

hendrickx associates

training. consultancy. support.

Anxiety: How Autism Explains Everything

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**It is entirely to be expected
that autistic people will be
anxious**

- understanding and accepting this is
the first step in providing the right
sort of help

Mental Health in Autistic Individuals

- High levels (40%-50%):
 - Stress
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- Feel 'different' or 'odd'
- 'It's all too much'
- Struggling with 'basics'
- Sense of failure – negative experiences & messages
- Socially excluded/isolated
- No hope for future change



Why aren't you anxious
now?

Why You Aren't Anxious Now:

- Understanding what is going on and filling in gaps
- Generalising from past similar events
- Picking up signals – seeing that other people are OK
- Identifying your own feelings
- Putting things into perspective/bigger picture – cost/benefit
- Filtering out sensory data
- Being able to ACCURATELY 'guess'/predict what is likely to happen next?
- Knowing that whatever happens, you can think of an EFFECTIVE strategy to resolve

THESE ARE ALL IN THE DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR AUTISM

What makes you anxious?

Processing / Thinking – making sense of:

Social Language & Communication:
people

Self, feelings and the Sensory World:
internal & external

Non-Social World:
imagination, context,
abstracts

Behaviour:

Communication difficulties
Relationship difficulties
May avoid people
Solitude

Routines, sameness
Struggles with change
Unexpected events
Decision-making
Self-care

Consequences:

Isolation
No social support

Daily hassles
Struggles with independence

Potential Outcome:

Anxiety
Depression

Adapted from Gaus, V.L.

Global Stability (Beardon)



Autism & Anxiety – Invisible Conditions

- Autism may:
 - be invisible
 - be hidden/masked
 - manifest as an anxiety response
- Anxiety response may:
 - be invisible
 - be hidden/masked
 - manifest as a physical health condition
- Do not presume extent of impact by behaviour or presentation

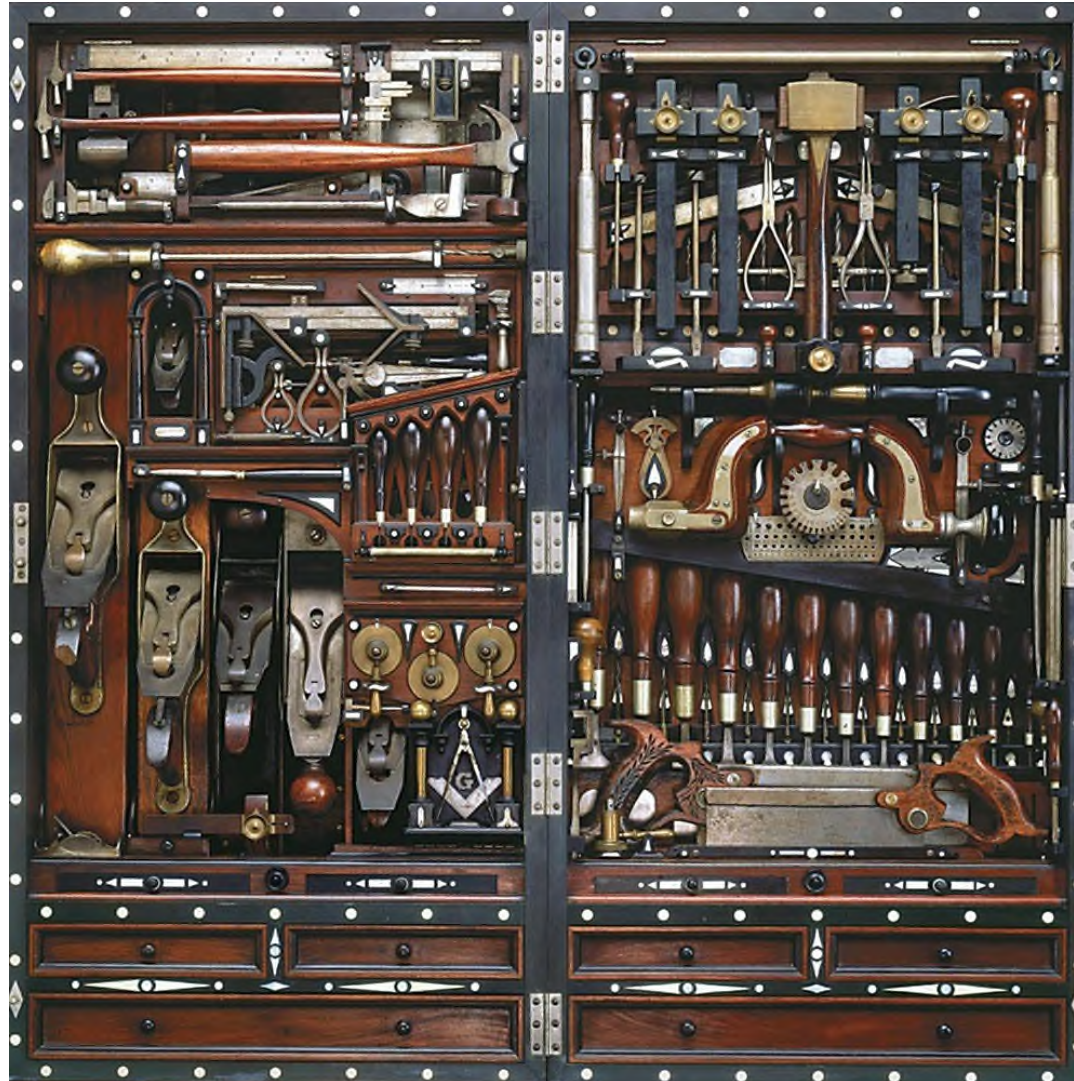


‘Challenging Behaviour’??

- Autism and/or anxiety response may manifest as perceived ‘challenging behaviour’
- It’s not ‘challenging behaviour’; it’s ‘the only tool in my toolbox right now’
- **ASK: What else could they have done with what they had to work with?**

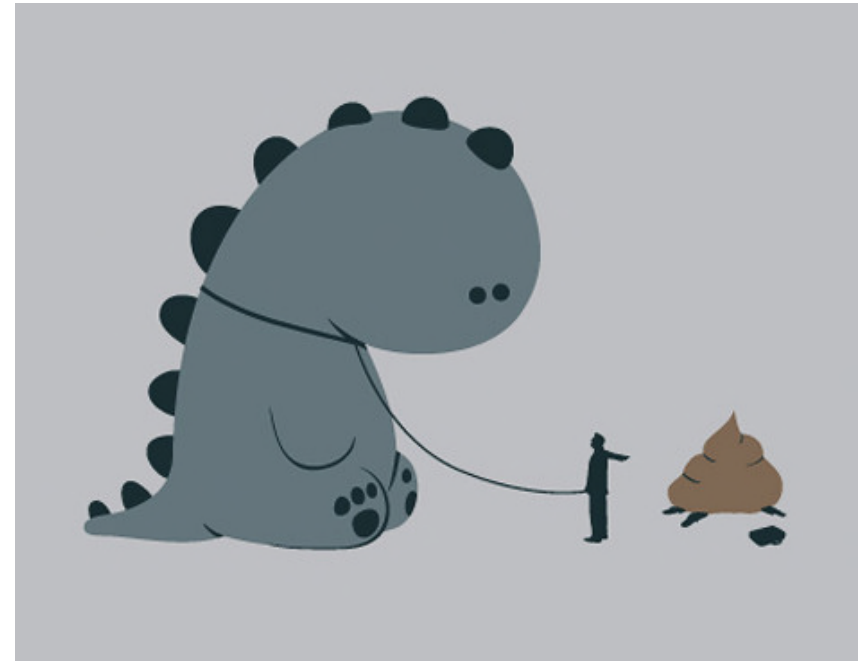


Other People Have a Bigger Choice of Tools



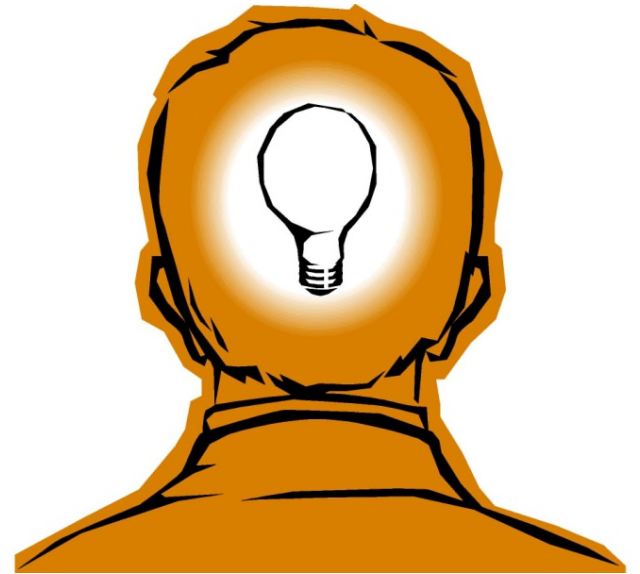
Anxiety Management

- Avoiding anxiety teaches the brain that it is correct to be afraid
- Anxiety is normal and useful
- Zero anxiety is unrealistic
- Thoughts & feelings are not fact/truths - 'Smoke alarm and toast'
- Teach to recognise signs, manage, minimise & live with



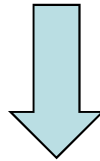
Teach Social Context

- Autistic people tend to apply same solution to all problems
- Explicitly teach social understanding
- Teach to generalise – supports prediction
- Teach to problem solve
- Teach to develop multiple responses – what could I do instead?
- Visual flowcharts easier than words

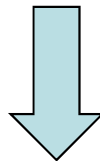


Break the Cycle

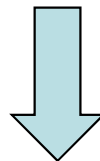
Increase support and understanding of effects of autism



Better able to cope with anxiety & increased self-efficacy



Decrease in anxiety response



Decrease in stress-related health issues / behaviour