



Autism and Intellectual Disabilities in Pennsylvania

Safely stepping into the community.

How to Support Individuals Process Their Feelings

Dealing with the stay-at-home order is a stressful and confusing change for many. Everyone is experiencing the impact of the disruption in our daily routine. This can result in difficult emotions. For individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities, it may be even more difficult to understand and process these strong emotions. This resource highlights some ways to help people process their feelings.

MINDFULNESS

How does mindfulness help to process emotions? Mindfulness is a strategy that helps by forcing us to be aware our thinking, feelings, and physical sensations. The more you are able to notice these changes in these areas, the more that you will be able to process these emotions.

Mindfulness can be used by many individuals. It can even be adapted for individuals with communication challenges.

BUILDING AN EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

It is important to have a strong emotional vocabulary in order to identify how you are feeling. Most people can recognize and label basic emotions (happy, sad, anger, disgust, fear and surprise). It is sometimes challenging for people to identify degrees of these emotions, or even more complex emotions. It is important to find ways to teach how to identify emotions based on the individual's skills. For people with communication challenges or intellectual challenges, using visuals can help to build this emotional vocabulary. It is also helpful to identify and label changes in behavior that are related to emotions. For those who have a good understanding of basic and complex feelings, it is helpful to have discussions about these feelings and the impact on a person's mood and functioning. Another good way to build a person's emotional vocabulary is to use strategies like video modeling, social stories, or social-emotional learning resources.

TEACH COPING STRATEGIES

It is normal to feel varying degrees of emotions. However, it is important to be able to deal with strong emotions in healthy ways. For individuals who have difficulty dealing with strong emotions, it is helpful to teach and reinforce healthy coping strategies. This can include strategies like deep breathing, finding helpful distractions, identifying when a person needs a break, or other strategies that have been helpful in the past. It is also important to teach communication skills to be able to describe these difficult emotions to others.



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