

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM AND ANXIETY



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June 2018

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WORKSHOP PLAN

- Overview of mental health and autism
- Spot the signs - recognise the underlying problem
- What is anxiety and how does it work?
- What can you do to help?
 - Talk about it
 - Building resilience

MENTAL HEALTH AND AUTISM

- 71% of children with autism have at least one co-occurring mental health problem (Siminoff et al 2008)
- 40% have two or more
- 1 in every 10 children who access CAMHS has autism
- (NAS Campaign 2014)

IMPACT

**Stress and anxiety
are the most
debilitating element
of my Autism (adult
with ASD)
Research Autism**

- Impacts on academic attainment, friendships, self-esteem, communication skills
- For parents, anxiety is more stressful than the autism (Oszivadjian et al 2012)

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS CAN BE HARD TO SPOT?

- Common symptoms of may be masked by ASD
- May present differently
- Difficulty expressing mood state, talking about feelings and insight may make it harder for others to recognise
- Very few valid screening tools
- Implications? Reduced access to appropriate support and self understanding

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE AND MOTHERS TELL US ABOUT ANXIETY?

- Two qualitative studies
- Interview study with 14 autistic boys aged 13-18 (Acker, Knott & Knight, submitted)
- Focus group study with 17 mothers of 19 autistic children aged 7-18 (Ozsivadjian, Knott & Magiati 2012)

DIFFICULTY THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT ANXIETY

- Overwhelming theme :

**The difficulty children had in telling others
when or why they were anxious**

- Many mothers reported having to go through a 'detective process' to access thoughts and experiences

DETECTIVE PROCESS

Putting it in some sort of order before they can talk about how they felt...for M that order will be really jumbled for a while, so he'll tell you bits of it, he might even tell you key words and in between those keywords he's on the floor and crying.

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

MELTDOWN

- Mothers: vast majority of comments fell into this category – ‘meltdowns’

She gets very agitated, she wrings her hands and starts to shout. In the past she was violent, she's hit us, bitten me...

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

MELTDOWN

- Teenagers: an uncontrollable whirlwind of anxiety turning into anger

When I'm anxious I get, very emotional very riled up, I can't control myself and sometimes it does come to violent end

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

AVOIDANCE

- Mothers: second most common indicator

At school last year, I didn't realise he was spending most of his time actually hiding under the table or behind the trolley. It was literally the foetal position, when he gets anxious, that he's going into

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE? OVER AROUSAL

- Mothers - often the first sign

If you didn't know him, you might think he has hyperactivity because he goes completely 'woohoo'

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

- Sensory (chewing clothes, jumping and making noises)
- Increase in obsessions and rituals

Depending on how anxious he is, all the trains have to go back in the station

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- A normal emotion, a useful emotion
- 'Problematic' when it stops us doing things we would like to do and makes our daily life difficult
- Managing anxiety and stress is an important life skill

Thinking of anxiety in its biological sense

Anxiety is an emotional response experienced during times of perceived physical or psychological danger or threat

Flight

or fight

Anxiety has physical effects

...**but anxiety does not just happen in our bodies**

- Being anxious makes you think in a different way
- Worries can go round and round in your head
- Worries can affect sleep and concentration
- Worries can also make us avoid things

Example of anxiety provoking situation

Having to talk in front of a large group of people:

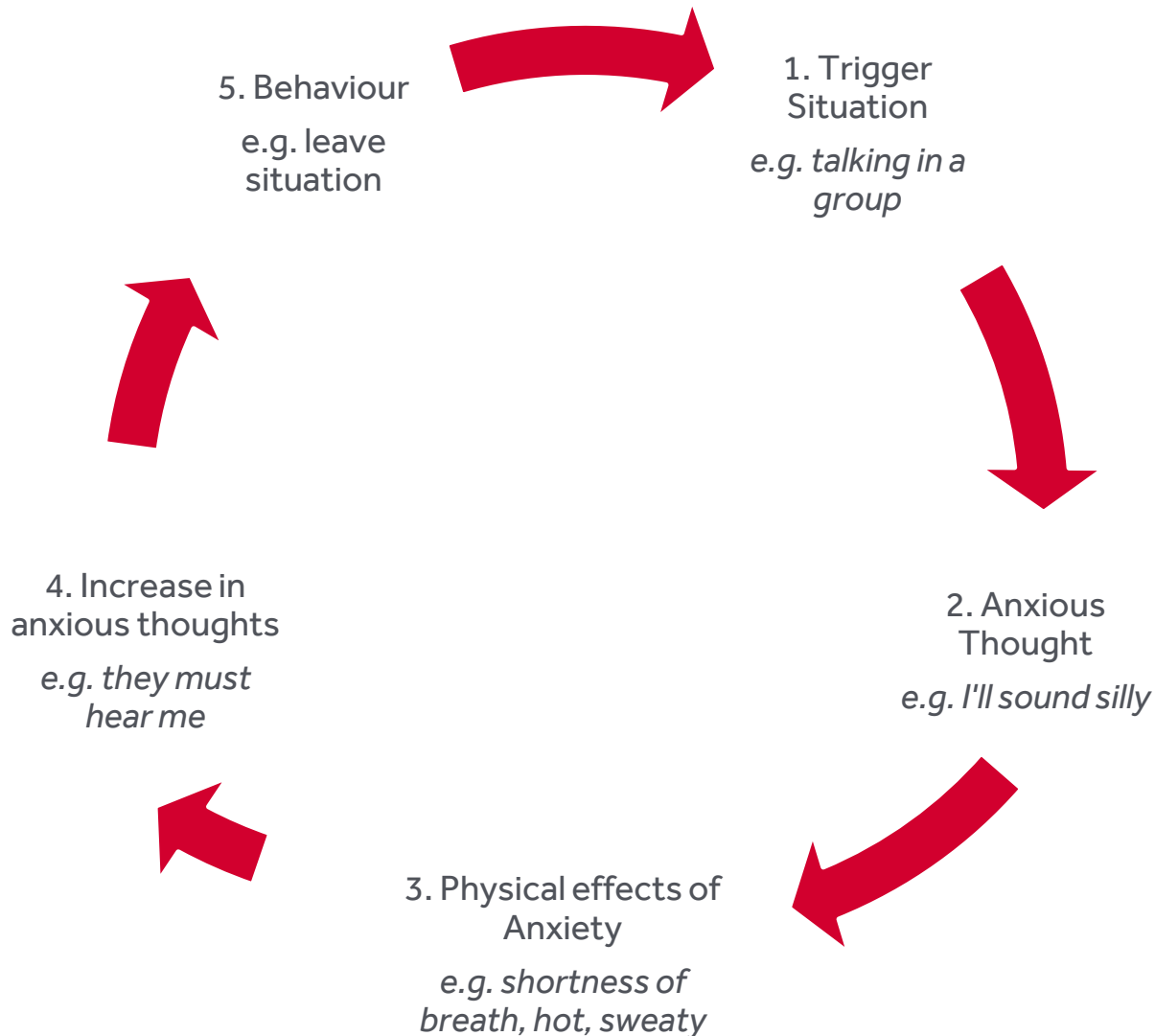
➤ Thoughts

➤ Physical feelings

➤ Emotions

➤ Behaviours

Vicious cycle of anxiety



WHAT CAN YOU TO DO HELP

The most important thing
to remember

Asking is helpful

It does not make things worse or put ideas into
someone's head!

A DELICATE RELATIONSHIP TO HELP

I usually don't like it when I'm like anxious if other people start talking..... 'cause I take it emotionally I often misinterpret what they're saying. And er...if they say like, if they use an imperative sentence like say 'stop it' or 'come back inside', then of course then sort of accelerates the anxiety process 'cause I'm being told what to do, and I'm in a stressful situation and that can often lead to an angry outburst

RECOGNISE THE EFFORT IT TAKES

- Balance 'pushing' with 'listening'
- Work out together what helps:
- Help find a way to communicate
- Trust young people to use their strategies

LABELLING EMOTIONS

- How am I feeling?
- Rating anxiety levels
- Incredible 5 Point Scale (Kari Dunn Buron)

BUILDING RESILIENCE

- Getting the basics right....

TRY TO ADOPT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- Diet
- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Fresh air

- Challenges....?

INCREASE SOCIAL NETWORKS

- Feel connected - help them to keep in touch with people and activities they care about
- Explore ways to maintain networks and build new networks
 - ❖ At school - lunchtime club or joint activity with other children
 - ❖ Volunteering
 - ❖ Out of school youth clubs
 - ❖ Online?
 - ❖ What else?

HELP FIND A WAY TO RELAX

- Build in time alone to relax
- Recognise how important this is. It is putting 'money in the bank' to spend later when they need to be with others
- At home: chill out zone, bedroom
- At school – create space to chill
At lunchtimes eg resource base

MAKE TIME FOR INTERESTS

- Rewarding
- Enjoyable
- Builds self esteem

LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

- Autism Berkshire e.g. Lego club
- ASSIST – Wokingham-based but workshops available to all
- Parenting Special Children www.parentingspecialchildren.co.uk
- The Autism Group – Maidenhead-based
 - Special interest groups;
 - parent support; training (only for East Berks)
- Young SHaRON (online discussion/support)
 - email Sharon.Jupiter@Berkshire.nhs.uk with your name, child's name , contact details and email address

- ASD Family Help <http://www.asdfamilyhelp.org/>
- PHAB <http://berkshirephab.org/>
- Fifi's vision – Caversham based support group (find on Facebook)

- Remember to check the 'local offer' for your local authority for other organisations

- Webpage explaining how stress from school can manifest at home
- <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/school-home.aspx>

RESOURCES AND WEBSITES

- Sleep
 - Parenting Special Children
<http://www.parentingspecialchildren.co.uk/>
 - Cerebra <http://www.cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/>
- Sensory
 - Document produced by Falkirk Council “Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour” available online

ANXIETY RESOURCES

- Self help
- Mood Juice self help resources www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk
 - MindEd www.minded.org.uk
 - Anxiety BC www.youth.anxietybc.com
- Courses for parents:
- Parenting special children
www.parentingspecialchildren.co.uk
- National Autistic Society 'Healthy minds'

- **BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Al-Ghani, H. (2013). *The Panicosaurus. Managing anxiety in children including those with AS. Jessica Kingsley Publishers*
- Altiero J. (2006); *No more stinking thinking: a workbook for teaching children positive thinking. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.*
- Aspden, K. (2016). *Help! I've got an alarm bell going off in my head. How panic anxiety and stress affect your body. Jessica Kingsley Publishers*

- Buron, K (2013). When my worries get too big; a relaxation book for children who live with anxiety. *AAPC publishing*
- Collins-Donnelly (2013) Starving the anxiety gremlin. A CBT workbook on anxiety management for young people. *Jessica Kingsley Publishers* (note there are 2 versions for different ages)
- Fiorile, S and McDonagh, B. (2014). Scardies Away! (ages 6-12)
- Rowe, A. 2014. The Girl with Curly Hair. Asperger's syndrome and anxiety. *Lonely Minds Books.*