

Anxiety Management

Some of the common triggers for anxiety in children with ASD include:

- changes in routine – for example, no longer going to school due to the Coronavirus outbreak
- changes in environment – for example, furniture in your home gets moved, there's new play equipment at the local park, or you move house
- unfamiliar social situations – for example, a birthday party at an unfamiliar house
- sensory sensitivities – for example, sensitivities to particular noises, bright lights, specific flavours or food textures
- fear of a particular situation, activity or object – for example, sleeping in their own bed, going to the toilet, balloons or vacuum cleaners.

Once you've worked out some of the things that make your child feel anxious, it can help to **make a list** of them, so that you can find ways to help your child manage these situations.

It helps if everyone in the household is aware of and ready to help manage the anxious feelings and resulting behaviours.

Below are some key ways to cope with your child's anxiety.

1. Help your child recognise anxious feelings

Your child might need to be taught what anxiety is and what it feels like in her body. For example, when she feels anxious her palms get sweaty, her heart beats faster, and her hands flap. This can be taught using the zones of regulation resource too.

You could try drawing an outline of a person's body. Inside the outline, help your child draw or write what happens in each part of their body when they feel scared or worried.

2. Use relaxation and calming strategies

Your child might also need to learn what she can do to calm down. You can help your child come up with a toolbox of ways to help herself calm down when she starts feeling anxious or stressed. These might be:

- counting slowly to 10
- taking five deep breaths
- running around the yard five times
- doing 50 jumps on the trampoline/ on the spot
- looking at a collection of favourite or special things
- reading a favourite book



- closing eyes for a few moments
- going to a quiet part of the house.

Get your child to practise these strategies when they are calm. Once they know the strategies well, you can gently guide them to try them when feeling anxious.

Use visual techniques

Children and teenagers with ASD are often visual learners. This means that visual timetables, [Social Stories™](#), picture schedules or photographs of themselves in certain situations can help them know what to expect. These have been made available to you during this time and are also relevant to the Coronavirus outbreak.

For example, if your child gets anxious when the day is less structured than when they are at school, you could take/ download some photos of what you'll be doing throughout the day together.

If your child gets anxious when there's a change in routine, daily or weekly [visual schedules](#) can help prepare him. When you know a change is coming up – for example, the daily walk will be later – you can show this on your schedule. Leading up to the change, look at the schedule regularly with your child so that they know the weekly routine will be different.

Some children find it helpful to be warned about a change or an event a day in advance. Some like to know a week in advance. But for some, too much warning can mean they worry until the event happens.

3. For students who need constant reassurance/ ask the same question many times it is recommended that you have a written or visual schedule that they can keep with them to look at regularly. To decrease continuous questions about the certain topic and plans it can be beneficial to limit them to 3 of the same question and then they need to read the information.