Supporting Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorders

Connie Persike, M.S., CCC/SLP
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
Rigidity
Task Frustration
Communication Difficulties
Social Difficulties
Why The Prevalence?
Recognizing Anxiety In Our Students: Why We Need Clues!

Anxiety curve created by Kari Dunn-Buron

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

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

Upstairs Brain
- Emotionally regulated
- Controlled
- Organized
- Rational
- Logical
- Abstract
- Empathetic

Anxiety curve created by Kari Dunn-Buron

 Connie Persike, M.S., CCC/SLP. 2019 adapted from the concept of Fourtas & Pinnell
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
### Distress Level Rating Scale

**Student Form**

- **Required**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My distress level in the car was...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My distress level during period one was...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My distress level during period two was...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My distress level during period three was...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My distress level during period four was...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>The Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Practices To Support Anxiety
Relationships
Neurons that fire together wire together!
Avoidance

Flooding

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
Choose a category to begin:

rise  clarity
focus  calm
joy  rest
favorites

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Top-Down Approaches To Support Anxiety
Tip Of The Day!

GROWING
POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICES FOR TEENS & ADULTS
HAPPY
52 Card Deck

The Anxiety and Stress Solution Deck
55 CBT & Mindfulness Tips & Tools
Positive Self-Talk And Scripts

**Thinking Error Cycle**
- **Thoughts**: I am not good enough. People will judge me.
- **Feelings**: Anxious, upset, depressed, lonely.
- **Physical Sensation**: Tight chest, headache, tired, mind numb.
- **Behaviour**: Drink too much, avoid interaction, eat too much, or avoid going stay home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving a presentation to a group of people.</td>
<td>I might make a mistake and appear as if I don't know my material well enough. They will think I'm incompetent.</td>
<td>anxious</td>
<td>Go over and over the material trying to perfect it or Avoid the presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a presentation to a group of people.</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>calm</td>
<td>Deliver the presentation as planned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenging Errored Thinking
Unhelpful thought

I will never get it right; I'm a failure.

Helpful thought

I did ok. I passed. Next time I will study and do better.

Provide Replacement Thoughts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxious Thought</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobody ever plays with me.</td>
<td>Johnny didn’t play with me today but Annie did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll never make friends.</td>
<td>I can’t tell the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are talking about me.</td>
<td>They are probably talking about other things, not about me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Awareness and Strategies
Calming Routines/Strategies

Body Scan

CHECKING IN
By EMILY ARROW
Illustrated by JOY STEUERWALD
Music by EMILY ARROW

Calm Down Plan

This activity will help the child develop a calm visual inventory of how to settle down when faced with triggers. Have the child identify the patterns, create a visual check-list, and share it with a trusted adult who can use a chart to help the child calm themselves. Following is an example of a blank form used.

- Close eyes
- Take 3 deep breaths
- List 3 things to do
- Get back to work

Design

Chase Your Own

Start from the top.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Laura's

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
Influencers
Questions?

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