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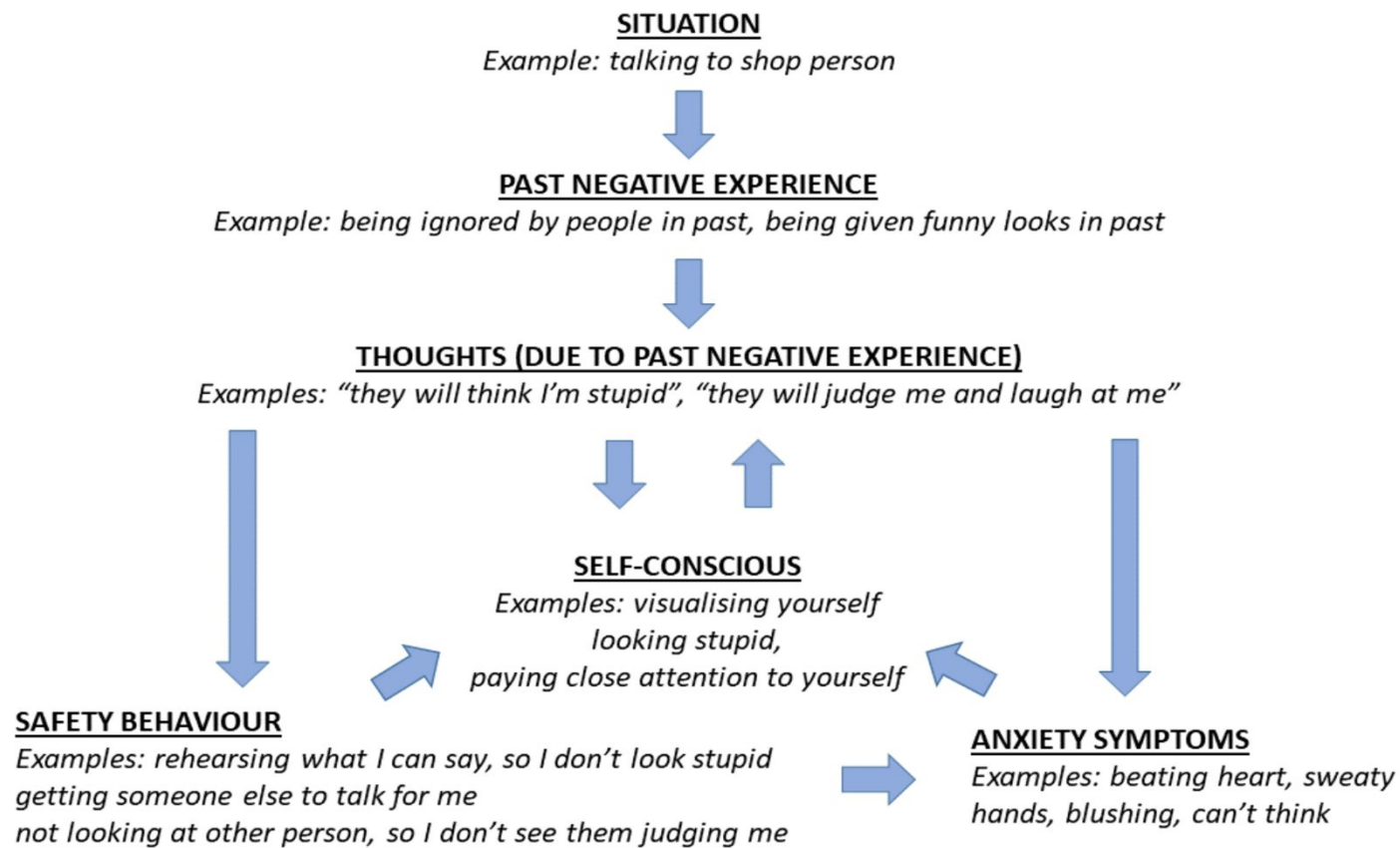


educate • empower • embrace

CLASSIFICATION APPREHENSION MEANING PRESENT IRRATIONAL DISTINGUISH NORMAL RESTLESS NIGHTMARES/BAD AL WITH DETERMINES OCCURRENCE UNCONTROLLABLE TRIGGERING REA
ALTHOUGH INCREASED SWEATING MUSCLE
HEART FLOW
SIGNS RELATED
WORD
ANXIETY
SKIN ATTACK RESP
EFFECTS
PSYCHOLOGICAL
STRESS DIVIDES PERSON COME INCLUDE BLOOD
CONSIDERED
DREAD
PALE STATE

An Example of Social Anxiety

Clark and Wells model (Dr Alex Wilson Newcastle University study)



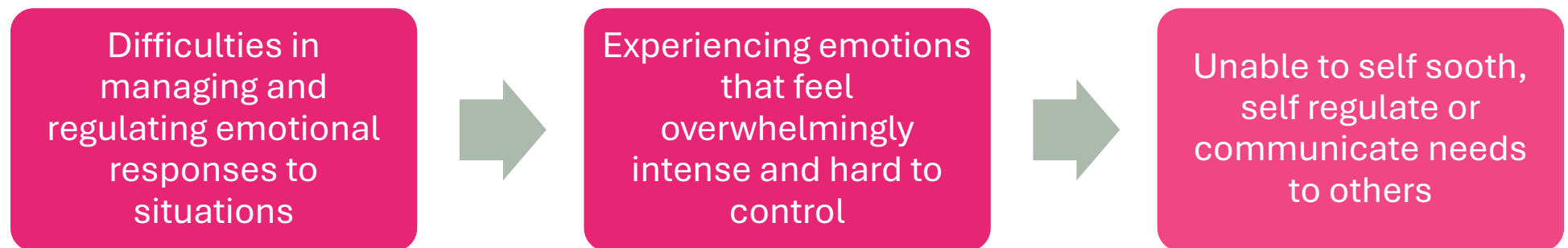








What is emotional dysregulation?



The problem with autism interventions

Change the behaviour?

Build the connection?



Working together to minimise dysregulation

- ***Co-regulation*** – support, coaching and modelling calm connection
- ***Self-regulation*** – conscious control of thoughts and feelings



Gillespie, L. (2015) It Takes
Two: The role of Co-regulation in
Building Self-Regulation



Co-regulation

..co-regulation has measurable effects (Feldman-Barrett, 2020, p.84) ... our actions affect what is happening in other people's bodies - heart rate, chemicals, nervous system etc

your nervous system is bound up with the behaviour of other humans, for better or for worse... the best thing for your nervous system is another human. The worst thing for your nervous system is also another human. (Feldman-Barrett, 2020, pp.92-93)

Dysregulated people, dysregulate people and can instead become a co-escalators.

Predictor Theory

Our brains make our lives easier by predicting what will happen next based on previous experiences

Our senses also create memories, if our senses are giving us mixed signals or the wrong signals, it is hard to create accurate sense memories

For someone with autism, the brain can't always predict things. The neurotypical brain precomputes everything, when you see something familiar, the brain immediately tries to remember what it is and that's how we know what will happen next.

Sensory overload, is also when sensory input overrides prediction. Sensory overload can cause stress and makes it difficult to focus or recall memories

Recognition leads to a generation of an expectation or prediction. When the brain receives surprises, it wants to minimize that surprise in the future by memorizing it and the corresponding environment, a process otherwise known as learning.

We also use our sense memories to create emotional memories, this can be difficult if you are autistic because you are not getting reliable predictions

Transitioning requires Change and that can feel unpredictable

- Change in focus
- Change in environment
- Change from one activity to another
- Change in routine (Lockdown, return to norms, job, housing, education)
- Change is unpredictable
- Change requires sequencing
- Change may include abstract concepts like time

Change is unpredictable and Scary

- Anxiety is the most common co - morbid state
- Other's don't relate to your concern
- You are happy where you are, doing what you are doing
- Processing everything required for successful transition takes energy
- Imagining the new is very hard – not seeing it either as positive or negative, just NOT SEEING it.

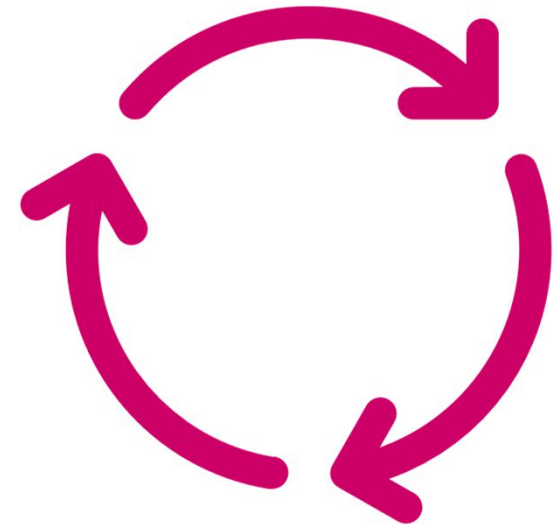


Sensory Integration and Perception – Unpredictability and Anxiety

- 84% of neurodivergent individuals have high levels of anxiety
- 70–90% of autistic individuals have challenges with sensory integration and perception
- Unpredictability and uncertainty exacerbates anxiety
- Anxiety exacerbates sensory integration challenges

'What we are suggesting is that all these factors are interacting, and if you act on one of these things, it might have positive consequences for the others'

(Professor Liz Pellicano)



Polyvagal Theory

The Polyvagal System is part of the autonomic nervous system (the part of the nervous system we have no control over) It controls our heartrate and our breathing

Porges suggests that the polyvagal system in an autistic individual is 'twitchier' or more turned on

This can result in anxiety as the body is experiencing a higher rate of arousal, even though the individual is not aware of this

It also means that the fight, flight or immobilise reactions can happen much quicker than in a neurotypical individual

Understanding of the biology of safety and danger, based on the interplay between our bodies and the voices and faces of the people around us.

A kind face or a soothing tone of voice can dramatically alter the way we feel. We feel seen and heard and that can make us feel calm and safe, and why being ignored or dismissed can precipitate rage reactions or mental collapse.

Attuning with another person can shift us out of disorganized and fearful states. Porges's theory makes us look beyond the effects of fight or flight and put social relationships front and centre in our understanding of trauma

It also suggests new approaches to healing that focus on strengthening the body's system for regulating arousal
#somatic exercises, heartbeat work and the 3C Pathway



Beat to Beat Work and Co-Regulation

Heartbeat rhythms and why they are so successful and so powerful:

- Anxiety can become part of our muscle memory
In a state of anxiety heartbeat will rise, leading to tightness, breathlessness and sometimes panic.
- Bringing the heart beat down is key
- Working with a heartbeat rhythm can help restore balance
- Heartbeat rhythm can be comforting and replicate the last place any of us felt completely secure, in the womb. Heartbeat is the first function an embryo performs



- The Beat-to-Beat exercises are best used once you feel confident, practise them when you are calm
- They are best used before the anxiety has risen to an unmanageable level
- Calming exercises should be adapted to suit you
- Calming exercises work best if you are in control of them, rather than someone else doing them to you

**organise,
prioritise
and activate**

**focus,
sustain
and shift
focus**

**regulate alertness
sustain effort and
speed**



**EXECUTIVE
FUNCTION**



**monitor and self
regulate
actions**

**utilise working
memory
and short term
recall**

**manage and
modulate emotions**

Clear Time

Time spent with the child/young person to build a secure base for their social and emotional wellbeing.

You must be:

Clear

of anxiety

Clear

of distractions

Clear

of expectations

3 C pathway — The change starts with us



Connect

Empathetic Connections, walking in someone else's shoes, seeing the world through their eyes.



Calm

Create a safe space, be a safe person. Use strategies to reduce anxiety. Beat to Beat work. Breathing exercises



Communicate

Build a person centered, secure base for communication of feelings and needs.

Connect

- Be on their side – understand that the behavior is not always a choice but a form communication.
- Understand their sensory perspective, social challenges and processing difference as much as possible. Empathetic Connection.
- Spend quality moments in 'Clear Time'. Physical Connection
- Validate with no expectation of response.
- Share your vulnerability.
- Share their interest.

Calm

- Yourself first – modeling calmness/low and slow.
- Normalise anxiety – *“I hear you.. lots of people worry about this”. “It’s hard– I can see you are anxious; I hear what you are saying”*
- Manage the sensory environment
- Safe spaces and safe people.
- Share calming strategies with them. **Beat to Beat work, heartbeat rhythm, heartbeat exercises and breathing exercises**

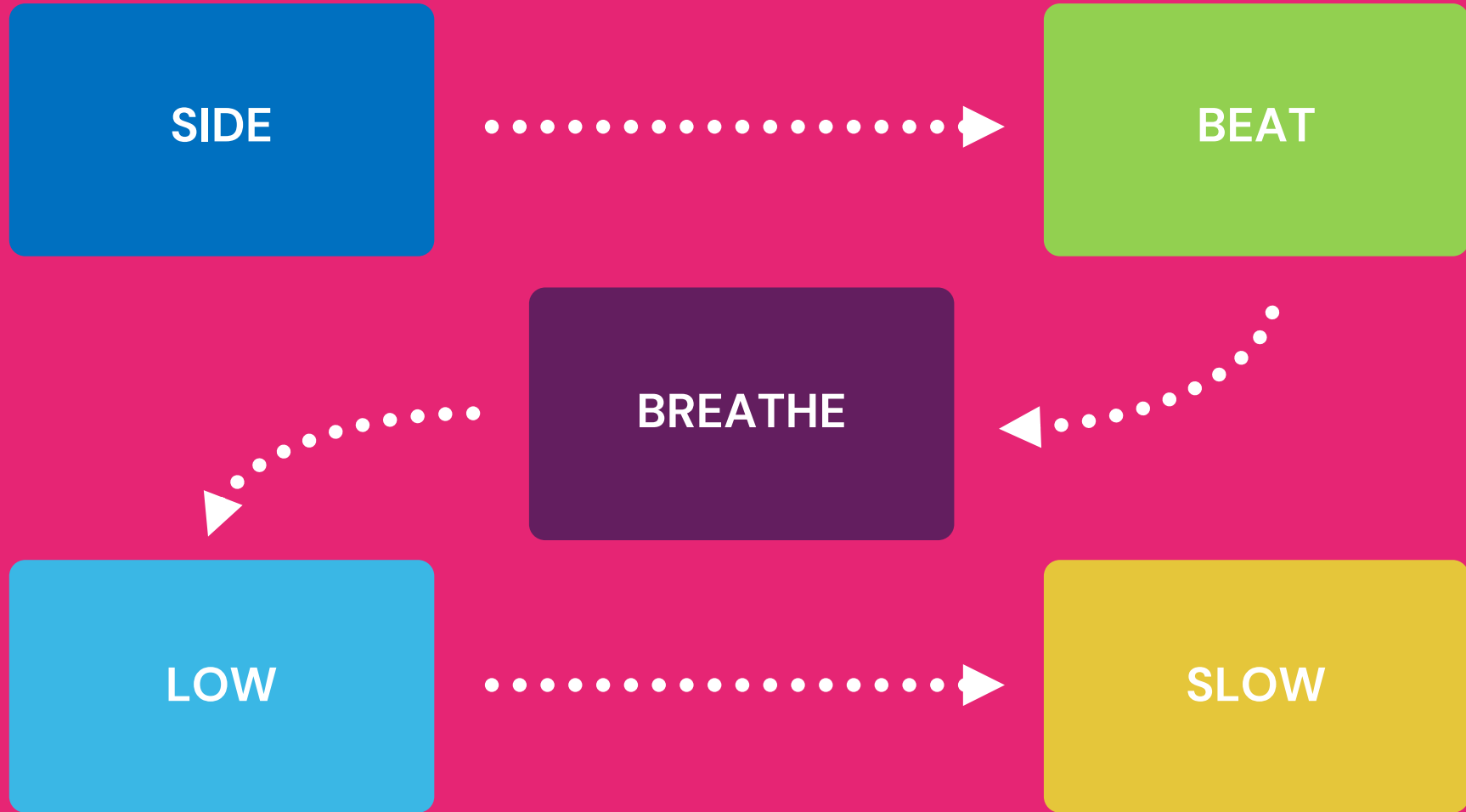
Calm

- Cold exposure increases vagal activity and heart rate variability HRV (the fluctuation in intervals between adjacent heartbeats which helps us adapt to environmental and psychological challenges)
- Exercise and movement: stimulating vagal tone, somatic movement
- Mindfulness practices can increase interoception
- Probiotics and Omega-3s
- Laughter- diaphragmatic breathing
- Humming, chanting, singing 'om' can deactivate the limbic centre of the brain (responsible for threat and emotion)
- Massage (increases oxytocin)
- Havening: (boosts serotonin) hugging yourself, hands on heart, cupping and pressing, crossing arms
- Understanding your window of tolerance, don't try all the above at once

Communicate

- Communication is 93% non verbal, what are you communicating, what are they communicating?
- Create a system with them that works for them, *pictures, thumbs up...*
- Encourage communication in any form and validate it
- Modify your communication style
- Use visuals
- Directly teach emotions: emojis talk about how characters feel in films, books,
- Talk about their autism with them if they are willing

Calming techniques



8 things to say to an anxious child/young person



You are safe
with me



It's okay to feel
nervous, I do
too sometimes



Let's go for
a walk



Let's draw the
worry, how big
is it?



Let's talk back
to this worry



I am here
for you



Let's sit together
until the thought
passes



Let's take a few
deep breaths
together

**actfor
autism**

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Signposting/Organisations

- <https://www.autistica.org.uk/> Autistica
- <https://www.autismcentral.org.uk> Autism Central
- <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/directory-record/42483/parent-group-coventry> Coventry Action For Autism Community Group
- <https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/> The Curly Hair Project
- <https://www.autism.org.uk/> National autistic Society
- <https://entrustcarepartnership.org.uk/> Entrust Care Partnership
- <https://autisticgirlsnetwork.org/> Autistic Girls Network
- Understood.org (good resources, even though it's American)
- additudemag.com (Primarily ADHD also American)

References





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You can follow us at:



www.actforautism.co.uk



[@actforautismnow](https://www.facebook.com/actforautismnow)



[@actforautism_](https://www.instagram.com/actforautism_)

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Written by Act for Autism

CONNECTING & COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR AUTISTIC CHILD

A Toolkit of Activities to Encourage Emotional Regulation and Social Development



Introducing the 3C Pathway

'An excellent and informative analysis of autism in a readable, accessible and relatable way. Highly recommended.'

– Paul Isaacs, speaker, trainer, consultant and author on the autism spectrum

This book empowers parents and professionals working with children and young people on the autism spectrum using drama-based, immersive exercises. The exercises follow the authors' simple, person-centred relational approach 'The 3C pathway' of connecting, calming and communicating, and they enable you to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges an autistic child may face by 'walking in their shoes', while empowering children to become more self-aware and express themselves in healthy ways.

The activities included in the book are tried-and-tested, accessible and easy to implement, such as breathing exercises, mirroring movements and heartbeat connections. The book explains the science behind their approach as well as introducing a way in for parents and professionals to gain insight into the sensory and social challenges experienced by those on the spectrum and how to build a positive and trusting relationship, offering a secure base for children's emotional development.

Tessa Morton has been a coach mentor and workshop leader for over 30 years. She is a trained drama teacher and BACP registered CBT counsellor specialising in supporting autistic students, their families and schools. She founded Act for Autism with Jane and together they have created the acclaimed Connections Workshop, the 3C pathway and the award-winning Autistic Voices project.

Jane Gurnett holds an MA in The Advanced Teaching of Shakespeare and a BPhil in Autism (Children). She is an actor, teacher of drama and workshop leader, and has written articles published in *Advances in Autism* and *Good Autism Practice*. She co-founded Act for Autism and develops workshops and strategies for the organisation.



Author photo: Maxine Evans Photography

Act for Autism delivers country-wide training and presents nationally at events such as the Autism Show, the National Autistic Society's professionals conference, TES Sen conference and at schools and universities. In 2020 they won a prestigious NAS professionals award for their community projects.



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Written by Act for Autism



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