

autistic anxiety workbook



When you have an autistic child, you tend to find that anxiety plays a big part in family life. But when is anxiety not anxiety? What approaches to autistic anxiety should you avoid? And what strategies can you use to help your autistic child?

This workbook will help you to answer all of those questions, so that you feel confident in helping your child to deal with their emotions.

In the following pages you'll find information, assessment and record sheets, activities to try, and posters you can print to mark out an anxiety-free space for your child.



Dos and Don’ts for Parents



DO listen. Listening to your child’s worries is the most important thing you can do.

DO take worries seriously. Life for autistic children can be very tough, and minor worries can have a huge effect.

DO take action. If your child is struggling with something in their routine or environment, see what you can do to fix it.

DO show confidence. If your child believes you can fix problems, it will lower their anxiety level.

DO work on anxiety reduction methods with your child. Many autistic people struggle with anxiety all their lives, so your child may need those skills.



DON’T tell your child there’s nothing to worry about. There is. Being autistic in a non-autistic world is stressful.

DON’T assume that your child is always dealing with anxiety. Sensory overwhelm and dread of difficult situations can look very similar to anxiety.

DON’T forget that autistic routines can be very strong. If your child gets into the habit of feeling anxious, that can be difficult to change.

DON’T try to teach your child that a more positive mental attitude will solve the problem. If they worry about noise because loud noises cause them pain, for instance, an attitude adjustment won’t help!

Autistic Guide to Anxiety

Most autistic people suffer from anxiety, and their anxiety can trigger many other problems. This is a guide to some common sources of anxiety in autistic children.

Social anxiety



Anxiety about social situations is common. Triggers can include crowds, new people and too much noise.

Dietary limitations



A lot of autistic people worry about what to eat. This can affect school, holidays, family occasions and days out.

Sleep disturbances



Many autistic people suffer from insomnia or poor sleep, and this both triggers and increases anxiety.

Sensory awareness



Sensory sensitivities and anxiety are closely related. Too much sensory input, like bright lights or loud noises, is a source of anxiety.

Interoception



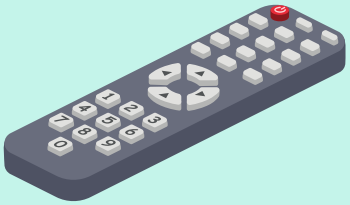
Autistic people may struggle to identify bodily feelings like hunger or tiredness. Instead they experience them as anxiety.

Communication



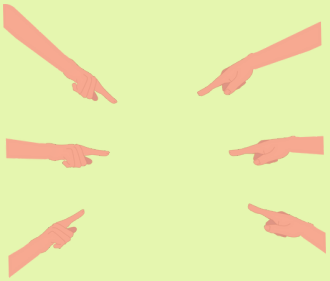
The frustration of not being able to communicate causes a lot of anxiety, particularly to autistic people who can't always speak.

Autonomy



A strong need for autonomy and control is associated with anxiety. Things that are out of a person's control can be worrying.

Bullying



Past or current experience of bullying can be a source of anxiety, particularly in school and community contexts.

Change



Routines are important to autistic people, and a sudden change (or even the thought of a change) can trigger anxiety.

autistic anxiety assessment

Pick a worry that's been bothering your child.

Is it a 'what if?' worry, or a worry about change? **what if/change**

Is it to do with the present or the future? **present/future**

Is it based on something that has happened before? **yes/no**

Anxiety is based on worries about what might happen in the future. Those worries are sometimes irrational or out of proportion to the risk involved.
Your child **might** be experiencing anxiety - but your answers above might indicate something else...

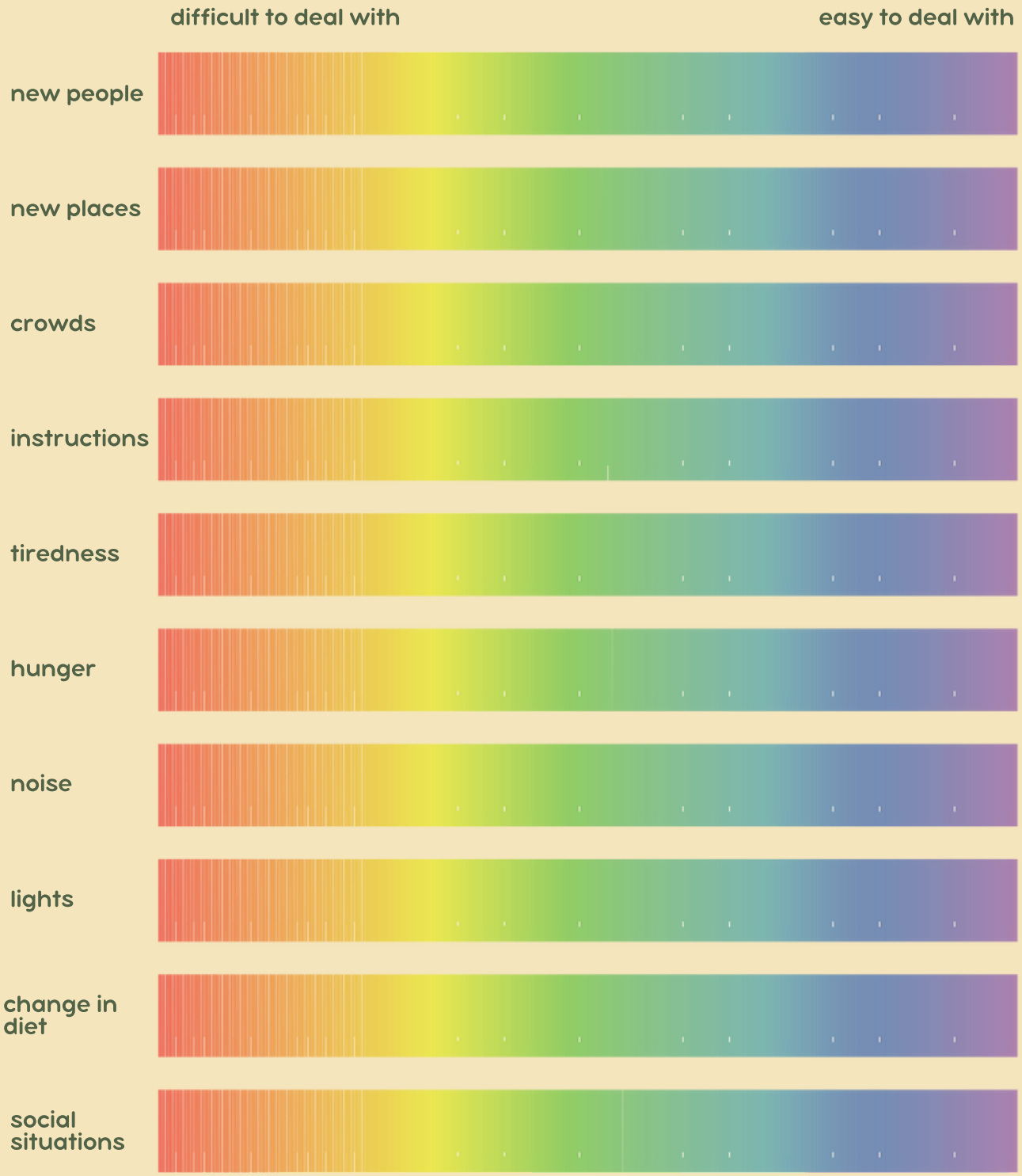
Distinct Anxiety: this is a specifically autistic form of anxiety which can be triggered by a response to, or fear of, change or disruption to routine, as well as by worry about social or sensory overload.

Autistic Overwhelm: based in the present. Your child's current situation may be triggering their distress, and the reaction looks like an anxiety attack.

Autistic Dread: based on something that has happened before. Your child knows that they will struggle in a situation, because they've felt like that before. Autistic dread is often either sensory or social.

my emotional settings

My emotional sensitivities affect my ability to cope with situations. This profile maps my emotional settings.



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my happy things

Write about - or draw - some of the things that help you to feel safe, calm or happy.



my coping strategy

People I can ask for help:



Things I can do to calm myself:



Things that have helped me in the past:

My strengths:

Interests that might distract me:

my coping playlist

If music is something you enjoy, a coping playlist might be a good thing to prepare.

Create a playlist to help you cope with different situations, by choosing songs that fit your emotional needs.

Confidence	A song that stays stuck in your head	A song that you know all the words to	A song that makes you smile
Relaxation	A song that can play quietly in the background	A song that helps you fall asleep	A song that makes you feel calm
Energy	A song that inspires you	A song that makes you feel motivated	A song that makes you want to dance
Safety	A song that reminds you of home	A song that is very familiar	A song that makes you feel comforted
Control	A song that makes you feel strong	A song that brings backs good memories	A song you associate with a strong person

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Grounding technique

This technique helps you to connect with the world around you by using your senses. It can help to calm anxiety or distress.

Take a deep breath and slowly work through the list below, thinking about what you can sense around you in this moment.

5 — list 5 things you can see 

4 — list 4 things you can touch 

3 — list 3 things you can hear 

2 — list 2 things you can smell 

1 — list 1 thing you can taste 


posters

I am safe here.
This is my space.


In my space
I can be
my amazing self.
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In my space
I am
in control.

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