



A summary of an article from the Raising Children Network Mary Kelly, Clinical Psychologist

While anxiety is a normal part of life for everyone, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can experience anxiety more intensely and frequently than other children. It can help to get your child to notice anxious feelings, and use relaxation and other strategies to help them feel calmer and manage better.

This summary is based on an article by the Raising Children Network and Lia Castorina, Helping Children with Autism Program Manager, Autism Victoria.

## HOW ANXIETY AFFECTS CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

The world can be a confusing place for children on the Autism Spectrum. They may find social or unfamiliar situations overwhelming and hard to understand. They can have difficulty working out what others are thinking and feeling. People and situations can therefore seem unpredictable leading children to feel stressed and anxious. Children with ASD can also have difficulty verbalising their feelings, which may appear in increased

challenging behaviour.

## YOUR ANXIOUS CHILD MAY AS A RESULT ;

- Insist on routine or sameness
- Have trouble sleeping
- Have meltdowns or tantrums
- Avoid or withdraw from social situations
- Rely on obsessions and rituals
- Stim by rocking, spinning or flapping hands
- Harm themselves through head-banging, scratching or biting skin

## WHAT MAKES YOUR CHILD ANXIOUS

- Changes in routine (a relief teacher)
- Changes in environment (moved furniture in your home or new equipment in the park)
- Unfamiliar social situations (a birthday party)
- Sensory sensitivities (to noises, bright lights, food flavours/textures)
- a specific fear (sleeping in their own bed, going to the toilet, balloons)

## RELAXATION AND CALMING STRATEGIES

- taking five deep breaths
- counting slowly to 10
- running around outside
- jumping on the trampoline
- reading a favourite book

## USE VISUAL TECHNIQUES

Visual techniques including visual schedules, Social Stories™, and timetables can also be useful given children with ASD are often visual learners.

## REHEARSE STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Rehearsing or practising situations your child finds stressful can help with understanding the situation in a visual way, and prepare them beforehand.

## GETTING HELP WITH MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY

Psychologists and other mental health professionals can more directly help your child to develop strategies for reducing and managing anxiety more effectively. Please click here for the original article and References <https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/behaviour/understanding-behaviour/anxiety-asd>