

*Embracing
Autism*



Mental Health & Well-being

Post Diagnosis Workshop 4



Objectives of the workshop

To develop a fuller understanding of:

- Mental health and well-being in relation to autism
- Identifying emotions
- Anxiety and ways to manage this
- Burnout in relation to anxiety
- Depression and ways to manage this



What is wellbeing?

- Mental wellbeing doesn't have one set meaning. We might use it to talk about how we feel, how well we're coping with daily life or what feels possible at the moment.
- Good mental wellbeing doesn't mean you're always happy or unaffected by your experiences. But poor mental wellbeing can make it more difficult to cope with daily life.

www.Mind.org.uk



Five Ways to well-being



- **Five simple steps:**

- Connect – with people around you e.g. family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours
- Be active : Find an activity you enjoy e.g. go for a walk, do some gardening, dance, exercise etc.
- Take notice: enjoy the moment, reflect on how you feel physically and emotionally
- Keep learning : try something you or re-visit something you have enjoyed before
- Give: do something nice for a friend or stranger e.g. smile, volunteer, say thank you.

Taken from Oxfordshire Mind 5 Ways to Well Being



Feelings



- For many autistic people recognising, naming and coping with feelings can be very difficult
- Learning to recognise when you are starting to feel 'not good' or have negative feelings is key
- Once you have noticed the negative feeling (the 'not good' feeling) starting you can try to do something about it



Feelings



- Learning to know yourself is key:
 - What do you find particularly difficult?
 - What situations/people/environments upset you?
 - How do you know you have had enough?
 - What makes you feel better?
 - How can you let others know you have had enough?
 - How can you make sure you can do the things that help?
- Different strategies work for different people



Anxiety

- Anxiety or worry can be linked to uncertain situations or events
- A high level of anxiety is common in people on the autism spectrum – people worry about changes in routines, unanswered questions, uncertainties , unknowns
- It is normal to experience anxiety at times. However, anxiety which is long lasting can affect daily life and impact on emotional and physical well-being.



When might anxiety show and what might it look like?



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- **Difficulty recognising emotions in yourself and others**
 - Can result in anxiety in social situations because it is so hard to 'read' other people, making other people seem unpredictable
 - Feeling overwhelmed by feelings you don't like (i.e. 'not good' feelings) but can't control
- **Sensory sensitivities**
 - Autistic people may have additional sensory processing difficulties like with sounds, touch and smell
 - Feeling like you are being constantly bombarded by sensory experiences can be extremely overwhelming and anxiety provoking



When might anxiety show and what might it look like?



- **Difficulty with uncertainty**

- Having sensory sensitivities and being unsure if you will stumble across these sensory triggers in new situations may make you less able to manage change or uncertainty
- The uncertainty of not knowing what to say, or what someone is going to say to you and how to reply
- Not knowing for sure how the day/meeting/activity is going to go

- **Performance anxiety**

- Having high expectations of yourself and being unsure about whether you can do things well enough can lead to a lot of worry and avoidance
- Fear of failure may result in a reluctance to try new things or complete tasks



What might anxiety look like?

- Fidgety
- Eye contact may become more difficult
- Heart 'racing'
- Hot sticky hands
- Unable to focus
- Difficulty in maintaining concentration
- information may take longer to process
- Harder to voice your thoughts, withdrawn
- Pacing back and forth
- Need to leave a situation
- Shouting, door banging
- Self harming

Time to Pause.....

- Any questions?
- Any comments?
- Time to share.



What happens during increased anxieties and meltdowns

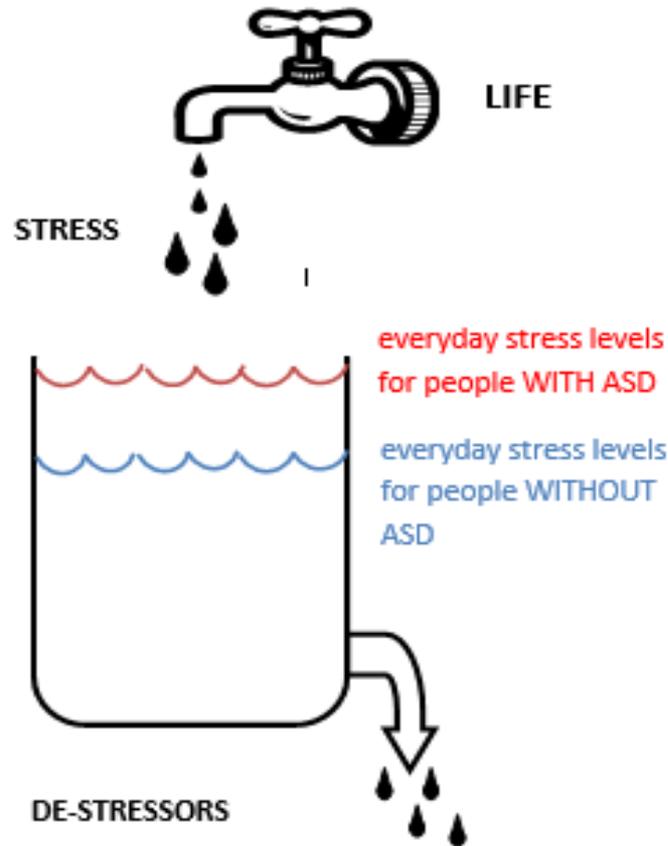


- When a stressful situation occurs the body produces more of the hormone adrenaline
- This increases the heart rate which, in turn, increases the blood flow and oxygen to the muscles – making you ready to run away (flight) or fight
- Even more stress leads to the 'freeze' response
 - Many autistic people jump straight to freeze
- After the stress has subsided, adrenaline's effect can last for up to an hour
 - Can leave you shaky and exhausted



The more anxious you are, less able you are to cope with the demands of life

THE STRESS BEAKER



Intensity Level	What I am doing	Called	What helps
5	Complete shut down	Meltdown	Give me space Leave the place that is difficult Don't talk to me
4	Withdraw.	Anxious	Listen to calming music Don't talk to me too much – use short sentences. Ask me what would help
3	Get repetitive and talk about something a lot Pace	Agitated	Count to 10 Deep breathing Ask me what would help
2	Become quieter. Fiddle with an object. Tap fingers. Begin to loose focus	Fidgety	Changing focus to another task. Listen to music, podcast, book Ask me what would help
1	Ok being with people Working Enjoying favourite activities	Chilled	Leave me to enjoy myself!



Burnout

- Autistic burnout is a type of meltdown that effectively stops a period of long-term gradual overload of anxiety or stress
- Ideally we have enough energy (social and emotional or physical) to get through the day and do what we want/need to do
- Autistic people may have less energy available to spend because of needing to cope with the demands of everyday life
<https://autisticmama.com/what-is-spoon-theory/>
- That means they run their energy level down to zero much more quickly when doing the same things – they then need to ‘borrow’ from tomorrow’s energy– this could lead to eventual burnout.



Preventing Burnout



- If you have a lot to do, you need to conserve energy
 - Ration your energy out throughout the day
 - Timetable in rest periods
- What gives you energy?
 - Structure into your day activities which you know restore you and give you energy.
- Say 'No' or reduce activities you know steal your energy
 - Be kind to yourself – reduce workload, go part-time, be aware that you can do whatever it is you want to do - but you will need to borrow energy from tomorrow. So tomorrow needs to be an easy day to recover
 - Ask for help
 - Asking for help is an important self-care tool, especially when your energy is running low.



Time to Pause.....

- Any questions?
- Any comments?
- Time to share.



Depression



- Very common mental health problem in autism
- 20% of people with Asperger Syndrome experience depression (Bruggink et al., 2016).
- People with autism may compare themselves to others and feel they are 'different' or not achieving, or missing out (negative comparisons)



What might depression look like?



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- Persistent low mood (i.e. 'not good' feelings)
- Increased withdrawal
- Decrease or increase in sleep
- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Crying spells
- Thoughts of self-harm
- Possibly some physical symptoms
 - headaches
 - Irritability
 - Fatigue
- Talk to your GP



Strategies to manage depression



- Find one thing you used to enjoy doing
 - Engage the help of others to support you to do that one thing again
- Physical Exercise
 - Take a walk, go swimming, running, dancing, gardening
 - Being outside in nature helps
- Pets
 - Don't require talking to!
 - Give unconditional love
- Mindfulness and meditation
 - Use apps – eg Headspace, Beezone
 - Might take practice, try to do regularly



Prevention is better than cure



Five Ways to Well-being

- Connect
- Be active
- Take notice
- Keep learning
- Give



Time to Pause.....

- Any questions?
- Any comments?
- Time to share.

