

ALONGSIDE AUTISM TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Ruth Millman

[r.millman@alongsideautism.co.u](mailto:r.millman@alongsideautism.co.uk)

[k](mailto:r.millman@alongsideautism.co.uk)

Strategies to manage anxiety and meltdowns



Agenda

- What is anxiety and how does it link to autism?
- What triggers anxiety?
- What can we do about anxiety and meltdowns?



Autism and Anxiety

- Vulnerability to anxiety and depression (teenager / young adult)
- 65 % of patients with Asperger's syndrome presented with symptoms of psychiatric disorder

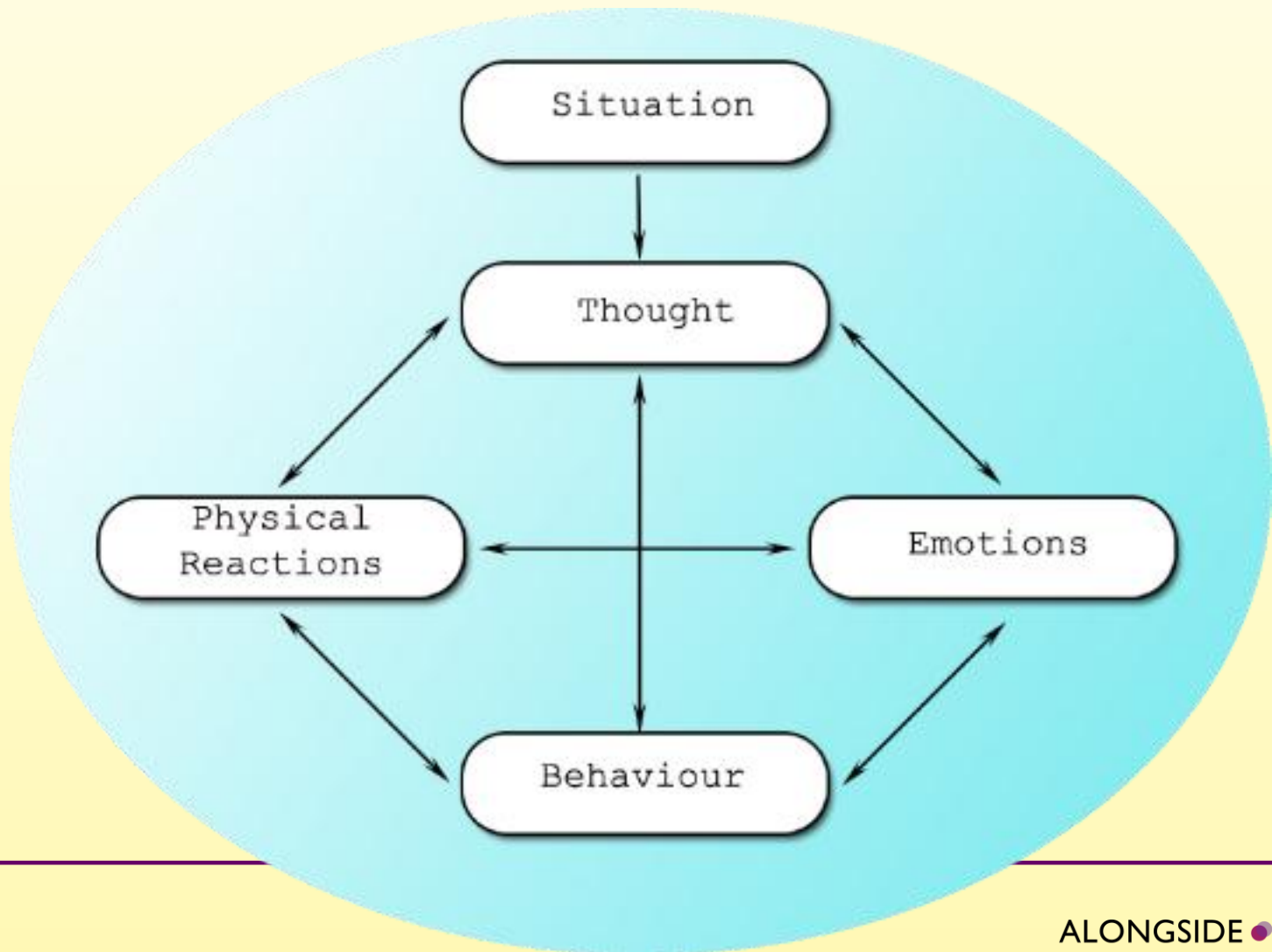
The inability of people with autism to communicate feelings of disturbance, anxiety or distress can also mean that it is often very difficult to diagnose depressive or anxiety states, particularly for clinicians who have little knowledge or understanding of developmental disorders".

(Howlin 1997)

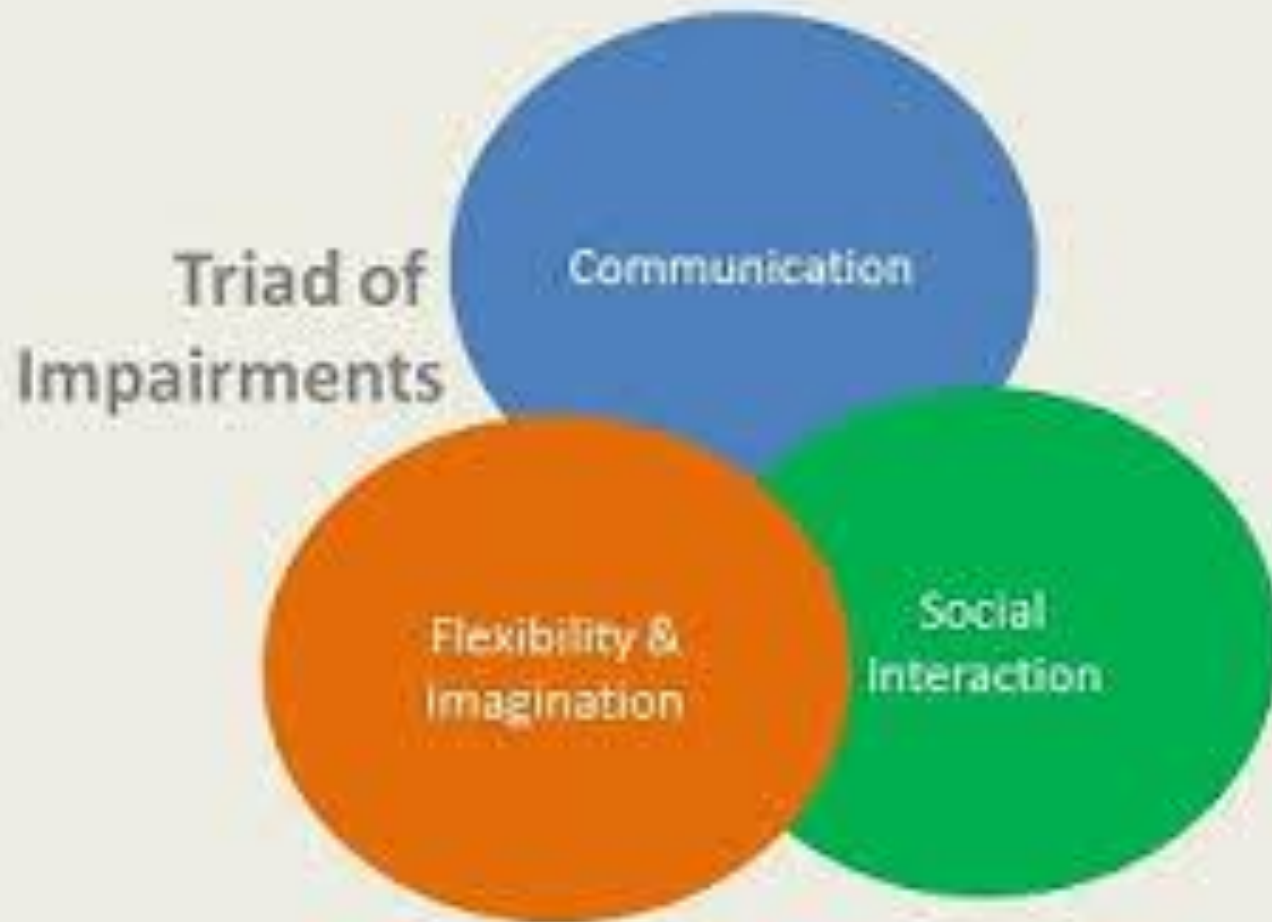
What do we mean by anxiety?



What is anxiety?



How does Autism link to anxiety?



Communication & Anxiety

- Difficultly understanding what emotions are and expressing emotions
- Difficultly asking for help
- Difficultly in being diagnosed

- *What have you noticed?*



Social Interaction and Anxiety

- More vulnerable to bullying
- Lack of friends and social support, and feeling lonely.
- Not knowing what to do socially leads to anxiety.

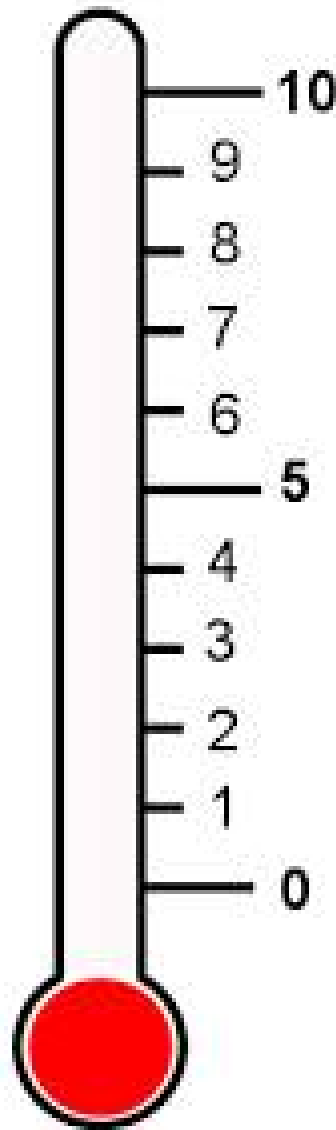
- *What have you noticed?*

Rigid thinking and Anxiety

- Difficulties with change
- Routines or specialist interests being interrupted
- Not being able to mind read.
- *What have you noticed?*



The experience of anxiety for those with autism



“For me, a meltdown is when I get totally overwhelmed emotionally - it's like an overwhelming, irresistible (emotional) force that feels like it sweeps me off my feet, buffeting me about, taking me where I don't want to go, like in a sudden flash flood - I can't control what happens to me, I can't regain my 'footing'; I lose the ability to think straight, the thoughts that do come are overwhelmingly negative, doom-laden; it's really scary and terrifying; I can't stop crying.”

What have you noticed triggers anxiety in those you care for?



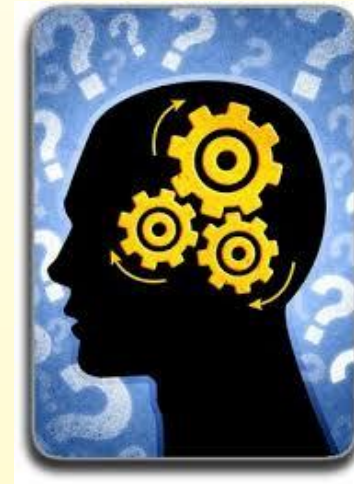
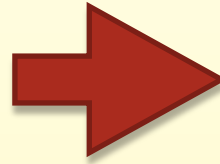
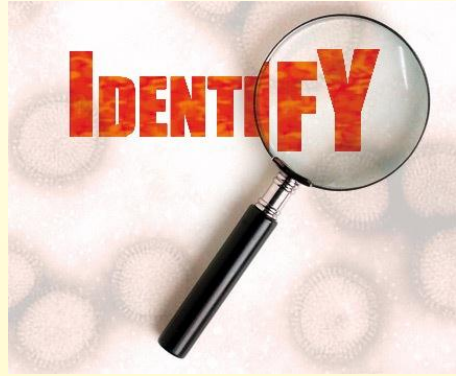
Common Triggers for Anxiety

- Change
- Sensory issues
- Other people!
- Diagnosis
- Routines and specialist interests
- Communication problems

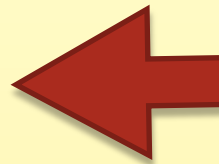
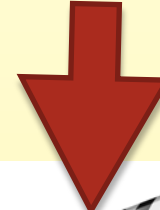


Anna's Experience

Strategies



Understand



Self Awareness

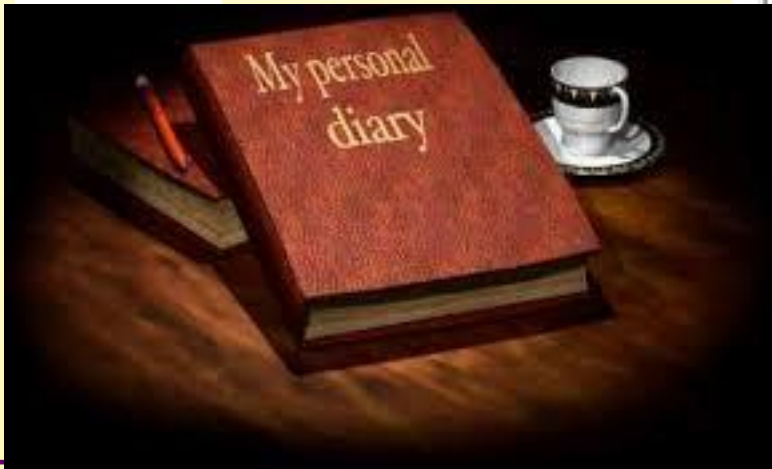
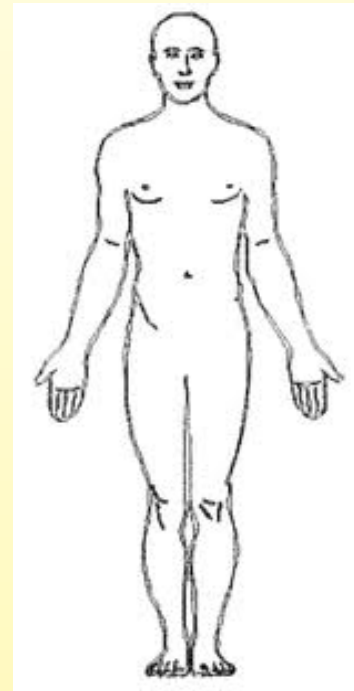
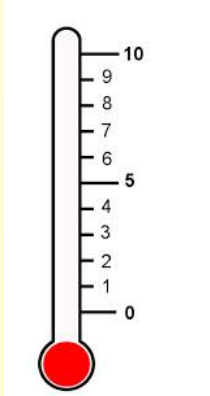
- Understanding their autism
- Understanding what triggers them
- Understanding how anxiety affects them (e.g. in their bodies)
- Understanding what helps
- Focus on their strengths!



- **How self aware are those you care for?**
- Do they have a “language” to express their anxiety - this could be non verbal?
- Do they have a hierarchy?
- know what is the worst stress and what is not so bad?



Tools that can help develop self aw



Sensory Strategies: What have you found works?



Sensory Strategies:

- Identification
- Chill out/relaxation time regularly
- Minimise uncomfortable sensations
 - Ear plugs
 - Rules around touch
 - Lighting.....
- If can't eliminate it scheduled relaxation/chill out time / create “safe space”

“Structure” Strategies: What have you found works?



“Structure” Strategies:

- Regular use of timetables/planner
 - Calendars
 - On computer
 - Reminders on mobile phones
- Structured environment
 - “Your office is where you....”
 - Structure times to chat/relax



“Structure” Strategies: For Socialising

- Social Stories
- Scripting - beforehand discussing and writing down what they want to say
- Set of rules or manuals for work/home on what is expected



**“Structure”
strategies for
managing
change: what
have you found
works?**



“Structure” strategies for managing change:

When We Can....Plan!

- Planners/timetables
- Social stories
- Visual/photos
- Reminding them of the use of relaxation/sensory techniques
- Rewards



“Structure” strategies for managing change:

Planning for the unknown?

- Create general “Chill Out” plan (sensory techniques /relaxation exercise / coping statements)
- Create specific plans for certain events
 - “So plan B if it rains is.....”
- Clear plan on how to ask for help
- Help them to develop problem solving skills

Simple De-stress Strategies

- Relaxation (sensory)
- Exercise
- Use of specialist interest
- Sleep and appetite
- Create a “Chill Out Box”



Relaxation Techniques

- Breathing

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/docs/Info-Calming%20technique.pdf>

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/docs/Info-PMR.pdf>

Anxiety Management Info

- Managing stress:
<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/StressSelfHelp.pdf>
- Managing anxiety:
<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/AnxietySelfHelp.pdf>
- Worry Tree:
<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/worrytree.pdf>
- Emergency Bag:
<http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/EmergencyBag>

Questions