ASC and Anxiety Resources

**Websites**

**- My Anxiety Plan (MAP) – Anxiety Canada**. This is an online course based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for young people to work through either on their own or with an adult. It has 6 units, and you can work through it at your own pace. <https://maps.anxietycanada.com/courses/child-map/>

- **CAMHS Resources** – This website has links to a number other helpful websites, as well as collections of apps, books, videos and downloadable content on a variety of topics affecting young peoples’ mental health. <https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/>

**- National Autistic Society** – A central resource on Autism, with resources for education, family life, communication and behaviour. <https://www.autism.org.uk/about.aspx>

**- Autism Speaks** – Further information by topic, including health and wellness, safety, and behaviour tools. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/information-topic>

- **Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett** – These two experts in Autism Spectrum Conditions have a website with short videos on topics relating to Autism, and answer questions that are sent in to them. This <https://attwoodandgarnettevents.com/category/access-to-expertise/> is the link for the videos, and questions for the experts can be sent via the ‘contact us’ page.

**Books**

For younger readers:

*- The huge bag of worries* – Virginia Ironside

*- All birds have anxiety* – Kathy Hoopmann

*- The Panicosaurus* – K.I Al-Ghani

*- Don't Worry, Be Happy: A Childs Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* – Poppy O’Neill

For older readers:

*- Been there. Done that. Try this!* – Craig R. Evans and Anita Lesko, edited by Tony Attwood.

For identifying emotions and developing emotional literacy:

*- How are you peeling? Foods with moods* – Saxton Freymann and Joost Elffers

*- The emotions survival guide* – RH Disney

*- Box of mixed emotions* – Brittany Candau

*- Exploring feelings* – Angela Scarpa, Anthony Wells and Tony Attwood

CBT techniques for use with ASCs:

*- Exploring feelings: CBT to manage anxiety* – Tony Attwood

*- Exploring feelings: Anxiety training manual* – Tony Attwood

*- CBT to help young people with Asperger’s* – Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett

*- CBT for children with high functioning ASD* – Valerie L Gaus

*- Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries 2nd Edition: A self-help guide for parents* - Cathy Creswell, Lucy Willetts, Prof Peter Cooper, and Polly Waite

*- Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide Using Cognitive Behavioral Techniques* - Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts

Mindfulness books for people with ASCs:

*- Meditation for Aspies* – Ulrike Domenika Bolls

*- Mindful living with Asperger’s Syndrome* – Chris Mitchell

*- Asperger’s Syndrome and Mindfulness* - Chris Mitchell

*- Mind- Body techniques for Asperger’s Syndrome* – Ron Rubio

*- Therapeutic massage and bodywork for ASD* – Virginia S Cowen

To help you create your own resources:

*- The New Social Story Book* - Carol Gray

*- Successful Social Stories* – Dr. Siobhan Timmins

*- Visual Supports for People with Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* - Marlene Cohen and Peter Gerhardt

**Apps**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Name* | *Description* | *Cost* | *Availability* |
| Mind Shift | From Anxiety Canada, the same producers of ‘My Anxiety Plan’ – this app follows the same program in a format that provides strategies for quick relief from anxiety symptoms and practice new ways of thinking Also allows tracking of anxiety levels. | Free | iOS and Android |
| Smiling Mind | A mindfulness-meditation app that has categories tailored to different age ranges, from 7-9 years, all the way through to adult. | Free | iOS and Android |
| Relax Melodies | A well-researched app that allows users to access a library of calming sounds, and create their own personalised playlists for sleep, relax and focus. | Free | iOS and Android |
| Molehill Mountain | An app developed with people with ASCs to track worries and the situations that trigger anxiety, get evidence-based daily tips to understand more about anxiety, and feel more confident to self-manage anxiety. | Free | iOS and Android |
| Brain in Hand | A comprehensive app aimed at supporting people with different conditions to live independently. In collaboration with the National Autistic Society, Brain in Hand looks at recording planned and unplanned events in the day, strategies to use in real time, and allows you to input contact details for a trusted person for times when things get overwhelming. More information and how to sign up for it can be found at <https://www.autism.org.uk/services/education/brain-in-hand.aspx>  | Pricing not advertised, but frequently funded through EHCPs, DSA or Access to Work schemes | iOS and Android |
| CAMHS Resources | This webpage has a collection of different apps for young people to promote good mental health. There are apps for younger children such as Worrinots and Chill Panda, as well as teens, including Clear Fear, SAM and the MoodKit. <https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/apps-1> | Various | Various |

**North Tyneside CAMHS Resources (scroll down for these)**

**- Emotional Toolkit** – An information sheet to help you and the young person develop a source of ‘tools’ to use when different emotions arise, including anxiety.

**- Sensory Diet** – A more in-depth explanation of sensory needs and how a sensory diet can have a positive impact on mood and anxiety levels.

The Emotional Toolbox

Throughout our lives, we all experience different emotions, be they joy, anger, sadness, frustration, excitement, worry or confusion (to name just a few!). It’s really important that as we grow, we develop strategies, or tools, for managing these emotions when they come up. These strategies change throughout life. As a baby, for example, we really only have one strategy: crying. As we grow older, we learn to use words to ask others for help, or tell others how we’re feeling.

The emotional toolbox is a way of keeping all your strategies in one place. That way, when you are feeling, for example, angry, you can go to your emotional toolbox and look at the things that help you feel calm, or express angry feelings in a safe way. You can think of the emotional toolbox as just that: a toolbox. When you have a particular problem, you go to the toolbox and find the right tool to fix the problem.

How to create your toolbox:

1. Your toolbox should feel like it’s yours. It should be personal, and it won’t look the same as somebody else’s. You can make an actual physical box to keep your strategies in, or any other way you choose,
2. Spend some time creating your toolbox. You want what’s inside it to be valuable and actually helpful to you. For example, if you read the strategy ‘go for a bike ride’ and think that’s not for you, then don’t include it.
3. Keep an open mind. Particularly in the early stages, be open to different strategies that people suggest. Some things might surprise you, and it doesn’t hurt to try!
4. Keep updating your toolbox. Strategies can be removed, added and replaced as you see fit. Something that used to work might not work anymore, or something that never worked before may now be something that helps. Listen/look out for ideas from friends, family and other people for things that you might like to try.

The Emotional Toolbox aims to reduce the intensity of the emotions being experienced (i.e. prevent your emotions from becoming overwhelming). It also aims to give you confidence in your ability to manage your emotions when they come up – having a tool for every job.

Below are some examples of the different types of tools you might need: Physical, Relaxation, Social, Thinking, Special Interest, Medication, and Other. Again, you should add/remove those that are right for you, and those which aren’t. Things like sensory activities is one that a lot of people like – for example, things they like the feel/sound/smell of. Be creative, and remember to keep an eye out for anything that makes you think “that made me feel happy/calm/relaxed” – that’s a useful tool!

**Physical Tools: physical activities that quickly release emotional energy**

* Jump on a trampoline, on the spot or on a big ball
* Go on the swing
* Take a walk, go for a run or a bike ride, dance, swim
* Play sports or do exercises
* Do house work
* Watch a comedy (to laugh)

**Relaxation Tools: slowly release emotional energy and help to calm and lower the heart rate**

* Retreat to a quiet place
* Do progressive muscle relaxation (tension-release)
* Draw or paint
* Do crafts, read, listen to music
* Rock gently
* Access fidget items (e.g. stress ball, stones, soft objects, worry beads)
* Organize personal belongings or do relaxing chores
* Watch a television program, favourite film, look at a photo album
* Listen to a recorded message from an important person in one’s life (parent, grand-parent)
* Ask for a break and incorporate breaks into the day

**Social Tools: help manage emotions and change moods through interaction with a person or an animal**

* Go see a person you trust
* Talk to a friend, teacher, parent, grand-parent, counsellor or support person
* Show altruism – help others or do something for someone
* Volunteer (help classmates, students in another classroom, in the library or office, at a local pet store)
* Spend time with a pet

**Thinking Tools: capitalize on intellectual strengths to teach how to change thinking and manage emotions**

* Replace poisonous thoughts with antidotes (positive self-talk)
* Create a mantra (positive and calming statement)
* Imagine a calm, positive or happy scene or area
* Imagine a positive result through visualization or Cognitive Picture Rehearsal
* Use logic and facts to put the situation in perspective
* Engage in an academic task that helps one calm down and feel successful
* Keep an object that symbolizes calm
* Create a “happy book/album” of successes, fun activities, talents and strengths
* Peruse “self-help” information
* Refer to strategies on the 3-point or 5-point scales, emotional thermometer, etc.

**Special Interest Tools: provide pleasure, relaxation and serve as an ″off switch”**

* Engage in a special interest for a specific amount of time (make time more concrete with a timer, watch, etc.)
* Incorporate special interests into the schedule
* Incorporate special interests or talents into the curriculum, employment or volunteer work

 **Medication: used to treat mood disorders**

* Work collaboratively with health care professionals
* Follow the physician’s instructions
* Record any side effects (positive and negative) and discuss with the physician
* Understand that medication is a tool but that it should not be the only tool in the toolbox

 **Other Tools: reduce anxiety or effects of negative emotions but do not belong in a specific category**

* Develop self-advocacy skills
* Educate others about strengths, needs and accommodations necessary for success
* Self-reinforce for using new tools – congratulate yourself for trying something new, or doing something that worked.

**Sensory Diet Information Sheet**

*Introduction*

It’s important to understand that everyone has sensory needs – use this example to help get you in the right frame of mind. It’s common for a lot of people to enjoy soaking in a hot bath after a stressful day. Why do we enjoy this? Of course, an obvious answer is the time alone, however this doesn’t explain it fully. Maybe we like the feeling of the hot water against our skin, the smell of the bubble bath we’ve used or watching the bubbles swirl around the tub. Maybe the sound of water sloshing around is relaxing, or maybe the pressure of pushing our feet at the end of the bathtub is nice. There are so many subtle sensory elements to activities that we often don’t notice, which can lead us to think we don’t really have any sensory needs, but this isn’t true.

People can be calmed by or enjoy different feelings/tastes/sounds/smells etc., as well as have those that can make them feel distressed, disgusted, or which they plain don’t like. This varies a lot with all individuals, and some people may find it difficult to identify which sensations they like, and which they don’t like, or they may experience them to different levels of intensity to others (i.e. the sense being felt too strongly, or not strongly enough). They may also find it more difficult to communicate their sensory needs to others, especially if the sensation is causing them unpleasant feelings.

It’s important for individuals to be able to identify when they are feeling too much of something, or not feeling enough of something. Either extreme can make us feel anxious, uncertain, angry, sick, or even pain. As we know, these feelings can be triggers for challenging behaviour, so it is really important to identify anything in the environment that might be causing these feelings. We all have different sensory sensitivities, so it is important for us to know what our own body needs to feel normal.

A sensory diet is a set of sensory activities based on the notion that everyone has a unique sensory profile and needs different levels of input to meet their needs. Below we talk about the different senses that should be considered when building a sensory diet.

*The Senses*

We are all aware of the five senses taught in school, but research has shown that we have further senses that are important to be aware of.

**Sight**

**Hearing**

**Taste**

**Touch**

**Smell**

**Proprioception** – This is about being able to tell where your body is in space without looking at it (to demonstrate this, close your eyes and touch your nose). It helps us feel grounded and move with confidence, without having to think about it. If this sense feels a bit low, we may feel a bit unsteady, or bump into things.

**Vestibular** – This is about your sense of balance and orientation. Depending on the sensitivity levels of this system, a person may either seek out or avoid activities that stimulate this system, such as spinning or rocking.

**Interoception** – This is about being able to recognise signals coming from your body, which includes things like feeling hungry, nervous, or needing the toilet. If this is under sensitive, a person may not recognise these feelings, and if they are oversensitive, these feelings may feel more intense to them that we might expect.

*Building a sensory diet*

At the end of this document are several websites listed which explain and give examples of different sensory diets. To summarise here, a sensory diet is a detailed description of a person’s sensory needs, and a set of activities which aim to address these needs throughout the day. It’s also a tool to use in different situations – e.g. what are the different sensory inputs that make you feel calm? – you can use these when you are feeling heightened levels of stress.

For each of the senses above, it’s important to think of examples for each sense – examples of what we like, and what we don’t like. It can also help to think about ***why*** you like/don’t like them. Maybe they remind you of a pleasant or unpleasant memory, maybe they make you feel physically sick, or make you feel calm, or maybe they are just part of the normal likes and dislikes that everyone experiences.

In addition to this, it’s important to think about over (hyper) and under (hypo) sensitivity. People naturally have different levels of sensitivity to stimuli (think about peoples’ different pain thresholds). Some people may be at the more extreme ends of this spectrum. For example, if you are hypersensitive (over-sensitive) to taste, then you might experience tastes very strongly and as overpowering to the point where this feels deeply unpleasant. This might mean you only enjoy bland foods and avoid anything even vaguely strong tasting.

To create a sensory diet, we have to think about an individual’s sensory needs, and activities that meet these needs, and then how we build them into the day. Examples of sensory diets can be found in the resources at the end of this document.

As much as possible, it is most helpful to include the child/young person in their sensory diet – they may have ideas that you wouldn’t notice or think of, and this can help them become more aware of their own sensory needs too.

*Sensory Needs Linked with Stress, Anxiety and Emotional Dysregulation*

We have already seen how different experiences of sensory input can lead to very different feelings in individuals. If the experience of sensory inputs can elicit either positive or negative feelings, then it’s important that we are aware of the sensory environment around a person at any given time. In order to help someone feel calm and regulated throughout the day, we have to ensure that their sensory needs are met. For example, if a person has a need to move around a lot, maybe their vestibular sensory system needs a bit more input. If a typical day would involve sitting still in a chair for several hours at a time, it is clear that movement breaks will need to be added throughout the day to ensure this sensory need is not ignored.

If a sensory need is ignored, it can result in unpleasant feelings which can lead to emotional dysregulation and challenging behaviour. So, in this way, addressing sensory needs is also a pre-emptive behaviour strategy – we’re helping someone to feel calm and minimise distress. This will also affect how we use behavioural strategies with the person. If someone is over-sensitive to noise, for example, and we can see them becoming distressed, we would think to **reduce** all noises in the environment as much as possible. We would also **increase** the things that are sensory soothing for this person – maybe there’s a movement or specific texture that helps this person feel calm.

It is also good practice generally to understand that when someone is experiencing high levels of distress, they are less able to process information. Therefore, we would reduce the amount of conversation a person has to engage in (they will find it too hard to organise their thoughts and communicate them clearly), and increase the amount of sensory soothing activities, to give the person a chance to calm down.

*Where/when can a sensory diet be used?*

The short answer is anywhere and everywhere. Children and young people are in different environments throughout the day, and so sensory activities should be adapted suitably. Obviously, it is not practical to have a trampoline in the classroom! However, substitutions can be made – is there a small trampoline in the PE hall that could be used? Could they have a quick break to run around outside? Is there a swing or a roundabout that they could use? This is where it’s important to think creatively about how to meet a sensory need - the aim is for anyone working with the young person to think about what can be offered throughout the day to keep this person’s sensory needs balanced, and allow them to reach their potential.

A caregiver may have to promote regular meetings with those working with the young person (and the young person themselves if applicable), so everyone is aware of this person’s sensory needs, and can co-operatively plan activities that work in different environments. It should be a plan that changes with the needs of the person, so it should be updated regularly.

**Websites for more detailed information and instructions on building a sensory diet:**

* The National Autistic Society (NAS) section on sensory differences, examples and resources - <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/behaviour/sensory-world.aspx>
* A detailed description of a sensory diet, why it is important and how it can be modified - <https://childdevelopment.com.au/areas-of-concern/sensory-processing/sensory-diet/>
* Example of a daily sensory diet and possible activities <https://www.sensorysmarts.com/sensory_diet_activities.html>
* A useful step by step process for creating a personalised sensory diet <https://www.theottoolbox.com/how-to-create-sensory-diet/>
* Questions to ask/things to think about when creating a sensory diet <https://www.sensory-processing-disorder.com/sensory-diet.html>
* These websites have a huge selection of different sensory items to consider. Even if not buying items from these websites, there are a lot of different ideas here that may inspire you. Sensory toys also don’t always need to be bought, they can also be made.
	+ <https://www.cheapdisabilityaids.co.uk/sensory-toys-and-sensory-lighting-1-c.asp>
	+ <https://www.sensetoys.com/sensory-toys-c14>

It is also worth noting that a google image search of ‘examples of sensory diets’ yields a variety of visual displays of a sensory diet, which can help you find or create one that suits you. All sensory diets are unique to the individual, and should be tailored to their needs, ability and age to be appropriate and engaging for them. Hopefully this resource allows you to feel more confident in identifying and meeting the sensory needs of your young person, and even yourself!