



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

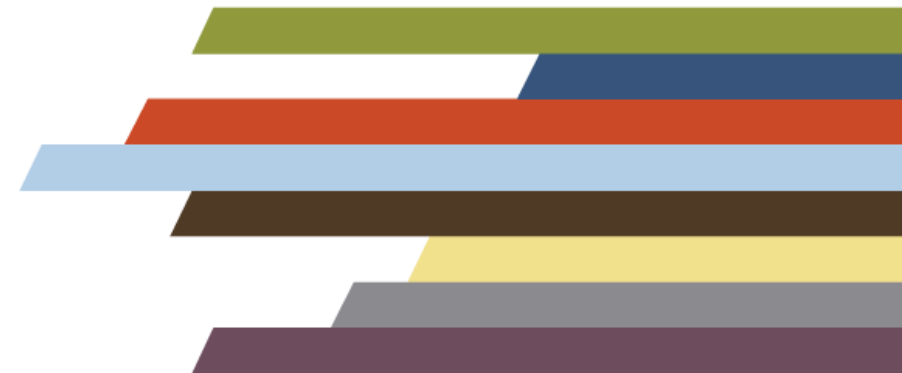
Supporting Autistic Students in the Classroom with Anxiety: Your Questions Answered

Katherine Pickard, PhD

Emory University School of Medicine

February 7, 2024

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



DISCLAIMER

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

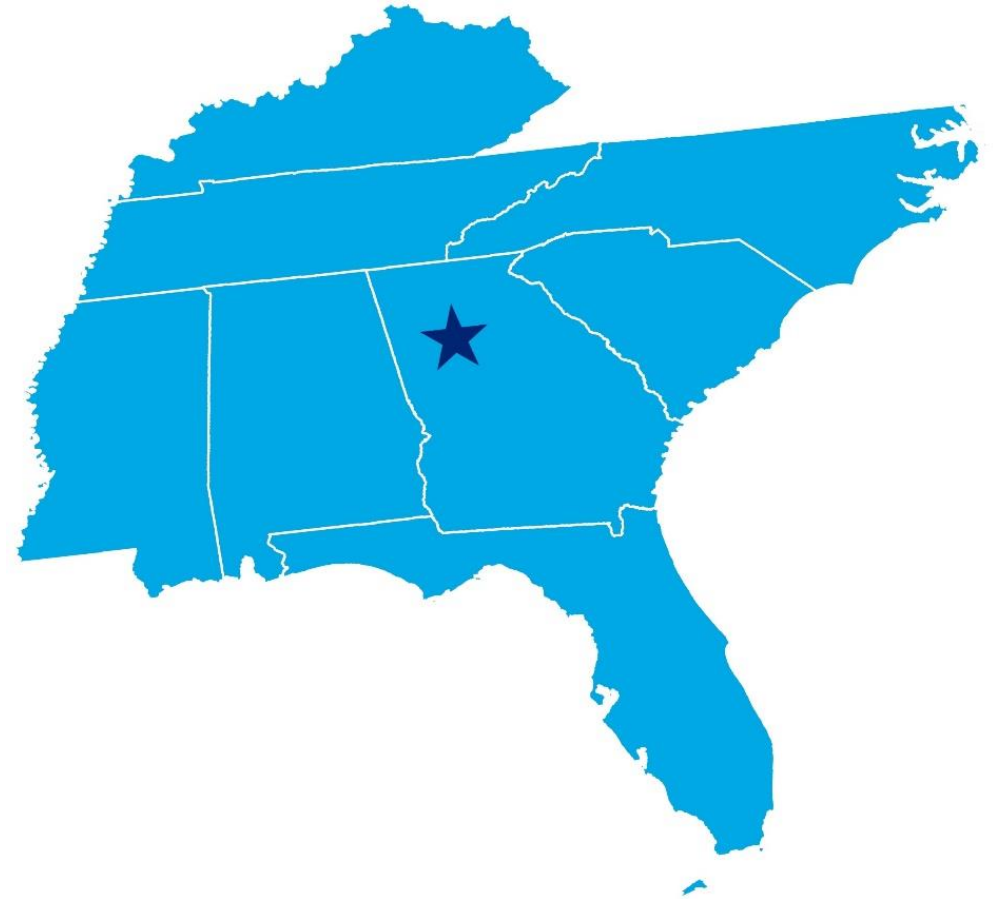
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The Southeast MHTTC is located at Emory University in the Rollins School of Public Health.

Our Mission: To promote the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based mental health services in the Southeastern United States.

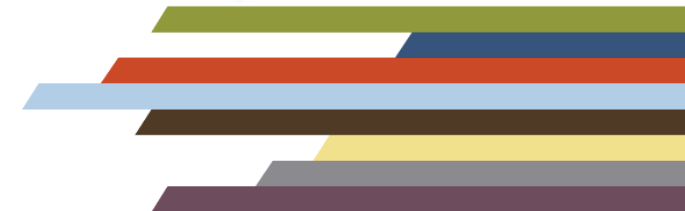
Our Vision: Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

Our Services: We use a public health approach to build leadership capacity and to provide mental health trainings and resources to providers, agencies, and communities across the Southeast.



SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



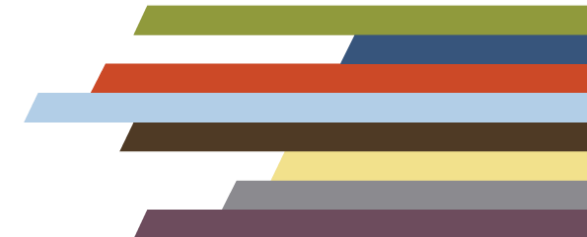
Katherine Pickard, PhD

Assistant Professor

Emory University, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Autism and Related Disabilities

Research and Clinical Interests

- Translating best practice interventions for autism into community settings.
- Extensive work in early intervention and public school systems.



A Note on Identity First Language Use

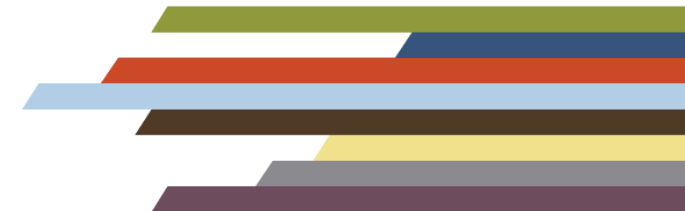
Within our products on autism, we use *identity first* language.

We have made this decision:

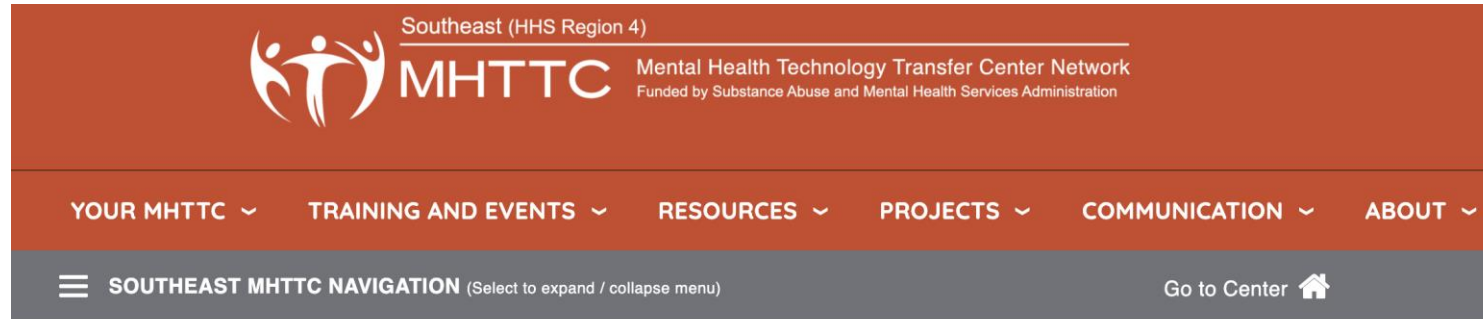
- In response to the neurodiversity movement.
- Based on the preference of many autistic adults.
- In order to avoid the use of ableist language.

However, we recognize that this is not the preference of every individual or family and that many people continue to use person-first language.

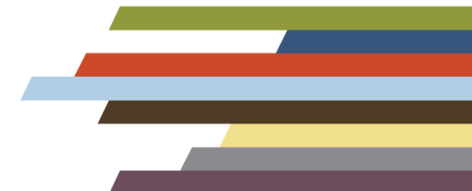
Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 18-29. Link: <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>



Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Autistic Students



Toolkit for Supporting the Mental Health of Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

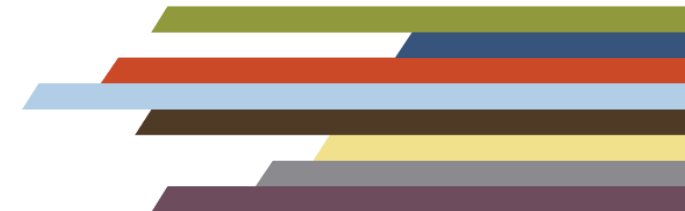


Office Hour Objectives

The first office hour is devoted to identifying anxiety and other mental health challenges in autistic students.

By the end of the learning sessions, participants will be able to:

1. Identify anxiety and signs of other mental health challenges in autistic students.
2. Describe risk factors for autistic students to develop anxiety and other mental health challenges.
3. Identify anxiety signs within two case examples of an autistic student.



Polling Questions

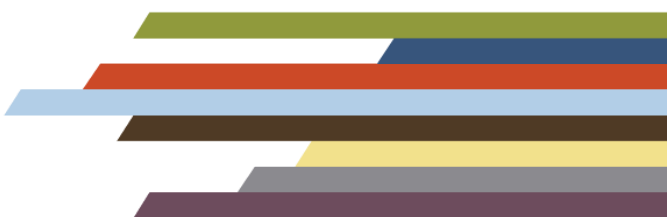
1. What is your professional role?
2. How much of your professional time do you spend working with autistic students?
3. How much of your professional time do you spend supporting the behavior and/or mental health of autistic students?

Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges in Autistic Individuals

Mental Health Category	Autistic Youth	General Population
Anxiety	25%	7.3%
Depression	11%	4.7%
Bipolar Disorders	5%	0.7%
Schizophrenia	4%	0.4%

PRE-COVID!

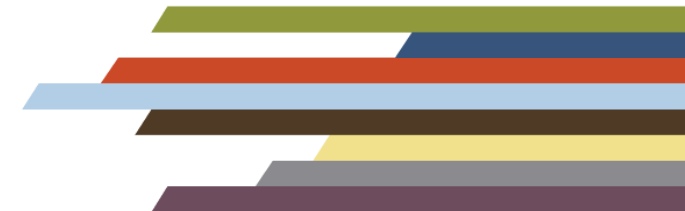
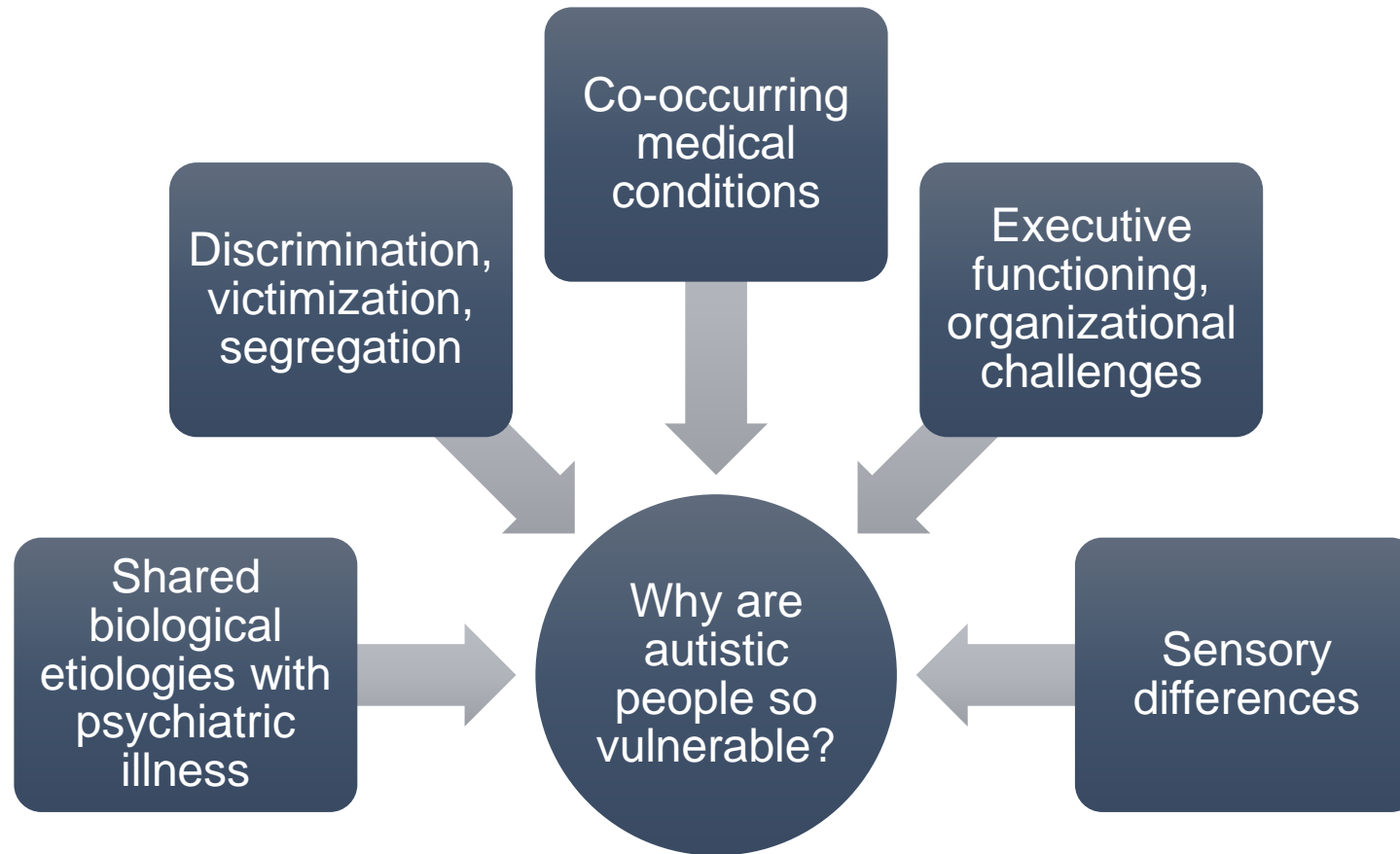
(Casseus et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2023; Ghandour et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2019)



Anxiety

- Anxiety is a subjective sense of fear, distress, or worry.
- Anxiety disorders occur when anxiety symptoms are persistent and interfere with an individual's ability to function.
- Anxiety disorders range from those associated with a specific thing or event to those in which anxiety is evoked by a broad spectrum of situations.

Increased Vulnerability to Anxiety and Mental Health Challenges in Autistic Youth



Challenges Identifying Anxiety

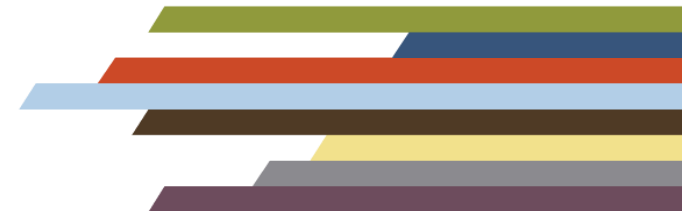
- Problem Behaviors: Aggression, self-injury, or other difficult behaviors are seen “naughty” behavior rather than mental health challenges.
- Diagnostic Overshadowing: Symptoms of anxiety and other mental health challenges are seen as parts of autism.
- Diagnostic Overlap: Shutting down or not talking to peers is a symptom of autism and also a symptom of social anxiety.
- Psychosocial Masking: Students may be able to “hide” their anxiety or mental health challenges at school due not wanting to appear different.
- Symptoms Present Differently: In autistic youth, anxiety may also look like an increase in autistic traits, such as more repetitive behaviors.



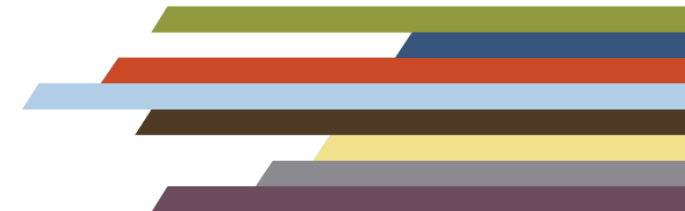
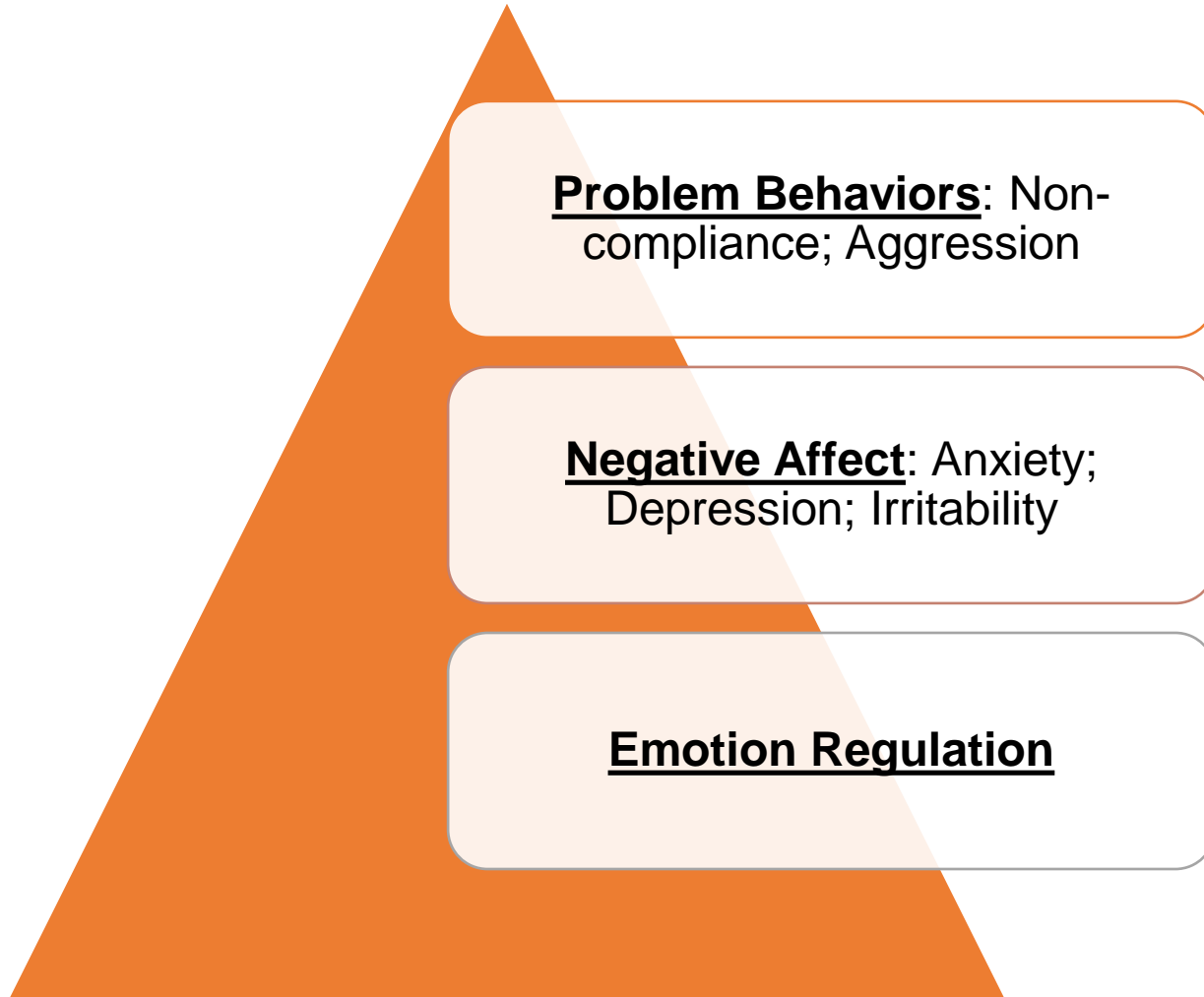
Emotion Regulation at the Heart of Mental Health

- Emotion regulation is the ability to *recognize* and *manage* emotions in reaction to the environment
- Deficits in emotion regulation may be a risk factor and underlie many mental health symptoms
- Thus, many intervention and prevention programs that focus on anxiety also support emotion regulation skills

(Weiss, 2014; White, 2014)



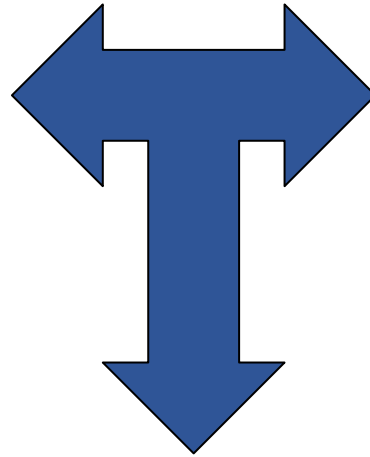
Emotion Regulation



Common Anxiety Symptoms in the General Population

Physiological:

- Arousal; rapid heart rate
- Shaking/restlessness
- Anxious facial expression
- Crying/screaming
- Sleep/eating disturbance

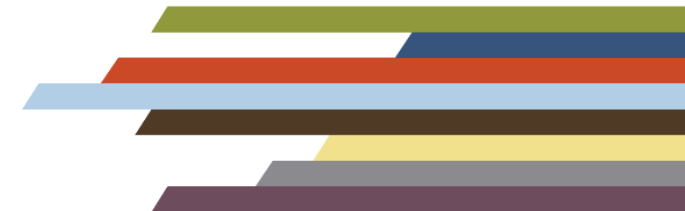


Cognitive:

- Cognitive distortions
- Negative self talk
- Rumination
- Worry
- Anticipation of negative events

Behavioral:

- Avoidance/withdrawal
- Reassurance seeking



Common Categories of Anxiety in the General Population

Specific Fears:

- Animals, bugs, doctors, dark
- Crowds

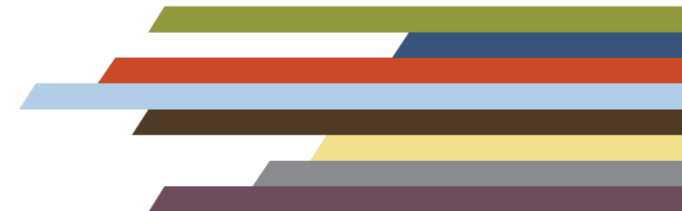
Separation from Caregiver

Social Fears:

- Worries what others think
- Teased/bullied

Chronic Worry:

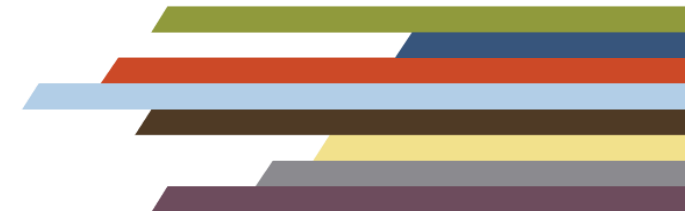
- School performance
- Death and dying
- The future



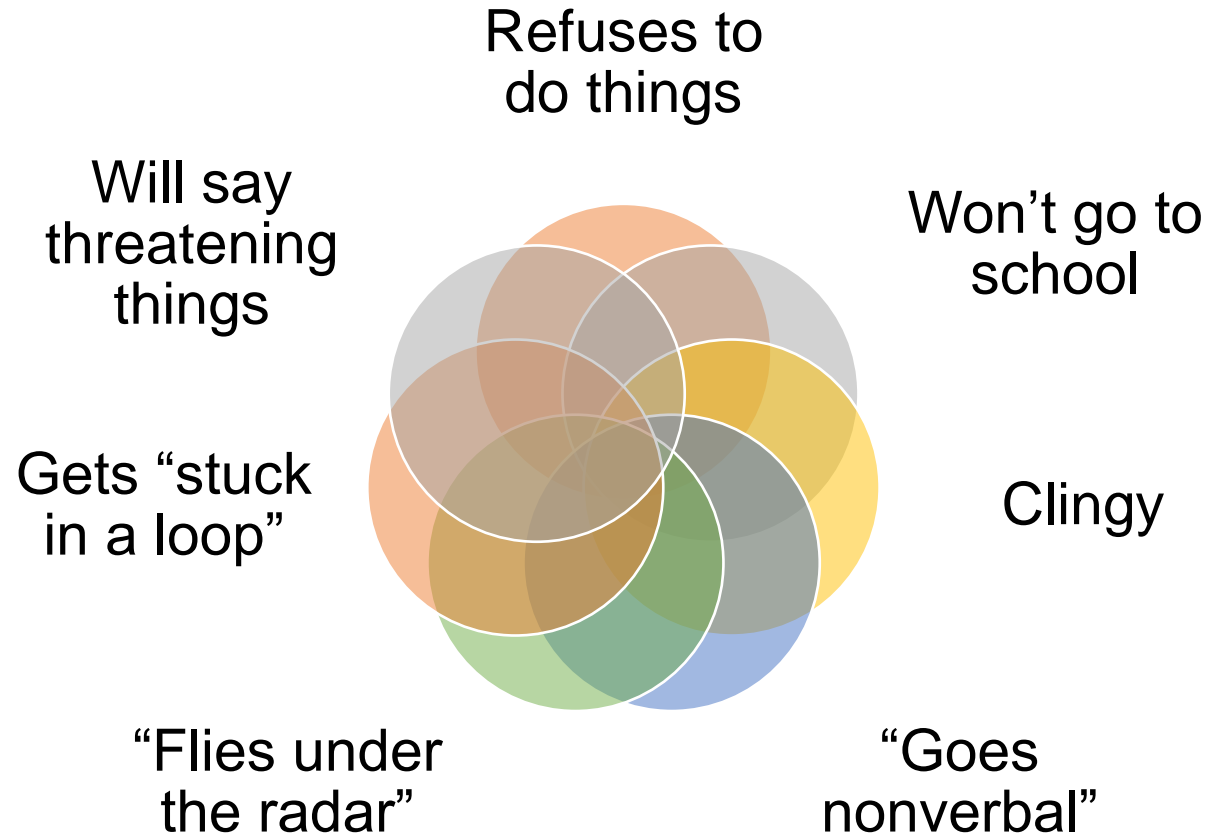
Additional Distinct Anxieties in Autism

In autistic youth, fears include those experienced across the general population, in addition to:

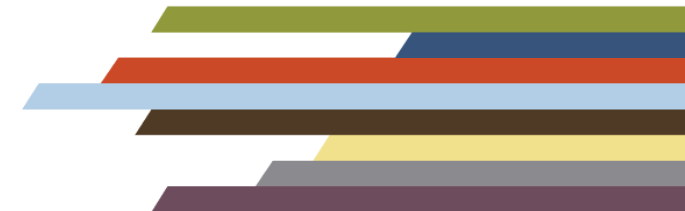
- Idiosyncratic fears
 - Fans, graffiti, beards, people who look different, mechanical objects
- Transitions/change (e.g., worry in anticipation of the change)
- Situations that cause sensory aversion
- Confusion/fear about social situations (in the absence of negative evaluation)
- Prevention from engaging in special interests



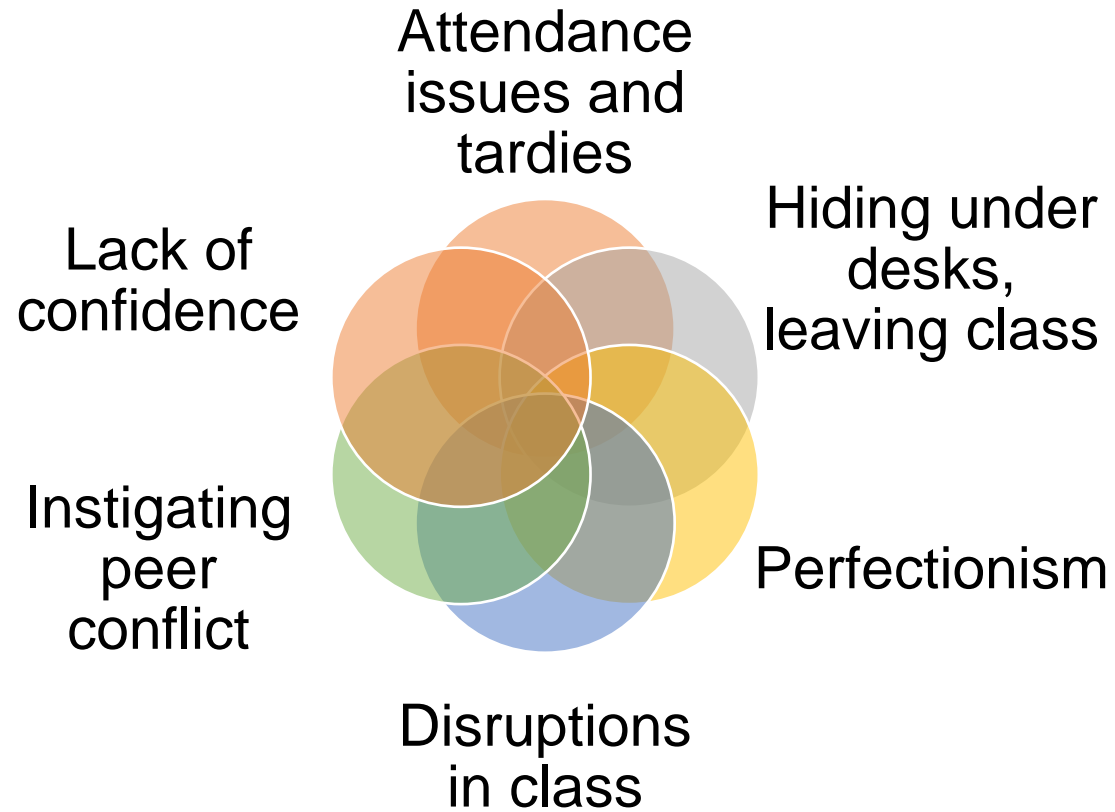
Anxiety Symptoms Reported by Parents of Autistic Students



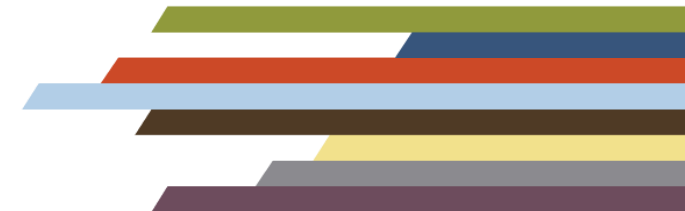
(Reaven et al., 2020)



Anxiety Symptoms Reported by School Providers Serving Autistic Youth

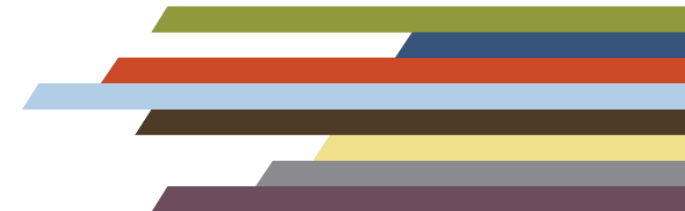


(Reaven et al., 2020)



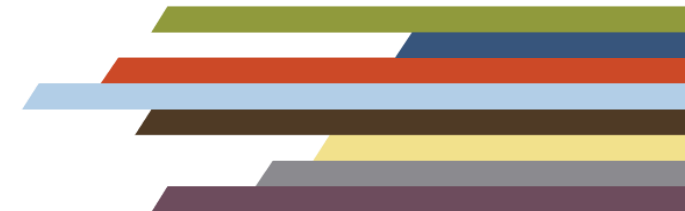
School Interference

- School refusal which can look like absences and tardies.
- More autistic traits, including being less engaged or having more repetitive behaviors
- Reduced extra-curricular participation
- Trips to the nurse's office due to physiological anxiety symptoms (e.g., headache, stomachache)
- Lots of avoidance, which can look like shutting down in class or “non-compliance”



Case Study

Sam is in fourth grade. She does not have an autism diagnosis but participates in the school lunch bunch group and receives support related to ADHD and learning disability. Sam is enrolled in general education and receives pull out support for reading and math. Over the past academic year, her school team has noticed that Sam is not raising her hand in class and puts her head on her desk when called on or looks frozen. Her team has also noticed that Sam seems to ask repetitive questions when it comes to upcoming tests and assignments (e.g., Is it going to be hard? When is it due?). Her mother shared that Sam is also asking her a lot of questions at home about upcoming assignments and is starting to complain about stomach aches before school. Her school team is wondering if anxiety is at play and what their next steps should be to support her.





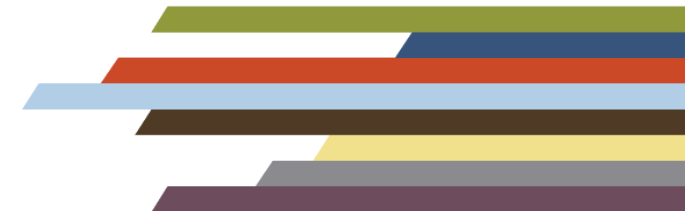
Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

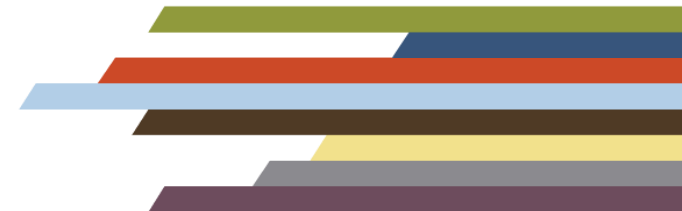
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

POLL QUESTIONS



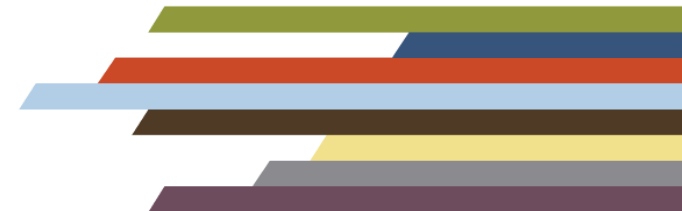
Discussion Question 1

What other information would you want or need about this student to feel confident they are experiencing anxiety?



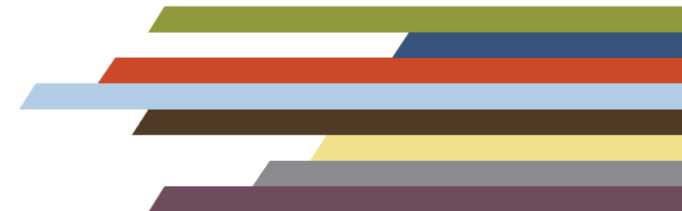
Discussion Question 2

For students who don't use spoken communication or who also have an intellectual disability, what behaviors would signal the student may be experiencing anxiety?



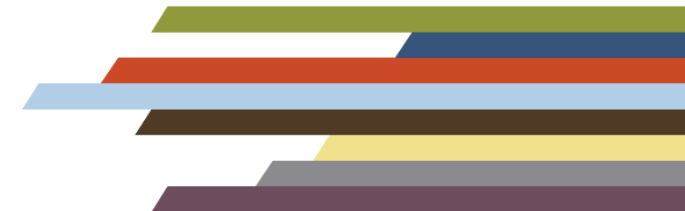
Discussion Question 3

If you suspect this student has anxiety, what are your next steps to confirm anxiety and support this student?



Case Study

Jack is in 8th grade at a large public middle schools. Jack received an autism diagnosis when he was in kindergarten and qualifies for an IEP with an autism designation. Jack participates in General Education. He does well, but he does not like group work, and is quick to correct others if they don't follow the rules and becomes upset when peers are off topic, loud, or not contributing to the project. Peers are starting to make fun of him and call him the "rules police." When there is a group project, he is now saying "I don't want to do it" or goes to the nurse with complaints of a headache. He has a hard time at lunch and recess, where he says that it is too loud and that he doesn't like being watched. He is protesting going to both activities and asks to go to the library instead. His school team is wondering if anxiety is at play and what their next steps should be to support him.





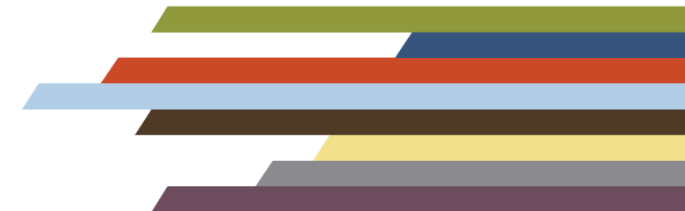
Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

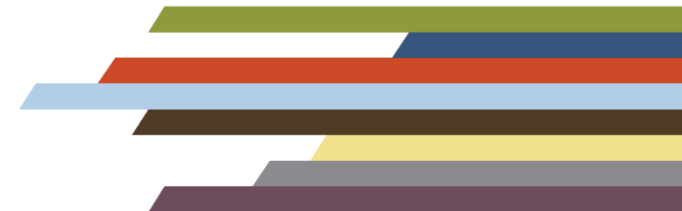
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

POLL QUESTIONS



Discussion Question 1

What other information would you want or need about this student to feel confident they are experiencing anxiety?



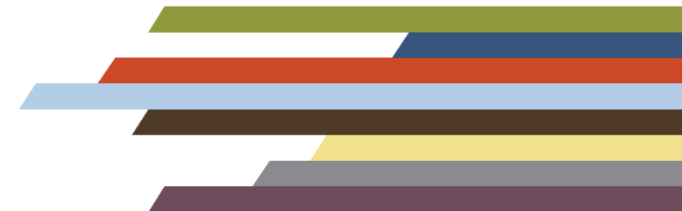
Discussion Question 2

What about the student's environment could be contributing to their anxiety?



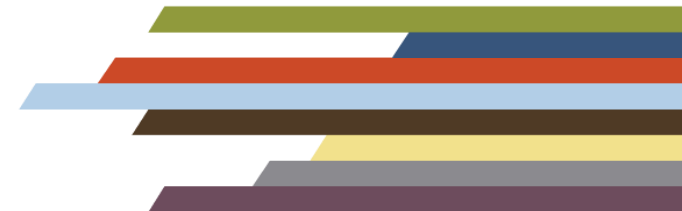
Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

Alabama | Florida | Georgia | Kentucky | Mississippi | North Carolina | South Carolina | Tennessee



Discussion Question 3

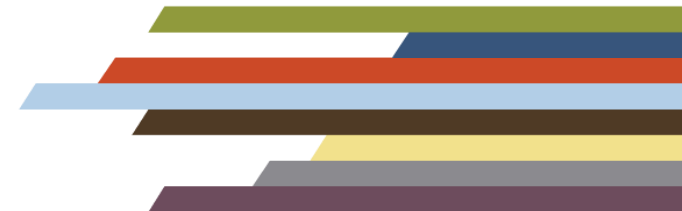
If you suspect this student has anxiety, what are your next steps to confirm anxiety and support this student?



Next Time ... Learning Session 2

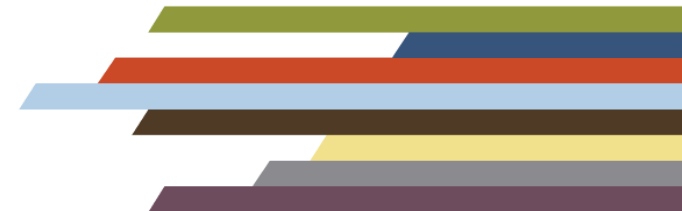
Objectives

1. Describe evidence-based approaches to support anxiety in autistic students.
2. Understand different ways that mental health programming can be delivered to autistic students in schools
3. Identify strategies that may support an autistic student with anxiety as described within two case examples.



Polling Questions

1. What are mental health topics that you would like more information on?
2. For the topics you identify, how would you want information presented?



Thank you!

Southeast MHTTC:

<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/home>

Contact:

Katherine.e.pickard@emory.edu

Website:

<https://www.marcus.org/autism-research/autism-research-team/katherine-pickard>



Region IV Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

Keep in touch with us!

Visit our website to view:

- Upcoming events
- Products and resources

[Southeast MHTTC](#)

Sign up for our listserv:

<https://southeastmhttc.org/listserv/>

Follow us on social media:

- Facebook:
- Twitter: @SE_MHTTC

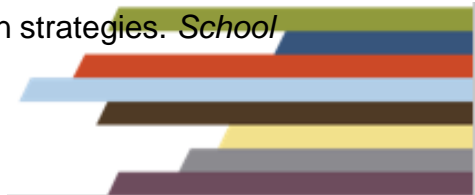
<https://www.facebook.com/semhttcriv/>

<https://twitter.com/SoutheastMHTTC>



References

- Ali, M. M., West, K., Teich, J. L., Lynch, S., Mutter, R., & Dubenitz, J. (2019). Utilization of mental health services in educational setting by adolescents in the United States. *Journal of School Health, 89*(5), 393-401.
- Barry, L., Holloway, J., & McMahon, J. (2020). A scoping review of the barriers and facilitators to the implementation of interventions in autism education. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 78*, 101617.
- Casseus, M., Kim, W. J., & Horton, D. B. (2023). Prevalence and treatment of mental, behavioral, and developmental disorders in children with co-occurring autism spectrum disorder and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder: A population-based study. *Autism Research, 16*(4), 855-867.
- Domitrovich, C. E., Bradshaw, C. P., Poduska, J. M., Hoagwood, K., Buckley, J. A., Olin, S., ... & Jalongo, N. S. (2008). Maximizing the implementation quality of evidence-based preventive interventions in schools: A conceptual framework. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 1*(3), 6-28.
- Eiraldi, R., Wolk, C. B., Locke, J., & Beidas, R. (2015). Clearing hurdles: The challenges of implementation of mental health evidence-based practices in under-resourced schools. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 8*(3), 124-140.
- Ghandour, R. M., Sherman, L. J., Vladutiu, C. J., Ali, M. M., Lynch, S. E., Bitsko, R. H., & Blumberg, S. J. (2019). Prevalence and treatment of depression, anxiety, and conduct problems in US children. *The Journal of Pediatrics, 206*, 256-267.
- Hollocks, M. J., Lerh, J. W., Magiati, I., Meiser-Stedman, R., & Brugha, T. S. (2019). Anxiety and depression in adults with autism spectrum disorder: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine, 49*(4), 559-572.
- Hossain, M. M., Khan, N., Sultana, A., Ma, P., McKyer, E. L. J., Ahmed, H. U., & Purohit, N. (2020). Prevalence of comorbid psychiatric disorders among people with autism spectrum disorder: An umbrella review of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. *Psychiatry Research, 287*, 112922.
- Kerns, C. M., Kendall, P. C., Berry, L., Souders, M. C., Franklin, M. E., Schultz, R. T., ... & Herrington, J. (2014). Traditional and atypical presentations of anxiety in youth with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders, 44*(11), 2851-2861.
- Lyon, A. R., & Bruns, E. J. (2019). From evidence to impact: Joining our best school mental health practices with our best implementation strategies. *School Mental Health, 11*(1), 106-114.



References

- Perihan, C., Burke, M., Bowman-Perrott, L., Bicer, A., Gallup, J., Thompson, J., & Sallese, M. (2020). Effects of cognitive behavioral therapy for reducing anxiety in children with high functioning ASD: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 50(6), 1958-1972.
- Perou, R., Bitsko, R. H., Blumberg, S. J., Pastor, P., Ghandour, R. M., Gfroerer, J. C., & Huang, L. N. (2013). Mental health surveillance among children—United States, 2005–2011. *MMWR Suppl*, 62(2), 1-35.
- Toseeb, U., & Asbury, K. (2023). A longitudinal study of the mental health of autistic children and adolescents and their parents during COVID-19: Part 1, quantitative findings. *Autism*, 27(1), 105-116.
- van Steensel, F. J., Bögels, S. M., & Perrin, S. (2011). Anxiety disorders in children and adolescents with autistic spectrum disorders: a meta-analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 14(3), 302.doi:10.1007/s10567-011-0097-0
- Weiss, J. A. (2014). Transdiagnostic case conceptualization of emotional problems in youth with ASD: An emotion regulation approach. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 21(4), 331.
- Weist, M. D., Hoover, S., Lever, N., Youngstrom, E. A., George, M., McDaniel, H. L., ... & Hoagwood, K. (2019). Testing a package of evidence-based practices in school mental health. *School Mental Health*, 11(4), 692-706.
- Weston L, Hodgekins J, & Langdon PE (2016) Effectiveness of cognitive behavioural therapy with people who have autistic spectrum disorders: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 49, 41–54.
- White, S. W., Mazefsky, C. A., Dichter, G. S., Chiu, P. H., Richey, J. A., & Ollendick, T. H. (2014). Social-cognitive, physiological, and neural mechanisms underlying emotion regulation impairments: Understanding anxiety in autism spectrum disorder. *International Journal of Developmental Neuroscience*, 39, 22-36.
- Zablotsky, B., Pringle, B. A., Colpe, L. J., Kogan, M. D., Rice, C., & Blumberg, S. J. (2015). Service and treatment use among children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of developmental and behavioral pediatrics: JDBP*, 36(2), 98.

