



Tips for Working with Individuals with Autism and Anxiety

Many direct support staff work with people with autism who show signs of anxiety. This resource provides some tips and suggestions that staff can use to recognize when someone is anxious and help lower their anxiety.

Be aware of stressful environments.

People with ASD are often nervous or anxious in new places. People can get easily upset by places that are noisy or crowded. People with ASD can also feel easily upset by crowded places and places that are very noisy. Think about the environment you are going in and prepare for stress ahead of time. Bring soothing objects, headphones, or technology to help the person cope better with stress.



Prepare the person for a change in their routine as much as possible.

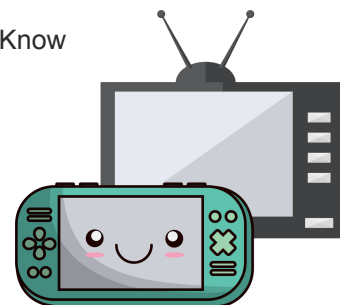
Some people may feel more anxious when their schedule is changed. Tell the person about changes in their schedule ahead of time to help them to feel ready for it.

Give simple directions when the person you are working with is really anxious.

Make sure your directions are clear. Try giving one direction at a time. Give them plenty of time to think about what you said. Remember, people with ASD need to be given longer to understand and respond.

Know their coping skills.

Some people find distractions, music, games or a comfort item helpful when they are anxious. Know what works for the individual that you are supporting. Make sure there are multiple calming strategies in case one item or activity is unavailable.



Teach skills to decrease anxiety.

Help them practice coping skills even when they are calm. You can do this by acting it out or using social stories. Other strategies include: teach deep breathing and how to control their breathing, how to ask for a break from an activity, and how to ask for other things that help them feel calm.



Know where to get help.

- Think about who else might have a good relationship with the individual. Family members, other staff members, and supervisors can be good people to help with more tips.
- Talk with your supervisor about other ways you can help in crisis situations. Ask if there is training available to improve your own skills.
- If needed, help the person to make an appointment with their primary doctor, psychiatrist, or therapist. Let the doctor know about the problems with anxiety.
- Put emergency numbers (like a family members, number, the crisis hotline or 911) somewhere the individual can easily find them. It may be helpful to hang them on the wall near a phone or to save them in a cell phone's contact list.