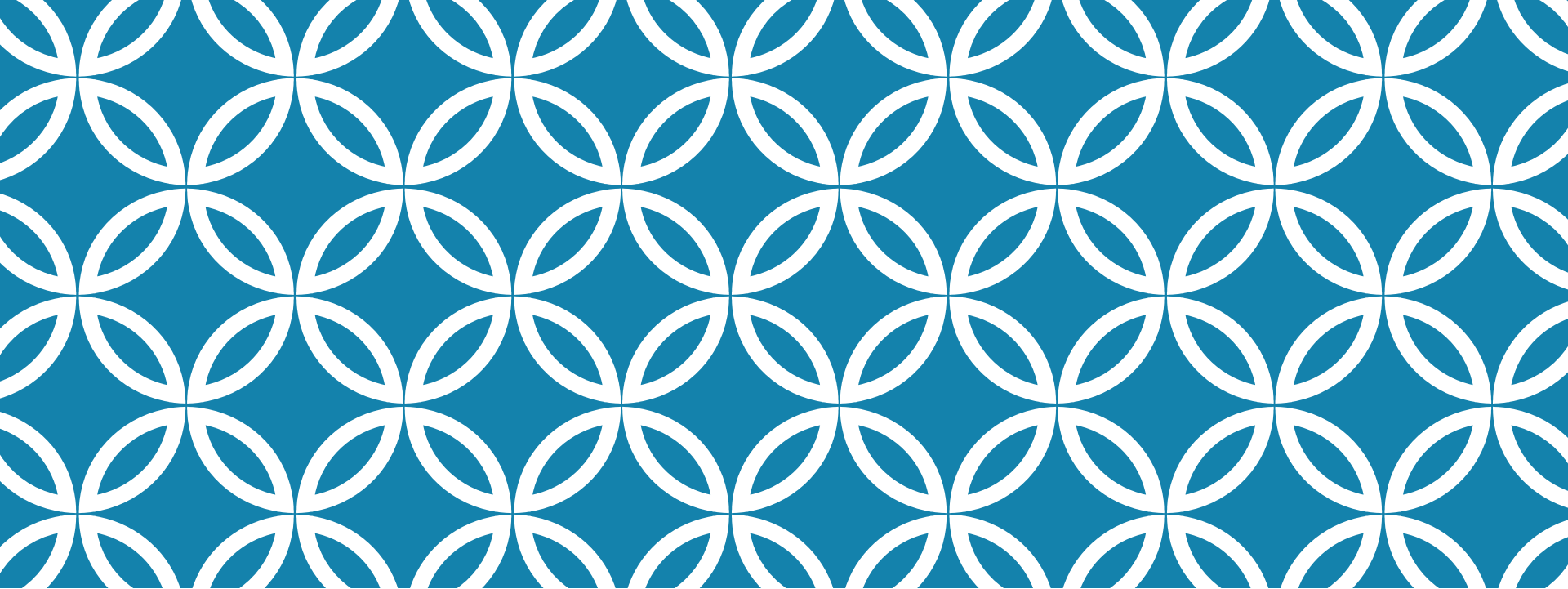




AUTISM AND ANXIETY

East Islip Parent Training
October 26, 2022
Rebecca Wade, Psy.D.

AGENDA

1. The basics of Anxiety
2. Comorbidity between ASD and Anxiety
3. Mindset matters
4. Strategies to address negative thinking tendencies

ANXIETY: ADAPTIVE VERSUS MALADAPTIVE

Anxiety can be a **normal** and **helpful** response

- Anxiety can alert and prepare us to respond in the face of a threatening situation

Anxiety can become a challenge if our...

- **Bodies response > Actual threat**



ANXIETY: SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Worrisome and/or fearful comments

Crying

Social withdrawal

Avoidance of situations

Irritability/anger/behavioral Tantrums

Nervous habits

Muscle tension

Trouble concentrating

Fatigue/difficulty sleeping

Change in appetite/GI problems

Headaches/stomach aches

Bedwetting

ANXIETY AND AUTISM: PREVALENCE

~40% of children with ASD (aged 6-18) are also diagnosed with at least one anxiety disorder

- 20% of children under 6
- Anxiety disorder prevalence in general children age 3-17 is 9.4% (and climbing)

The most common comorbid ASD and anxiety disorders:

- Specific phobias (30%)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (17%)
- Social Anxiety Disorder (16%)

ANXIETY & ASD ... OVERLAP IN TRIGGERS

ASD Characteristics

Insistence on sameness
Inflexible adherence to routines
Strong attachment and preoccupation to items
Circumscribed interests
Rigid, concrete thinking
Communication deficits
Intolerance of uncertainty

Setting events of Anxiety

Unexpected changes
Starting something “new”
Relinquishing preferred items
Unexpected exposure to upsetting stimuli
Unpredictable behavior of others

Intolerance of Uncertainty: “dispositional incapacity to endure the aversive response triggered by the perceived absence of salient, key, or sufficient information”

Essentially... when we don't know have enough information to feel prepared for what is coming!

ACCOMMODATIONS....

Is our response/support designed to get “us” through the day

- OR

Is our response designed to develop and encourage skills and provide corrective learning, thus reducing future challenges.

MINDSET MATTERS:

I can do it

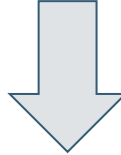


Confident



Begin work

THINK



FEEL



ACT

I can't



Anxious



Resist work

MINDSET MATTERS: “I CAN’T BECAUSE I THINK I CAN’T”

- Individuals who are repeatedly sad, anxious, irritable, or angry are more likely to demonstrate negative thinking
- Negative thinking can become habitual

Even though some with ASD may have difficulty communicating their thoughts, we should not ignore the role negative thinking may have on feelings and actions.



COMMON THINKING ERRORS

All or nothing

Fortune telling

Catastrophizing

Discounting the
positive

Blaming self

Out of your
control

BUILDING POSITIVE THINKERS: TOOLS & STRATEGIES

Make and bank positive concluding statements

Consider the Facts

Social stories

Predictable responses to unpredictable events

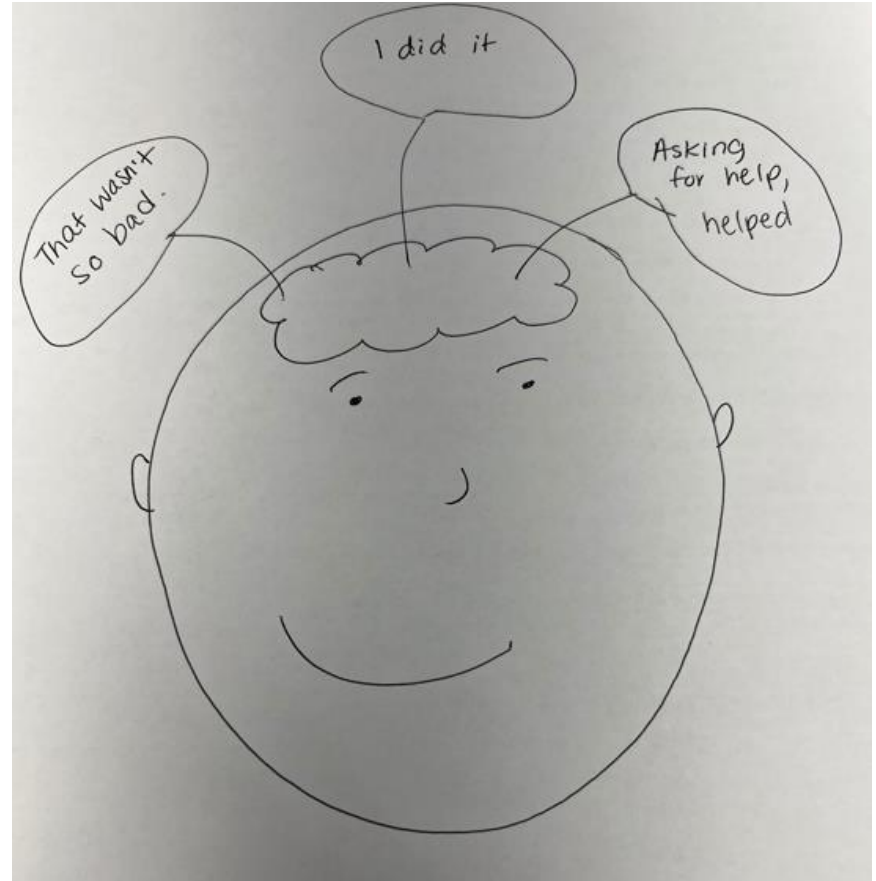
Teach self-assurance

POSITIVE CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

Represent positive conclusions in a manner that can be easily recalled and drawn from in the future

“Banking” it in the memory bank

Front loading prior to the next opportunity



I



Asking for help,
helped



That didn't take
long



I did it



It's done. Now I
can do
something else

- Look at the facts
 - ↪ Can use yes/no questions
 - ↪ Did my teacher greet me... Yes or no
 - ↪ Did my teacher give me a complement... Yes or no
 - ↪ Did my teacher encourage me... Yes or no
 - ↪ Did my teacher laugh at me ... Yes or no
- Make evidence concrete and noticeable
- Tilt the balance



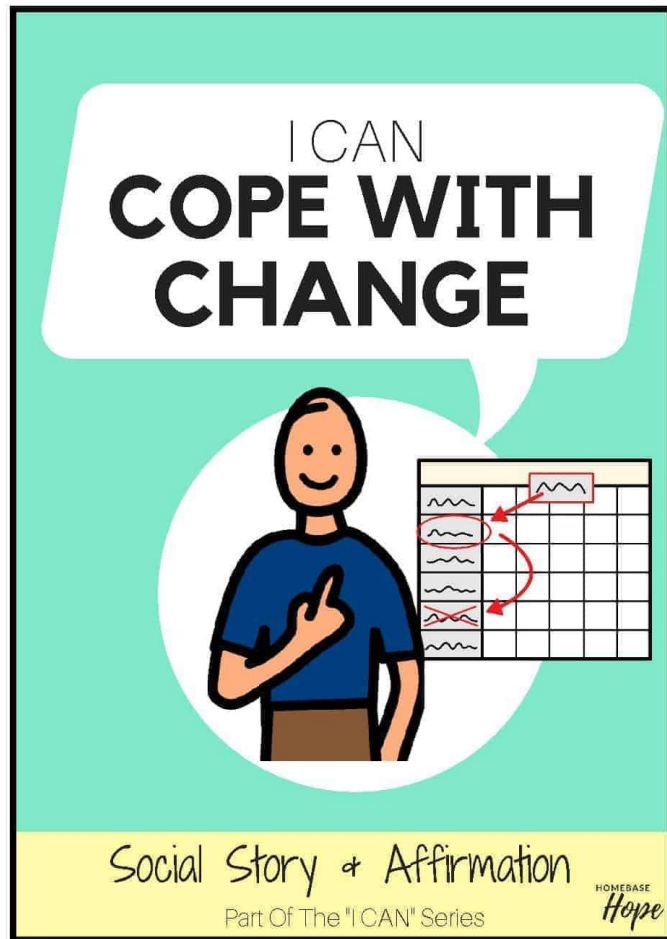
CONSIDER THE FACTS

SOCIAL STORIES

Can reduce anxiety by...

- Can clarify expectations
- Can clarify how environment will respond
- Can desensitize to upcoming experience
- Can prime positive thinking ("I got this")
- Can clarify reinforcement
- Can allow for rehearsal
- Can build confidence

Helps decrease intolerance of uncertainty!





Use social stories to prepare your child for times when unexpected changes may occur.

Visuals can remind them that they are ready to handle it!



**PREDICTABLE RESPONSES TO
UNPREDICTABLE EVENTS**

TEACH SELF-ASSURANCE



Reassurance: comments from others that remove doubts or fears

"You got this"

"It is almost over"

"I am here to help"

"I understand, it's going to be OK"

Self-assurance: self comments that remove doubts or fears

"I got this"

"It is almost over"

"I can ask for help"

"It's going to be OK"

Reinforce student for being able to anticipate for what you are about to say!