



Communication and Autism Team (CAT)

Autism and Anxiety

Anxiety and the four areas of difference

Autism is characterised by rigid thought and a need for routine and predictability. This is both a result of anxiety and a cause.

Interacting

- Misreading social situations
- Unable to communicate
- Lack of recognition of emotions of self and others
- Use behaviour as a form of expression
- Masking



Processing Information

- Take longer to process what is being said
- Cannot make small talk
- Display repetitive behaviours
- Focus only on own interests



Sensory Processing

- Can be over sensitive or under sensitive to sensory stimuli
- Can include: fear of loud noises, avoid busy crowded places, dislike touch, stimming (hand flapping, rocking), lick or eat inedible items, avoids bright lights or craves them, likes to make noises, dislikes background noises



Communication

- Unable to express themselves or comprehend what is being said
- Literal in their understanding
- Unable to read facial expressions or body language
- May not realise group instructions include them

How to help and support - We can all support our children by providing them with the skills to manage their symptoms, support them to build a tolerance to uncertainty and increase their resilience.

Interacting

- Stay calm
- Lower your tone of voice
- Acknowledge how they are feeling
- Lower demands
- Give them space
- Reassure them
- Remind them of difficult times when they have coped



the art of active listening

Repeat, Reflect, Respond;

Processing Information

- Clear instructions supported visually
- Use of interests and tools to structure recording things
- Allow processing time
- Reducing information and delivering learning in manageable chunks
- Pre-tutoring/post-tutoring
- Learning breaks/energy banking



Sensory Processing

- Management of the sensory environment using a Sensory Audit
- Know your child through their individual sensory profile
- Opportunities to access low/high arousal spaces
- Calm down/safe space
- Sensory boxes and self-regulation materials/activities
- Movement breaks



Once you have started to help the young person to cope with their sensory needs, then they may start to experience a lower level of everyday stress and be better equipped to cope, thereby reducing their long-term anxieties.

Communication

- Lessen language
- Check they understand what is being said
- Allow time to process and respond
- Use alternative forms of communication as needed
- Emotion coaching – say what you see
- Focus on special interest

Tools that can help -

- Make an Action Plan

You could include sections for:

- Healthy food
- Exercise
- Relaxation
- Fun
- School work
- Tv
- Online time
- Special interest



Keep a diary of your feelings
Learn a new skill
Meditate
Practice breathing exercises
Listen to music
Talk things through with someone



Use Social Stories <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/>
or Comic Strip Conversations <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

To help explain situations in a way that may help alleviate anxiety.

Things to access online that may help –

- NHS 5 Steps to Mental Well Being: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/>
- Apps CALM, STOPP, Breathe, Think, SAM



- NAS - <https://www.autism.org.uk/services/education/brain-in-hand.aspx>
- <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help/anxiety-information/autism-and-anxiety/>
- An Evidence Based guide to Anxiety in Autism
<https://www.city.ac.uk/news/2019/april/new-guide-help-manage-anxiety-autism>