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

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

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

![Image of a siren with a calm person and an angry person, along with an anger scale.]

Circle the highest and lowest for today:

- Circled options: Calm, Imitated, Frustrated, Angry, Upset

- Options: GOOD, BAD, VERY BAD

www.parentcoachplan.com

The Anger Thermometer

- Circled numbers: 3

- Anger: Frustrated, Crossed, Imitated, Angry, Upset
Identifying Situations

- 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

Identifying Situations

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
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

Expressing Emotions
Situation Selection Options:
1) Experience – choosing to face a situation in spite of the negative emotions it might elicit (might have long-term benefits)
2) Avoidance – escaping or avoiding the situation
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do Something Different</th>
<th>Do The Same Thing</th>
<th>Can I Make It Better?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRO:</strong></td>
<td><strong>PRO:</strong></td>
<td><strong>CON:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Get to dance</td>
<td>• Won't make any mistakes</td>
<td>• Don't like to make conversation with strangers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hear great music</td>
<td>• Won't get nervous trying to talk to strangers</td>
<td>• Afraid no one will ask me to dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hang out with friends</td>
<td>• Won't be embarrassed that I wasn't asked to dance</td>
<td>• Might make an embarrassing mistake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be part of a group</td>
<td>• Will feel safer</td>
<td>• Will feel really nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet new people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet someone to date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have lots of fun</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CON:</strong></th>
<th><strong>CON:</strong></th>
<th><strong>CAN:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Won't get to dance</td>
<td>• Won't get to dance with me instead of waiting to be asked</td>
<td>• Practice making conversation with _____ ahead of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Won't get to hear great music</td>
<td>• Ask someone to dance with me instead of waiting to be asked</td>
<td>• Ask good friends ahead of time if they'll dance with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Won't be able to see my friends</td>
<td>• Will be lonely</td>
<td>• Practice calming sequence so I won't get nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Won't meet anyone new</td>
<td>• Will be bored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Won't meet someone to date</td>
<td>• Will be sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will be lonely</td>
<td>• Will be sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will be bored</td>
<td>• Will be sad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will never get to go to a dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138](http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138)

[http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138](http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138)

[http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138](http://elearning.autism.net/visuals/main.php?g2_itemId=138)
**Autism 5-Point Scale App**

*By The Autism Society of Minnesota*
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?
When you need help, you can raise your hand or come and tap the teacher on her shoulder. You can say, “Excuse me, I need help please.” Then wait for your teacher to respond.

I need help please.

I need help please.

The ‘Do I Need Help?’ Flowchart

Problem Solving

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

www.asq.com

http://ecmhc.org/tutorials/social-emotional/mod4_3.html
What is the problem? ______________________________

One solution is: ________________________________

Another solution is: ________________________________

Consequence: __________________

Consequence: __________________

Action: __________________
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 BOARDS

http://www.txautism.net/docs/Guide/Interventions/Relaxation.pdf
Distraction Objects

Manual or Tactile

Auditory

Visual Cognitive

What is Mindfulness?

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance. This means paying attention to thoughts and feelings without judging or reacting to them.

When you’re mindful, there is no “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a particular moment.

A Mindful Minute

There are lots of ways to take a mindful minute.

“What if I fail the test?”
I have a worried thought. It’s nothing big. It’s only a thought. I’m not going to have to react to it. I am not my thoughts.

I’m paying attention to my breath. That’s it. I am observing my breath and if my mind wanders, that’s okay. I just come back to my breath.

I’m bringing myself back from a worried future thought to the present by getting in touch with my breath. I feel the breath in my nose, I notice the smell, hear and see in this moment.”
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 and Exploring Feelings)
- These interventions should be implemented by professionals trained in cognitive behavioral interventions that also have experience working with individuals with ASD
Cognitive Behavioral Interventions

- 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 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)
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)

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Ways to Teach Cognitive Restructuring

- Using Thought Bubbles
- Using a Thought Record
Cognitive Restructuring

- “Flipping the Pancake”
- Facing Your Fears - *Group Therapy for Managing Anxiety in Children with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders* - (Reaven, Blakeley-Smith, Nichols, & Hepburn)

http://autismteachingstrategies.com/
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 Restructuring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Worries</th>
<th>Feeling/Action</th>
<th>Helpful Thoughts</th>
<th>Feeling/Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm horrible at math!</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Fail Test</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math might not be my best subject, but I try hard. I'm better at…</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if someone laughs at me in the lunchroom?</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Eat in bathroom/don't make friends</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one has laughed at me during lunch before and if they do I can ignore them.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can’t make any mistakes on my homework.</td>
<td>Worried</td>
<td>Don’t do homework</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes help me learn. Everyone makes mistakes.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I lose, I must be dumb.</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Avoid playing games</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has a turn at winning and losing because everyone is good at different games.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dog will bite me.</td>
<td>Scared</td>
<td>Won’t go places where there are dogs</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most dogs I’ve seen have been friendly and didn’t bite me.</td>
<td>Calm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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.

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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.

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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/nyscasd.php
Questions?

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Email: card@albany.edu
Website: www.albany.edu/autism