

Anger management

Advice & Support for:

Overview

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Communicate clearly

Autism and anger management- a guide for parents and carers

Autistic people have a lot to contend with. The difficulties they experience in everyday life - due, for example, to communication and sensory differences - may lead to feelings of frustration and anger.

This guide gives some practical ways in which you can help, including preventing and managing anger and helping your child to manage their feelings.

Communicate clearly

Some autistic people can experience difficulties making themselves understood, understanding what's being said to them, and understanding facial expressions and body language. This can cause considerable frustration and anxiety which may result in anger or distressed behaviour.

Speak clearly and precisely using short sentences. By limiting your communication, the person is less likely to feel overloaded by information and more likely to be able to process what you say.

Autistic people often find it easier to process visual information. Support the person to communicate their wants, needs and physical pain or discomfort, eg by using visual stress scales, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System), pictures of body parts, symbols for symptoms, or pain scales, pain charts or apps.

Give more time to process information. Use the six second rule (give the information, wait approximately six seconds to allow processing time, then if necessary, repeat the information using

the same words).

Provide structure

Creating structure for your child can help reduce anxiety and angry reactions:

Make sure your child knows what is going to happen daily.

Use visual supports and timetables.

Build in relaxing activities.

Give your child time alone to recharge.

Help to identify emotions

Many autistic people find it difficult to understand abstract concepts such as emotions, but there are ways to turn emotions into more 'concrete' concepts, eg by using stress scales. You can use a traffic light system, visual thermometer, or a scale of 1-5 to present emotions as colours or numbers. For example, a green traffic light or a number 1 can mean 'I am calm'; a red traffic light or number 5, 'I am angry'.

You could help the person to understand what 'angry' means. One way to do this is to refer to physical changes in the body. For example, 'When I'm angry, my tummy hurts/my face gets red/I want to cry'. Once the extremes of angry and calm are better understood, you can start addressing the emotions in between.

If the person can identify that they're getting angry, they can try to do something to calm themselves down, can remove themselves from a situation, or other people can see what is happening and take action.

For children and some adults [social stories](#) can be a useful way of explaining how to manage anger. Adults can also use the Brain in hand app to manage anxiety.

Offer a safe space or 'time out'

A safe space, or time out, can be a way to calm down, especially if environmental factors, such as flickering lights, are causing distress. This could be in a familiar place, like their bedroom, or doing a calming activity.

Offer an alternative

Anger can often be diffused by an activity that releases energy or pent-up anxiety. This might be

Anger can often be aroused by an activity that releases energy or pent-up anxiety. This might be punching a punch bag, bouncing on a trampoline or running around the garden.

Find out if the person is being bullied

Autistic people are at more risk of being bullied than their peers. Some will have difficulty recognising what bullying is, and may not be able to describe what has happened. The feelings created by being bullied may lead to anger or distressed behaviour.

[Read more about bullying and what you can do to help.](#)

Useful resources

Autism: understanding and managing anger by Andrew Powell

Autism seminars for families - Managing anger seminar booklet

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