Learning Better Ways to Cope: Teaching Students with ASD to Recognize and Manage Their Emotions

Objectives

1) Participants will describe the difficulties individuals with ASD may have in regulating their emotions and coping with stressful situations

2) Participants will employ modifications to the environment to make it easier for individuals with ASD to manage stressful situations

3) Participants will use strategies to teach students on the autism spectrum ways to cope and regulate their emotions
Emotion Regulation

Emotion Regulation: *How we try to influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express these emotions* (Gross, 1998)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQ3hjymiCCg

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Emotion Regulation and ASD

What do we know about emotion regulation in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Recent study (Lecavalier, 2006) found that more than 60% of school-aged children with an autism spectrum disorder have high rates of behavioral and emotional problems.
Emotion Regulation and ASD

• Between 11% and 84% of children with ASD experience some degree of impairing anxiety (White, Oswald, Ollendick, & Scahill, 2009)

• Individuals with ASD use adaptive emotion regulation strategies (e.g., goal-directed behaviors, seeking social support) less effectively than controls (Jahromi et al, 2012)

• Individuals with ASD tend to use more maladaptive strategies such as avoidance and venting (Jahromi et al, 2012)
ASD and Coping

Some common coping behaviors include:
- Self-isolation
- Biting and or motor stimulation
- Repetitive patterns in play, communication and familiar daily events
- Vocal stimulation (humming, echolalia self talk, whistling)
- Intense attachment to favored objects
- Excessive avoidance or intense seeking of particular sensory experience

http://www.fraser.org/tip_sheets/coping_skills.PDF
How Can We Help?

Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Model (Groden et al., 1994)

Mitigate and Cope (Ladd, 2007)

- MITIGATE - the adult (e.g., parent, teacher) makes environmental modifications to context
- COPE - the student is taught skills to “cope” with the context
Why Move Beyond Mitigation...

– Waiting too long – needs to start early
– Post graduation studies have show that our students with ASD are not faring well
– Lack of independence

Mitigate and Cope (Ladd, 2007)

• Austin is likely to have problem behavior when he is hungry
• Mitigate – teacher schedules an extra snack time for Austin during the day
• Cope – Austin is taught to indicate on a visual when he is feeling hungry

Mitigate and Cope (Ladd, 2007)

Example – ACTIVITIES/ROUTINES:
• Cameron is more likely to have problem behavior when she has to end a preferred activity
• Mitigate – parent provides access to a new preferred activity/object
  • In addition, parent gives/uses visual timer to indicate when preferred activity is going to end
• Cope – Cameron is taught to use her communication skills to request the new preferred activity that is appropriate
Mitigate and Cope (Ladd, 2007)

Example – SOCIAL:
- Hunter had more problem behavior when told “No, that’s wrong”
- Mitigate – teacher/parent said “Try again” instead of “No, that’s wrong”
- Cope – Hunter is taught to ask for help when he faces a difficult problem

When to Teach

Identifying Teachable Moments

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)
http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_preschool.html

Where/Who to Teach

- May need to practice some skills outside of the situation
- Important to also practice skill in actual context that behavior occurs in – plan time or set up scenario
- Also need to generalize individuals that person uses skill with
Coping Skills: What to Teach

9 Families of Coping (Skinner et al., 2003)

1) Emotional Regulation
2) Distraction
3) Support Seeking
4) Positive Cognitive Restructuring
5) Problem Solving
6) Escape
7) Rumination
8) Helplessness
9) Social Withdrawal

Emotional Regulation

• Recognize your emotions
• Express your emotions
• Control your emotions

Emotion Regulation: Recognizing How You Feel

• Learning to recognize what their body feels like
• Understanding when their feelings may be getting worse
• Recognizing other behavioral indicators of their internal state
• Identifying situations that make them feel a certain way
• Can be done verbally or nonverbally
Recognizing How You Feel

Circle the highest level for today:

- Calm
- Irritated
- Frustrated
- Angry
- Nervous

ANGER SCALE

GOOD  BAD  VERY BAD

www.parentcoachplan.com

The Anger Thermometer
Recognizing How You Feel

- Knowing yourself
- Forecasting emotions that situations are expected to produce
- Taking into account these emotions when selecting situations you will be exposed to

Pena-Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015

Recognizing How You Feel

Strategies to teach:
- How to identify situations that are difficult
- Linking situations with the emotions they will likely cause
- Weighing pros and cons of confronting or avoiding certain situations
- Appropriate ways to avoid known difficult situations

Mark whether each period makes you feel like you have a happy brain 😊 or a worry brain 😟:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Happy brain</th>
<th>Worry brain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning Routine</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
<td>😟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack/Break</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers/Library</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>😊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts and Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td>😊</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NYS
Recognizing How You Feel

Emotional Regulation
- Recognize your emotions
- Express your emotions
- Control your emotions

Expressing How You Feel
- Appropriately communicating how they feel can be an important part of the process
- Can be done verbally or nonverbally
- Alerts the adult to when intervention may be necessary
- Can be difficult for children with ASD – may require frequent labeling
- May not be a necessary step for all individuals
Emotional Regulation

- Recognize your emotions
- Express your emotions
- Control your emotions

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Jacobson (1929) – Anxiety
- Reduces anxiety, promotes self control and improves sleep
- Numerous studies have shown behavioral benefit to those with ASD
Teaching Relaxation

Mindfulness and ASD

- Few research studies examining mindfulness to support persons with ASD have had some success (ex – Bogels et al., 2008, 2 studies by Singh et al, 2011, Spek, 2013)

Coping Skills: What to Teach

9 Families of Coping (Skinner et al., 2003)

1) Emotional Regulation
2) Distraction
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5) Problem Solving
6) Escape
7) Rumination
8) Helplessness
9) Social Withdrawal
Distraction

- Helping student identify situations where using distraction may be beneficial
- Teaching the individual to select and engage in an activity that will distract them during the identified situation
- Teaching the individual to attend to the positive aspects of a situation instead of ruminate on the negative

Distraction Objects

Manual or Tactile

Auditory

Visual

Cognitive

DISTRACTION BOARDS

http://www.txautism.net/docs/Guide/Interventions/Relaxation.pdf
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Support Seeking

Skills to Teach:
- Knowing you need help
- Determining what kind of help you need
- Who to ask for Help
- How to Ask for Help
- When to Ask for Help – Is it the right time?

Coping Skills: What to Teach
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Cognitive Change

- Cognitive Change – changing one or more cognitive appraisal in a way that alters the situation's emotional significance, by changing how one thinks either about the situation itself or about one's capacity to manage the demands it poses

Recent research suggests that compared to typically-developing children and adolescents, individuals with ASD use cognitive reappraisal less frequently, which was associated with increased negative emotion experience, which in turn was related to greater levels of maladaptive behavior (Samson, Hardan, Lee, Phillips, & Gross, 2015)
### Common Cognitive Distortions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or White</td>
<td>Viewing situations, people, or self as entirely bad or entirely good – nothing in between</td>
<td>Paul made an error while playing on the school's basketball team. He began thinking, &quot;I'm a total failure. Nobody will like me. Everyone will hate me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing</td>
<td>Blowing expected consequences out of proportion in a negative direction</td>
<td>Sierra did not win first prize at the science fair. She thought, “My life is over. I’ll never win anything. People will look down on me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>Predicting everything will turn out badly</td>
<td>Kelly finished taking an important test. She immediately predicted that she failed. &quot;I’ll never get into college, because I blew it here&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings are Facts</td>
<td>Because you feel a certain way, reality is seen as fitting that feeling</td>
<td>Jim did not have plans with his friends this weekend. He felt lonely and inferior. He thought, “no one likes me. I have a terrible personality&quot;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

Established Intervention for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ages 6-14) – National Standards Project, 2015

- Some manualized cognitive behavioral intervention packages have been modified for students with ASD (e.g., The Coping Cat Program, Exploring Feelings and Facing Your Fears)
- These interventions should be implemented by professionals trained in cognitive behavioral interventions that also have experience working with individuals with ASD

- Recently there is more research on school-based implementation of these strategies
- Studies suggest that prevention programs using CBT in the schools are effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety in students (Nell & Christensen, 2009)
Cognitive Restructuring

• “Flipping the Pancake”

Cognitive Restructuring Techniques

• Coping Modeling
• Identifying Negative Self-Talk
• Being a detective – What’s the evidence?
• Identifying positive replacement thoughts or realistic thinking

Bernstein, Aldridge, & May (2013)

Ways to Teach Cognitive Restructuring

• Using Thought Bubbles
• Using a Thought Record
Using Comic Strip Conversations

• Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994) are one instructional strategies to help teach social understanding and cognition
• Illustrates conversation through simple drawings
• Can be used as a social autopsy
### Cognitive Picture Rehearsal

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<th>Helpful Thoughts</th>
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<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Math might not be my best subject, but I try hard. I'm better at...</td>
<td>Calm</td>
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<td>What if someone laughs at me in the lunchroom?</td>
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<td>No one has laughed at me during lunch before and if they do I can ignore them.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can't make any mistakes on my homework.</td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Everyone makes mistakes.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I lose, I must be dumb.</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Everyone has a turn at winning and losing because everyone is good at different games.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dog will bite me.</td>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>Most dogs I've seen have been friendly and didn't bite me.</td>
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### Cognitive Restructuring

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Adapted from Managing Anxiety in People with Autism – Chalfant, 2011
Teaching cognitive strategies to younger children or children with cognitive delays (Macklem, 2011)

Suggested modifications:
- Decreasing cognitive load by using concrete examples, slowing pace, adding more frequent practice, increasing visual aids and modeling
- Decreasing discussion and adding more actions such as fun games
- Adding emotion education
- Adding reinforcement
- Involving Parents

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Problem Solving

- How do you teach problem solving?
- What skills does a student need?
  - Decision making skills
  - Experience
Decision Making Tools

- Decision-making is a life skill
- Students with ASD don’t always have much experience
- Students with ASD have a difficult time predicting or conceptualizing outcomes
Problem Solving

1. Define the problem
2. Generate alternative solutions
3. Evaluate and select an alternative
4. Implement and follow-up to evaluate

Problem Solving Steps

1. What is my problem?
2. Think, think, think of some solutions
3. What would happen if...? Would it be safe? Would it be fair? How would everyone feel?
4. Give it a try!

Turtle Technique

- Recognize that you feel angry.
- Go into shell. Take 3 deep breaths and think calm, coping thoughts.
- "Think" stop.
- Come out of shell when calm and thinking of a solution.

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/
http://ecmhc.org/tutorials/social-emotional/mod4_3.html
Solution Organizer

What is the problem?

One solution is:________________________
Another solution is:________________________

Consequence:________________________
Consequence:________________________

Action:________________________

Problem Solving

Identify Your Problem
Possible Solutions
Try
Apply

Option: Solutions

Steps Required:
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_preschool.html
http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp
### Do Something Different

**PRO:**
- Get to dance
- Hear great music
- Hang out with friends
- Be part of a group
- Meet new people
- Meet someone to date
- Have lots of fun

**CON:**
- Don’t like to make conversation with strangers
- Afraid no one will ask me to dance
- Might make an embarrassing mistake
- Will feel really nervous

**Can I Make It Better?**
- Practice making conversation with someone ahead of time
- Ask someone to dance with me instead of waiting to be asked
- Ask good friends ahead of time if they’ll dance with me
- Practice calming sequence so I won’t get nervous

### Do The Same Thing

**PRO:**
- Won’t make any mistakes
- Won’t get nervous trying to talk to strangers
- Won’t be embarrassed that I wasn’t asked to dance
- Will feel safer

**CON:**
- Won’t get to dance
- Won’t get to hear great music
- Won’t be able to see my friends
- Won’t meet anyone new
- Won’t meet someone to date
- Will be lonely
- Will be bored
- Will be sad
- Will never get to go to a dance

### Can I Make It Better?
- Won’t get to dance
- Won’t get to hear great music
- Won’t be able to see my friends
- Won’t meet anyone new
- Won’t meet someone to date
- Will be lonely
- Will be bored
- Will be sad
- Will never get to go to a dance

### My ANGRY Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Looks/Sounds I Like</th>
<th>Feels Like</th>
<th>I Can Try To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Laughing/Tears</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leave room with permission and go back to the room when I’m calm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Crying, loud</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Go get a drink and come back to the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Screaming, shaking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Go get a drink and come back to the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shouting, crying</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Go get a drink and come back to the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nothing of Interest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Go get a drink and come back to the room.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Autism 5-Point Scale App

By The Autism Society of Minnesota
Embedding Strategies into the Classroom

Why?
1) Children with ASD have difficulty generalizing from one setting to another.
2) Repetition is important for new skill acquisition.

Embedding Strategies into the Classroom

At the Elementary Level

1) Consider whole class social skills lessons
2) Choose books that correspond to skills being taught during large group reading.
3) Target skill use in the whole class reinforcement system.

Embedding Strategies into the Classroom

At the Elementary Level and Beyond

1. Look for naturally occurring opportunities to use coping language.
2. Look for naturally occurring opportunities to practice skills as a whole class.
What to do when it doesn’t work

• Are maladaptive strategies continuing to “work” better for the student?
• Has the coping skill been adequately taught? (e.g., small steps, visuals, using reinforcement, modeling)?
• Does the student have the necessary prerequisite skills to perform the new behavior?
• Do they see the “benefit” of using the new behavior?
• Have they had enough opportunities to practice? Have they practiced in the actual stressful situation with prompting?

What about those Ruminators?

• Teaching Flexibility

Unstuck & On Target! An Executive Function Curriculum to Improve Flexibility for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders

Lynn Cannon, Lauren Kenworthy, PhD, Katie C. Alexander, MS, OTR, Monica Adler Werner, and Laura Gutermuth Anthony, PhD
Summary

• The world for individuals with autism spectrum disorders may be more stressful
• It is important to not just modify the individual’s environment to make things easier but also to TEACH COPING SKILLS
• Teach individuals how to recognize and express how they feel, and cope with the situation or problem-solve it
• The goal is to increase the individuals independence in using these skills in multiple settings

CARD Albany is now on Facebook
https://www.facebook.com/cardalbany

Required Coursework for Special Education Professionals now online – “Responding to the Needs of Students with ASD”
http://www.albany.edu/autism/nysed_autism_training.php

Online Distance Learning Training
http://www.albany.edu/autism/33452.php

New York State Regional Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders
http://www.albany.edu/autism/nysrcasd.php
Questions?

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
Phone: (518) 442-2574 or toll free 1+(866) 442-2574
Email: card@albany.edu
Website: www.albany.edu/autism