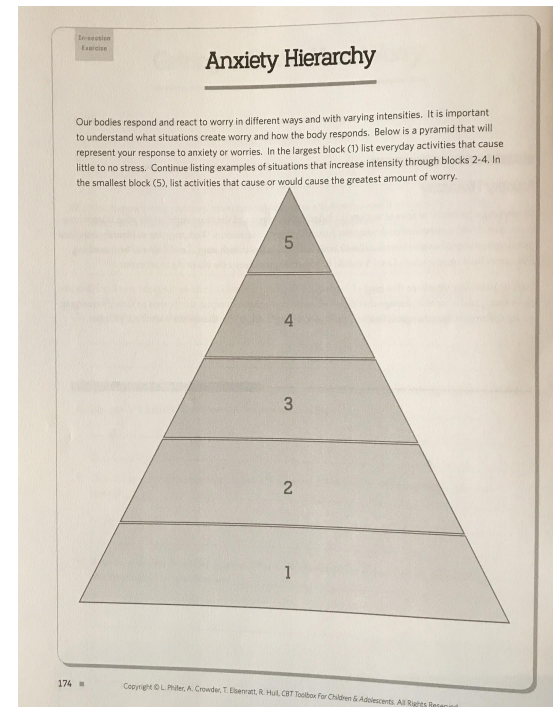
Relationships



**Neurons that fire
together wire
together!**



Prevention!



Flooding

Avoidance

White Knuckling

Facing and Feeling

The Edge



Predictability



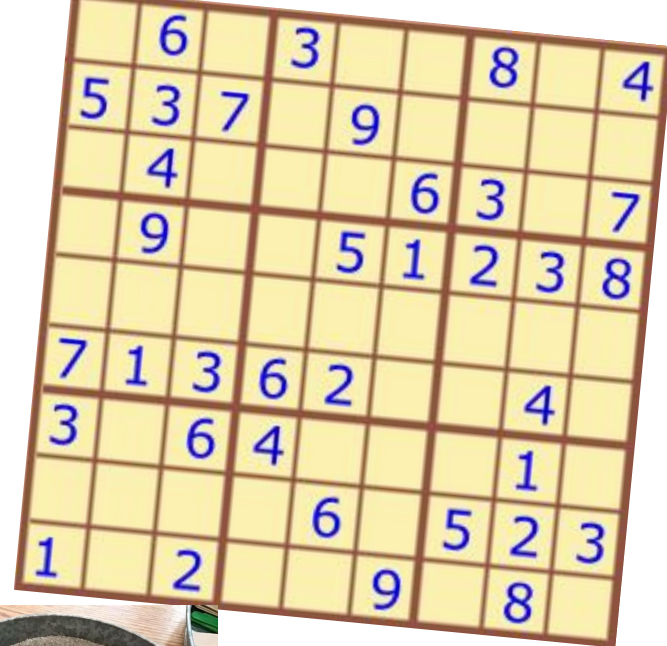


Bottom-Up Approaches To Support Anxiety





Shake It Up: Mindfulness Games by Susan Kaiser-Greenland



Cognitive Breaks

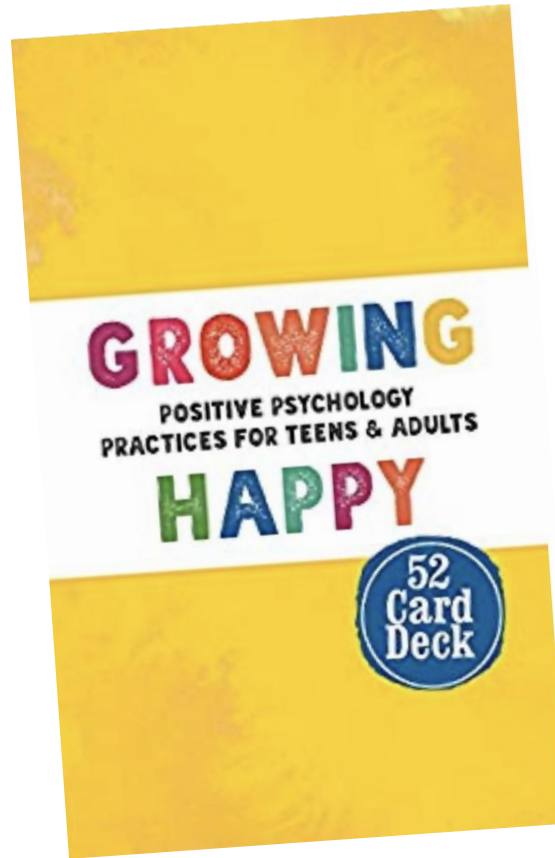
CalmConnect



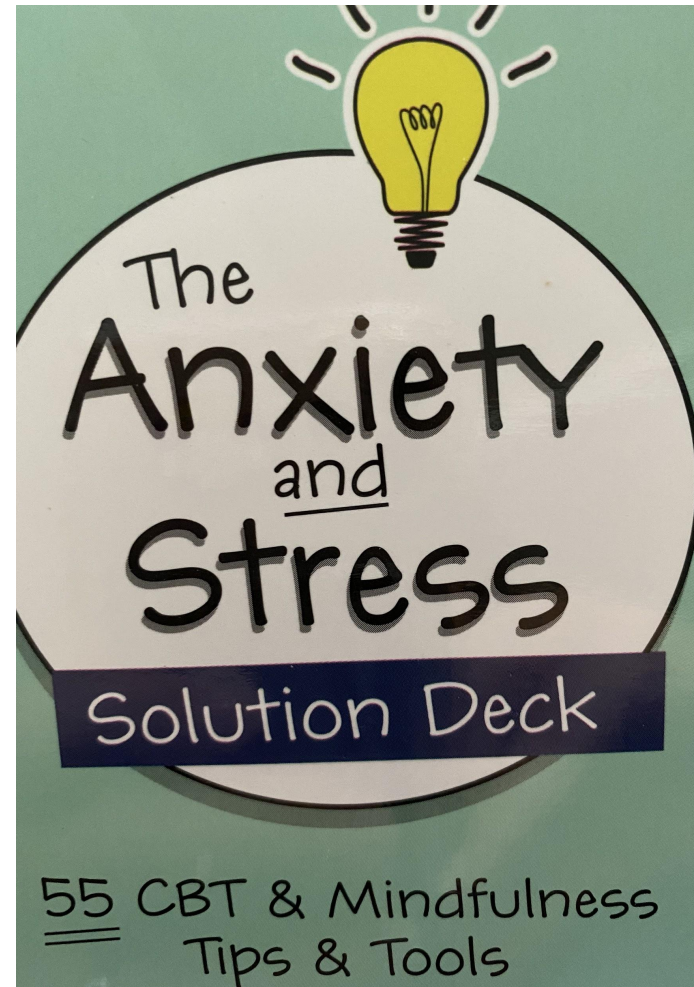


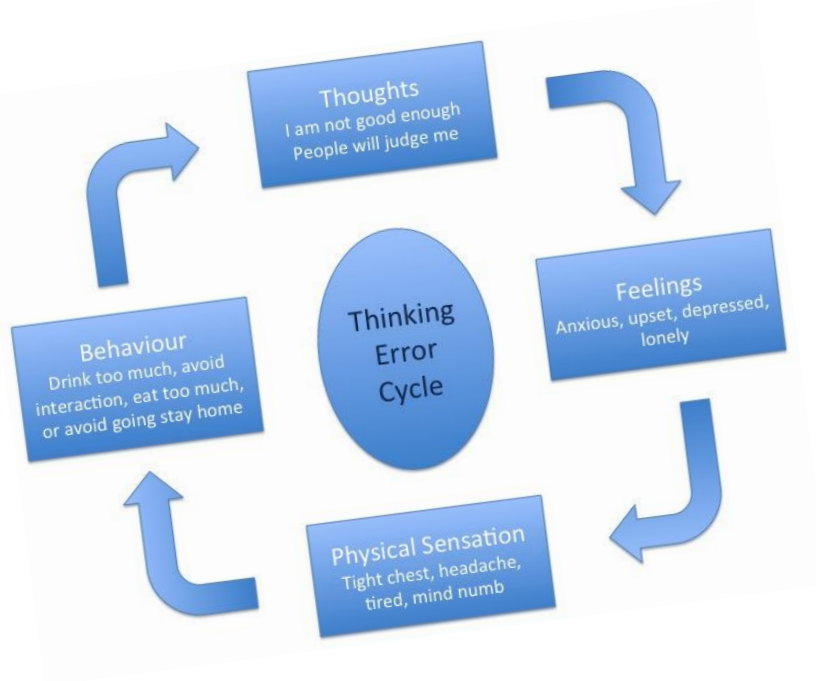
Top-Down Approaches To Support Anxiety





Tip Of The Day!





Situation	Thought	Emotion	Action
Giving a presentation to a group of people.	I might make a mistake and appear as if I don't know my material well enough. They will think I'm incompetent.	anxious	Go over and over the material trying to perfect it or Avoid the presentation
Giving a presentation to a group of people.	I've prepared well for the presentation so it is unlikely that I will make a mistake. If I do make a mistake than I can correct it. I'm sure the audience will not be bothered by it.	calm	Deliver the presentation as planned.

Positive Self-Talk And Scripts

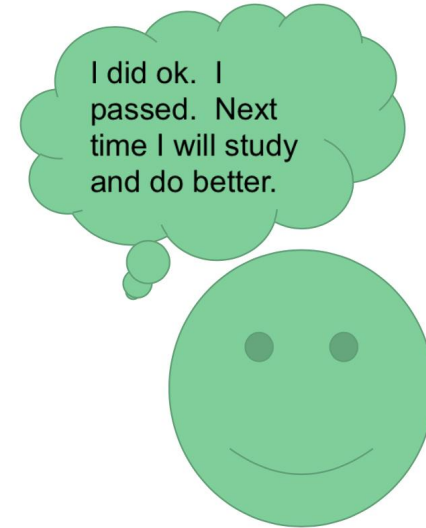


Challenging Errored Thinking

Unhelpful thought



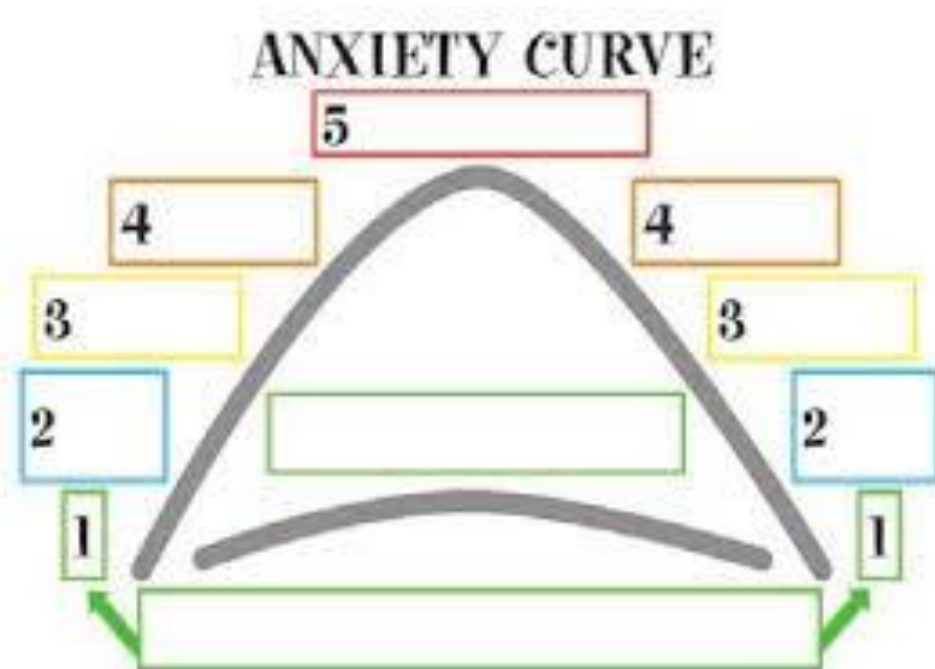
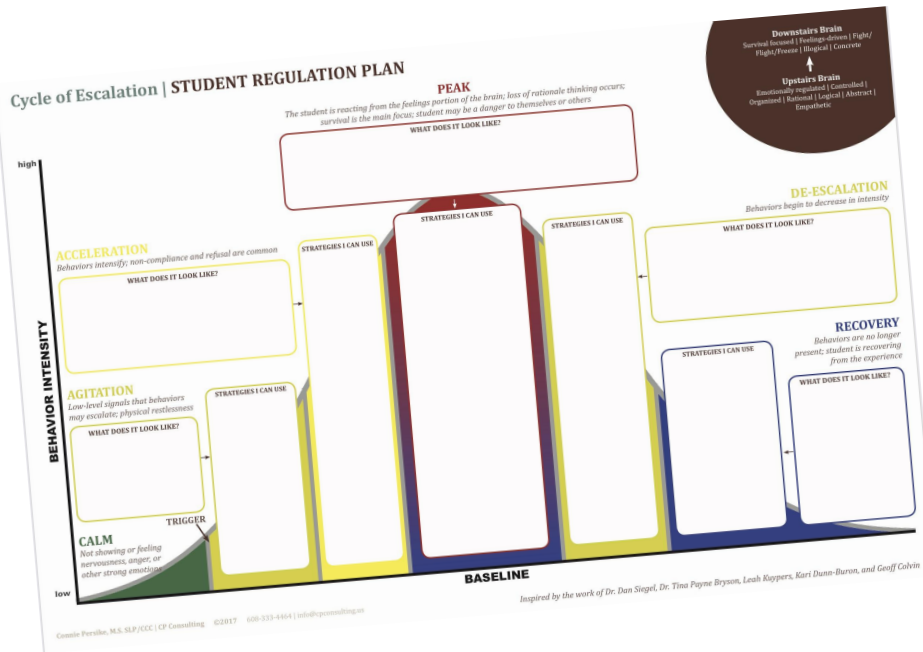
Helpful thought



Provide Replacement Thoughts

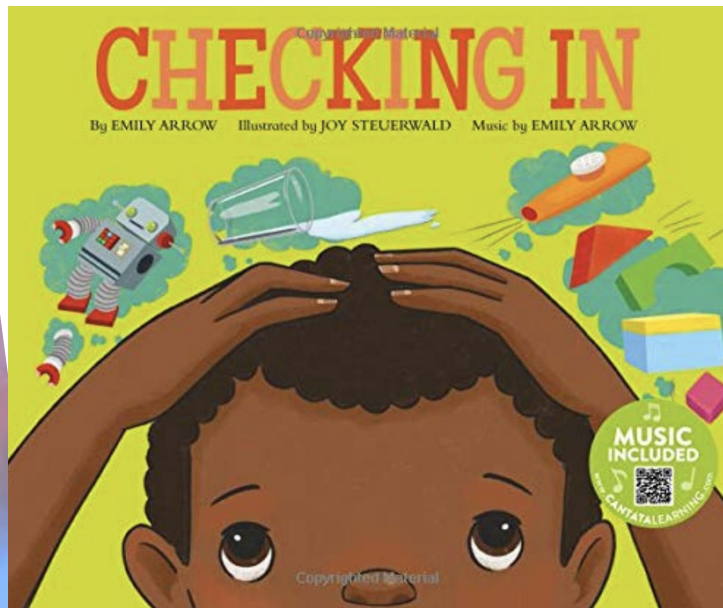
Anxious Thought	Challenge
Nobody ever plays with me.	Johnny didn't play with me today but Annie did.
I'll never make friends.	I can't tell the future.
People are talking about me.	They are probably talking about other things, not about me.

Challenge Anxious Thoughts



Self-Awareness and Strategies

Body Scan



Calm Down Plan

This activity will help the child develop a quick visual reminder of how to settle down when faced with triggers. Have the child brainstorm preferred strategies and create a small illustration or use a color to help calm themselves. Following is an example of a four-step process.

Example:

Calm Down Plan
1. Sit down
2. Close eyes
3. Take 5 deep breaths
4. Get back to work

Create Your Own:

Calm Down Plan
1.
2.
3.
4.

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Calming Routines/Strategies

Influencers



Questions?

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