Building Your ASD Toolbox – Stress Management

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Building Your ASD Toolbox

What is all the STRESS about?
Why Teach Stress Management?

Stress doesn’t get enough credit!

- Our kids in a constant state of arousal
- Chronic stress = illness / disease
- Isolation, low self-esteem, aggression
- Typical cycle:
  Stress = behavior = negative consequences = stress = more behaviors
- Kids labeled oppositional / “bad” rather than looking at root cause: Lack of coping skills
Types of Stress

Intervention determined by type

- **Type 1**
  - Irrational: should not illicit an emotional response
  - Relaxation; Desensitization: systematic exposure; teach flexibility and tolerance

- **Type 2**
  Antecedents that cause some anxiety
  - “Over the Top” response / extreme
  - Relaxation; Coping Responses (e.g., “bummer”, “I’ll do better next time”, “I did my best”, “they’re just trying to help”, “They didn’t mean it, it was an accident,” Big Deal/Medium Deal/Little Deal)
Types of Stress

- Type 3
  - Some form of wrong doing
  - Justified reaction of anger but response too strong
  - Teach appropriate degree of response ("match")
  - Anger w/o aggression
  - Teach relax / calm to counter anger response

Type Distinction: skills taught are differently depending on type.
Proactive Component

**HOW?**

- Stress Management must be taught
  - Students can’t be expected to do something they haven’t been taught

Developing lesson plans

- Presentation style depends on level of student
- Assess their ability, buy in, what works
- Break it down! teach one step at a time
- Systematic teaching: just like social skills!!
When to teach -

When students are calm -
- Beginning of class
- End of class
- Practice before a test
- During morning work
- Role model why a good time to use
Creating Your Tool Box

**WHEN / WHERE**
- When: best vs. worst time of day?
- Where to teach: quiet / relaxing / limited distractions / no demand. We need student’s buy in
- At least 3 X’s per week
- Build it into weekly schedule
- Be creative: tie into existing lesson plans
- Payoff = less behaviors = more learning time

Goal: stress management to become a habit / unconscious level
The Student’s Toolbox

- Classroom Tool Box – have a visual representation.
- Each Student has a toolbox – a visual representation that can be referred to.
- The “tools” are the stress management techniques the student has learned.
- Students add to the tool box as they learn new strategies.
Stress/Happy Collages

- Have your students make them using magazines, etc.
- Teach the use of the happy collage – before tests, after a difficult day for class, for an individual student situation
- Variations: happy book – calming picture – happy journal
# Handling My Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What stresses me out?</th>
<th>Physical feelings</th>
<th>What I need to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Stress</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Medium Stress</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low Stress</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Calm**
Check-ins!!!

- Determine what “plan” or language will be used – a number or color scale – or student decided!
- Ask “Where are you?”
- Student should respond.
- Teacher’s response based on student!
Creating Your Tool Box

Other Meters:

- Horizontal Meter ("Am I stressed or excited?")
- Mood O Meter (current / prediction)
- Frequent meter check ins
  - "Catch them being calm" (not just when kids are escalating)
  - Use early in student’s escalation cycle
How Do I Feel?

Excited  Cool/Calm  Stress

Checked Out
Emotions Level

Cool/Calm

1
Happy

2
Excited

3
Silly

4
OTT

Very Upset

Upset

Mad

Checked Out
Big Deal  Medium Deal  Little Deal
Creating Your Tool Box
What to teach

“Calm Tools”:
Teach “calm” vs. “tense”: P.M.R

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (P.M.R.)

  Steps

1. Make a fist with both hands / Hold / Relax
2. Roll head around in circle, then reverse / Relax
3. Wrinkle your face and shoulders tight and up / Hold / Relax
4. Tighten legs and point toes / Hold / Relax
Creating Your Tool Box

More “Calm Tools”

- Away Breaks
  - Wall push ups
  - Bathroom break
  - Drink of water
  - Running laps
  - Errands (non reinforcing)
  - Scripting
Creative Visualization

Find a script!
The Incredible 5-Point Scale

- Thermometer type activity with number scales – can be created for ANY behavior/situation
- Breaks down common target behaviors and puts them in “thermometer format”
- Do not use to replace an individual’s “general” stress thermometer...use in addition to!

For use with the above book:


*Includes a physical folder representation of the 5-point scale and activities. Includes individual stress scales to fill in any person, place, or thing.*
Positive Journal

1. Today I am thankful for –
2. Today I am proud of –
3. I am happy about –
Apply what you already know-

- Social Autopsies, Comic Strip Conversations – When should I have used a calming technique?
- Social Stories – about the use of calming techniques
Coping Strategies: Keep Filling Your Tool Box!!

- Deep Breathing
- P.M.R. (Progressive Muscle Relaxation)
- Count to 5
- Short Breaks
- Squeeze Stress Ball
- Drink of Water
- “Happy Place”

- Brisk Walk
- Palming
- Worry Stone (spell R-E-L-A-X)
- Reading, looking at pictures
- Listening to music
- Creative Visualization
Break System

- Must pre-teach this skill before implementation of Break Card program!
- Goal is to teach student to use Break Card before they “lose it”
- Break Card programs need to be highly individualized to meet the specific needs of your student and of your classroom
- When initiating a Break Card program, do not worry about overuse. This can be remedied (but rarely needs to be)
- Remember to use your thermometer “check-in”
- Needs to be something physical (card?) for accountability
“BREAK” System – What to teach!

- *Teach! Teach! Teach!*  
  - Teach the student their triggers/stressors.  
  - Teach the student their physiological and outward signs.  
  - Teach the student the level of breaks. Teach him to start at the local level.  
  - Teach the student that level of stress and level of break should match!  
  - Teach the student when they need a break; cue the need for a break at first.  
  - The goal is for the student to become independently aware of need for a break and what level he should take.  
  - Provide a set plan and time limit for all levels of breaks.  
  - Ultimate goal is a local break; life is not full of opportunities for away breaks.
“Problems” with Break Plans

- Where does the student go – needs to be covered by an adult
- Plan for how long student will stay – 10 minutes then someone will talk to you.
- Plan for student returning to class – in a certain amount of time? When student can have a calm conversation?
- What is the plan for the missed work?
- Always set up a time to debrief – briefly during or after the break? Later?
- Remember – there is a difference between “taking a break” and a student who is in escalation! These two incidents require totally different responses from the staff.
- Getting the student to leave the area and take the break!
  - Practice! Practice! Practice!
  - Social Stories, Include “breaks” in social autopsies
  - Bonus points for taking a break!
  - Rationale! Rationale! Rationale!
Level of Breaks

- **Table Breaks** should occur at early signs of frustration or escalation. They involve short breaks that the Student can do at his/her desk or wherever he is without having to leave the area. *Examples include:* head down on desk, turning his paper over, pushing himself away from his desk, stretching arms & legs up and out (making sure not to touch anyone sitting next to him), standing up briefly and pushing on his desk (without moving desk).
Levels of Breaks

- **Local/In-Room Breaks** are breaks that the Student can take if he/she is feeling mildly stressed where and needs to get up from his/her desk but does not require leaving the room. He can sharpen his pencil; get a tissue; stretch in the back of the room. **Staff should discuss/get permission for these types of breaks with each individual teacher ahead of time. Student should be taught what to do/what is allowed.**
Levels of Breaks

- **Away Breaks** are breaks that require Student to leave the room or area completely when he or she was unable to get it together on a Table or Local Break. These breaks can involve standing just outside of the room; walking up and down the hall or other designated area, sitting in a chair to “chill out” and get calm. (When on an “away break” staff is not to talk to Student unless it is necessary to give him an instruction.)
Breaks, especially away breaks, are a time to practice a stress management technique in a calming area. Students should have visual reminders to use their “tools” for calming. Younger students may have a calming object/item.

Breaks should NOT be a time to get a lot of attention from a preferred adult, to gain access to reinforcers, or to enjoy all that is happening around the student!

Remember, there is a difference in a “break” and needing an “alternate work space.”
Don’t Forget!!

- Give students a copy of the toolbox.
- Teach a stress management strategy.
- Add a “tool” to the tool box as the students practice and master each one!
Don’t forget the classroom environment!

- Lighting
- Uncluttered
- Calming music
- Safe place
- Smells or no smells
RESOURCES
Books To Help With Stress


This book includes three relaxation training scripts.

Relaxation training scripts can be found in many places! Use a script!