


Anxiety in Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities

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Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder (RRCASD)


Provides Community Education and Technical Assistance to increase knowledge of ASD and available regional resources.

Strives to enhance community resources through new activities and product development:

- Information & Referral
- Webinar Series
- Newsletters
- Information Sheets on ASD-related topic
- Community Presentations & Events
- Parent/Guardian & Professional Development Programs



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House Keeping

To reduce background noise during the webinar, please put yourself on 'mute' through your phone or computer.

Please feel free to type any questions into the 'chat' box on your screen. We will review/answer questions during the Q & A at the end of the webinar.

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Anxiety can look like this



Anxiety can also look like this



Hallmark features

- Fear/distress
- Avoidance
- Out of proportion
- Physiological response

Interference

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The "triad"

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graph TD
    Thoughts --> Feelings
    Feelings --> Behavior
    Behavior --> Thoughts
  
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Thoughts

Feelings

Behavior

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CHILDREN

- Less likely to report cognitive symptoms
- Limited insight into excess worry
- Very young children may not meet full criteria
- Behavioral indicators (e.g., tantrums, refusal to follow directions)
- May appear inattentive

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Anxiety in asd


- High comorbidity (approximately 40%)
- Atypical presentation of anxiety disorders
- "Exacerbated and clinically-impairing anxiety around the hallmark features of ASD" (Kerns et al., 2014)
- Hypersensitivity

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ANXIETY DISORDERS

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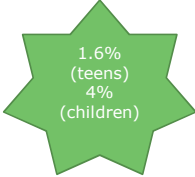



Separation anxiety

- Distress/anticipation of separation
- Worry about loss or scary event
- Avoidance/refusal
- Nightmares (not night terrors)
- Somatic complaints




4 weeks






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Separation anxiety

- Tantrums upon separation
- Complain of being sick before school
- Follow caregiver around the house
- Insist upon caregiver present at bedtime
- "Check up" on caregiver when he/she is separated

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Social phobia

Fear/distress in social situations

Fear of negative evaluation

Avoidance/endurance

(Performance only)



6 months

7 %

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Social anxiety

Shy with new people

Shy in large (or small) groups

Can be overly quiet and rule-bound in school

Tantrums when criticized

Physical symptoms

Some report negative evaluation

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Social anxiety in ASD

Social "discomfort" (or hitting a wall)

Social avoidance

Fear related to not knowing what to do

Presenting *without* fear of social rejection

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Generalized anxiety



- Excessive worry/apprehension/doom
- Worry is difficult to control
- One physiological symptoms
- More days than not

6 months

0.9 %

WHAT IF...???

MR. WORRY

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GAD

- "What if..."
- Safety concerns
- "Checking up" on loved ones
- Worrying about getting in trouble
- Reluctant to try new things
- Tantrums during transitions/change
- Social concerns
- Others' health
- Being good enough

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GAD in ASD


- Worry about rule-breaking
- Worry about having preferred items/activities taken away
- Fear of novel situations
- Fear of change


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Specific Phobia

Immediate and persistent fear of object/situation
Animal/natural environment/blood/situational

 6 months

 5 %




Specific phobia in ASD

Most commonly-endorsed anxiety disorder in ASD

Atypical specific fears


- Baby crying
- Specific stores
- Haircuts
- Songs

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ASSESSING FOR ANXIETY

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Standardized anxiety assessment

Typically used when child is at least 6 years old

In younger children, based upon observation and parent report

Ask about child behavior and interference with daily life



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Assessment

Observational assessment

- Look for patterns in behavior
- Time of day/ situation/ environmental cues

Gather information from parents/ school/ etc.

Children with anxiety may look much better at school than at home

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Child report of anxiety

Children rarely divulge if you don't ask!

Assess for understanding of emotional language

- What does anxious mean?
- What does nervous mean?
- What does scared mean?



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Asking about anxiety

Ask specific questions in language the child understands

Start with open-ended questions:

- How did it feel when you made a mistake?
- What will happen if you get the wrong answer?
- Why is it hard to ask a friend to play?
- What was the best thing about today? What was the hardest?

Provide range of options if needed (try to avoid yes/no)

- Did you feel happy or scared or okay?
- Do you think about making mistakes a lot or just sometimes?
- Is it because you are scared they will not want to play with you or maybe you just don't always feel like playing with other kids?

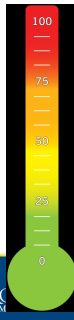
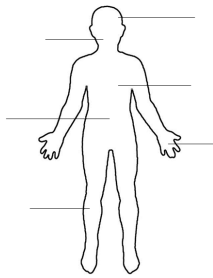
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visuals



How does my body react to being nervous?

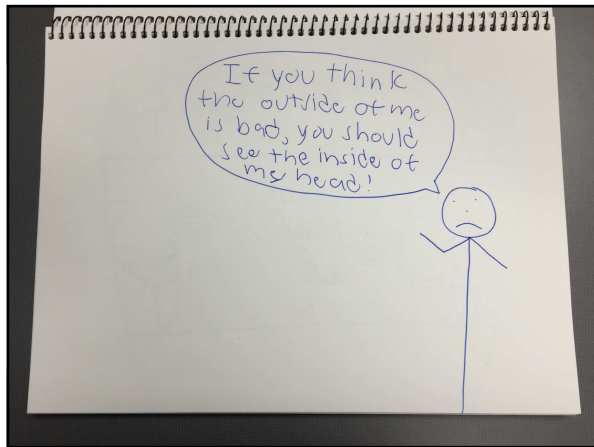


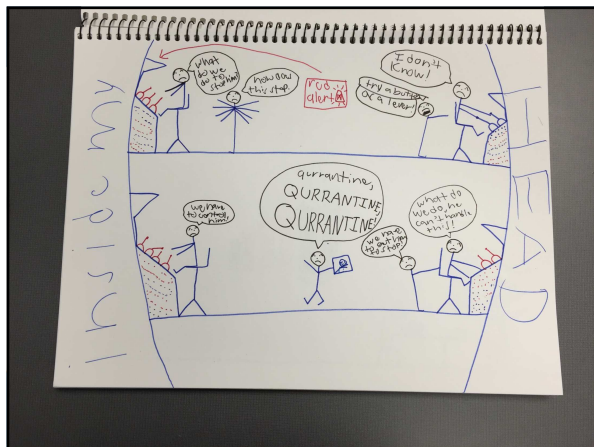
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ANXIETY INTERVENTION



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General strategies


Minimize reassurance

Minimize avoidance

Teach coping strategies

- Relaxation
- Coping thoughts/scripts
- Increase emotional vocabulary
- Practice in "safe" situations

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General strategies

Be gentle


Make expectations and consequences very clear

Consistency across settings (school, home)

Use rewards!

Use visuals!

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SET UP FOR SUCCESS

[illegible]

Prevention strategies


Preferential seating

- Near the teacher
- Away from disruptive students

Set clear expectations

- Consistency
- Class-wide rewards systems
- Posting and reviewing important rules

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Visual schedules


Kids with anxiety love routine

Reduces anxiety about unknown
or what comes next

Reduces anxiety about getting
preferred activities

Helps child self-monitor

Review frequently – before each
transition



The image shows a vertical visual schedule on a dark background. It consists of seven rectangular icons arranged vertically, each with a small illustration and a label below it. From top to bottom, the icons are: 1. A plate with a fork and knife, labeled 'breakfast'. 2. A group of people sitting in a circle, labeled 'circle time'. 3. A person sitting at a desk with a book, labeled 'work time'. 4. A person running, labeled 'recess'. 5. A person sitting at a desk with a book, labeled 'work time'. 6. A person running, labeled 'recess'. 7. A person sitting at a desk with a book, labeled 'home'. A large red arrow points to the first icon, 'breakfast'.

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-
- A vertical timeline of daily activities is shown on a blue background. The activities are represented by icons in rounded rectangles, connected by a vertical line. From top to bottom, the activities are: break fast (plate with fork and knife), go to school (three children), work time (briefcase), home (house), work time (briefcase), home (house), and home (house). A large red arrow points to the 'break fast' activity.

reinforcement

Praise for positive behavior

Consider a reward system for anxiety-specific situations

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TEACH COPING SKILLS

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Coping skills

Transfer the control of coping from the adult to the child

Teach and practice first when the child is calm

Coach child to use coping skills in anxiety-provoking situations

May vary depending upon child's developmental level

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Psychoeducation

Normalize

- Lots of kids feel scared or upset (around other people, when they get the wrong answer, when they make a mistake)

Help the child understand the link between their feelings and actions

- Sometimes when kids are scared they might yell, throw things, or cry. What happens to you when you're scared?

Give a rationale for coping skills

- It's okay to be scared! We want to help you learn how to calm yourself down, so you can feel better

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Emotion recognition

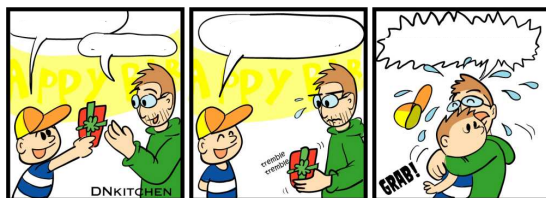
Being able to put words to feelings is often an effective intervention

Teach emotion words using feelings faces, cartoons, etc

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Emotion recognition



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relaxation

<https://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/4%20Emotion%20Regulation%20Skills/Client%20Handouts/Relaxation/Relaxation%20Script%20for%20Younger%20Children.pdf>



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Modeling in-the-moment

Should occur immediately

Presented calmly


Shows appropriate behavior

- "I'm frustrated"
- "This is hard"
- "I need help"
- "I'm scared"
- "I need a break"






Use emotion cards/ break cards

- For younger children
- For children with limited language skills


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Put it all together

	Feeling	Example	Coping Skills
5	The most angry or mad	When King Triton destroyed Ariel's grotto 	Go to my room for alone time. Ask, "Can you please leave me alone?" Say "I need to be alone!"
4	Getting more angry or frustrated	When Vanessa tried to marry Prince Eric 	More deep breaths, do the turtle or squeeze a lemon (hold for 6 seconds)
3	A little upset or sad	When Ursula takes her voice 	Take deep breaths, use Breathe 2 Relax app
2	Happy	Ariel singing 	Keep doing what you're doing
1	Calm	Ariel in her grotto 	Keep doing what you're doing

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Be gentle

Reprimands and yelling often exacerbate the problem

Phrase rules and corrections positively

Helps child understand what to *do* instead of what not to do

NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
No running	Use walking feet
Stop screaming	Tell me in a calm voice
Come back here	Walk next to your friend

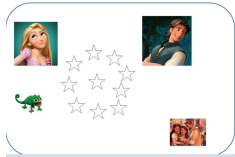
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reinforcement

Reward *any attempts* to cope, not just success

Consider behavior/rewards chart (home and school)



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Thought recognition



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Cognitive restructuring

What you expect will happen:



What is likely to happen?

What are the chances of that happening?

What has happened in the past?

What's the worst that could happen? AND THEN....????

What else could you tell yourself?

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Coping thoughts

Alternatives to "automatic" thoughts

"Everyone will laugh at me."

They will be too worried about themselves to notice me.

"If I go on the bus I'm going to get off at the wrong stop and get lost."

I've done this before; I can do it again.

"I just don't want to!"

It will be over soon.

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Social stories

- First-person narrative
- Overview of expectations in frustrating/difficult situations
- Uses highly positive language
- Individualized to child
- Gives the child an internal "script"

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My name is Lily, and I am
a big girl in Pre-K!

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Every day I get out of bed and get ready for
school.



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Sometimes mommy is still in bed when I wake up. I like to snuggle with her. We listen to the alarm ring and sometimes we listen to the dogs bark. I like to draw flowers.




Presented by Michael O'Neil, Frances Hill, and the University of Rochester Medical Center

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Sometimes mommy will already be awake when I wake up. I can look for her in the bathroom or the closet or downstairs!



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It's okay if mommy is not in bed when I come into her room. She will still get me ready for the day! I can eat breakfast with Bennett if I want to.



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Mommy will spend time with me before she goes to work. She will give me a hug and a kiss. It is fun to get ready in the morning!



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SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

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Separation anxiety

- Advance preparation on individual basis
- Social stories
- Transition objects
- Relaxation
- Make the separation quick and clear
- Always say goodbye!



I'll wait here till you get home

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Social phobia

Teaching social scripts

Relaxation

Social stories

Cognitive restructuring



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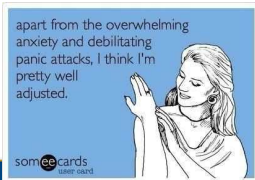
Generalized anxiety

Relaxation

Social stories

Patience

General cognitive restructuring



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Specific phobia

Exposure is our best tool

GRADUAL desensitization to the feared situation

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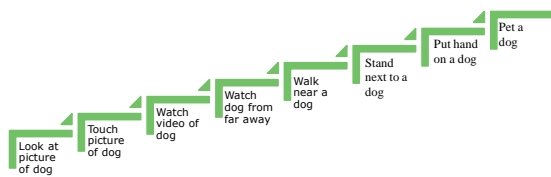
Exposures

Can use with different forms of anxiety
 Real-world "practice" getting scared and then using coping skills
 Should be done in a gradual, systematic way

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Example: dog phobia



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		Distress Rating (0 - 10)
1.	Hardest Parents getting a haircut	8
2.	Parents scheduling a haircut for real	7-8
3.	Talking about getting a haircut	6-7
4.	Going inside the salon	6
5.	Looking at salon logo or website	4-6
6.	Walking up to the salon doors	4
7.	Going into a different salon	3-5
8.	Driving by the salon	3
9.	Parents schedule a fake haircut	2
10.	Parents pretend to leave for a haircut	1
11.	Sitting in the salon parking lot	0-1
12.	Easiest	



Transition-related anxiety

Warnings (gradual and then faded out)
Visual/auditory supports (e.g., timers, countdowns, schedules)
Consistency
Transition objects
Advance notice of changes
Reinforcement for tolerating transitions/changes

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Sensory sensitivity

Advance warning
Comfort object
Teach asking for a break
Calm-down areas
Social stories
Distraction (think of as many animals as you can...)

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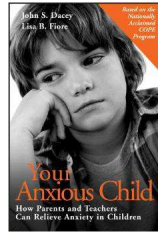
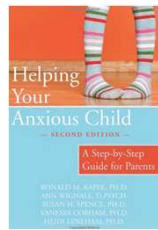
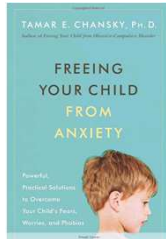
Final thoughts

Consistency is key!
Communicate with parents/ therapists/ school staff – use same strategies across settings
When possible, use same materials (e.g., rewards charts, transition objects) across settings
People involved are usually open to learning new strategies

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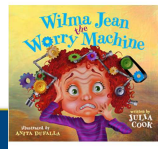
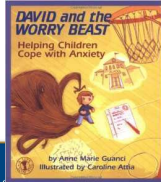
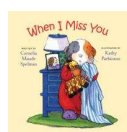
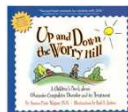
Books on anxiety



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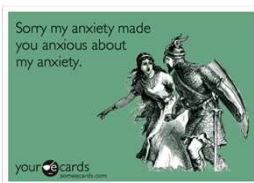
Books for children



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Thank you!




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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Online resources

For adults

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>


<http://www.worrywisekids.org/>

http://www2.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry/schoolpsychiatry_chiladolescent.asp

For kids and teens

<http://youth.anxietybc.com/>

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School recs for separation


General school recs:

- Plan for a routine check-in with parents
- Use visual schedules, especially for morning activities
- Provide a calm down space

Transition to a new school/classroom:

- Meet the teacher ahead of time
- Visit the classroom or campus before school starts
- Emphasize positives of new classroom/school
- Start a morning schedule at least one week before school starts

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Social phobia recs for school

Avoid calling on the student unless he/she has raised his/her hand

Warn the student when he/she will be expected to be called on (e.g., "I'm going to ask Jaxson, then Ashley, then Maddie")

Subtly encourage social interactions with the student. Set up small group games, offer a conversation starter, or suggest to a classmate that he/she ask the student to join in

Use a peer mentor

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GAD recs for school

Listen to child and keep calm

When possible, do not provide a "perfect example"

Praise efforts on tasks

Use clear expectations of classroom rules and consequences

Encourage creative and silly responses/activities, especially during non-instructional times

Use distraction (and do not let child avoid) during somatic complaints

Encourage child to use relaxation strategies

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Resources

Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder (RRCASD)

- Educational resources, webinars, Information & Referral services.
- Contact information:
 - Website: www.golisano.urmc.edu/rrcasd-nyautism
 - Email: rrcasd@urmc.rochester.edu
 - Telephone: (855) 508-8485

Autism Speaks - Website: www.autismspeaks.org

- This site contains various toolkits and guides for home, school, work, safety, health/medical, etc.


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Question & Answer

Please Note: A Webinar Evaluation Survey and information regarding a Certificate of Attendance for today's webinar will be sent to your email. If you have any questions, please contact the RRCASD at rrcasd@urmc.rochester.edu.

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