

CREATIVITY & ART THERAPY FOR AUTISM

TRAINING COURSE FOR YOUTH TRAINERS

2024



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INTRODUCTION

This comprehensive course is designed to explore the intersection of creativity, art therapy, and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In this journey, we delve into the profound impact of creative expression on individuals with ASD, and how art therapy can serve as a powerful tool for intervention and support.

Module 1: Understanding ASD and how can we intervene. Techniques for working with young people and children with ASD

In this foundational module, participants delve into the multifaceted nature of autism spectrum disorder. Through interactive lectures and case studies, we examine the spectrum's characteristics, challenges, and strengths. Moreover, we explore evidence-based intervention strategies tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals with ASD.

Module 2: Exploring Creativity & Art Therapy

Module 2 embarks on a journey into the realm of creativity and art therapy. Participants uncover the therapeutic potential of art in fostering self-expression, communication, and emotional regulation for individuals with ASD.

Module 3: Stimulating Intuitive Imagery

Diving deeper, Module 3 focuses on techniques for stimulating intuitive imagery in individuals with ASD. Participants learn innovative approaches to encourage imaginative thinking, sensory exploration, emotional regulation and creative problem-solving.

Module 4: Relaxation, Meditation, Art and Craft

In Module 4, participants explore the symbiotic relationship between relaxation, meditation, art and craft. Through guided relaxation exercises and mindfulness practices, we cultivate a nurturing environment for artistic exploration and self-reflection. Participants engage in therapeutic art&craft activities, promoting sensory integration, stress reduction, and emotional well-being.



Module 5: Unveiling the Symbolic Meaning of Art Objects

Module 5 delves into the symbolic meaning of art objects created by individuals with ASD. By fostering a deeper understanding of visual language, we empower individuals to communicate and connect through the language of art and symbols.

Module 6: Facilitating Emotional Expression

The final module, Module 6, focuses on facilitating the expression of emotions in individuals with ASD. Participants explore creative techniques for navigating complex emotions, building emotional literacy, and fostering healthy self-expression. Through experiential activities and role-play scenarios, we equip participants with the tools to support emotional well-being and resilience.

Embark on this enriching journey of "Creativity & Art Therapy for Autism" and discover the transformative power of creativity in the lives of individuals on the autism spectrum. Join us as we cultivate a nurturing space for exploration, expression, and growth, empowering individuals to thrive and flourish through the medium of art. Through interactive lectures, practical demonstrations, and hands-on activities, this course equips participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to harness the power of creativity and art.



RELEVANCE FOR THE YOUTH TRAINERS

"Creativity & Art Therapy for Autism" offers youth trainers a unique opportunity to deepen their understanding of ASD, develop valuable skills in creative therapy, and make a positive impact on the lives of individuals with autism and their communities.

Here are several key benefits:

Enhanced understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Youth trainers gain a comprehensive understanding of ASD, including its characteristics, challenges, and strengths. This knowledge equips them to interact more effectively with individuals on the autism spectrum, fostering empathy, and sensitivity in their approach.

Skill development in creative therapeutic techniques: Through engaging with the course content, youth trainers develop a diverse toolkit of creative therapeutic techniques tailored specifically for individuals with ASD. These skills include stimulating intuitive imagery, facilitating emotional expression, and decoding symbolic meaning in art objects.

Increased competence in intervention strategies: The course provides youth trainers with evidence-based intervention strategies proven to be effective in supporting individuals with ASD. By learning how to implement these strategies in a creative and art-focused context, trainers can better meet the diverse needs of their clients or students.

Empowerment to foster self-expression and emotional well-being: Youth trainers gain the knowledge and skills necessary to create a supportive environment where individuals with ASD can express themselves creatively and explore their emotions in a safe and nurturing way. This empowerment fosters personal growth, self-confidence, and emotional resilience in both trainers and their clients or students.

Professional development opportunities: By completing this course, youth trainers enhance their professional credentials and expand their expertise in the field of autism support and creative therapy. This may open up new career opportunities or enhance their existing roles in youth development, special education, counseling, or related fields.

Impactful contribution to the community: Armed with the knowledge and skills gained from this course, youth trainers have the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals with ASD and their families. By incorporating creative and art therapy techniques into their work, trainers can help promote inclusion, understanding, and acceptance within their communities.



TRAINING METHODS

The training methods utilized in the course "Creativity & Art Therapy for Autism" are carefully designed to provide a rich and engaging learning experience. These methods incorporate a blend of theoretical knowledge, practical application, experiential learning, and interactive engagement to cater to diverse learning styles and maximize retention.

Facilitators deliver informative lectures and presentations to impart foundational knowledge about autism spectrum disorder (ASD), creativity, art therapy, and related topics. These sessions provide participants with a solid theoretical framework upon which to build their understanding and practice.

The course incorporates case studies and real-life scenarios to illustrate concepts, theories, and intervention strategies in practical contexts. Participants analyse and discuss these case studies, gaining insights into the complexities of working with individuals on the autism spectrum.

Hands-on experiential activities are integral to the course curriculum, allowing participants to directly engage with creative therapeutic techniques and art-based interventions. Through guided exercises, participants experience firsthand the transformative power of creativity in promoting self-expression, emotional regulation, and personal growth.

Group discussions foster peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchange, and collaborative problem-solving. Participants have the opportunity to share their perspectives, insights, and experiences, enriching the learning process and promoting a supportive learning community.

Facilitators conduct demonstrations and skill-building workshops to teach participants practical techniques for stimulating intuitive imagery, facilitating emotional expression, and decoding symbolic meaning in art objects. These sessions provide hands-on practice and guidance, enabling participants to develop competency in applying creative therapy techniques.

The course encourages participants to engage in reflective practices and self-assessment to deepen their understanding, identify personal learning goals, and track their progress over time. Reflection prompts, journaling exercises, and self-assessment tools empower participants to integrate their learning and apply it effectively in their professional practice.

Supplementary online resources, including readings, videos, and interactive multimedia materials, complement the course content and provide additional learning opportunities. Participants can access these resources at their own pace, reinforcing key concepts and exploring topics of interest.

By combining these diverse training methods, the course "Creativity & Art Therapy for Autism" offers a dynamic and engaging learning experience that equips participants with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to effectively utilize creative techniques in supporting individuals on the autism spectrum.



COURSE CURRICULUM

MODULE 1 - WHAT ASD IS AND HOW WE CAN INTERVENE. TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN WITH ASD

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation criteria	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will be able to improve their knowledge on the main characteristics of autism spectrum disorder	Main characteristics of autism: - general information on the spectrum - classification and main characteristics - weaknesses and strengths	Frontal lesson	Final reflections in group and questionnaire	Slides and video	60 minutes
Participants will improve their knowledge on how to establish relationships and communicate with persons with ASD	Effective communication in the presence of the disorder - how to relate and communicate - facilitators and barriers in communication and relationships	Frontal lesson and interactive practical session	Final reflections in group and questionnaire	Slides and video	60 minutes
Participants will practice operative strategies to facilitate the communication with young persons with ASD	Examples of operative strategies - how to explain a metaphor - conversation cards	Interactive practical session	Final group reflections and questionnaire	Slide video	90 minutes



MODULE 2 - CREATIVITY & ART THERAPY FOR AUTISM

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation criteria	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will understand the basics of ASD and its characteristics	Overview of ASD: characteristics, diagnosis, and prevalence	Lectures with multimedia presentations	Participation in discussions and activities	Whiteboard or projector for presentations	30 minutes
Participants will recognize the potential benefits of art therapy for persons with ASD	Introduction to art therapy: definition, history, and its application in treating autism	Group discussions and sharing of personal experiences	Understanding demonstrated through quizzes or short assessments	Multimedia resources (videos, slide-shows)	30 minutes
Participants will identify different approaches and techniques	Exploration of art therapy techniques suitable for ASD	Analysis of case studies	Ability to apply learned techniques in practical scenarios	Art supplies (paper, paints, markers, clay, etc.)	30 minutes
Participants will understand the sensory processing differences in ASD	Overview of sensory processing in autism	Lecture on sensory processing in autism	Ability to recognize sensory processing challenges in ASD	Sensory-friendly materials	30 minutes
Participants will understand the communication challenges faced by individuals with ASD	Overview of communication difficulties in autism spectrum	Lecture on communication challenges in autism spectrum	Ability to apply art-based communication methods in practical scenarios	Visual schedules and social stories	30 minutes
Participants will explore how art therapy facilitate non-verbal communication	Introduction to art-based communication methods	Demonstration of art-based communication methods	Improvement in communication skills demonstrated through role-plays	Art supplies for hands-on activities	30 minutes



Participants will develop strategies to enhance communication skills through artistic expression	Hands-on activities focusing on non-verbal communication through art	Role-playing exercises to practice communication skills	Engagement in group discussions and reflection on communication strategies	Role-play scenarios and props	30 minutes
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MODULE 3 - WAYS OF STIMULATING INTUITIVE IMAGERY

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation criteria	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will be able to use Intuitive Imagery strategies to gain emotional regulation	Intuitive Imagery vocabulary and strategies that address emotional regulation, sensory integration and mindfulness practices	Group game, interactive presentation, storytelling	Engagement in group discussions and the use of dedicated vocabulary	Presentation slides, handouts with relevant information, pens, paper	60 minutes
Participants will be able to use Mental Imagery in the processes of problem-solving and decision-making	Mental Imagery strategies applied to solve real-life problems effectively	Group game, interactive presentation, social story, storytelling	Ability to apply learned techniques in practical scenarios	Presentation slides, handouts with relevant information, pens, paper	80 minutes
Participants will improve memory skills through Mental Imagery strategies	Techniques of Mental Imagery in memory encoding and retrieval	Group game, interactive presentation	Ability to apply learned techniques in practical scenarios	Presentation slides, handouts with relevant information, pens, paper	70 minutes



MODULE 4 - RELAXATION, MEDITATION, ART AND CRAFT

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation criteria	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will be able to improve their coordination, sensory processing, and overall well-being	Warm-up, sensory-friendly and balancing cool-down activities, with gentle movements, sensory integration and deep breathing	Hands-on workshops, demonstration and practical assignments	Self-evaluation and evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance	Sensory materials, soft fabrics, mats, sensory balls, music, visual props, comfy clothes	20 minutes
Participants will learn how to provide sensory experiences	Exploring painting with handmade brushes made of materials found in nature	Hands-on workshops, demonstration and practical assignments	Self-evaluation and evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance	Big sheets or rolls of paper, canvases, paint & accessories, pieces of wood, wire, thread	60 minutes
Participants will be able to learn how to enhance individual expression and self-discovery	Exploration of diverse tactile materials and different art media, to touch and interact with them and create unique artworks	Hands-on workshops, demonstration and practical assignments	Self-evaluation and evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance	Art supplies, tactile materials, and clean-up supplies	45 minutes
Participants will learn to develop emotional regulation skills	Working with clay and throwing clay balls against the wall	Hands-on workshops, demonstration and practical assignments	Self-evaluation and evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance	Clay, sculpting tools, small bowls, clean-up and surface protection supplies	45 minutes
Participants will be able to improve their cognitive skills such as memory, concentration, and attention	Creating (cutting and hand painting), and playing a memory game	Hands-on workshops, demonstration s, practical assignments	Self-evaluation and evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance	Cardboard, Pencil, ruler, scissors, coloured pencils, markers, paint	40 minutes



MODULE 5 - SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE ART OBJECT

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation criteria	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will be able to comprehend the importance of symbols when working with children	The importance of symbols when working with ASD children, important factors in preparing for work	Case studies, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	Slides Handouts with relevant information	20 minutes
Participants will be able to organize activities, create the timetable/lesson plan	Timetable development activities, helps to plan and structure activities	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	The printed cards, sheets of paper, tools for drawing and writing	20 minutes
Participants will be able to develop skills in order to raise motivation to complete tasks and learn	Timetable development activities, helps to motivate the participants to complete the tasks	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	The printed cards, sheets of paper, tools for drawing and writing	20 minutes
Participants will expand their knowledge about motor skills and attention training	A colouring activity that develops concentration and motor skills. Using the symbols of art	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	Ready-to-print drawings, sheets of paper, drawing and writing tools	70 minutes
Participants will develop their emotional expression skills	An emotion recognition activity that helps to calm down and express emotions with the help of symbolic colours	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	Ready-to-print drawings, sheets of paper, drawing and writing tools, scissors, glue	40 minutes
Participants will develop their skills of expressing emotion through movement	Emotion recognition activity that helps to calm down and express emotions with the help of symbolic movements	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments	Self-evaluation	Ready-to-print drawings, sheets of paper, drawing and writing tools, scissors, glue	40 minutes



MODULE 6 - DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND REGULATION ON YOUTH WITH ASD

Learning outcomes	Description of contents	Methods	Evaluation method	Materials & equipment	Duration
Participants will be able to understand how to create a safe and supportive environment for youth and children with ASD	Creating a safe and supportive environment for youth with ASD	Group game, interactive presentation	Self-evaluation	Eggs, recyclable materials	20 minutes
Participants will be able to apply strategies of support for young people and children with ASD to successfully recognize and express emotions	Helping youth with ASD to identify and express their emotions	Interactive presentation, social story, drawing	Self-evaluation	Computer, projector, handouts, A4 copy paper, coloured pencils, pens, markers	90 minutes
Participants will be able to identify emotional regulation methods and coping strategies to help young people and children with ASD to deal with difficult emotions	Enhancing emotional regulation skills on youth with ASD	Role playing, storytelling	Self-evaluation	Computer, Internet connection, projector, pens, A4 copy paper, handouts	100 minutes



TRAINING METHODOLOGY

MODULE 1 - WHAT ASD IS AND HOW CAN WE INTERVENE. TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILDREN WITH ASD

This module delivers specific information about ASD, general characteristics of neurodevelopmental disorders and practical techniques on how to work with young people with ASD.

MODULE 1:	What ASD is and how can we intervene. Techniques for working with young people and children with ASD
GENERAL GOAL(S):	The general aim of the activity is to provide the participants to the training with: - information and knowledge about the Autistic Spectrum Disorder, - a clearer understanding of the neurodevelopmental disorders, - practical techniques on how to work with young people with ASD
OBJECTIVES:	By the end of the module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know the main characteristics of autism; • know effective strategies for managing relationships and communication; • know some operational practices for the management of learning activities.
METHODS:	Frontal lesson and interactive practical session
DURATION:	3,5 hours
RESOURCES NEEDED:	Computer, video projector, internet
ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:	<p>Activity 1.1 - Main characteristics of Autism</p> <p>Duration: 60 minutes</p> <p>1.1.1 General information on the autism spectrum</p> <p>The trainer will provide general information on the spectrum by commenting on projected slides that will have the following content in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What it is: the autistic spectrum is a group of neurodevelopmental disorders that have some common characteristics;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the causes: organic and environmental (some still unclear); - How is it manifested: Variability of symptoms (e.g. communication deficit, social deficit, "imagination" deficit, etc.); - Abnormalities in attention, sensory, executive functions. - Practical examples and viewing the video on sensoriality: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2P4Ed6G3gw&t=4s - Comorbidity: may be associated with other disorders: e.g. epilepsy, intellectual delay, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, ADHD etc. <p>1.1.2 Classification: the three levels and their characteristics</p> <p>The trainer will explain the difference between the levels that classify autism according to the DSM V indications by commenting on projected slides that will have the following contents in summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of the 3 levels of support (minimum, medium, very significant); - Presentation of the common characteristics of the 3 levels. <p>1.1.3 Functionality: areas involved and emerging strengths:</p> <p>The trainer will provide information regarding the affected areas of the spectrum. The pervasiveness of the disorder and the strengths, commenting on slides that will have in summary the following contents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Areas involved (pervasiveness of the disorder); - Strengths.
	<p>Activity 1.2 – Effective communication to establish a relationship</p> <p>Duration: 60 minutes</p> <p>The trainer will explain what the major difficulties in the area of communication and social interaction of people with ASD are, indicate (with examples) what are the facilitating factors and barriers in communication and relationship in some specific situations.</p> <p>1.2.1 General communication difficulties</p> <p>Facilitators and Barriers for the general communication with a person with ADS</p>



	<p>1.2.2 Difficulties in social communication and interactions</p> <p>Facilitators and Barriers for the the social interaction and communication with a person with ADS</p> <p>1.2.3 Difficulties in understanding figurative messages - humour and irony</p> <p>Facilitators and Barriers for the figurative and humoristic communication.</p> <p>1.2.4 Other difficulties in communication and interaction – repetitions</p> <p>Facilitators and Barriers for overcoming and understanding the stereotypies of the person with ADS.</p>
	<p>Activity 1.3 – Examples of operative strategies – Explain a metaphor</p> <p>Duration: 45 minutes</p> <p>The trainer proposes a practical activity on metaphors to understand how the meaning of sentences with figurative language can be made explicit to youth with ASD through pictures.</p>
	<p>Activity 1.4 - Examples of operative strategies – Conversation cards</p> <p>Duration 45 minutes</p> <p>The trainer presents and guides participants in the realisation and use of conversation cards to make a child/young person with ASD learn the rules of conversation.</p> <p>Through the cards and some gradual activities, the child/young person with ASD can be taught how to hold a conversation in an appropriate way, respecting social rules and conventions, established according to the interlocutor and the context (e.g. communication/social acts, greeting, taking turns, thanking, asking for something related to the context, etc.).</p> <p>Participants create cards and experiment with their use: they identify a social rule and match it with an explanatory image that can be understood by a young person with ASD.</p>
KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that access to the activity available for all. • Ensure room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. • Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone.



EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p style="text-align: center;">Final reflections in group and questionnaire</p> <p>1) What is autism?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. physical handicap 2. neurodevelopmental disorder 3. learning disorder <p>2) In level 1 autism is cognitive impairment?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. yes 2. no 3. sometimes <p>3) Which abilities are impaired on the spectrum?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. social 2. motor skills 3. social, communicative and behavioural <p>4) To improve the quality of life of the person with autism spectrum it is necessary to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the family alone 2. the family and the school 3. the network between all the figures with whom the person relates <p>5) Is space-time structuring fundamental to creating a facilitating environment?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. yes 2. no 3. don't know
REFERENCES:	<p>American Psychiatric Association, DSM-5 Task Force. (2013). <i>Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5™</i> (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596</p> <p>Cottini, L., Vivanti, G. (2017) "Autismo - come e cosa fare con bambini e ragazzi a scuola", Giunti Edu</p> <p>Pontis, M. (2021) "Autismo: cosa fare (e non)", www.erickson.it</p> <p>https://www.autismo.it/blog/spettro-autistico</p> <p>https://www.autismo.it</p>



MODULE 2 – CREATIVITY & ART THERAPY FOR AUTISM

This module delivers information about art therapy techniques that can be used in order to develop creativity and self-expressivity among individuals with ASD.

MODULE 2:	Creativity & Art Therapy for Autism
GENERAL GOAL(S):	<p>The general aims of the activity are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to enhance creativity and self-expression among individuals with autism; - to provide participants with tools and techniques for utilizing art as a therapeutic outlet; - to foster a safe and supportive environment for individuals with autism to explore and express themselves through art.
OBJECTIVES:	<p>By the end of the module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the principles of creativity and art therapy in the context of autism; • learn various art therapy techniques tailored for individuals with autism; • practice implementing these techniques in a safe and inclusive manner; • explore strategies addressing the specific needs and challenges of individuals with autism in art therapy sessions.
METHODS:	<p>Lecture: Introduction to creativity and art therapy principles for autism</p> <p>Demonstration: Demonstrations of art therapy techniques with explanations</p> <p>Hands-on Practice: Participants engage in hands-on practice of the demonstrated techniques</p> <p>Group Discussion: Reflection and sharing of experiences and insights</p> <p>Q&A Session: Addressing any questions or concerns</p>
DURATION:	3,5 hours



RESOURCES NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art supplies (e.g., paper, paints, brushes, markers, clay) • Visual aids (slides or posters) • Space for hands-on activities • Projector or screen for presentations • Handouts/ worksheets for participants
ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:	<p>Activity 2.1 - Introduction and Welcome</p> <p>Duration: 15 minutes</p> <p>Greet participants and introduce yourself and any co-facilitators. Provide an overview of the workshop's objectives and agenda. Establish ground rules for participation and emphasize the importance of respect and confidentiality.</p>
	<p>Activity 2.2 - Understanding Creativity and Art Therapy for Autism</p> <p>Duration: 135 minutes</p> <p>2.2.1 Define creativity and its significance in the context of autism (30 minutes):</p> <p>Discuss the therapeutic benefits of art therapy for individuals with autism, including self-expression, emotional regulation, and social interaction.</p> <p>Present evidence-based research supporting the efficacy of art therapy in the autism community.</p> <p>Share case studies or personal anecdotes to illustrate the impact of art therapy on individuals with autism.</p> <p>2.2.2 Demonstration of art therapy techniques (45 minutes):</p> <p>Provide step-by-step demonstrations of various art therapy techniques suitable for individuals with autism.</p> <p>Techniques may include painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, or sensory-based activities.</p> <p>Explain the rationale behind each technique and how it addresses specific needs or challenges faced by individuals with autism.</p> <p>Offer tips and adaptations for accommodating sensory sensitivities and motor difficulties.</p>



	<p>2.2.3 Hands-on practice (60 minutes):</p> <p>Distribute art supplies and invite participants to engage in hands-on practice of the demonstrated techniques.</p> <p>Encourage participants to experiment with different materials and methods, emphasizing the process over the final product.</p> <p>Circulate among participants to provide individualized support, feedback, and encouragement.</p> <p>Foster a supportive atmosphere where participants feel free to explore their creativity without judgment.</p>
	<p>Activity 2.3 - Group discussion and reflection</p> <p>Duration: 40 minutes</p> <p>2.3.1 Facilitate a group discussion where participants can share their experiences and insights from the hands-on activities (15 minutes):</p> <p>Prompt participants to reflect on their creative process, any challenges they encountered, and the emotions evoked during the activity.</p> <p>Encourage participants to discuss the potential applications of art therapy techniques in their work or personal lives.</p> <p>2.3.2 Q&A session (15 minutes):</p> <p>Open the floor for questions and clarifications from participants.</p> <p>Address any concerns or uncertainties raised by participants regarding the content or techniques covered in the workshop.</p> <p>Provide additional resources or references for further exploration, if requested.</p> <p>2.3.3 Closing remarks and summary (10 minutes):</p> <p>Recap key concepts, techniques, and takeaways from the workshop.</p> <p>Express gratitude to participants for their engagement and participation.</p> <p>Offer contact information for follow-up questions or support.</p> <p>Encourage participants to continue exploring creativity and art therapy in their practice or daily lives.</p>
<p>KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that access to the activity available for all. • Ensure room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. • Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone.



EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p>Trainer will propose some self-evaluation questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and post-assessment surveys to measure participants' knowledge and understanding of creativity and art therapy for autism. • Observation of participants' engagement and participation during hands-on activities. • Feedback forms to gather participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the workshop and areas for improvement.
REFERENCES:	<p>American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.</p> <p>Brooke, S. L. (2014). Creative arts therapy manual: A guide to the history, theoretical approaches, assessment, and work with special populations of art, play, dance, music, drama, and poetry therapies (2nd ed.). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher, Ltd.</p> <p>Dunn, W. (Ed.). (2019). Sensory Profile 2: User's manual. San Antonio, TX: Pearson.</p> <p>Gray, C. A. (2000). The new social story book: Illustrated edition. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.</p> <p>Kielhofner, G. (2009). Model of human occupation: Theory and application (4th ed.), Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.</p> <p>Malchiodi, C. A. (Ed.). (2012). Handbook of art therapy (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.</p> <p>McNiff, S. (1998). Art heals: How creativity cures the soul. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.</p> <p>Riley, S., & Alber-Morgan, S. (2010). Teaching art to young children (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.</p> <p>Wadeson, H. (2000). Art psychotherapy (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.</p> <p>Winner, M. G., & Crooke, P. J. (2008). Social thinking at the preschool and elementary school levels. San Jose, CA: Think Social Publishing, Inc.</p>



MODULE 3 - WAYS OF STIMULATING INTUITIVE IMAGERY

This module delivers information about the concept of intuitive imagery (mental imagery), an important cognitive skill that contributes to a better, richer and more nuanced understanding of the world. It provides practical knowledge and exercises on how to develop mind's capacity to generate mental pictures, ideas, or concepts in order to a deeper and more flexible understanding of our surroundings.

MODULE 3:	Ways of stimulating intuitive imagery
GENERAL GOAL(S):	The general aim of the activity is to emphasize and develop through practical exercises the ability to mentally visualize and create mental images in order to enrich various aspects of our cognitive development and adaptive functioning.
OBJECTIVES:	By the end of the module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define the concept and the importance of mental/intuitive imagery in various aspects of our cognitive, social and emotional development; • develop symbolic language; • enhance creative expression through guided visualization exercises; • use mental imagery practical techniques to improve learning and memorising, problem solving ability, sensorial experiences and flexible thinking on a daily basis.
METHODS:	Group game, interactive presentation, social story, storytelling
DURATION:	3,5 hours
RESOURCES NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation slides • Handouts with relevant information • Pen and paper for participants
ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:	<p>Activity 3.1- Intuitive imagery vocabulary and the use of it the areas of emotional regulation and sensory integration</p> <p>Duration: 60 minutes</p> <p>3.1.1 The trainer defines and explains the concept of mental imagery and other terms associated with it, such as mental representation, aphantasia, and synaesthesia. (1st Appendix)</p>



	<p>3.1.2 The trainer asks participants to describe their own particular mental representations/ images of different sensory experiences: visual (the trainer mentions the colour red), auditory (the trainer plays a metal sound), gustatory (the trainer asks about the mental representation of a recipe that tastes like oregano), tactile (the trainers give to some of the participants to touch a piece of silk fabric).</p> <p>Participants are invited to a discussion about their answers guided by questions like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are your representations similar or various? • Is mental imagery a visual process or it implies other senses to? • Do you think this skill is useful? In what areas of activity or mental capacities? <p>3.1.3 The trainer details the dimensions of cognitive development improved by a good mental representation ability: learning, communication, problem solving, memory improvement, emotional regulation, sensory integration. (2nd Appendix)</p> <p>3.1.4 The participants are invited to exercise and develop their Intuitive Imagery skills in an exercise that emphasises the role of positive mental images in emotional regulation, sensory integration and mindfulness practices. The exercise is called „My peaceful corner“. Each participant has to describe as complex, colourful and vivid as possible, using a multi-sensory approach guideline (3rd Appendix) their mental representation of a relaxation spot.</p> <p>At the end of the activity, participants are invited to share their descriptions with the others. Afterward, the participants are welcomed to reflect on the importance of quality and quantity in terms of mental imagery and ways to measure it. (4th Appendix)</p>
	<p>Activity 3.2 - Problem-solving skill development through mental imagery techniques</p> <p>Duration: 80 minutes</p> <p>If the first activity described the concept and benefits of mental imagery and emphasized its importance in our emotional regulation and sensory integration skills with the help of the exercise called „My peaceful corner“, second activity focuses on problem-solving skill development through mental imagery.</p>



	<p>3.2.1 The trainer explains the benefits of mental imagery in the processes of problem-solving and decision-making pointing out that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental imagery uses the mind to simulate experiences that are not currently perceived by the senses; • Mental imagery fosters cognitive flexibility, allowing individuals to adapt to new situations, think abstractly, and approach challenges from multiple perspectives; • Mental imagery enables individuals to mentally manipulate images, explore different scenarios and visualize potential solutions. <p>In order to emphasize the importance of mental imagery in problem-solving skills, the trainer describes it compared with traditional problem-solving methods. (5th Appendix)</p> <p>Then, the trainer lists some of the mental imagery techniques that can be used on a daily basis. (6th Appendix)</p> <p>3.2.2 Next, the trainer present pictures of three successful individuals in various fields, such as athletes, artists, and entrepreneurs and invites participants to discuss how mental imagery has been used by them to overcome difficulties and achieve their goals. (7th Appendix)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were their challenges? • What mental representations did they use in order to increase motivation, overcome hard times, enjoy the results? • Which do you think is the most representative image for them to define their career path? <p>Afterwords, the trainer encourages participants to share personal experiences where intuitive imagery has helped them solve problems or achieve goals.</p> <p>3.2.3 Participants are presented with a problem-solving case study, in order to demonstrate how mental imagery can be applied to solve real-life problems effectively.</p> <p>The trainer:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Divides the participants in four small groups; b. Presents groups with a problem-solving scenario relevant to their personal or professional lives, along with 4 solutions through mental imagery; (8th Appendix)
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Instructs participants to take a moment to brainstorm and visualize 2 more possible solutions to the problem using mental imagery; d. Facilitates a discussion where each group shares its potential solutions based on their mental images; e. Encourages participants to evaluate the effectiveness of using intuitive imagery in generating solutions compared to traditional problem-solving methods. <p>At the end of the activity, participants are invited to reflect on how mental imagery methods can be applied to diverse contexts, ranging from personal to professional ones. By harnessing the power of visualization, individuals and teams can unlock creativity, insight, and innovation to address complex challenges and achieve their goals effectively.</p>
	<p>Activity 3.3 - The role of intuitive imagery in the development of cognitive and memory abilities of individuals</p> <p>Duration: 70 minutes</p> <p>3.3.1 The trainer begins the session by asking participants to close their eyes and imagine a familiar scene, such as a beach scene.</p> <p>After a minute, he asks participants to share what they visualized and how vivid the image was for them.</p> <p>The trainer explains the role of mental imagery in creating mental representations of objects, events, and experiences and discusses about the importance of mental imagery in memory encoding and retrieval. The participants are presented with four major research findings from studies in cognitive psychology and neuroscience that consistently support the effectiveness of mental imagery in enhancing memory performance across various domains. (9th Appendix)</p> <p>3.3.2 Memory exercise with mental imagery.</p> <p>The trainer has to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. provide participants with a list of unrelated words or objects. (10th Appendix) b. instruct participants to use mental imagery to create vivid associations between each pair of words or objects. c. encourage participants to visualize these associations in their minds and to make them as detailed and memorable as possible.



	<p>d. after a few minutes, ask participants to recall and write down as many pairs as they can remember.</p> <p>e. discuss the effectiveness of using mental imagery to enhance memory encoding and retrieval, emphasizing the role of visual cues and associations in improving memory performance.</p> <p>3.3.3 Visual mnemonics. Participant are presented with different kinds of memorizing techniques using mnemonics (memory ads).</p> <p>(11th Appendix) Afterwords, they are asked to create a humoristic mnemonic for the solar system.</p> <p>3.3.4 Memory palace exercise. The Loci method (lat. <i>locus</i> - place)</p> <p>The trainer will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> explain the concept of the memory palace/ loci technique, which involves mentally associating information with specific locations in a familiar place, such as a house or a street. provide participants with a simple list of items or words to memorize. (12th Appendix) instruct participants to visualize themselves walking through their memory palace and associating each item with a specific location in the palace. after a few minutes, ask participants to recall and write down as many items as they can remember using the memory palace technique. <p>The trainer concludes the session by discussing practical ways in which participants can incorporate mental imagery into their daily lives to enhance cognitive abilities and memory. He encourages participants to use mental imagery regularly and to reflect on how it impacts their cognitive abilities and memory performance.</p>
KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that access to the activity available for all. Ensure room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone.
EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p>Trainer will propose some self-evaluation questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the domains of cognitive development in which imagery impacts?



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is mental imagery a visual process or it implies other senses to? • Can you tell me two mental imagery strategies that can be use in problem-solving situations? • What mental imagery can you incorporate into your daily life to enhance cognitive abilities and memory? • Can you give me some examples of visual mnemonics that you can use in your academic or daily life?
REFERENCES:	<p>Bower, G. H., & Winzenz, D. (1970). <i>Depth of processing and retention of words in episodic memory</i>. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 86(3), 368–374.</p> <p>Clark, J. M., & Paivio, A. (1991). <i>Dual coding theory and education</i>. <i>Educational Psychology Review</i>, 3(3), 149–210.</p> <p>Goleman, D. (2012). <i>The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights</i>. More Than Sound.</p> <p>Marks, D. F. (1973). Visual imagery differences in the recall of pictures. <i>British Journal of Psychology</i>, 64(1), 17-24.</p> <p>Oaks, S. (2018). <i>Visualization for Success: Guided Imagery for Career Development and Interview Success</i>. Independently Published.</p> <p>Presson, C. C., & Hazelrigg, M. D. (1984). Mental imagery and associative learning: A test of the cognitive mediational hypothesis. <i>Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition</i>, 10(3), 476–485.</p>



MODULE 4 - RELAXATION, MEDITATION, ART, AND CRAFT

This module delivers information about how to lead the session on promoting relaxation, meditation, and arts and crafts activities and provides practical knowledge for the facilitators on how to adapt each activity to the target group.

MODULE 4:	Relaxation, meditation, art, and craft
GENERAL GOAL(S):	<p>The general aims of the activities are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engage participants in activities that improve their coordination, sensory processing, and overall well-being; - help participants to relax and reduce stress and provide space for individual expression and self-discovery; - encourage participants to express themselves creatively; - develop fine motor skills; - improve participant's cognitive skills such as memory, concentration, and attention; - provide therapeutic and enjoyable activities that can serve as a calming and relaxing experience.
OBJECTIVES:	<p>After completing this module, facilitators are likely to have the following skills and knowledge:</p> <p>Engaging participants in the activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing appropriate activities that take into account participant's developmental stages; - Creating engaging and enjoyable exercises to keep participants active. <p>Facilitating sensory processing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the role of sensory processing in personal development; - Designing activities that stimulate different sensory modalities such as proprioception, vestibular, tactile, visual, and auditory;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding of the different sensory needs of the group and adaptation of activities accordingly. <p>Improve overall well-being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrating holistic approaches that address the physical emotional, and social aspects of a person's well-being; - Implementing activities that contribute to physical health, emotional regulation, and social well-being. <p>Relaxation techniques and stress reduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning and using relaxation techniques appropriate to the group; - Understanding how activity can be a tool for stress reduction; - Incorporating mindfulness and calming exercises to help participants relax. <p>Creation of a safe space for individual expression and self-discovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing activities that allow participants to express themselves creatively through movement, artistic media, and crafts; - Fostering an environment that encourages individuality, self-expression, and self-discovery. <p>Adaptation of activities for different age groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tailoring activities to the different developmental needs and abilities of different age groups; - Recognising and responding to the different levels of energy and attention of young people at different stages of development. <p>Safety and inclusivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasising the importance of safeguarding activities; - Ensuring that activities are inclusive and adaptable to participants with different abilities and needs. <p>By acquiring these skills, facilitators will be better equipped to create a positive and enriching environment for participants, promoting their physical, emotional, and social well-being.</p>
METHODS	<p>Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct practical, hands-on workshops in which facilitators actively participate and are allowed to experience and understand the impact of different activities;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrate effective techniques for engaging participants in activities, promoting sensory processing, and incorporating relaxation exercises; - Use different types of demonstration: live demonstrations and combination with theory of key concepts and methods. - Practical tasks that require facilitators to plan and implement activities for participants; - Providing constructive feedback on their performance and offering suggestions for improvement. <p>Case studies, role plays, and simulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysing situations from their own experience to understand the different needs of participants and how to adapt activities to different situations and age groups; - Encourage discussion about activities and different situations; - Encourage facilitators to practice dealing with different situations that may arise during activities with the group. <p>Interactive discussions, peer learning, and collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group discussions to encourage facilitators to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in implementing the techniques learned; - Open-ended questions to encourage critical thinking and reflection; - Collaborative learning environment where facilitators can learn from each other; - Encourage peer observation and feedback to promote continuous improvement. <p>Educational materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive teaching materials, including written resources, infographics, and multimedia presentations and materials, that are easily accessible and can be used as a reference for facilitators as they apply what they've learned. <p>Assessment and evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessments to check the facilitator's understanding of key concepts and their ability to apply them; - Other feedback mechanisms, quizzes, and practical evaluations to measure the learning process.
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	By combining these methods, this training module will provide an immersive learning experience, ensuring that facilitators not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop practical skills that can be applied in different scenarios with their groups.
DURATION:	3.5 h
RESOURCES NEEDED:	<p>Activity 4.1 For the "Awaken" activity that incorporates warm-up, sensory-friendly and balancing, and cool-down exercises, the facilitator will need a variety of materials to create a well-rounded and engaging experience. (20 minutes)</p> <p>List of materials and resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open space: a spacious and safe area for participants to move freely without obstacles. • Chairs or other comfortable seating options. • Sensory materials, soft surface fabrics, and mats: a variety of sensory materials like textured fabrics, soft brushes, or tactile items that participants can touch and explore during the sensory integration phase. Soft and comfortable fabrics for participants to sit, lie, or carry on during the activity. For some participants, it might be useful to have mats (for those who prefer a more defined space for exercise.) • Sensory balls: different types of sensory balls, such as textured balls, inflatable balls, or weighted balls. It can also be created from papers or any other materials. • Music playlist: a playlist with music suitable for different phases of the activity, including upbeat tunes for warm-up and calming melodies for cool-down. • Timer or stopwatch: to keep track of the duration of each phase, ensuring a smooth transition between warm-up, sensory integration, and cool-down. • Visual props: such as colourful scarfs or ribbons, to make movements more visually stimulating. • Comfortable clothing: The facilitator and participants are invited to wear comfortable clothing suitable for movement.



4.2 “Handmade brushes”

Materials needed:

- Big sheets of paper, big format paper rolls or canvases
- Acrylic and tempera paints
- Containers with water
- Pieces of wood or driftwood to mount brush tip on
- Wire, thread, rope
- Collected/found/upcycled materials from home or nature: twigs and small branches, leaves and grass, feathers, natural fibers, string or twine, pebbles or rocks, sponge, cloth or fabric, old toothbrushes, foam, serrated knife, found objects, dried plants, old combs or hairbrushes, bubble wrap.

4.3 For the “**Sensations through art**” activity which is a creative continuation of work with tools created during the “**Handmade brushes**” activity and is designed to enhance participant's sensory experiences through artistic expression, the facilitator will need the following materials:

Art supplies:

- Paper and sketchbooks: provide a variety of paper sizes and types suitable for different art media;
- Paints: watercolours, acrylics, or tempera paints;
- Brushes: various sizes and shapes to allow for different painting techniques, preferably handmade brushes created during the previous activity;
- Drawing materials: pencils, coloured pencils, charcoal, markers, or pastels;
- Palettes or mixing trays: for mixing and blending colours if using paints;
- Erasers and sharpeners for drawing materials.

Tactile materials:

- Textured paper: includes different textures, rough and smooth paper;
- Fabric swatches: various types of fabric with different textures.

Seating arrangements, lighting, and ambience:

- Tables and chairs: set up a comfortable and accessible workspace for each participant;
- Natural light to ensure participants have adequate lighting for their creative work;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calming ambience, soft music, or ambient lighting to create a relaxed atmosphere. <p>Clean-up supplies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aprons or smocks: protect participants' clothing; - Table coverings: protect surfaces from spills or mess; - Water cups: for cleaning brushes if using paints; - Paper towels or tissues for wiping hands and cleaning brushes; - Trash bags: dispose of used materials. <p>4.4 “Mindful emotion regulation with clay” and “Take it out”</p> <p>For these activities the following materials are needed:</p> <p>Clay and other materials to work with it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clay (amount depends on the group size); - sculpting tools: different tools for shaping, carving, and detailing the clay; - tables and chairs; - covers for the table, wall, and floor: preferably plastic; - small bowls or cups: for participants to dip their fingers or tools in water to smooth clay surfaces; - aprons and gloves: to protect the participant’s clothing from clay residue; - clean-up supplies: damp cloths or wet wipes. <p>4.5 “Handmade memory game”</p> <p>Materials needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cardboard, pencils, ruler, scissors, coloured pencils or markers or paint <p>Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big, preferably round table and chairs to accommodate all the group <p>ADDITIONAL NOTE</p> <p>For all the activities it is recommended to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First aid kit: basic first aid supplies, in case of minor injuries or accidents.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The facilitators must always consider the preferences and needs of the participants, and adapt the materials to create an inclusive and comfortable environment. <p>Facilitator's guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is also recommended, that the trainer creates a plan about how to use the above-mentioned activities. It can be helpful to have a notebook, where they can outline the activity structure, and talking points, and have a creative adaptation plan for the potential challenges; - To have marked some instructions and variations for each exercise, will help to ensure the success and effectiveness of the activities; - Depending on the participant's needs, it can be also useful to have printed Instructions or guidelines for participants, which can provide step-by-step instructions or prompts through the process; - Demonstration materials: if applicable, to prepare samples or demonstrations to illustrate techniques.
<p>ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:</p>	<p>Activity 4.1 - "Awaken"</p> <p>Duration: 20 minutes</p> <p>Info: This exercise unites warm-up, sensory-friendly, and balancing cool-down activities. Starting with gentle movements to awaken the body, continuing with sensory integration like using the ball, soft surface fabrics, and some other sensory materials, and then, gradually bringing the activity to a balancing state, cooling down, with deep breathing, and lying down.</p> <p>Participants: 1 - 10 people</p> <p>The facilitator invites the participants to explore the space and guides the exercise from the beginning to the end, accompanied by calm music.</p> <p>Warm-up process: awakening the body parts gradually to bring awareness and energy to each body part mindfully. The process involves a gradual progression from the feet to the head, allowing participants to focus on each part individually, and after all, to feel more present, energized, and connected with their physical selves.</p> <p>The facilitator invites the participants to wake up body from down to up and at the same time, she/he also makes demonstrations of movements to engage</p>



	<p>the participants. This means that the facilitator not only verbally instructs but actively performs each movement, ensuring clarity for the participants.</p> <p>Detailed description:</p> <p>Feet: participants are invited to begin by sitting or standing comfortably. The facilitator encourages them to bring attention to their feet. They may be asked to wiggle their toes, rotate their ankles, or gently tap their feet on the floor, creating a sense of grounding and connection with the earth.</p> <p>Legs: moving upward, the focus shifts to the legs. Participants are guided to tense and release the muscles in their calves and thighs, promoting blood circulation and flexibility. Gentle stretching exercises might be demonstrated, encouraging participants to follow along.</p> <p>Hips and pelvis: participants are instructed to engage their hip muscles through subtle movements such as pelvic tilts or rotations. This helps in awakening the lower torso and promoting flexibility in the hip joints.</p> <p>Torso: the attention then moves to the torso. Participants are guided to breathe deeply, expanding their chest and contracting their abdominal muscles.</p> <p>Arms and hands: the focus shifts to the upper body, specifically the arms and hands. Participants may be encouraged to perform simple arm stretches, rotations, or wrist movements.</p> <p>Neck and shoulders: the facilitator guides participants to release tension in the neck and shoulders. Slow and controlled neck rotations, shoulder rolls, and gentle stretches are demonstrated to encourage relaxation and flexibility.</p> <p>Head: finally, attention is brought to the head. Participants may be prompted to do facial exercises, such as scrunching and relaxing their facial muscles. Mindful movements like nodding and tilting the head are incorporated to complete the awakening process.</p> <p>After the warm-up process, the facilitator continues with a sensory-friendly activity.</p> <p>Participants are invited to choose tools such as a ball, soft surface fabrics, or other sensory materials. This phase seeks to transform the activity into an interactive and enjoyable experience while fostering coordination and</p>
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	<p>refining sensory processing skills. Participants are moving around the space with those objectives and using it with movement while interacting with others. This phase can be combined with the warm-up process, in case participants are not feeling comfortable awake their body from up to down without any objective. As usual, props help them to get engaged and move their body parts.</p> <p>Detailed description:</p> <p>Tool selection: participants are invited to choose sensory tools, that may include balls of different textures, soft surface fabrics, or other materials designed to stimulate the senses. This process empowers participants with choice, allowing them to select tools that resonate with their preferences and comfort levels. The chosen tools also serve as aids for movement and interaction, enhancing participant’s engagement in the activity.</p> <p>Movement exploration: participants are encouraged to explore the space while utilizing the selected sensory tools. This may involve rolling the ball on different body parts, feeling the textures of soft fabrics, or engaging in activities that require coordination and balance. The movement aspect ensures a dynamic and physically stimulating experience, allowing participants to integrate sensory input with motor skills. The activity promotes social interaction as participants engage with one another. They may share tools, collaborate on movements, or engage in activities that involve both individual and group participation. The sensory tools act as mediators, facilitating communication and connection among participants.</p> <p>Recognizing individual comfort levels, the facilitator can integrate this sensory-friendly phase with the warm-up process. For those who might not feel at ease awakening their body from head to toe without a specific objective, the tools provide a purposeful and enjoyable context for movement. Props become a bridge, aiding participants in feeling more comfortable and engaged in the warm-up process.</p> <p>The facilitator in this phase also encourages participants to express themselves through movement: whether bouncing a ball rhythmically, running fingers over a soft fabric, or collaborating with a partner.</p> <p>The final phase of the activity involves balancing and cool-down exercises to bring participants to a stable state, and relaxation.</p>
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	<p>Detailed description:</p> <p>The facilitator invites participants into a phase, which focuses on balance and stability, creating a bridge between the energetic movements and the upcoming calming cool-down. They will guide the participants through structured deep breathing exercises, participants are encouraged to take slow, deep breaths, fostering mindfulness and creating a physiological shift towards relaxation.</p> <p>The cool-down phase is characterized by slower and deliberate movements, allowing the body to gradually transition from heightened activity to a state of rest. After this, participants are invited to spend a period lying down. This posture promotes relaxation, and the facilitator may guide them through a body scan, encouraging them to release any remaining tension. The facilitator employs verbal cues to facilitate relaxation during the lying-down phase. This may include encouraging participants to visualize a peaceful scene or focusing on their breath and body sensations.</p> <p>By incorporating balancing, stability, deep breathing, lying down, and cool-down phases, the facilitator ensures a comprehensive conclusion to the activity. The transition from dynamic movement to relaxation creates a harmonious flow, leaving participants feeling not only physically rejuvenated but also mentally and emotionally centered.</p> <p>Tips for the trainer: throughout the session, maintain a tone of encouragement and adaptability. Attend to the unique needs of each participant, ensuring inclusivity and individualized support. The success of this holistic exercise routine lies in its capacity to engage participants cognitively, emotionally, and physically.</p>
	<p>Activity 4.2 - “Handmade brushes”</p> <p>Duration: 60 minutes</p> <p>Info: exploring painting with handmade brushes made of materials found in nature.</p> <p>Participants: 1- 10 people</p> <p>Materials needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pieces of wood or driftwood to mount brush tip on;



- Wire, thread, rope;
- Collected/found/upcycled materials from home or nature.

Materials use ideas:

- twigs and small branches: trimmed, can be used to create brushstrokes with a natural, uneven texture.
- leaves and grass: bundle them together and secure them with string or twine to make a unique brush with a varied surface.
- feathers: attached to a stick or small branch can create delicate and textured strokes.
- natural fibers: thin vines, straw, or other natural fibers can be bundled together to make brushes with a rustic texture.
- string or twine: wrap it around a stick or bundle to create a brush that leaves linear and textured marks.
- pebbles or rocks: make stamps with those that create bold and textured patterns.
- sponge: cut it into various shapes or attach it to a stick for a brush that can create soft and blended effects.
- cloth or fabric: attach a piece of cloth or fabric to a stick to make a brush that can produce smooth and flowing strokes.
- old toothbrush: can be repurposed to create spatter or splatter effects.
- foam: cut or shape foam pieces to create brushes that can be used for a variety of textures.
- serrated knife: can be used to apply paint in interesting textures.
- found objects: experiment with unconventional materials like small pieces of cardboard, metal, wood, plastic, cork, or even crumpled paper for unique textures.
- dried plants: use dried flowers or plants with interesting textures as a brush to add intricate details.
- old combs or hairbrushes: can create linear patterns or textures when dipped in paint.
- bubble wrap: wrap it around a stick to create a brush that imparts a bubbly texture to the artwork.

Step-by-step instructions:

Preparation:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on your group and time, you can start the activity with a walk together to collect twigs, leaves, feathers, and any other materials you find in nature that might make interesting brush tips. <p>Step 1: Create a comfortable and supportive environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a calm and comfortable space with minimal distractions, considering the sensory needs of participants. Ensure there are sensory-friendly materials available, such as fidget tools or weighted blankets, if needed. Introduce the materials using visual aids or a visual schedule to help participants understand the steps. <p>Step 2: Introduce and choose materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show and briefly explain each material simply and clearly. Allow participants to choose the materials they feel most comfortable with, providing options and encouraging exploration. <p>Step 3: Guided exploration and demonstration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide participants through the process of creating their handmade brushes, offering assistance or modifications based on individual needs. Give instructions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> trim twigs to your desired brush size. bundle leaves, grass, or fibers together and secure them with string to create brush heads. attach feathers to the end of a twig using string or twine. get creative! combine different materials to make unique brushes. Demonstrate how to use the handmade brushes by gently making strokes on a sample paper or canvas. Emphasize that there are no strict rules and encourage creativity. <p>Step 4: Explore brush techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage participants to dip their handmade brushes into the paint and experiment with different strokes on paper or canvas. Provide examples and demonstrations of various painting techniques using handmade brushes. Suggest testing the brushes' flexibility, texture, and patterns they create and trying different brush sizes and shapes for diverse effects. <p>Step 5: Encourage collaboration and communication:</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, encouraging collaboration on a group artwork if the group is comfortable. ● Be mindful of sensory needs and offer breaks as necessary, providing sensory regulation tools if needed. ● Foster communication using visual cues or alternative methods, and encourage participants to express themselves through their artwork. <p>Step 6: Positive reinforcement and reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer positive reinforcement and praise throughout the activity, acknowledging effort, creativity, and exploration of artistic techniques. ● Allow time for individual reflection after the activity, providing a safe and non-judgmental space for participants to share their thoughts if they wish. <p>Step 7: Clean up and celebrate achievements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide clear instructions for cleaning up the workspace, offering assistance if needed: to dispose of any leftover materials responsibly and to clean handmade brushes for future use, if possible. ● Celebrate each participant's unique creations and achievements, considering displaying the finished artworks in a safe and positive manner. ● Depending on the group, you can take a moment to reflect on the experience. What did they enjoy about using handmade brushes? Did they discover any surprising effects or techniques? <p>Approach the activity with flexibility, patience, and a focus on the participants' comfort, enjoyment, and exploration of the artistic process. Adapt the instructions based on the specific needs and preferences of your group.</p>
	<p>Activity 4.3 - "Sensations through art"</p> <p>Duration: 45 minutes</p> <p>Info: In the "Sensations through art" activity, participants engage in a 45-minute session, which unites the process with guided instructions and reflection, designed in a way to enhance participant's sensory experiences through artistic expression. The exercise involves the exploration of diverse tactile materials and different art media, encouraging participants to touch and interact with them and create unique artworks.</p> <p>Participants: 1 - 10 people</p>



	<p>Detailed description:</p> <p>The facilitator invites the participants to explore tactile materials and diverse art media. Participants are encouraged to touch, feel, and interact with these materials, promoting a multisensory experience. They take more or less 5-10 minutes to choose the materials they want to use to create their art pieces. After everyone gets what they need, the facilitator continues guiding them. She/he invites the participants to think about how they feel when they are happy.</p> <p>Facilitator guiding the creative process:</p> <p>“After you have the materials you are going to work with, I am inviting you to think about how it feels when you are happy. Please, remember the last moment you felt happiness. Where and when it was, with whom you were, what was happening? How does it feel to be happy? What and who makes you happy? please, choose the event and try to express it through your artwork.”</p> <p>This kind of guided instruction will take more or less 5-10 minutes, then the facilitator gives 15 minutes for participants to finish their artwork.</p> <p>While they are creating artwork, they may need other materials. It is recommended to have it separately on one table for them to go there and take whatever they need.</p> <p>If they take a lot of time choosing materials, the facilitator must politely remind them about the time and invite them to go back and sit.</p> <p>Participants are prompted to use tactile materials and art media to create unique artworks, encouraging imaginative exploration and free-flowing creativity.</p> <p>Regarding the participant's speed, the facilitator gives additional minutes to finalize their work.</p> <p>After everyone is done it is time for reflection, the activity concludes with a guided reflection period. Participants are encouraged to contemplate their creations, sharing thoughts and feelings about the artistic process. This reflective component aims to deepen the connection between participants and their artistic expressions, fostering self-awareness and encouraging an appreciation for the sensory experiences encountered during the activity.</p>
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	<p>Tips for facilitators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foster a non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere to promote creative expression. ● Be attentive to individual preferences and sensitivities regarding tactile materials. ● Encourage verbal communication during the reflection period, allowing participants to express their experiences and emotions. <p>The "Sensations through Art" activity is designed not only to nurture artistic skills but also to provide a platform for enhancing sensory perception, creativity, and self-awareness in participants. Facilitators are instrumental in guiding this experience.</p>
	<p>Activity 4.4 - "Mindful emotion regulation with clay" and "Take it out"</p> <p>Duration: 45 minutes</p> <p>Info: Participants engage in the creation of their sculptures, investing time and effort into shaping and detailing their representation of anger, and they will throw it, together with other clay balls, against the wall, releasing their anger and stress.</p> <p>Participants: 1 - 10 people</p> <p>4.4.1 "Mindful emotion regulation with clay" (20 minutes)</p> <p>Detailed description: there is a table covered with plastic material to protect the surface, comfortable chairs, clay pieces for each participant, clay tools, and a bowl of water on it.</p> <p>The facilitator decides what kind of tools participants can use regarding their abilities and age. As this activity is designed to be made with closed eyes or scarves, it is recommended to provide a safe environment and experience. In such cases, it can be done without tools and just with a bowl of water for wetting the hands only and working on clay with fingers.</p> <p>The facilitator shows participants the space, tools, and clay they are going to work with and then asks them to sit down and close their eyes or use a scarf to cover them if they feel comfortable doing so. They need to ensure that</p>



	<p>participants are comfortable and have their piece of clay, also they can reach the tools and water bowls easily.</p> <p>In the beginning, the facilitator explains the purpose of the activity and starts the guided imagination process: "You are invited to explore and express emotions through the tactile medium of clay, as you touch the clay, imagine how you feel when you are angry, explore the sensations, and take deep breaths. Allow the emotions to guide your creation."</p> <p>The facilitator encourages participants to sculpt something from the clay that represents their anger. "While you are touching the clay imagine how you feel when you are angry, why are you angry? Who or what makes you angry? Breath in, breathe out."</p> <p>They can invite the participants to practice inhaling and exhaling while working with clay and remind them through the process.</p> <p>It is recommended to provide around 10-15 minutes for this process, also allowing flexibility based on the needs of the participants and adding 10 minutes after.</p> <p>The facilitator can also guide participants to think about other emotions such as disappointment and sadness and invite them to incorporate these feelings into their clay creation. After the sculpting, when participants feel they are ready they can stop and open their eyes.</p> <p>4.4.2 "Take it out" (25 minutes)</p> <p>"Take it out" is the continuation of the clay sculpting process and this exercise involves the physical activity of throwing clay balls at the wall.</p> <p>Preparation: Cover the table with plastic material and protect the floor with fabric or plastic, ensure that the wall is covered with plastic, at least 3 meters on both sides, and secure it with tape. Emphasise the importance of following safety guidelines and respecting the space. First the facilitator asks the participants to throw the sculpture they made to the wall during the first exercise. After</p>
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	<p>that, they already have at least 10 clay balls on the tables for each participant to throw.</p> <p>Throwing clay balls: the facilitator invites participants to throw the clay balls against the wall from a distance of two meters. They will stand after the tables to make it easy to grab the balls. The facilitator also asks to throw them at different speeds and powers. For the first round, the facilitator asks the participants to start throwing very fast and with a lot of power, for the next round speed and power can decrease gradually.</p> <p>Tips for facilitators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage participants to fully engage while being mindful of their own and others' safety. ● Be mindful of individual comfort levels with eye closure or using a scarf, ensuring alternatives are available for those who may not be comfortable with these practices. ● Allow flexibility in the duration of the clay sculpting process based on the emotional needs and engagement of the participants. ● Prioritize safety by ensuring the throwing area is clear, and participants are mindful of their surroundings.
	<p>Activity 4.5 - "Handmade memory game"</p> <p>Duration: 40 minutes</p> <p>Info: Making (cutting and hand painting) and playing a memory game.</p> <p>Participants: 1 - 10 people</p> <p>Materials needed: Cardboard, pencils, ruler, scissors, coloured pencils, markers or paint</p> <p>Instructions for participants: Take a piece of cardboard and measure out equal squares with the ruler and pencil. You can also measure the squares with some objects (small boxes, etc.). There are an even number of squares. Take two squares and draw/paint identical pictures on them.</p> <p>The theme can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your happy place - Your dream



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Something that makes you feel good <p>When the cards are ready, participants turn them over, shuffle them, and place them in the middle of the table. Now the cards are ready to play a memory game.</p> <p>Rules of a memory game: The first player turns over 2 cards. If the pictures match, the player keeps the cards and tries again. If they do not match, the cards are turned over again and the player to the left takes a turn. Each player must try to remember where they saw the cards so that they can use them to make a match.</p> <p>Facilitator's tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that the activity environment is comfortable, with minimal distractions. ● Consider using visuals or a visual schedule to explain the rules. ● Consider individual preferences and sensory needs while selecting colors and themes for the pictures. ● Allow extra time for participants to process and take turns. ● Encourage verbal or non-verbal communication based on individual preferences. ● Be patient and provide positive reinforcement for each successful match. ● Create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, allowing participants to enjoy the activity at their own pace.
KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that access to the activity is available for all. ● Ensure the room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. ● Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone. ● Ensure that everyone has finished the task and respect everyone's personal space and timing.
EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p>The evaluation criteria for the Relaxation, meditation, art, and craft module revolve around two primary aspects: first, assessing the effectiveness of each activity in achieving its specific objectives and enhancing the overall well-being and satisfaction of the participants, and second, evaluating the facilitator's performance.</p> <p>For the successful implementation of the module, the facilitator needs to evaluate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if learning objectives were achieved; - if the module activities were relevant for participants;



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - if participants were engaged; - if the overall structure of the module, including time, resources and instructions were clear and enough. - if the module was accessible to participants with diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities. <p>It is also essential, that the facilitator ensures that content and resource utilization is inclusive.</p> <p>Feedback from participants: It is important to have feedback from participants regarding their overall experience, the relevance of content, and the effectiveness of the used methods and techniques during these activities.</p> <p>Here are evaluation questions for assessing the facilitator's performance in the module's activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How well did the facilitator establish a positive and inclusive atmosphere at the beginning of the session? ● To what extent did the facilitator encourage participant interaction and engagement throughout the module? ● How effectively did the facilitator communicate instructions and guidance for each activity? ● Were the facilitator's verbal and non-verbal communication clear and supportive? ● How well did the facilitator adapt to unexpected situations or changes in the flow of the activities? ● Were adjustments made by the facilitator to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of participants? ● To what extent did the facilitator demonstrate knowledge of sensory-friendly practices and techniques? ● How well did the facilitator address the sensory needs of participants during different activities? ● Did the facilitator actively encourage participants to express their creativity and individuality during art activities? ● How did the facilitator foster a positive and non-judgmental environment for creative expression? ● How well did the facilitator manage group dynamics and ensure a respectful and inclusive environment? ● Were any conflicts or challenges addressed effectively by the facilitator? ● To what extent did the facilitator monitor and respond to the well-being of participants during the module?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How did the facilitator provide support to participants who may have faced challenges during certain activities? ● How effectively did the facilitator manage time throughout the module to ensure the completion of all planned activities? ● Were the pacing and duration of each activity appropriate for participant engagement? ● How well did the facilitator provide feedback to participants on their creative efforts? ● Was the facilitator responsive to questions and concerns raised by participants? ● Did the facilitator demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement, seeking feedback from participants for future sessions? ● How open was the facilitator to adapting their approach based on participant feedback and evolving needs?
REFERENCES:	<p>Attwood, T., & Scarpa, A. (2013). "Cognitive-behavioral therapy for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders.";</p> <p>Malchiodi, C. A. (2012). The Art Therapy Sourcebook. McGraw-Hill Education;</p> <p>Srinivasan, S. M., Lynch, K. A., & Bubela, D. (2013). "Occupational therapy using sensory integration to improve participation of a child with autism: A case report." The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 67(5), 537-545.</p> <p>White, S. W., Oswald, D., Ollendick, T., & Scahill, L. (2009). "Anxiety in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders." Clinical Psychology Review, 29(3), 216-229;</p> <p>https://archive.org/details/arttherapysource0000malc_h4e6/page/n5/mode/2up</p> <p>https://www.academia.edu/116463145/Creative Techniques</p>



MODULE 5 - SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE ART OBJECT

This module delivers information about introducing symbols to ASD children in order to teach them to communicate. Learning to communicate throughout symbols depends on the child's age, the nature of the communication disorder, intelligence, the child's attitude towards the proposed method of communication, general and fine motor skills, and the elementary level of vocal language. Sign language, when educating children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), is an effective way to communicate visually and describe the course of activities. At the same time, the use of symbols stimulates children's cognitive activity and can help develop children's language.

Symbols, photographs, or pictures usually depict real objects that non-speaking children can recognize. Symbols are easier to represent things, properties, worse – actions, abstract concepts. Thus, many specialists claim that symbols are a simple and easily understandable way of communication for many children with autism spectrum disorders (Vaicekauskienė, 2004.).

MODULE 5:	Symbolic meaning of the art object
GENERAL GOAL(S):	<p>The general objectives of the module activities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - development of independence and development of social skills in everyday life; - improving communication skills; - motivate children to complete tasks and learn; - relax and manage emotions.
OBJECTIVES:	<p>By the end of the module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help the children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) maintain the agenda/routine; • raise the motivation of ASD children to complete tasks and learn; • teach ASD children to relax, manage their emotions.
METHODS:	Hands-on workshops, demonstrations, and practical assignments
DURATION:	3,5 hours



RESOURCES NEEDED:	Scientific literature presented in the module; Tasks provided (step by step); The assignments contain all the necessary material; Paper, pens.
ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:	Activity 5.1 – Lesson Timetable Duration: 40 minutes Create an activity lesson timetable, according to the provided table which helps to plan work and motivate children. 1. According to the child's age and abilities, divide the class time. 2. Mark the planned works (using the provided examples, specific symbols, written words, etc.). 3. According to the child's age, abilities, and interests, come up with a reward for the completed task.
	Activity 5.2 – Colouring activity Duration: 80 minutes A colouring activity that helps concentration and develops motor skills. 1. According to the child's age and ability to colour the mandala (does the child know numbers, letters). 2. If the child is of an older age and ability, all three drawings can be done: mandala colouring, dinosaur colouring, free drawing colouring.
	Activity 5.3 – Emotions expression Duration: 90 minutes An emotion recognition activity that helps to calm down and express emotions with the help of movement of symbolic colours. 1. Introducing the four-color zone. 2. Naming your emotion. 3. Emotion is expressed with the help of movement.



KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that access to the activity is available for all. • Ensure a room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. • Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone.
EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p>Trainer will propose a self-evaluation test:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Important agenda factors when using symbols are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Creative approach to activities; absence of time limits; the priority of the child's wishes b. Accurate time planning; clear description of activities; rewards after the activity. c. Not separating the child with ASD from the children in the class; flexibility of boundaries; inclusion of awards. 2. The effect of the mandala symbol is: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. For the child's acquaintance with colors; improving the parental relationship; improving mathematical knowledge. b. For awareness of musical sounds; for improving motor skills; improving relationships with peers. c. Focusing attention; for improving motor skills; for improving hand-eye coordination; creativity; develops math skills. 3. To encourage children to do activities, it is important to reward them: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Before activities. b. After activities. c. Reward has nothing to do with motivation. 4. Children with ASD have difficulties because: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. They have no emotions. b. They have difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions. c. They do not know how to express emotions. 5. Emotions can be expressed by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Only with the help of specialists b. Only when parents are around. c. With the help of movement, art, and other arts. <p style="text-align: right;">Correct answers: 1.b; 2.c; 3.b; 4.b; 5.c.</p>



REFERENCES:	<p>Attwood, T. (2013). Aspergerio sindromas. Išsamus vadovas. Vilnius: Margi raštai.</p> <p>Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). (2014). http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html</p> <p>Bec Oaklay, 2020. Pasiruošimas darbui su vaikais, turinčiais autizmo spektro sutrikimų: mokytojo vadovas https://vilkijosdaigelis.lt/images/dokumentai/t%C4%97vams/Kaip_padeti_vaikui_turinciam_autizmo_sutrikimu.pdf</p> <p>Ivoškuvienė, R. (2003). Autistiški vaikai. J. Ambrukaitis (Sud.). Specialiojo ugdymo pagrindai. Vadovėlis edukologijos specialybės studentams.</p> <p>Kairelytė-Sauliūnienė, E. (2017). 5 auksinės taisyklės dirbant su autizmo spektro sutrikimą turinčiu vaiku. http://www.aboscentras.lt/5-auksines-taisykles-dirbant-su-autizmo-spektro-sutrikima-turinciu-vaiku/</p> <p>Vaicekauskienė, V. (Sud.). (2004). Neįgaliųjų bendravimas simbolių – gestų kalba. Darbo patirtis socialiniams darbuotojams, pedagogams, tėvams ir kitiems specialistams, besidomintiems neįgaliųjų ugdymu. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla. https://srsvb.lt/apie-biblioteka/https://srsvb.lt/kas-yra-mandalos-ir-kodel-ju-kurimas-svarbus-vaiku-motoriniam-vystymuisi/</p>
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MODULE 6 - DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION AND REGULATION ON YOUTH WITH ASD

This module delivers information about how to develop youth with ASD skills of recognizing, expressing and dealing with emotions.

MODULE 6:	Developing emotional expression and regulation on youth with ASD
GENERAL GOAL(S):	The general aim of the module is to help youth and children with ASD to develop their skills of understanding, expressing and regulation of their emotions.
OBJECTIVES:	By the end of the module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand how to create a safe and supporting environment for with ASD. • apply strategies to for supporting young people with ASD to successfully recognize and express emotions. • identify emotional regulation methods and coping strategies to help young people with ASD to deal with difficult emotions.
METHODS:	group game, interactive presentation, social story, drawing, role playing, storytelling
DURATION:	3,5 hours
RESOURCES NEEDED:	Recyclable materials, raw eggs, computer, video projector, internet, pens. Handout 6.1 – Emotion recognition character, A4 white paper, coloured pencils, markers, Handout 6.2 – Emotional thermometer, Handout 6.3 – Negative emotions, Handout 6.4 – Regulation strategies and coping mechanisms.
ORDER OF ACTIVITIES:	Activity 6.1 - “Protect the egg” Duration: 20 minutes The trainer splits the group in teams of 4-5 participants and instructs them to build a structure, using recyclable materials (plastic sticks, glass, boxes, cardboard, textiles, etc.) and try to protect a raw egg from breaking when



	<p>dropped from 1.5 metres. The mission is to protect the egg from cracking using teamwork and creativity.</p> <p>Participants are asked to build their structure for 10 minutes, and then they have to place their egg inside their structure. When time is up, trainer collects all the structures. The structures are dropped from at least 1.5 metres in elevation and then carefully inspected to see if the eggs survived.</p> <p>(Activity adapted after: Group Dynamics (2016-2023). [Protect the egg]. https://en.dinamicasgrupales.com.ar/activities-and-games/problem-solving/protect-the-egg/)</p> <p><i>Discussions questions (5 minutes):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies did you use to build the structure in order to protect the egg? • Thinking that the egg is a young person or a child with ASD, what is representing your structure? • Why is so important to create a safe and supportive environment for youth with ASD? • What strategies and measures you already used for this? • What other suggestions do you have for creating a safe and supportive environment for youth with ASD? <p>The trainer will explain in a short interactive presentation (5 minutes) how the participants can create a safe and supportive environment for youth with ASD, using the information from <i>Training materials, Module 6, section 6.1</i>.</p>
	<p>Activity 6.2 - Create a social story</p> <p>Duration: 55 minutes</p> <p>The trainer makes a short interactive presentation of the information from <i>Training materials, Module 6, section 6.2</i>. (if it's the case, the trainer can create a Powerpoint presentation). Suggested questions for discussions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What difficulties do young people with ASD face in terms of recognizing their own emotions and those of others? • What challenges they face regarding the expression of their emotions? • What kind of strategies you used for supporting emotion recognition and expression of youth with ASD? Which are the most effective? (10 minutes).



	<p>The trainer explains what is a social story, its structure, and how it can be used in working with youth with ASD (Please see <i>Training materials, Module 6, section 6.2.</i>) (5 minutes) and divides the participants in 4 groups.</p> <p>Each group will receive a flashcard with a character having one of the four emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger (Please see Module 5: Handout 1 – Emotion recognition character). The group has to create a social story for the chosen flashcard, writing on it the name of the character and how he/ she feels. If necessary, they can write some notes when creating the social story behind the card.</p> <p>After 15 minutes, each group will present their social story (5 minutes each group, 20 min. total).</p> <p><i>Debriefing:</i></p> <p>The trainer can conclude, as following: You can create this type of flashcard and invent tailored social stories for the young people with ASD you work with. Then, you can ask the child questions about the emotions of the characters, the way the child feels now, if he/ she ever felt like the character, in which situations, etc. This is a great way to help them learn about the emotion triggers and help them to learn about the situations that can cause a specific emotional outcome.</p> <p>The trainer can also ask the participants the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you apply the social story method in working with youth with ASD? Why? • How effective do you find this method in supporting emotional recognition and expression? (5 minutes).
	<p>Activity 6.3 - Duration:</p> <p>Drawing the emotions in my body – 35 min.</p> <p>The participants are given white A4 papers, coloured pencils and markers. The trainer asks them to draw the outline of a human body. The task of the participants is to colour as they feel, of their choice, the parts of the body where they feel the following emotions: joy, anger, sadness, fear, calm, surprise, shame, boredom, enthusiasm, anxiety (10 minutes).</p>



	<p>The participants who wish can share with the large group how they drew the emotions, answering the following questions (20 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you choose the colour for each emotion? What do those colours symbolize for you? • Give me an example of a situation in which you felt at least two of the emotions in the place where you represented them? • What can you do to feel better when you feel negative emotions? <p>Questions for all participants (5 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think you can use this activity in your work with young people with ASD? • How effective do you think this activity is to help them better recognize and express their emotions?
	<p>Activity 6.4 - Duration:</p> <p>Emotional thermometer – 65 min.</p> <p>The trainer asks the participants to watch the video on Youtube - <i>Zones of Regulation and Autism: Animated Social Stories for Children With Autism</i>: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnrBrHJ7WNc&ab_channel=Autismworks.</p> <p>The trainer opens a discussion based on the video, supplementing the information with those from <i>Training materials, Module 5, section 5.3</i> on emotional regulation and intensity (10 minutes).</p> <p>The participants are divided into 4 smaller groups and they receive Module 6: Handout 2 – Emotional thermometer. Their task is to complete the information in the handout with whatever emotion, but considering the appropriate level, starting for CALM (10 minutes).</p> <p>E.g: Level 1 – calm</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Level 2 (First upsetting feeling) – a little worried</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Level 3 (The next stronger feeling) – worried</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Level 4 (Big, awful feeling) – panic</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Level 1 – calm</p>



	<p>Level 2 (First upsetting feeling) – annoyed</p> <p>Level 3 (The next stronger feeling) – angry</p> <p>Level 4 (Big, awful feeling) – furious</p> <p>Or any other negative emotion at their choice.</p> <p>After filling the handout, each group will present their work, and for one of the intensity level at their choice, they will do a role playing with 2 situations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The situation when I start feeling like this. 2. The situation when I work to feel better. <p>Each group has 10 minutes. Total: 40 minutes.</p> <p>Questions for discussions (5 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you like the exercise? • Can you apply it together with young people with ASD? Does something need to be changed? • Do you think this activity is effective for them to understand emotional regulation and intensity?
	<p>Activity 6.5 - Duration:</p> <p>What to do when I am not OK? – 35 min.</p> <p>The trainer presents shortly the information related to emotional regulation and coping strategies for young people with ASD (See Training materials, Module 6, section 6.3), in a interactive way (5 minutes).</p> <p>The participants are split in 4 groups and each group receives a flashcard with a negative emotion (When I feel...) (Please see Module 6: Handout 3 – Negative Emotions) and Module 6: Handout 4 – Regulation Strategies and Coping Mechanisms. The task of the participants is to choose from Handout 4 at least 3 methods of calming the chosen negative emotion. Then they have to build a story based on these choices made. Each group will present its story (25 minutes in total).</p>



	<p>Questions for discussions (5 minutes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever used the regulation strategies or coping mechanisms you chose in dealing with this negative emotion? Can you give examples? • Can you apply this activity with young people with ASD? Does something need to be changed? • Do you think this activity is effective for them to improve their emotional regulation level and to choose appropriate coping mechanisms?
KEEPING LEARNERS SAFE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that access to the activity available for all. • Ensure room large enough to allow mobility for all learners. • Ensure enough resources and materials for everyone.
EVALUATION OF THE MODULE:	<p>Trainer will propose some self-evaluation questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Among the strategies for supporting emotion recognition and expression of youth with ASD is: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not using video support. b. Giving unclear instructions. c. Modelling emotions expression. (Correct) 2. What is false about mindfulness meditation? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Have to be practiced regularly to be effective. b. It is not recommended to be practiced by young people with ASD. (Correct) c. Cultivate present-moment awareness and acceptance of their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. 3. Which of the following actions does not refer to the creation of a safe and supportive environment for young people with ASD: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use the word “No” to suggest an interdiction. (Correct) b. Establish a clear structure and routine. c. Encourage social interaction. 4. Social stories are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Not following a specific format. b. Long stories to calm down the young people or child with ASD.



	<p>c. Often accompanied by visual supports such as pictures or drawings to enhance comprehension. (Correct)</p> <p>5. Which of the steps is not part of supporting youth with ASD:</p> <p>a. Ignoring the triggers to not create more stress. (Correct)</p> <p>b. Naming the emotion.</p> <p>c. Allow for silence.</p>
REFERENCES:	<p>Andersen R. (2022). Understanding and Managing Emotional Problems in Autistic Children and Teenagers, Autism Parenting Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/understanding-autism-emotional-problems/</p> <p>James, C., Bore, M., and Zito, S. (2012). Emotional intelligence and personality as predictors of psychological well-being. J. Psychoeducational Assess. 30 (4), 425–438.</p> <p>LuxAI. How to teach emotion understanding to children with autism. Retrieved from https://luxai.com/blog/how-to-teach-emotion-understanding-to-children-with-autism.</p> <p>Molnar-Szakacs I, Wang MJ, Laugeson EA, Overy K, Wu WL, Piggot J. (2009). Autism, emotion recognition and the mirror neuron system: the case of music. McGill J Med. 16;12(2):87. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2997252.</p> <p>OnlinePsychology@Pepperdine, the online Master of Science in Behavioral Psychology program from Pepperdine University. (2018). How to Improve Emotional Self-Regulation Among Children with Autism and Attention Disorders. Retrieved from https://onlinegrad.pepperdine.edu/blog/emotional-self-regulation-children-autism.</p> <p>Raising Children Network. (2022). Recognising, understanding and managing emotions: autistic children and teenagers. Retrieved from https://raisingchildren.net.au/autism/development/social-emotional-development/recognising-understanding-emotions-autistic-children-teens</p> <p>Trevisan DA, Abel EA, Brackett MA and McPartland JC. (2021). Considerations About How Emotional Intelligence can be Enhanced in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder. Front. Educ. Retrieved from https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.639736/full.</p>



TRAINING MATERIALS

MODULE 1.

Activity 1.1- Main characteristics of Autism

1.1.1 General information on the autism spectrum

The trainer will provide general information on the spectrum

- *What it is:*

The autism spectrum is a set of neurodevelopmental disorders characterised by a general difficulty in establishing intersubjective relationships and a restricted repertoire of activities and interests.

The DSM 5, the most recent edition of the main diagnostic system of mental disorders, replaced the term autism with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

- *Causes:*

The causes of ASD are multiple, both organic and environmental, some not yet determined.

It is an organic disorder, caused by a genetic predisposition that, in conjunction with environmental risk factors, leads to an alteration in brain development that expresses itself, with varying degrees of severity, in an abnormal course of cognitive development and, consequently, in an abnormal organisation of behaviour.

Autism is perhaps the most enigmatic of all developmental disorders. It was a mystery seventy years ago when Leo Kanner first spoke about it, and despite the strides that have been made and the evolution of knowledge in psychology and developmental biology, we are still unable to clearly answer all the questions it raises.

The DSM 5 currently indicates as diagnostic criteria:

- deficits in social interaction
- deficits in communication
- restricted and repetitive interests



- *How is it manifested - Symptoms:*

ASD presents itself with a variability of symptoms (e.g. communication deficit, social deficit, "imagination" deficit, etc.) that can have different degrees of complexity and severity and can express themselves in a variable manner over time.

The trainer illustrates through a study case (Massimo's case) how all the main symptoms of ASD can be detected in a specific child: difficulties in social understanding, difficulties in communication, repetitive behaviour and interests.

- *Abnormalities in attention, sensory, executive functions.*

ASD is often accompanied by abnormalities in attention, sensory (hypo- or hyper-sensory) and executive functions. Hypersensoriality (like hypo-sensoriality) can be common to all 3 levels of the spectrum.

The trainer shows a video that gives an insight into how a person with ASD can perceive reality on a sensory level. (Sensory Overload <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2P4Ed6G3gw&t=4s>)

ASD can therefore be considered, rather than a unitary condition, a continuum of conditions, with different clinical pictures that have many features in common, but whose boundaries are blurred. The very idea of 'spectrum' brings us back to this image of a wide range of varieties.

- *Incidence and Comorbidity*

ASD has a high incidence in the population (1/68 children) and can be associated with epilepsy, intellectual disability, mental retardation, anxiety and mood disorders, ADHD.

1.1.2 Classification: the three levels and their characteristics

The trainer will explain the difference between the levels that classify autism according to the DSM 5 indications

Until recently, ASD was classified of in terms of low, medium or high-functioning autism.

In the current method of diagnosing [autism spectrum](#) disorder (the DSM-5), these adjectives are no longer used, but there are still three levels of [autism](#). The term '*autism levels*' is used to describe the severity of the disorder or according to the level of support an individual may require.

Pay attention: these categories (levels) are not always clear-cut or distinct, there may be significant variables within each macrogroup.



- *Level 1:*

People with level 1 ASD require **minimal support** (example: formerly high-functioning autism - formerly Asperger's). Common characteristics at this level are:

- IQ (intellectual quotient) > 70.
- Adequate language but communication difficulties (e.g. difficulty initiating and maintaining conversations or interpreting social signals).
- In some cases, inflexible behaviour and have difficulty adapting to changes in routine or environment.

- *Level 2*

People with level 2 ASD **need medium/significant support**.

Compared to level 1, they have more significant difficulties in social communication. They may show:

- marked impairment in verbal and non-verbal social communication,
- limited social initiation,
- reduced response to social interactions.

- *Level 3*

People with level 3 ASD **require very significant support** (e.g. they are non-verbal or very low verbal). The common characteristics of this level are:

- IQ < 70
- no or poor language,
- little or no autonomy,
- very limited initiation of social interactions,
- rituals, repetitive behaviour difficult to interrupt.

Individuals with autism level 3 require constant support in daily activities to ensure their safety and well-being. This may include assistance in daily living skills, specialised educational support and targeted behavioural interventions.

It is important to note that despite these difficulties and needs, people with 'severe' autism (grade 3) with the appropriate support and interventions can learn and develop new skills. Early and personalised interventions are essential to help each person reach their full potential.



1.1.3 Functionality: areas involved and emerging strengths:

The trainer will talk about the areas involved in the spectrum and the pervasiveness of the disorder. In relation to this, the importance of acting "in a network" (e.g. family, school, specialists, out-of-school) will be emphasised. They will then illustrate the strengths.

- *Pervasiveness of the disorder*

Areas involved:

- Psychomotor area (e.g. clumsiness),
- Communication-linguistic area,
- Relational-social area,
- Cognitive area.

The pervasiveness of ASD is one of the main elements that makes caring for the person a complex task. In order for care and assistance to be effective, it is therefore necessary that they be supported in a shared manner by all the figures that revolve around the person. It is not by chance that we speak of a 'network' because this aspect is fundamental.

For example, if we want to work in the area of communication, we must coordinate with all the figures involved with respect to the strategies to be put in place: carer, family, specialists, and all the other figures who relate with the person.

- *Strengths:*

ASD does not only have problems, but we can also identify potentials and strengths. The identification of strengths should be the starting point for designing effective, person-centred interventions.

Examples of the possible strengths of a person with ASD are:

- skills in discrimination and visual analysis,
- ability to analyse rules and closed systems (e.g. mastering sequences and rules of operation of mechanical or similar systems),
- ability to achieve remarkable levels of competence on topics of interest,
- sincerity / honesty,
- sometimes extraordinary talents in drawing, music, calculation.



Activity 1.2 – Effective communication to establish a relationship

The trainer will explain what are the major difficulties in the area of communication and social interaction of people with ASD, indicate (with examples) what are the facilitators and barriers in communication and relationship in some specific situations

1.2.1 General communication difficulties

Verbal and non-verbal communication difficulties can be many and varied:

- the young person does not understand what is being said
- the young person does not respond adequately
- the young person has difficulty initiating, maintaining or ending a conversation

- *Facilitating factors:*

What to do to promote and ease the communication:

- When the young person starts to communicate, they must be given attention
- Language appropriate to their cognitive development should be used
- Verbal communication should be emphasised, using facial expressions and/or gestures
- Use visual aids: pictures, symbols, AAC.
- Use clear communication: short sentences, explicit directions, depending on the level (speak slowly)
- Show how to do it (imitation, modelling)
- Create 'motivating' opportunities to communicate
- Examples of effective communication and relational modes.

- *Barriers:*

What NOT to do, elements that makes the communication harder for the person with ADS

- Rushing
- Not using pictures



- Forcing the young person to express themselves verbally if they have done so with pictures
- Saying too many words

1.2.2 Difficulties in social communication and interactions:

Relational difficulties are relevant in people on the autism spectrum. They have the desire to have friends with whom they can share passions and time but lack the tools to do so in practice.

Because social interaction is closely linked to the ability to communicate, they have difficulties in understanding:

- social contexts and conventions,
- what others expect them to do,
- the other person's point of view
- jokes and non-literal expressions.

They can also be not interested in the same topics as their peers and have difficulties in organising and planning their behaviour.

- *Why does this happens?*

- Because relationships are unpredictable, they have no fixed rules,
- because they are bothered by physical contact, by noise,
- because they cannot put themselves in the other person's shoes.

- *Facilitating factors:*

What to do to promote and ease the social communication and interaction:

- Create opportunities for interaction with others based on common interests, or games the young person enjoys
- Help them to ask and answer questions
- Teach them to observe each other's facial expressions and gestures
- Give clear rules, create concrete moments of interaction,



- Teach how to hold a short conversation
- Explain the main social conventions: e.g. when you meet someone you know you greet them, take turns speaking, etc.

- *Barriers:*

What NOT to do to promote and ease the social communication and interaction:

- scold them if they lose attention to a topic or a person,
- force to have contact/communication with others if the young person with ASD does not want to
- give up, they must be trained to acquire these skills

Example of a social history with written indications of what it means to be in company and what behaviour is required:



People like to be together.

Sometimes people get together in groups to play, do homework, go for a walk, go to the cinema or go shopping.

Sometimes people get together in groups simply to chat, even during break time in class, before entering school or during a break at work.

People like to get together in groups to do different things.

When there is a group, people usually stay close together and chat to pass the time. People stay close together so they can hear what others are saying and so they can intervene in the discourse.

When people are in a group, usually one person speaks at a time.

If one person is already talking, I stay close and listen.

When I am in a group, I can decide to listen to the others talk. Or I can decide to say something.

What is important is to wait for the person who is talking to finish talking before intervening, because interrupting a person who is talking is not polite.



1.2.3 Difficulties in understanding figurative messages - humour and irony

There are many figurative and social communication that the person with ASD cannot understand:

- humour and irony,
- jokes and double meanings
- metaphors in general

- *Why does this happens?*

- Because they don't understand jokes and double meanings
- Because they cannot pay attention to the language, the tone, the look of other people

This characteristic is very common (see first level autism) and underestimated.

With autism of the first level, which is often accompanied by a high IQ, we would not expect such comprehension difficulties.

- *Facilitating factors:*

What to do to promote and ease the communication:

- Check whether they have understood the figurative language
- Ask classmates/friends to explain the joke or why they are laughing
- Work together on double meanings, metaphors, non-literal language.

- *Barriers:*

What NOT to do, elements that makes the communication harder for the person with ASD:

- Laughing without explaining why
- Getting angry with the young person if they answer wrongly: they are not provoking you.

1.2.4 Other difficulties in communication and interaction – repetitions

We must also remember that in ASD there are frequent stereotypies (see echolalia) and lack of flexibility which is also reflected in the use of language. This can result in repetitions of the same sentences or words.



- *Why does this happen?*

- It could be a way of communicating
- the sound of words could be gratifying
- it could be an attempt to communicate

- *Facilitating factors:*

What to do to understand the repetitions:

- try to observe what happens immediately before or after the repetition of words or sentences
- try to find out if echolalia increases in unstructured and unexpected moments that may generate anxiety or in the presence of sensory stimuli to which the person is hypersensitive to.

- *Barriers:*

What NOT to do:

- Scolding and losing patience
- Raising one's voice to overpower that of the person with ASD





Activity 1.3 – Examples of operative strategies – Explain a metaphor

The trainer proposes a practical activity on metaphors to understand how the meaning of sentences with figurative language can be made explicit to children with ASD through pictures.

- **Assignment:**

Each participant (or small group sharing the same mother tongue) chooses two commonly used metaphors in their own language and then looks for suitable pictures to make a short explanation of the meaning of the sentence (suitable for a person with ASD), makes the illustrated sentence and explains it to the group.

Example:

It rains cats and dogs	
It does NOT mean that animals are falling from the sky:	But it means that it is raining a lot:
	



Activity 1.4 - Examples of operative strategies – Conversation cards

The trainer proposes a practical activity to experiment with the tool of conversation cards.

- *Usefulness of communication cards:*



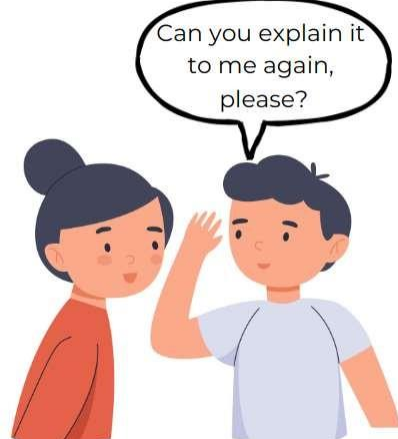

People with ASD do not learn social rules just by living them or observing the behaviour of others, they do not grasp the rules implicit in a social situation, they need someone to explain them clearly to them.

Through the communication cards, the child/young person with ASD can be taught how to hold a conversation appropriately, respecting social rules and conventions, established according to the context. It is important to make everything explicit, even what seems obvious to us.

- *Assignment:*

- Participants are divided into pairs: each pair chooses a context/situation: classroom, post office, dinner with friends, work meeting, etc...
- In pairs participants create cards by writing a simple social rule (for a social act) linked to the context and match it with a suitable picture or drawing. [e.g. communication-social acts: greeting, taking turns to speak, thanking, asking for something related to the context, etc...]
- After creating the card, again in pairs, they experiment with its use.



Look in the eyes the persons you are talking with	Listen in silence and wait for your turn to speak
	
Ask questions if you have not understood	Answer to the questions during the conversation
	



MODULE 2

Introduction to autism and art therapy

PowerPoint presentation: slides providing an overview of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), prevalence statistics, and the basics of art therapy.

Videos: short documentaries or testimonial videos showcasing the benefits of art therapy for individuals with autism.

Case studies: printed or digital copies of case studies demonstrating successful outcomes of art therapy interventions for individuals with autism.

Art supplies: basic art materials such as paper, markers, crayons, and clay for hands-on activities.

Handouts: informational handouts summarizing key points covered in the presentation for participants to take home.

Art therapy techniques for sensory regulation

Sensory-friendly art materials: various sensory-friendly art supplies including textured papers, noise-cancelling headphones, and soft brushes.

Examples of sensory-friendly environments: pictures or videos showcasing sensory-friendly art environments, such as calming spaces with soft lighting and comfortable seating.

Role-play scenarios: printed scenarios depicting situations where sensory regulation techniques can be applied, along with props to simulate real-life scenarios.

Art supplies: additional art materials for hands-on exploration and practice of sensory regulation techniques during the training session.

Handouts: guidelines for creating sensory-friendly art environments and managing sensory challenges during art therapy sessions.

Enhancing communication skills through art

Visual schedules and social stories: samples of visual schedules and social stories used in art therapy to support communication and social interaction.

Communication cards: printed communication cards with images and symbols representing various emotions, needs, and actions.

Art supplies: assorted art materials for hands-on activities focused on practicing communication skills through artistic expression.

Role-play scenarios: printed scenarios for role-playing exercises, along with props and scripts to facilitate communication practice.

Handouts: informational handouts summarizing communication strategies and techniques covered during the training session.



Emotional expression and regulation through art

Training materials:

Emotion cards: printed cards featuring different emotions for participants to use during emotion identification activities.

Comfort objects: soft toys or stress balls for participants to use as comfort objects during emotionally challenging activities.

Art supplies: various art materials including paints, pastels, and collage materials for hands-on activities focused on emotional expression.

Reflection journals: blank notebooks or worksheets for participants to jot down their reflections and emotional experiences during art activities.

Handouts: coping strategies and self-regulation techniques for managing emotions through art therapy.

Building social skills through collaborative art projects

Large art supplies: oversized canvases, paints, brushes, and other art materials for collaborative art projects during the training session.

Examples of collaborative art: images or videos showcasing successful collaborative art projects created by individuals with autism.

Group activity guidelines: printed guidelines outlining the objectives and rules for group art projects, promoting teamwork and communication.

Observation checklist: checklist for trainers to observe and evaluate participants' engagement, cooperation, and social interactions during group activities.

Handouts: tips and strategies for facilitating collaborative art projects with individual on the autism spectrum.

Integration and application of art therapy techniques

Case studies: printed case studies illustrating the integration of various art therapy techniques into comprehensive treatment plans for individuals with autism.

Art therapy plan templates: blank templates for participants to develop personalized art therapy plans based on hypothetical client scenarios.

Ethical guidelines: handouts outlining ethical considerations and professional standards in practicing art therapy with individuals on the autism spectrum.

Group discussion prompts: questions and discussion prompts to facilitate ethical discussions and reflection on professional practice.

Handouts: resources and references for further reading on integrating art therapy techniques and developing personalized treatment plans.



Creativity and art therapy stand as beacons of hope and empowerment for individuals navigating the complex landscape of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Within the realm of ASD intervention and support, these modalities offer not only avenues for self-expression and communication but also pathways to holistic growth and well-being. As we reflect on the profound impact of creativity and art therapy on individuals with autism, it becomes evident that their benefits extend

far beyond the confines of traditional therapeutic approaches. In this conclusion, we explore the multifaceted advantages of creativity and art therapy for autism and celebrate their transformative potential in enriching lives and fostering inclusivity.

At its core, creativity transcends boundaries and defies limitations, offering individuals with autism a means of exploring and expressing their unique perspectives, emotions, and experiences. Through painting, drawing, sculpting, and other creative mediums, individuals with autism can communicate thoughts and feelings that may be challenging to articulate verbally. In doing so, they not only enhance their communication skills but also develop a sense of agency and empowerment, knowing that their voices matter and their stories deserve to be heard.

MODULE 3

1st Appendix

Intuitive imagery. Definition and complementary terms.

Intuitive imagery or mental imagery refers to one's mind ability to create sensory information without relying solely on external input from the senses. This involves visual images, sounds, smells, tastes, movements, or tactile sensations. Intuitive imagery is a spontaneous mental skill that generates mental pictures, ideas, or concepts effortlessly. This cognitive skill contributes to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the world. The inability to create mental images is called Aphantasia, while the super-ability of creating complex mental images is called Synesthesia.



2nd Appendix

The importance of Intuitive imagery in cognitive development:

- Enhanced learning: intuitive imagery facilitates a deeper and more holistic understanding of concepts, allowing individuals to connect information in meaningful ways. This can lead to improved retention and comprehension of educational material.
- Problem-solving skills: the ability to mentally manipulate images aids in problem-solving by enabling individuals to explore different scenarios and visualize potential solutions. It promotes creativity and flexible thinking.
- Communication and expression: intuitive imagery plays a crucial role in expressive communication. It allows individuals to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences through mental pictures, supporting effective communication and social interaction.
- Memory formation: mental imagery enhances memory by providing a visual framework for information. When concepts are associated with vivid mental images, the brain is better equipped to recall and retain the information.
- Cognitive flexibility: developing intuitive imagery fosters cognitive flexibility, allowing individuals to adapt to new situations, think abstractly, and approach challenges from multiple perspectives. This flexibility is essential for navigating complex and dynamic environments.
- Emotional regulation: intuitive imagery can contribute to emotional regulation by providing a mental space for individuals to process and manage emotions. Creating positive mental images can have a calming and centering effect.
- Sensory integration: for individuals with sensory processing differences, intuitive imagery can help integrate sensory information and promote a balanced response to stimuli, contributing to a more regulated sensory experience.

In summary, intuitive imagery is a vital cognitive skill that enriches various aspects of cognitive development, including learning, problem-solving, communication, memory, and emotional regulation. Encouraging the development of intuitive imagery can have profound implications for individuals' overall cognitive abilities and adaptive functioning.



3rd Appendix

My peaceful corner

- Describe your favourite relaxation spot (an existing or an imaginary one) as detailed, colourful, vivid, tasteful as possible.

What does it look like?	
How does it feel like?	
What scents describe this place?	
What can I hear while I am there?	
Are there any tastes involved in my mental picture?	
Is there anything moving in my peaceful corner mental image?	



4th Appendix

Measuring intuitive imagery can be challenging due to its subjective nature, but there are some approaches you can take:

Self-report scales: design surveys or questionnaires that ask individuals to rate the vividness, clarity, and emotional impact of their intuitive imagery experiences. Use Likert scales or other rating systems to quantify responses.

Qualitative interviews: conduct interviews with individuals who frequently experience intuitive imagery. Probe them about their experiences, asking detailed questions about the content, clarity, and emotional resonance of their imagery.

Psychophysiological measures: explore physiological markers associated with intuitive imagery, such as changes in heart rate, skin conductance, or brain activity (measured through EEG or fMRI). While these measures can provide objective data, they may not directly capture the subjective experience of intuitive imagery.

Behavioral measures: develop tasks or experiments that require participants to engage with intuitive imagery, such as imagining scenarios or solving problems based on intuitive insights. Measure performance metrics like accuracy, response time, or solution creativity.

Content Analysis: analyze written or verbal descriptions of intuitive imagery experiences for common themes, symbols, or emotional content. This qualitative approach can provide insights into the nature of intuitive imagery across individuals.

Comparative studies: compare intuitive imagery experiences across different groups (e.g., individuals with high vs. low intuition, practitioners of different spiritual traditions) to identify patterns or differences in how intuitive imagery is experienced and described.

Longitudinal studies: track individuals' experiences of intuitive imagery over time to explore patterns of development, changes in frequency or intensity, and factors that may influence the occurrence of such imagery.

Combined approaches: use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of intuitive imagery.

Remember that intuitive imagery is highly personal and subjective, so it's essential to consider multiple perspectives and approaches when attempting to measure it. Additionally, ensure that your measurement tools are validated and reliable.



5th Appendix

Mental Imagery	Traditional Problem-Solving Methods
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Creative visualization: Mental imagery allows individuals to creatively visualize potential solutions to problems by engaging all senses and emotions. This can lead to innovative and out-of-the-box ideas that might not arise through conventional methods. Enhanced memory retrieval: When individuals use mental imagery to simulate problem-solving scenarios, they often tap into their long-term memory, retrieving relevant information and past experiences that can inform their solutions. Empowerment of intuition: Mental imagery can help individuals tap into their intuitive insights and gut feelings, guiding them towards solutions that feel right on a subconscious level. Emotional engagement: Imagining solutions vividly can evoke strong emotional responses, motivating individuals to take action and pursue their ideas with enthusiasm and confidence. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Logical analysis: Traditional problem-solving methods often rely on logical analysis and step-by-step reasoning to systematically evaluate and solve problems. This approach is effective for structured problems with clear parameters and known solutions. Trial-and-error: In some cases, traditional problem-solving involves trial-and-error experimentation, where individuals systematically try different approaches until they find one that works. While this method can be time-consuming, it can lead to practical solutions through iterative refinement. Use of frameworks and models: Many traditional problem-solving methods leverage established frameworks, models, and algorithms to guide the problem-solving process. These frameworks provide structured approaches for defining, analyzing, and solving problems across various domains. Reliance on data and evidence: Traditional problem-solving often emphasizes the collection and analysis of data and evidence to inform decision-making. This evidence-based approach ensures that solutions are grounded in empirical observations and objective reasoning.



6th Appendix

List of mental imagery techniques that individuals can use to enhance their visualization skills and tap into the power of mental imagery:

1. **Guided visualization:** listening to or reading a script that guides individuals through a specific mental imagery exercise, often focusing on relaxation, creativity, or problem-solving.
2. **Sensory visualization:** engaging all five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell) to create vivid mental images, incorporating sensory details to make the visualization experience more immersive and realistic.
3. **Future self visualization:** Imagining oneself in the future, visualizing desired outcomes, goals, and achievements, and mentally rehearsing the steps needed to reach those goals.
4. **Memory recall visualization:** Recalling past experiences, events, or memories in detail, visualizing them as if reliving the moment, and using this visualization to enhance memory recall and emotional processing.
5. **Creative synthesis:** Combining elements from different concepts, ideas, or domains to generate innovative solutions or creative insights, visualizing the fusion of these elements in the mind's eye.
6. **Problem-solving visualization:** visualizing oneself successfully overcoming challenges, obstacles, or problems, exploring different scenarios and solutions in the mind and mentally rehearsing effective problem-solving strategies.
7. **Mood enhancement visualization:** Creating mental images of positive experiences, emotions, or outcomes to uplift mood, reduce stress, and cultivate a positive mindset.
8. **Empathy building:** visualizing oneself in another person's shoes, imagining their perspectives, emotions, and experiences to foster empathy, understanding, and connection.
9. **Goal achievement visualization:** visualizing oneself achieving specific goals, milestones, or accomplishments, imagining the journey towards success and celebrating achievements in the mind's eye.
10. **Symbolic Imagery:** Using symbols, metaphors, or archetypes to represent abstract concepts, ideas, or emotions, visualizing these symbols in various contexts to gain insight and understanding.
11. **Fantasy Exploration:** Allowing the imagination to roam freely, visualizing fantastical scenarios, worlds, or possibilities without constraints, fostering creativity, and imagination.



12. **Relaxation Visualization:** Visualizing oneself in a calm, peaceful environment, such as a serene beach or tranquil forest, and using this visualization to induce relaxation, reduce stress, and promote mental well-being.
13. **Goal Setting Visualization:** Visualizing oneself setting and achieving specific goals, envisioning the steps needed to accomplish those goals and the rewards that come with success.
14. **Performance Enhancement Visualization:** Visualizing oneself performing tasks or activities with skill, confidence, and precision, mentally rehearsing each step and anticipating successful outcomes.
15. **Future Projection:** Visualizing possible future scenarios, outcomes, or consequences of current actions or decisions, helping to anticipate challenges, plan ahead, and make informed choices.

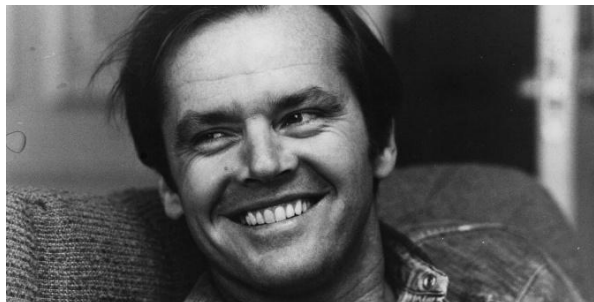
These mental imagery techniques can be adapted and combined to suit individual preferences and goals, allowing individuals to harness the power of visualization in various aspects of their lives, from personal development and creativity to problem-solving and goal achievement.



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7th Appendix



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8th Appendix

Problem 1: Improving Time Management Skills

Scenario: An individual is struggling to effectively manage their time and prioritize tasks, leading to feelings of overwhelm and inefficiency. They need to develop better time management habits to increase productivity and reduce stress.

Solution through Mental Imagery:

1. **Visualization of Ideal Schedule:** The individual can use mental imagery to visualize their ideal daily schedule, imagining themselves efficiently allocating time to different tasks and activities. By vividly picturing themselves moving through their day with focus and clarity, they can create a mental blueprint for optimizing their time management.
2. **Goal Achievement Visualization:** Using mental imagery, the individual can visualize themselves accomplishing their most important goals and tasks, imagining the sense of satisfaction and achievement they will experience upon completion. By mentally rehearsing successful outcomes, they can boost their motivation and commitment to managing their time effectively.
3. **Barrier Identification and Overcoming:** Through mental imagery, the individual can identify potential barriers to effective time management, such as procrastination, distractions, or lack of prioritization. They can visualize themselves overcoming these barriers with confidence and resilience, developing strategies to minimize distractions and stay focused on their priorities.
4. **Stress Reduction Visualization:** The individual can visualize themselves engaging in relaxation and stress-reduction techniques, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or taking short breaks throughout the day. By mentally rehearsing these calming activities, they can cultivate a sense of balance and well-being, which can enhance their ability to manage time more effectively.
5.
6.



Problem 2: Enhancing Public Speaking Skills

Scenario: An individual needs to improve their public speaking skills for an upcoming presentation or public speaking engagement. They struggle with nerves, confidence, and delivering a compelling message to their audience.

Solution through Mental Imagery:

1. **Visualization of Successful Presentation:** The individual can use mental imagery to visualize themselves delivering a successful and impactful presentation, imagining the audience's positive reactions, and their own confident demeanor. By mentally rehearsing each aspect of the presentation, from the opening statement to the closing remarks, they can build confidence and reduce anxiety.
2. **Audience Connection Visualization:** Using mental imagery, the individual can visualize themselves establishing a strong connection with the audience, engaging them with compelling stories, anecdotes, or examples. By imagining themselves speaking with authenticity and passion, they can create a sense of rapport and connection that captivates the audience's attention.
3. **Anxiety Reduction Techniques:** Through mental imagery, the individual can practice relaxation and anxiety reduction techniques before and during the presentation, such as deep breathing, visualization of a calm and serene environment, or positive self-talk. By mentally rehearsing these techniques, they can manage nervousness and maintain composure under pressure.
4. **Confidence Building Visualization:** The individual can visualize themselves embodying confidence and self-assurance, imagining themselves standing tall, making eye contact with the audience, and speaking with conviction. By cultivating a strong mental image of themselves as a confident and capable speaker, they can overcome self-doubt and project a confident presence on stage.
5.
6.



Problem 3: Conflict Resolution in a Team

Scenario: A team is experiencing interpersonal conflicts and communication breakdowns that are hindering collaboration and productivity. They need to find constructive ways to resolve conflicts and improve team dynamics.

Solution through Mental Imagery:

1. **Empathy Building:** Team members can use mental imagery to visualize themselves in each other's shoes, experiencing the perspectives, emotions, and motivations of their colleagues. By fostering empathy and understanding through visualization, they can develop a deeper appreciation for each other's viewpoints and build stronger interpersonal connections.
2. **Conflict Resolution Scenarios:** Participants can visualize hypothetical scenarios where conflicts arise within the team and practice resolving them constructively in their minds. By mentally rehearsing effective communication strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and compromise solutions, they can develop the skills needed to navigate real-life conflicts more effectively.
3. **Team Harmony Visualization:** Team members can collectively visualize an ideal state of team harmony and collaboration, imagining themselves working together smoothly, communicating openly, and supporting each other's growth and success. By aligning their mental images with this shared vision, they can inspire positive behavior change and foster a more cohesive team culture.
4. **Positive Affirmations:** Individuals can use mental imagery to visualize positive outcomes of conflict resolution, such as improved relationships, increased trust, and enhanced productivity. By focusing on these positive outcomes and reinforcing them through mental rehearsal, they can cultivate a mindset of optimism and resilience in the face of conflicts.
5.
.....
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6.
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Problem 4: Career Decision Making

Scenario: An individual is at a crossroads in their career and needs to make a major decision regarding their professional path. They are feeling uncertain and overwhelmed by the various options available to them.

Solution through Mental Imagery:

1. **Future Self Visualization:** The individual can engage in a visualization exercise where they imagine themselves in different career paths or roles, envisioning how each choice would align with their values, interests, and long-term goals. By visualizing their future selves in these scenarios, they can gain clarity on which path feels most fulfilling and authentic to them.
2. **Pros and Cons Exploration:** Using mental imagery, the individual can visualize the potential outcomes and consequences of each career option, exploring the pros and cons in detail. By mentally simulating different scenarios and evaluating their emotional responses, they can make more informed decisions based on intuition and gut feelings.
3. **Life Purpose Reflection:** The individual can reflect on their life purpose and core values through mental imagery, visualizing moments of meaning, fulfillment, and passion in their past experiences. By reconnecting with their innermost aspirations and desires, they can identify career paths that resonate deeply with their sense of purpose and identity.
4. **Decision Commitment Ritual:** After reaching a decision, the individual can create a mental imagery ritual to solidify their commitment and resolve. They can visualize themselves confidently and decisively choosing their desired career path, reaffirming their commitment to pursuing it wholeheartedly despite any challenges or uncertainties.
5.
.....
.....
6.
.....
.....



9th Appendix

Research findings consistently support the effectiveness of mental imagery in enhancing memory performance across various domains. Here are some key findings from studies in cognitive psychology and neuroscience:

1. **Dual-coding theory:** Allan Paivio's dual-coding theory proposes that information is stored in memory through two distinct channels: verbal and visual. According to this theory, when information is encoded using both verbal and visual representations (such as through mental imagery), it leads to stronger and more durable memory traces. Numerous studies have provided empirical support for dual coding theory, demonstrating that dual-coded information is more easily recalled than information encoded using only one modality.
2. **Method of loci (memory palace technique):** The method of loci, also known as the memory palace technique, is a mnemonic strategy that involves associating items to be remembered with specific locations in a familiar spatial environment. Research has shown that individuals trained in using the method of loci demonstrate significant improvements in memory recall compared to control groups. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies have also revealed increased activity in brain regions associated with spatial memory and mental imagery during the use of the memory palace technique.
3. **Imagery and verbal learning study:** In a classic study conducted by Bower and Winzenz (1970), participants were presented with pairs of words and asked to either form visual images of the pairs or repeat them silently to themselves (verbal repetition). The results showed that participants who used mental imagery to encode the word pairs demonstrated significantly better memory recall compared to those who engaged in verbal repetition. This study provided early empirical evidence for the effectiveness of mental imagery in enhancing memory performance.
4. **Visual mnemonics:** Research has shown that visual mnemonics, such as creating vivid mental images or associations to aid memory recall, can improve memory performance in various tasks. For example, studies have demonstrated that visual imagery techniques, such as the "keyword method" for foreign language vocabulary learning, lead to better memory retention compared to rote memorization techniques.
5. **Functional neuroimaging studies:** Neuroimaging studies using techniques such as fMRI have provided insights into the neural mechanisms underlying the beneficial effects of mental imagery on memory. These studies have revealed increased activation in brain regions associated with visual processing, spatial memory, and episodic memory retrieval during mental imagery tasks. Additionally, studies have shown that individuals with greater mental imagery abilities exhibit more efficient neural processing and connectivity in memory-related brain networks.

Overall, the evidence from research studies supports the role of mental imagery in enhancing memory performance by facilitating more elaborate encoding, strengthening memory traces, and engaging neural networks involved in visual and spatial memory processing. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating mental imagery techniques into memory enhancement strategies for both academic and everyday learning tasks.



10th Appendix

List of unrelated pairs of words or objects that you can use for a mental imagery memory retrieval game through Mental Imagery:

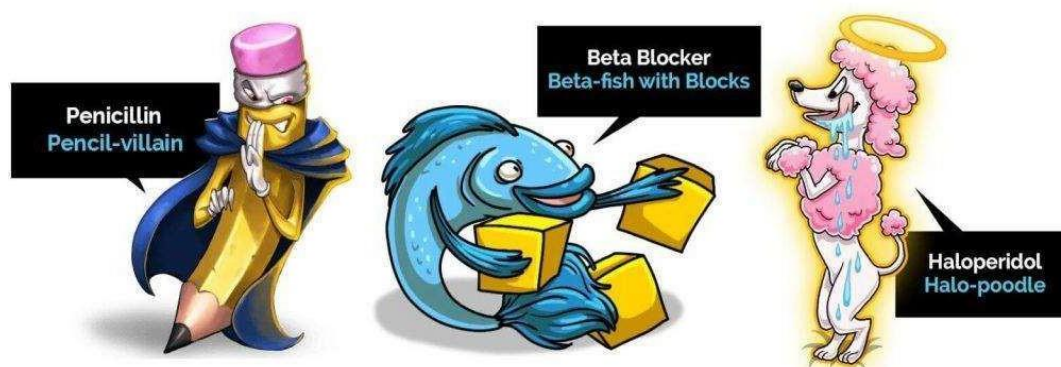
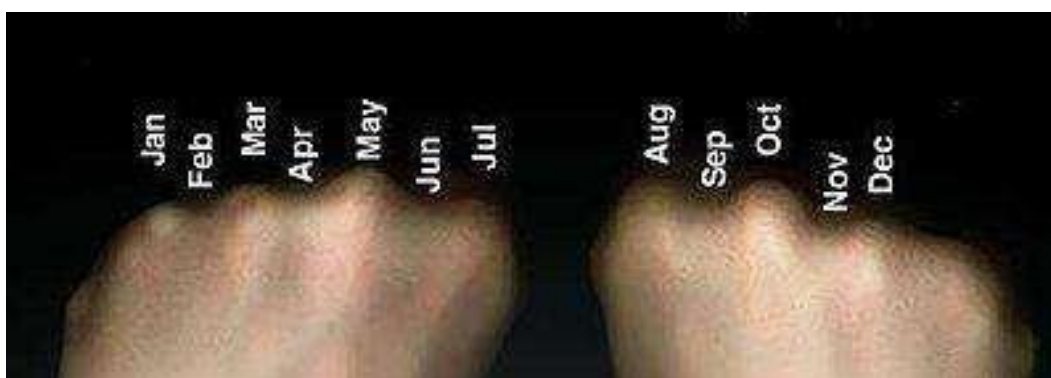
1. Tree - Piano
2. Banana - Hammer
3. Cloud - Bicycle
4. Chair - Watermelon
5. Sun - Shoe
6. Dog - Candle
7. Book - Fish
8. Hat - Telephone
9. Moon - Soccer ball
10. Clock - Butterfly
11. Car - Feather
12. Key - Sandwich
13. Glasses - Mountain
14. Door - Pizza
15. Star - Toothbrush



11th Appendix

Most common types of mnemonic devices:

- acronyms and acrostics.
- association.
- chunking.
- method of loci.
- songs and rhymes.



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One is a bun



Six is sticks



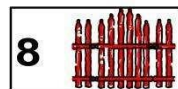
Two is a shoe



Seven is heaven



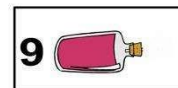
Three is a tree



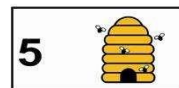
Eight is a gate



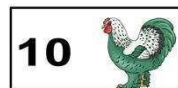
Four is a door



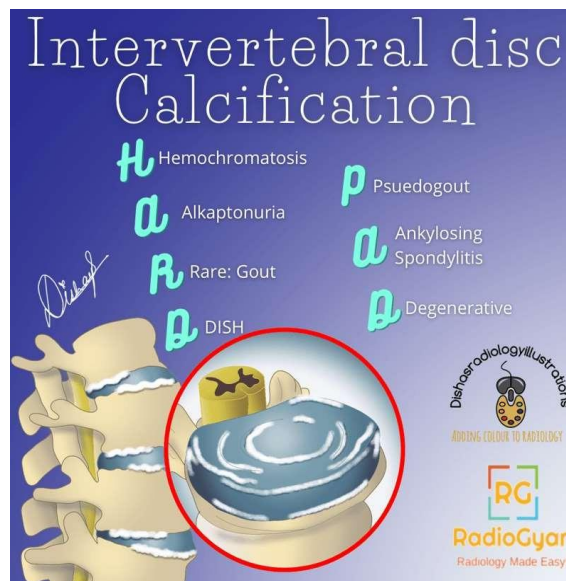
Nine is wine



Five is a hive



Ten is a hen





12th Appendix

List of unrelated words that you can use for Memory Palace Exercise:

1. Pineapple
2. Bicycle
3. Candle
4. Piano
5. Butterfly
6. Umbrella
7. Telescope
8. Brick
9. Jellyfish
10. Lighthouse
11. Suitcase
12. Coconut
13. Violin
14. Hot air balloon
15. Watermelon



MODULE 4

4.1 “Awaken”

For the “**Awaken**” activity that incorporates warm-up, sensory-friendly and balancing, and cool-down exercises, the facilitator will need a variety of materials to create a well-rounded and engaging experience.

Here's a list of materials and resources:

Open space: a spacious and safe area for participants to move freely without obstacles.

Chairs or other comfortable seating options.

Sensory materials, soft surface fabrics, and mats: a variety of sensory materials like textured fabrics, soft brushes, or tactile items that participants can touch and explore during the sensory integration phase. Soft and comfortable fabrics for participants to sit, lie, or carry on during the activity. For some participants, it might be useful to have mats (for those who prefer a more defined space for exercise.)

Sensory balls: different types of sensory balls, such as textured balls, inflatable balls, or weighted balls. It can also be created from papers or any other materials.

Music playlist: a playlist with music suitable for different phases of the activity, including upbeat tunes for warm-up and calming melodies for cool-down.

Timer or stopwatch: to keep track of the duration of each phase, ensuring a smooth transition between warm-up, sensory integration, and cool-down.

Visual props: such as colorful scarfs or ribbons, to make movements more visually stimulating.

Comfortable clothing: The facilitator and participants are invited to wear comfortable clothing suitable for movement.



4.2 “Handmade brushes”

Materials needed:

- Big sheets of paper, big format paper rolls or canvases
- Acrylic and tempera paints
- Containers with water
- Pieces of wood or driftwood to mount brush tip on
- Wire, thread, rope
- Collected/found/upcycled materials from home or nature:
 1. twigs and small branches
 2. leaves and grass
 3. feathers
 4. natural fibers
 5. string or twine
 6. pebbles or rocks
 7. sponge
 8. cloth or fabric
 9. old toothbrushes
 10. foam
 11. serrated knife
 12. found objects
 13. dried plants
 14. old combs or hairbrushes
 15. bubble wrap



4.3 For the **“Sensations through Art”** which is a creative continuation of work with tools created during the **“Handmade brushes”** activity and is designed to enhance participants' sensory experiences through artistic expression, the facilitator will need the following materials:

Art supplies:

- Paper and sketchbooks: provide a variety of paper sizes and types suitable for different art media.
- Paints: watercolors, acrylics, or tempera paints.
- Brushes: various sizes and shapes to allow for different painting techniques, preferably handmade brushes created during the previous activity.
- Drawing materials: pencils, colored pencils, charcoal, markers, or pastels.
- Palettes or mixing trays: for mixing and blending colours if using paints.
- Erasers and sharpeners for drawing materials.

Tactile materials:

- Textured paper: includes different textures, such as rough and smooth paper.
- Fabric swatches: various types of fabric with different textures.

Seating arrangements, lighting, and ambiance:

- Tables and chairs: set up a comfortable and accessible workspace for each participant.
- Natural light or well-lit space: ensure participants have adequate lighting for their creative work.
- Calming ambiance: consider soft music or ambient lighting to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Clean-up supplies:

- Aprons or smocks: protect participants' clothing.
- Table coverings: protect surfaces from spills or mess.
- Water cups: for cleaning brushes if using paints.
- Paper towels or tissues for wiping hands and cleaning brushes.
- Trash bags: dispose of used materials.



4.4 For the 4.4.1 **“Mindful emotion regulation with clay”** and 4.4.2 **“Take it out”** exercises, the following materials are needed:

Clay and other materials to work with it:

- clay (amount depends on the group size)
- sculpting tools: different tools for shaping, carving, and detailing the clay.
- tables
- covers for the table, wall, and floor: preferably plastic.
- small bowls or cups: for participants to dip their fingers or tools in water to smooth clay surfaces.
- aprons and gloves: to protect participants' clothing from clay residue.
- clean-up supplies: damp cloths or wet wipes, for participants to clean their hands after working with clay.

4.5 Materials needed:

- Cardboard
- Pencil
- A ruler
- A pair of scissors
- Coloured pencils or markers or paint

Setting:

- Big, perfectly round table and chairs to accommodate all the group around



ADDITIONAL NOTE:

For all the activities it is recommended to have:

First aid kit: basic first aid supplies, in case of minor injuries or accidents.

The facilitators must always consider the preferences and needs of the participants and adapt the materials to create an inclusive and comfortable environment. Additionally, to be mindful of any allergies or sensitivities participants may have when selecting materials.

Facilitator's guide:

- It is also recommended, that the facilitator creates a plan about how to use the above-mentioned activities. It can be helpful to have a notebook, where they can outline the activity structure, and talking points, and have a creative adaptation plan for the potential challenges.
- To have marked some instructions and variations for each exercise, will help to ensure the success and effectiveness of the activities.
- Depending on the participant's needs, it can be also useful to have printed Instructions or guidelines for participants, which can provide step-by-step instructions or prompts through the process.
- Demonstration materials: if applicable, to prepare samples or demonstrations to illustrate techniques.



MODULE 5

Preparation for working using symbolic signs with ASD children

A child with an autism spectrum disorder faces difficulties in maintaining relationships, understanding what is expected of them in certain social situations. It is easier for these children to "communicate" with inanimate objects and become attached to them. When communicating, they may prefer things rather than people. It can be difficult for these children to understand the feelings and needs of others, so they can treat them like objects (pushing, pulling) to satisfy their needs.

Children with autism spectrum disorders are able to communicate freely in a normal environment but may become completely withdrawn in a foreign environment. In mild cases of autism spectrum disorder, effective contact is possible. After creating favorable conditions for communication (normal environment, good mood, etc.), these children understand and can perform tasks and answer questions. When developing the communication skills of ASD children, it is necessary to pay attention to the following aspects. Which we present in the table below (Garšvienė, Ivoškuvienė, 2003).

Pleasant contact	Speak little, use exact imperative sentences, use address sparingly
Communication takes place through give and take	In this way, the child is constantly reminded that he needs other people.
Understands the environment better by symbols than described by words	Visual communication is the basis of education, which helps to learn more complex ways of communication, i.e. communication in words or the whole language system. Visual communication tools must be the same all the time, they help maintain attention, reduce the child's anxiety, provide clarity and concreteness to communication, encourage to act.
Multi-modal communication	Combining objects, pictures, symbols, gestures, words - helps the child to understand faster how to communicate and what the meaning of communication is.

Currently, it is proven that early help is important and significant for the further life of children with autism spectrum disorders. One of the most effective ways to help is structured training and behavioral therapy. This allows these children to adapt to the environment faster, better understand the world, learn, and acquire household and hygiene skills. Keep in mind that there is no one magic treatment that works for all children. Each teaching method needs to be adapted to a particular child. The most important thing is to follow the principle — do no harm.



Environmental preparation using symbolic cues with ASD children.

In mild cases of autism spectrum disorder, effective contact is possible. When favorable conditions are created for communication (normal environment, good mood, etc.), these children understand and can complete tasks and answer questions (the table below is based on Bec Oakley, 2020).

If the main challenge is:	They will cope better with it if:
A fast distraction	Will sit away from windows and doors; Will sit so that they cannot see toys and computers; They will sit further from the class aisles.
Slower processing of auditory information*	Will sit closer to you to hear fewer unexpected sounds.
Sensory Integration**	No one will walk behind them and sit away from the sound equipment (electric scraper, stapler or hole punch); Will not have physical contact with classmates; You will have space to calm down and move when thinking; Seats near an open window in rooms with scents (art or biology) Will not sit on a chair (gymnastics ball)
Common challenges	Will sit next to a patient and helpful classmate; Will sit in the place assigned to him; You will have your own marked place (on the carpet, chair, seed bag).

*Slower processing of auditory information - slower ability to perceive, analyse and express what is heard. This is one of the most important skills in learning to read and write. If this cognitive skill is weak, a problem arises that we can name as "listening, but not hearing."

**Sensory integration is the ability of the central nervous system to connect, systematize and evaluate information received from the body and environment through the senses. Impaired sensory integration is manifested by inadequate reactions to sensory stimuli and strange behaviour.



Activity 5.1. Introduction: Timetable/agenda using symbols.

Children with ASD manage better when they know what to expect, and schedules/agendas are an effective way to provide them with this information. A schedule is simply a list of events or activities and the order in which those events or activities occur.

Children with autism spectrum disorder are usually characterized by communication, social skills and behavioral development disorders. Therefore, this tool focuses on the development of communication and social skills and helps them understand the structure and order of the daily routine. This educational tool will greatly help in the educational institution and in the continuation of education after returning from the educational institution. It is also very necessary when the child is on vacation or sick, and when the established routine changes.

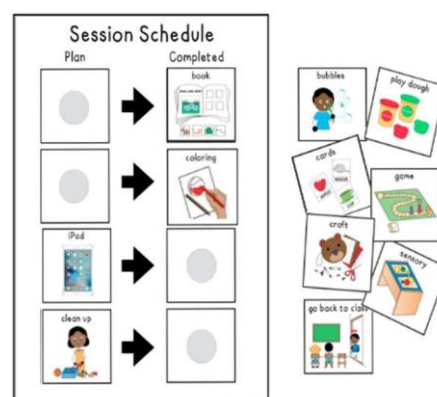
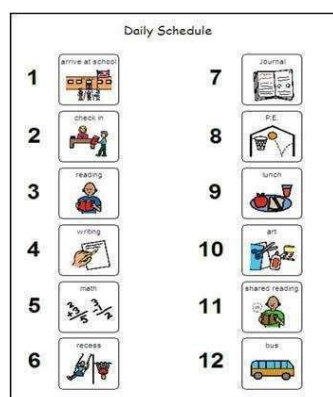
Timetable
Even if you have a group/class timetable for everyone hanging in the office, it's a good idea to make a separate timetable for students with ASD. They often need more instruction than other children. You will find that having the schedule on their desk or nearby works better than having the schedule posted in front of the classroom or on the wall.
Planning
Divide the time of the day (training) into parts according to the subjects or activities being taught. Make sure you include everything, even breaks and free time. If there are too many points to fit into one schedule, then divide that schedule into several parts. Create a full-day (activity) schedule with several smaller schedules for specific tasks, such as getting things out of your backpack and getting ready to study, draw, play, or get ready to eat a snack.
Creating
<p>Before making a timetable, think first: how you intend to use it. Before you grab the scissors and glue, think ahead:</p> <p>How will you show which tasks have already been completed and which still need to be completed?</p> <p>How will you add rewards or choices?</p> <p>Where will the schedule be held?</p> <p>How will a student transition from one schedule to another?</p> <p>How will you prompt the student to review the schedule?</p>

The table is based on Bec Oaklay, 2020



Agendas:

- ✓ Individual agendas: •
- ✓ Agenda with items; •
- ✓ Agenda with photos or pictures; •
- ✓ Agenda with specific graphic symbols; •
- ✓ Agenda with written words.



*All samples are taken from the internet

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Activity 5.1. Create an activity (lesson) agenda, according to the table provided.

1. According to the child's age and abilities, divide the class time.
2. Mark the planned works (using the provided examples, specific symbols, written words, etc.).
3. According to the child's age, abilities, and interests, come up with a reward for the completed task.

Time	Activity	Award

Description of activity:

Time:

It is very important to tell how long it will last. *e.g.: If the child does not understand the clock, we can use paid hourglasses.* It is important to remember not interrupt the task when you work with a children who have ASD, but also not to change the time of the task completion, to follow the agreement.

Activity:

Depending on the task we want to perform, we use symbols. *e.g.: numbers for math, letters for reading, etc.* We can use both symbols with specific pictures and with pictures or written words. It is important to find out if the child understands the meaning of the symbol, we can even discuss together with him to draw or choose a specific photo or picture.





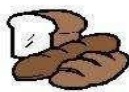





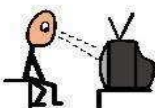


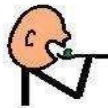


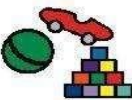


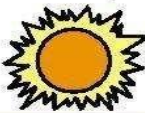
Award:

A very important part of motivating is a reward. Therefore, it is very easy to do this if you know the child's interests. However, if we do not know, it is important to find out how we will reward a child. For example: it can be a sticker of his favourite animals or a drawing. A favourite activity, a dance, a walk, or a gift of candy or another favourite snack.



<https://data1.skinnyms.com/en/autism-pecs-free-printables.html>



computer 	milk 	biscuit 	chocolate 	bread 
cereal 	school 	music 	apple 	exercise 
watch TV 	walk 	sit 	eat 	goodbye 
rest 	toys 	night 	cloudy 	sunny 

reading 	math 	science 	social studies 
lunch 	recess 	bathroom 	snack 
go home 	bus 	break 	computer 
special activity 	gym 	music 	art 



Activity 5.2. Introduction: Symbols in art therapy

One of the successes of working with ASD children is the art therapy method. Art therapy helps a child with autism become more independent, develop daily life skills, reduce anxiety, tension, and behavioural disorders. There would be no way to express your inner conflicts, misunderstood feelings. It would be difficult for a parent to communicate with his child, autistic people need a visual demonstration, without drawings the child does not know how to empathize with the state of another person, he does not understand from facial expressions that he is behaving inappropriately. Therefore, it is more effective to help the child by including active art therapy.

Mandala colouring is a great way to calm down for both children and adults. This activity is also suitable for the youngest children (as young as 2 years old), especially hyperactive children with autism spectrum disorder. A mandala is a centered, symmetrical drawing in a circle (other shapes are also possible). The word "mandala" in Sanskrit means "circle, connection, community". Mandalas have their roots in nature, as a circle with a centre is characteristic of almost everything in our Universe - flower blossoms, snowflakes, spider webs, conch shells, seashells, tree trunks, the Milky Way, etc. The subconscious is projected through the symbols and colours that we choose when colouring or creating a mandala, so it is often through the mandala that people discover an unexpected and new vision of themselves or the situation (below are examples of mandalas).



(<https://srsvb.lt/kas-yra-mandalos-ir-kodel-ju-kurimas-svarbus-vaiku-motoriniam-vystymuisi/>)



The effect of the mandala symbol

Focusing attention	When colouring mandalas, children must maintain their focus for quite a long time. By doing this regularly, it becomes easier for children to sit through lessons without too many distractions.
For improving motor skills	Especially for children with special needs, mandala colouring helps to develop the coordination of movements of body parts and motor skills of hands and fingers.
For improving hand-eye coordination	When colouring a mandala, brain connections are strengthened, which are responsible for fine motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination and dexterity of hands and fingers. Good training of fine motor skills makes it easier for children to learn to write.
Creativity	Mandala encourages self-expression and unleashing their individual creative potential, there are no rules and restrictions, so children can fully reveal themselves and experiment.
Develops math skills	Mandala colouring develops children's mathematical perception - they get to know repeating patterns, geometric ornamentation, dimensions, symmetry.

Created by material (<https://srsvb.lt/apie-biblioteka/>)

Activity 5.2. A colouring task that helps concentration and develops motor skills

1. Choose a drawing according to the child's age and abilities (does the child know numbers, letters).
2. If the child is of an older age and ability, all three drawings can be done.
 - Mandala colouring.
 - Dinosaur colouring.
 - Free drawing colouring

Below are three pictures with tasks.

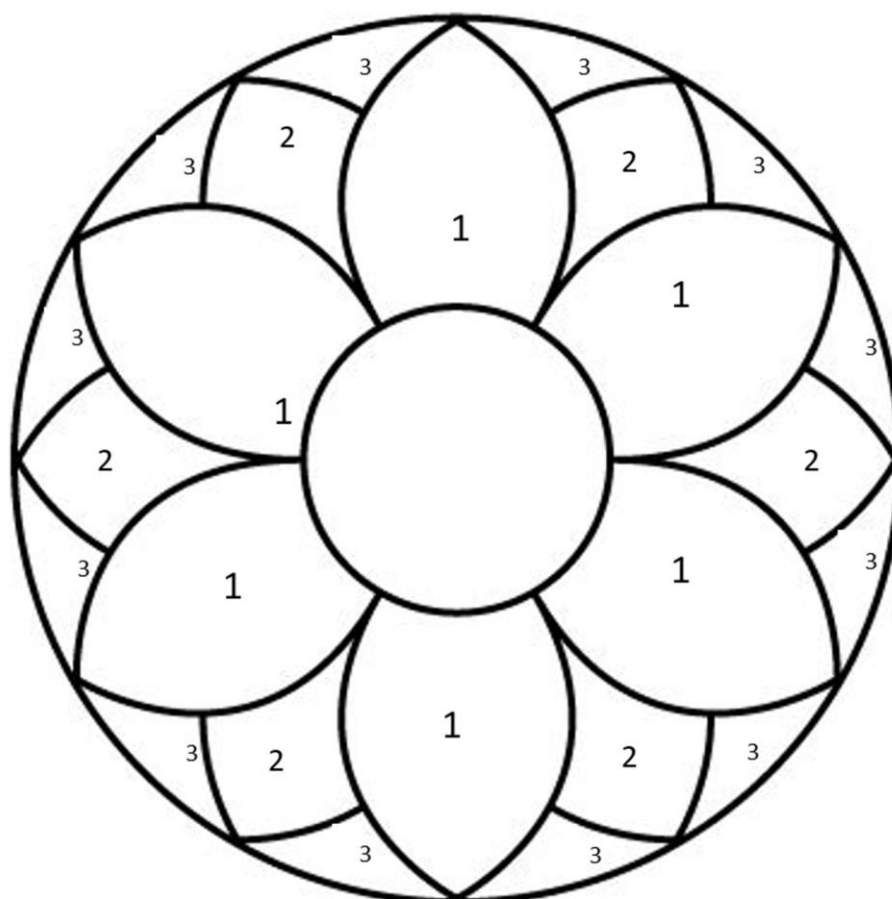


Description of activity:

Together with the child, decide which number you will paint with which colour. If the child does not want to choose, we can choose for him. Then mark that colour next to the corresponding number.

Colour by number:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.





Description of activity:

Together with the child, decide which letter you will paint with which colour. If the child does not want to choose, we can choose for him. Then mark that colour next to the corresponding letter.

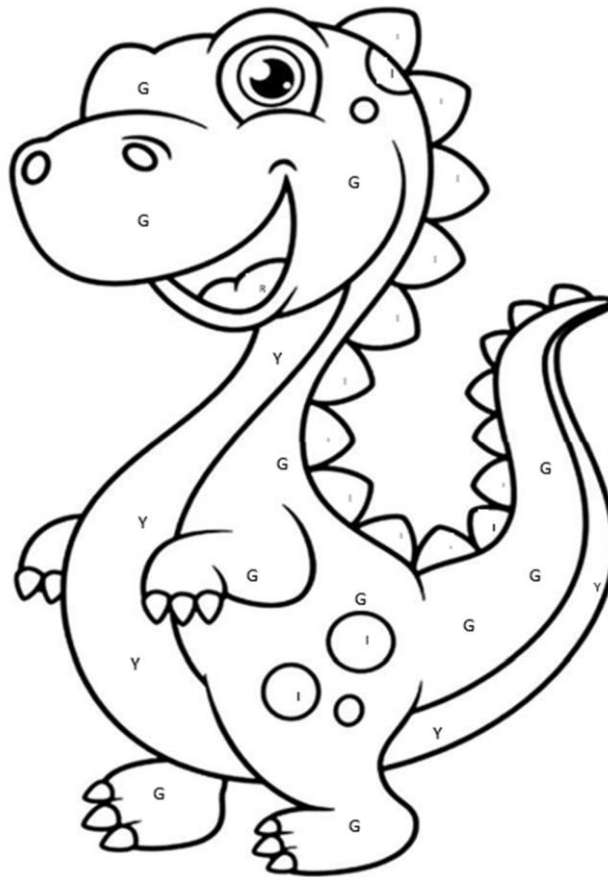
Colour by letters:

G.-

I.-

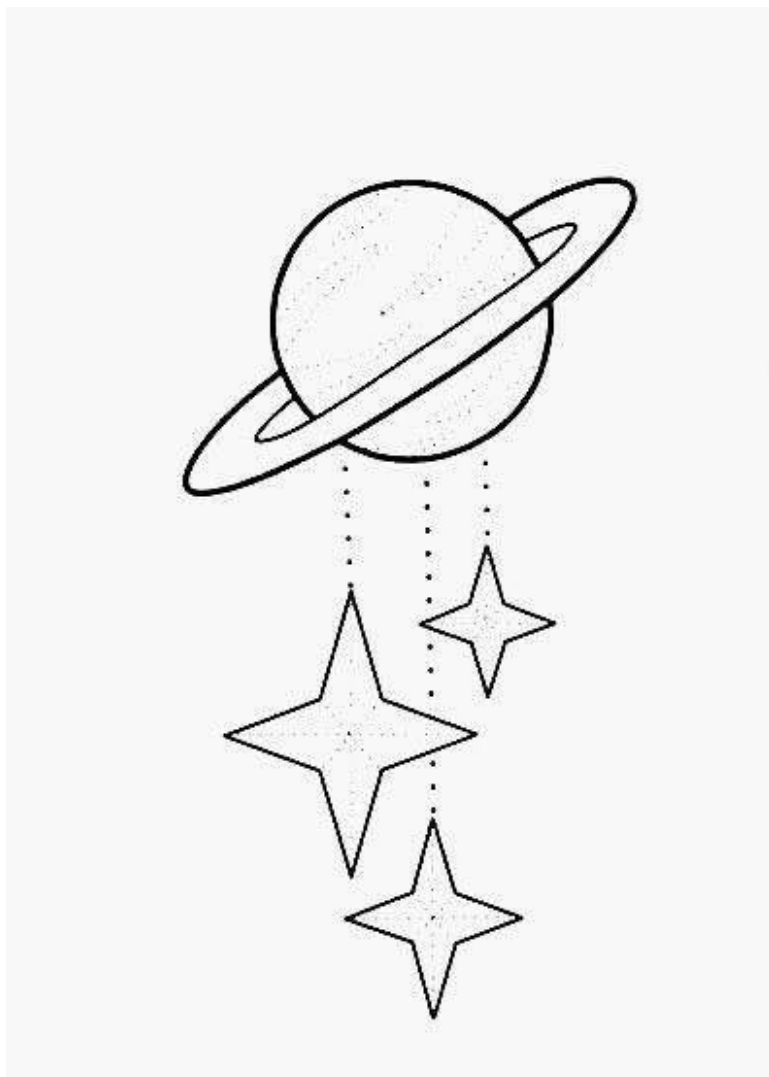
Y.-

R. -





Colouring according to your choice:









Activity 3. Introduction: The meaning of symbols in the management of emotions

ASD children – just like all children experience a wide range of emotions and are really able to share those feelings with other people. It's just that it's difficult for them to recognize what emotions they are, and because of communication difficulties, it's difficult for them to say how they feel. They may also have difficulty with social understanding, making it difficult to decide what to do when someone shows them a certain emotion. So, if a new student laughs when a classmate cries, they are not being callous or rude, they are just confused. It is very important to introduce, explain the other person's emotions. *(For example: that tears represent another person's sadness, and we can show them how to help. Or when someone is upset, we can ask if they are okay.)*

Visual-symbolic cards that depict various emotions can also help. They will help you talk about his feelings (The main emotions are shown in the table below).

			
Anger	Happiness	Sadness	Fear

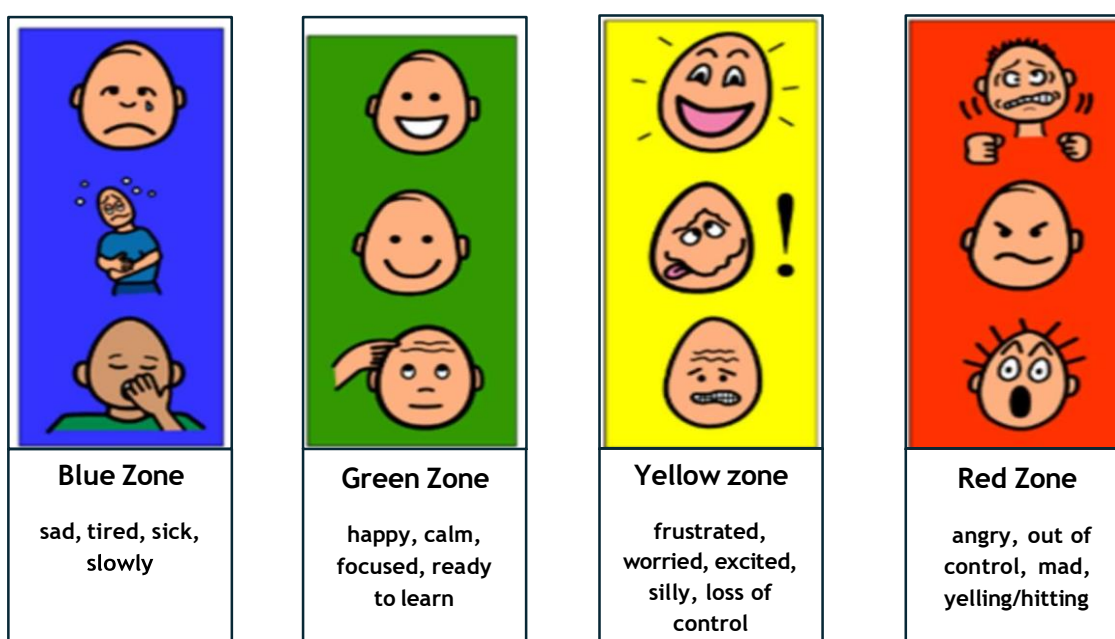
Before working with emotions, it is important to know them. Every day we feel a lot of emotions and for an autistic child, it can be difficult to understand what they mean, to get caught up in their names. To make it easier to know and understand them, you can start with four basic emotions: anger, sadness, happiness, confusion. In this way, we will not overload the child with information and will be sure that a child of any ability will be able to understand it. We can associate each of these emotions with a certain colour. For example, blue is associated with sadness, green is associated with happiness, yellow is associated with confusion, and red is associated with anger.



Activity 3.

An emotion recognition activity that helps to calm down and express emotions with the help of movement of symbolic colours.

1. Four colour zones.
2. Naming your emotion.
3. Emotion is expressed with the help of movement.



Description of activity:

1. Four colour zones are presented to children: blue zone, green zone, yellow zone, red zone. It is explained to the children that each zone represents a certain emotion.

As we can see, each colour can be a symbol of a certain emotion. To make it easier for the child to understand, smileys with certain emotions are presented for each colour.

The colour blue represents sadness, and sadness can hide many feelings. When you are in the blue zone, you may feel sad, tired, or apathetic about everything. Green represents happiness. When you are in the green zone, you feel happy, it is easy for you to concentrate and study. The yellow zone represents



confusion. When you are in the yellow zone, you may feel anxious, out of control, lost. Red colour means anger. When you are in the red zone, you may feel angry, it may be difficult for you to control your actions.

2. After getting acquainted with the four zones and learning what each of them means, we can move on to the second part of the activity. Children are asked which zone they would assign their current state to (a lower-ability child may be asked to choose the colour they like at the time). According to which zone the child assigned his emotion, we try to express it together. In several ways (depending on the child's abilities):

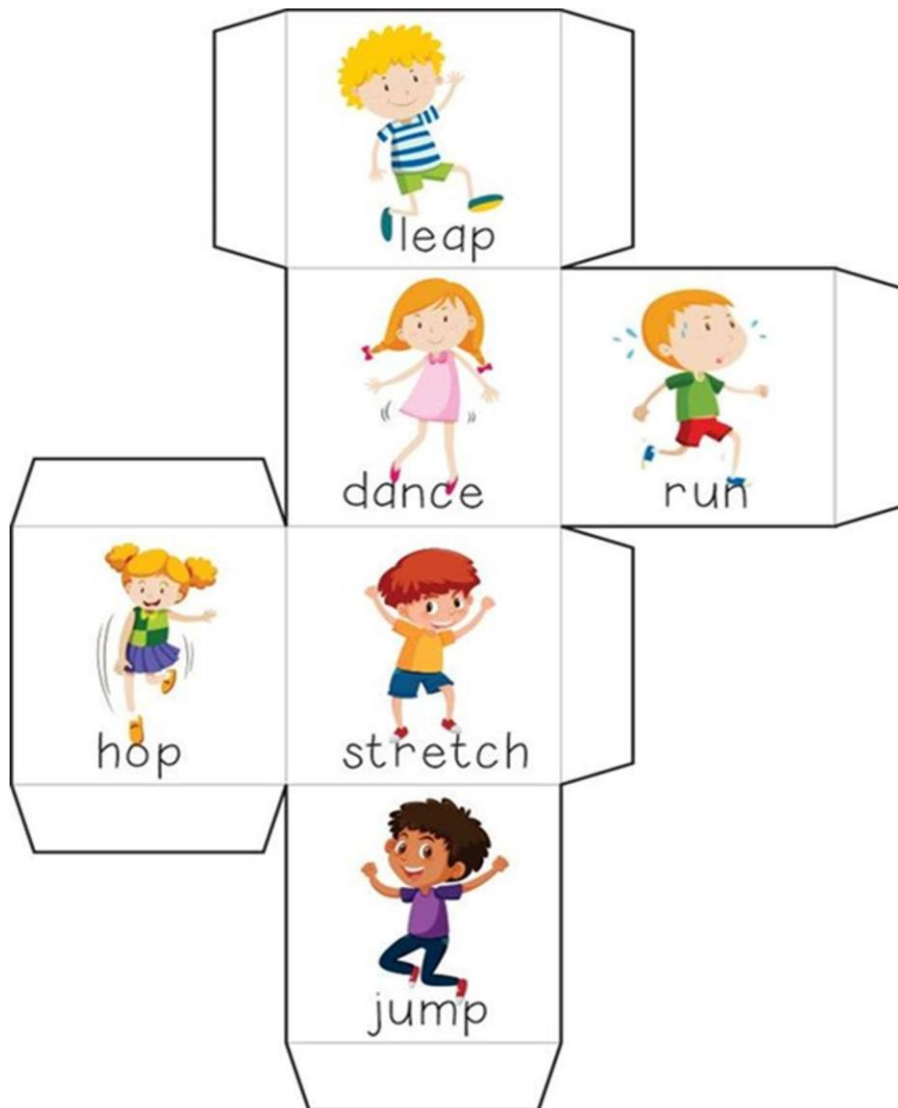
- Ask how they usually expresses that emotion and repeat it (anger - hitting the pillow, joy - jumping, fear - hugging, etc.);
- Show the cards below and suggest which one you like the most when feeling a certain emotion;
- From the given shape, cut and make a cube. Have the child throw and try to repeat the movement.

Movement Cards:





Emotion cube:









MODULE 6

Module 6: Handout 1 – Emotion Recognition Character

Please print this page on a cardboard and cut out each card on the dotted line.

 <p>This is..... He is feeling.....</p>	 <p>This is..... She is feeling.....</p>
 <p>This is..... She is feeling.....</p>	 <p>This is..... He is feeling.....</p>



Module 6: Handout 2 – Emotional Thermometer

BIG, AWFUL FEELING

I feel this way when:

My brain thinks:

My body feels:

The next stronger feeling

I feel this way when:

My brain thinks:

My body feels:

First upsetting feeling

I feel this way when:

My brain thinks:

My body feels:

CALM

I feel this way when:

My brain thinks:

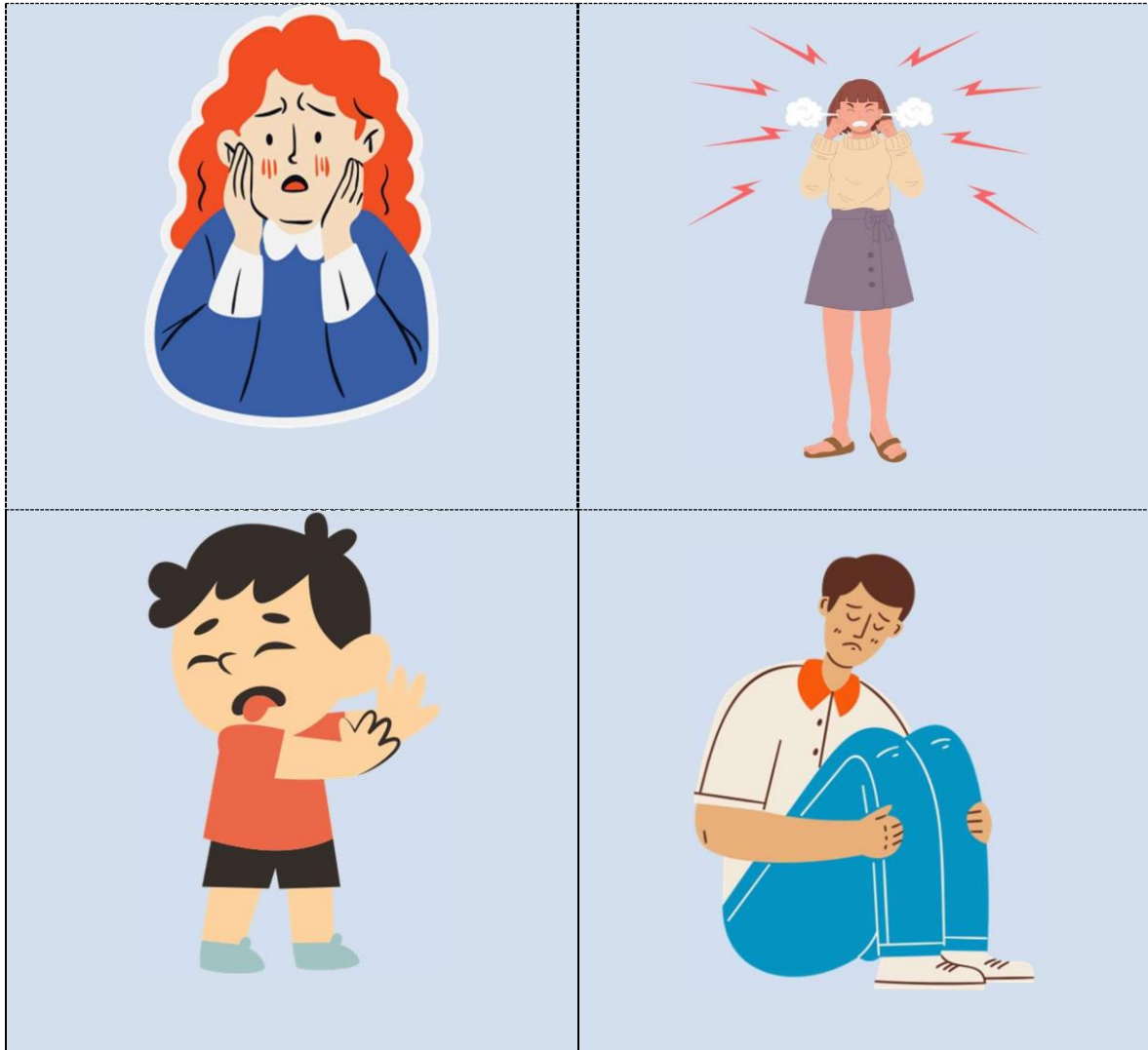
My body feels:

Handout adapted after: <https://autismteachingstrategies.com/>



Module 6: Handout 3 – Negative Emotions

Please print this page on a cardboard and cut out each card on the dotted line.





Module 6: Handout 4 – Regulation Strategies and Coping Mechanisms

 <p>Breathing Exercise</p>	 <p>Counting Technique</p>
 <p>Practicing a Hobby</p>	 <p>Mindfulness Meditation</p>
 <p>Take a Pause</p>	 <p>Physical Activity</p>



Module 6: Developing emotional expression and regulation on youth with ASD

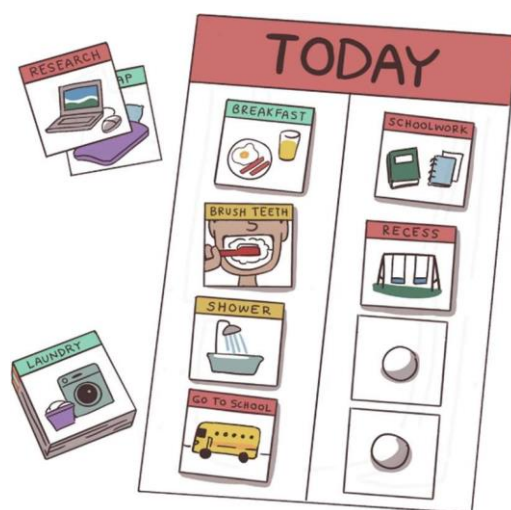
6.1. Creating a safe and supporting environment for youth with ASD

Ensuring a secure, encouraging, and supportive atmosphere is crucial for the positive emotional development of youth, especially those with ASD. Youth with ASD often face challenges in communication, emotional expression and regulation, social interactions, and sensory sensitivities, making it essential to tailor their environment to enhance physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

Incorporating the following ideas related to consistency, understanding triggers, and adapting the environment to their unique needs into your approach as youth trainer, you can further enhance the creation of a safe and supportive environment for youth with ASD:

1. Establish a clear structure and routine:

- Develop a predictable and consistent daily routine to manage expectations and minimize anxiety and stress for youth with ASD.
- While unexpected changes may occur, strive to maintain as much predictability as possible.
- Prepare the young person well in advance for any unavoidable changes in the schedule.
- Use visual aids such as written or picture schedules to communicate daily activities clearly.



Source: canva.com



2. Identify and modify triggers:

- Identify situations or factors that trigger anxiety, worry, fear, or low mood in your young person.
- Explore ways to modify or gradually introduce triggers to help them cope better.

3. Design a comfortable and secure physical space:

- Choose calming colors and soft lighting to create a visually soothing environment.
- Provide a comfortable chair and sensory objects, like weighted blankets or wiggle cushions, to address tactile needs of youth with ASD.
- Minimize distractions by keeping the space clutter-free.

4. Address sensory sensitivities:

- Identify and accommodate sensory sensitivities by adjusting lighting, minimizing noise, and providing noise-canceling headphones if needed.
- Utilize soothing background music or their favorite songs to assist with sensory regulation.

5. Create sensory-friendly breakout spaces:

- Designate quiet and calming spaces within the learning environment to retreat during overwhelming moments. It can be equipped with calming elements like bean bags, softer lighting, lava lamps, bubble tubes, and calming music.
- Tailor the space to what works best for your young person with ASD to aid in self-regulation, including with sensory tools like fidget toys.



Source: <https://www.pexels.com>

6. Utilize visual resources:

- Integrate visual resources such as planners, calendars, and timetables, especially for verbally able youth.
- Visual aids place less emphasis on memory and are easier to understand, particularly in times of stress or anxiety.

7. Incorporate fun and engaging learning, integrating also technology and educational apps:

- Integrate play into learning activities to make the educational experience more exciting.
- Utilize technology and educational apps designed for youth with ASD to support learning.
- Ensure that devices are user-friendly and provide technical support as needed.

8. Encourage social interaction:

- Foster social skills development through group activities and peer modeling.
- Teach new and interesting ways to play with toys, enhancing social play with peers.



Source: <https://www.pexels.com>

9. Incorporate transition tunes into the schedule.

- These songs assist young people in smoothly shifting from one activity to another. Furthermore, they introduce rhythm, rhymes, and music to tooth, aiding in language development and communication skills.
- For groups facing challenges with transitions, consider including extra prompts and signals as required. For instance, when moving between indoor and outdoor activities or transitioning from free play to structured tasks, provide signals indicating the time remaining, such as 30 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, and 2 minutes.

10. Stay mindful of communication:

- Be mindful of language use, recognizing that certain words or phrases may trigger anxiety.
- Foster open communication and provide alternatives when addressing challenges.

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11. Rephrase and suggest instead of “no”:

- Reframe responses to avoid using the word “no”, which may be a trigger for young people with ASD.
- Provide alternative suggestions or choices to empower decision-making.

12. Reward positive behaviors creatively:

- Get creative with rewards, using a variety of incentives such as stickers, preferred activities, social praises, favorite snacks or brief breaks.
- Tailor rewards to the young people’s specific interests to make the reinforcement more effective.

13. Involve others in supportive practices:

- Encourage collaboration with school, family, and caregivers to ensure consistency in implementing supportive practices.
- Share insights and effective strategies to create a supportive network.

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6.2. Helping youth and children with ASD to identify and express their emotions

Emotion recognition and expression are essential skills for social interaction and communication. While youth with ASD may face challenges in these areas, targeted interventions and support can help them develop and enhance their emotional competence. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to difficulties in emotion recognition and expression and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions, we can empower young people with ASD to navigate the complexities of emotions and build meaningful social connections.

Young people with ASD may struggle with various aspects of emotion recognition, including:

1. *Difficulty identifying facial expressions*

Youth with ASD may struggle to identify and interpret facial expressions accurately. They may have difficulty recognizing subtle facial cues and nuances associated with different emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. This challenge can make it hard for them to understand how others are feeling based on their facial expressions alone.



Source: <https://pixabay.com>

2. *Limited theory of mind*

- Theory of Mind refers to the ability to understand that others have thoughts, beliefs, and emotions different from one's own. Youth with ASD often have difficulties with Theory of Mind, which can impact their ability to recognize and understand others' emotions.
- They may struggle to grasp the idea that someone else may have a different perspective or emotional experience than their own, making it challenging to empathize with others or predict their behaviors based on their emotional state.



3. Sensory sensitivities

- Sensory sensitivities are common in individuals with ASD and can affect how they process emotional stimuli. Youth with ASD may be hypersensitive or hyposensitive to sensory input, which can lead to heightened emotional responses or difficulty focusing on relevant emotional cues. For example, a child with hypersensitivity to touch may become overwhelmed by physical contact, making it challenging for them to engage in social interactions or accurately perceive others' emotions.

4. Executive functioning deficits

Executive functioning skills, including attention, planning, and impulse control, play a crucial role in emotion recognition. Youth with ASD may experience deficits in these areas, impacting their ability to process and interpret emotional information effectively. Difficulties with attention may cause them to overlook important emotional cues, while challenges with planning and impulse control can lead to impulsive or inappropriate emotional responses. These executive functioning deficits can hinder their overall ability to understand and navigate social interactions.

On the other hand, youth with ASD may also face difficulties in expressing their own emotions:

1. Limited repertoire of expressive behaviours

- Young people with ASD often exhibit a restricted range of expressive behaviours, including facial expressions, gestures, and vocalizations. Their ability to convey emotions through these channels may be limited or inconsistent, making it challenging for others to accurately interpret their emotional state.
- For instance, a young person with ASD may have difficulty displaying typical facial expressions associated with specific emotions, such as smiling in response to joy or frowning when upset. This limited range of expressive behaviours can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the child's feelings by others.

2. Difficulty communicating emotions verbally

- Verbal communication of emotions can pose significant challenges for youth with ASD, particularly those who are non-verbal or have limited language skills. These young persons may struggle to articulate their feelings using words, making it difficult for others to understand their emotional experiences.
- They may have difficulty labelling their emotions or describing how they feel in words, which can further impede their ability to communicate effectively.
- As a result, young people with ASD may rely on alternative forms of communication, such as gestures, pictures, or behaviors, to express their emotions.



3. Emotional regulation difficulties

- Many young people with ASD experience difficulties in regulating their emotions, leading to outbursts, meltdowns, or shutdowns when overwhelmed by intense feelings. These emotional regulation challenges can stem from various factors, including sensory sensitivities, difficulties with coping strategies, or deficits in executive functioning skills.
- For example, a young person with ASD may become easily overwhelmed by sensory stimuli, such as loud noises or bright lights, leading to emotional dysregulation.
- Additionally, deficits in executive functioning skills, such as impulse control or problem-solving, may hinder the child's ability to manage their emotions effectively. As a result, youth with ASD may struggle to cope with changes in routine, transitions between activities, or stressful situations, leading to emotional dysregulation and behavioral challenges

4. Social communication deficits

- Challenges in social communication can further hinder the expression of emotions in social contexts for young people with ASD. These deficits may include difficulties in initiating or maintaining conversations, understanding social cues or norms, or interpreting others' intentions or emotions.
- Youth with ASD may have difficulty expressing their feelings verbally or non-verbally in social interactions, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations by others.
- Deficits in social communication skills may contribute to feelings of isolation or frustration in young people with ASD, as they may struggle to connect with others or express their emotional needs effectively.



Source: <https://unsplash.com>



Here are some ideas and strategies for supporting emotion recognition and expression:

1. Visual supports

- Utilizing visual aids is a highly effective strategy for helping youth with ASD improve their emotion recognition and expression skills. Visual supports, such as emotion cards, facial expression flashcards, and social stories, provide concrete examples and help make abstract concepts more understandable for youth with ASD.
- These visual tools can help young people learn to recognize and interpret emotions more effectively by providing clear, visual representations of different emotional states. Emotion cards, for example, may feature pictures or illustrations of people displaying various emotions, allowing youth to associate specific facial expressions with corresponding emotions. Similarly, facial expression flashcards can help youth practice identifying different facial expressions and understanding the emotions they convey.
- It is important to start with basic emotions (e.g., happy, sad, angry, scared) before moving on to more complex age-appropriate emotions (e.g., confused, embarrassed, disappointed).
- Social stories, on the other hand, use simple narratives and visuals to explain social situations and emotions in a structured and easy-to-understand format, helping youth with ASD learn about emotions in context.



Source: <https://unsplash.com/>



2. Explicit instruction

- Offering explicit instruction on emotions is another essential strategy for supporting emotion recognition and expression in youth with ASD. This involves providing direct and explicit teaching on different emotions, including naming and describing them, interpreting facial expressions and body language, and understanding social cues.
- By breaking down complex emotional concepts into simpler, more manageable components, youth with ASD can enhance their understanding of emotions and how they are expressed. For example, educators or youth trainers may use visual aids, such as emotion charts or diagrams, to teach youth about the various components of emotions, such as facial expressions, body language, and vocal tone.
- They may also provide verbal explanations and examples to help youth understand the different nuances of each emotion and how they are expressed in social interactions.

3. Modeling emotion expression

- Modeling appropriate emotional expression and communication is a powerful strategy for helping youth with ASD learn how to express emotions effectively. By observing others' emotional expressions and behaviors, young people with ASD can learn valuable social and emotional skills that they can then apply in their own interactions.
- Adults, youth trainers, educators, or peers can model appropriate emotional expression by using exaggerated facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tones to demonstrate different emotions in various social contexts. For example, an educator may use dramatic facial expressions and gestures to show excitement, sadness, or frustration during a storytelling activity, allowing young people to observe and imitate these expressions.
- Similarly, peers can model appropriate emotional responses during social interactions, such as expressing empathy or concern when a classmate is upset or sharing their own feelings and experiences in a supportive and expressive manner.

4. Practice social skills

- Engaging in role-playing or social skills training activities is an effective way to help young people with ASD practice identifying and expressing emotions in simulated social situations.
- These activities provide them with opportunities to apply their knowledge of emotions in real-life contexts and develop their social and emotional skills in a supportive and structured environment. Role-playing activities may involve scenarios where they are asked to identify and express different



emotions in various social situations, such as during a conversation with a friend, a conflict resolution scenario, or a group activity.

- By participating in these activities, youth can practice using appropriate facial expressions, gestures, and vocal tones to convey their emotions and communicate effectively with others. Educators or youth workers can provide feedback and guidance to help young people improve their social and emotional skills and build confidence in their ability to navigate social interactions.

5. Teach coping strategies

- Teaching youth with ASD coping strategies for managing overwhelming emotions is essential for supporting their emotional regulation and expression. Youth with ASD may experience difficulties regulating their emotions and may become overwhelmed or distressed when faced with intense feelings.
- Providing youth with a toolbox of coping strategies can help them learn how to manage their emotions effectively and cope with challenging situations. Coping strategies may include deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation techniques, mindfulness activities, or sensory-based interventions, such as using sensory tools or engaging in sensory activities to self-regulate.
- Youth trainers or educators can teach youth these coping strategies and help them develop personalized strategies that work best for them. By empowering young people with ASD with these tools and techniques, they can learn how to identify and manage their emotions in a healthy and constructive manner, leading to improved emotional well-being and overall quality of life.

Social stories – a powerful tool to support social and emotional development of youth with ASD

- Developed by Carol Gray in the 1990s, social stories provide structured narratives that help individuals with ASD understand and navigate social situations, routines, and expectations.



Source: canva.com



- Social stories are short, personalized stories designed to describe social situations or concepts in a clear and understandable way for young people with ASD.
- They typically follow a specific format, including descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences, aimed at explaining a particular social scenario, behavior, or skill.
- Social stories are tailored to the child's needs and are often accompanied by visual supports such as pictures or drawings to enhance comprehension.
- Social stories accomplish this by explicitly highlighting:

1. Details about the setting: Social stories provide detailed descriptions of the setting in which the social situation occurs. This includes information about the physical environment, such as where the interaction takes place, the people involved, and any relevant objects or surroundings. By describing the setting, social stories help young people with ASD understand the context in which the social interaction occurs, enhancing their comprehension and preparation.

2. Typical events or activities in the setting: Social stories outline the typical events or activities that occur in the setting. This includes routine activities, common occurrences, and expected sequences of events. By familiarizing youth with ASD with the typical events in the setting, social stories help them anticipate what will happen next and prepare for upcoming situations. This can reduce anxiety and uncertainty, enabling youth to navigate the setting more confidently.

3. Expected actions or behaviours in the setting: Social stories explicitly outline the actions or behaviours that are typically expected from youth in the setting. This includes appropriate social behaviours, communication skills, and interaction norms. By providing clear guidelines on expected behaviours, social stories help them understand what is expected of them in social situations and how to respond appropriately. This promotes social competence and facilitates successful interactions in the setting.

- Social stories provide youth with ASD a structured and visual framework to understand social situations that may be challenging or confusing. By breaking down complex social concepts into simpler, more manageable components, social stories help youth grasp the expectations and norms of various social interactions.
- Young people with ASD often thrive on routine and predictability. Social stories help establish predictability by preparing them for upcoming events, transitions, or changes in routine. By



familiarizing youth with what to expect, social stories reduce anxiety and uncertainty, leading to smoother transitions and improved behaviour.

- Social stories teach young people with ASD appropriate social behaviours and skills by providing concrete examples and strategies. Through repeated exposure to social stories, young people learn how to recognize social cues, understand the perspectives of others, and respond appropriately in various social situations. This process helps bridge the gap between social understanding and social application, empowering them to navigate social interactions more effectively.
- Social stories serve as a valuable communication tool for young people with ASD, enabling them to express their thoughts, feelings, and concerns in a structured and supportive manner. By incorporating personalized details and experiences, social stories facilitate communication and self-expression, fostering a deeper understanding of the child's perspective.
- Many young people with ASD struggle with regulating their emotions and managing stress or anxiety. Social stories offer strategies for coping with challenging emotions by providing reassurance, coping mechanisms, and problem-solving techniques. By presenting alternative responses and outcomes, social stories empower to navigate emotional situations with greater confidence and resilience.

6.3. Enhancing emotional regulation skills on youth with ASD

- Helping youth with ASD learn to calm down and develop effective coping skills is crucial for their emotional well-being and social development. Individuals with ASD often face challenges in managing overwhelming emotions and may require support in learning self-regulation techniques.
- As following, we will explore detailed strategies and techniques for assisting youth with ASD in calming down and developing effective coping mechanisms.
- After understanding different emotions, it's valuable to explore the realm of emotions that exhibit heightened intensity, teaching youth the art of managing and regulating intense emotional states effectively.



Source: canva.com



- For example, for the emotion of anger – a natural response that everyone experiences, it's equally important for young people to be aware that feeling angry is normal, but allowing anger to linger for prolonged periods or resorting to unsafe behaviours during moments of intense anger is undesirable.
- To facilitate a deeper comprehension of intense emotions, engaging in activities involving scenario cards can be profoundly insightful. These cards vividly depict real-life situations, coupled with the emotional responses of the individuals involved.
- Encourage young people to critically analyse the appropriateness of the depicted response and behaviour, and to discern whether the intensity of the emotions portrayed by the person in the scenario falls within the boundaries of the normal spectrum or veers towards an excessive extremity.
- Through active participation in these activities, youth not only gain a nuanced understanding of the variety of emotions, but also acquire invaluable strategies for navigating and managing them effectively in diverse situations, fostering emotional intelligence and resilience.

Strategies for emotional regulation and calming down intense emotions

Supporting youth with ASD in managing intense emotions involves a structured 5-step approach:

- a. Recognize the emotion: encourage young people to acknowledge and identify the emotion they are experiencing.
- b. Name the emotion: assist youth in articulating the specific emotion they are feeling, helping them to label and understand their emotional state.
- c. Allow for silence: create space for young people to process their emotions without pressure to respond immediately, fostering a sense of calm and reflection.
- d. Provide support: offer reassurance and support as the child works through their emotions, validating their feelings and offering comfort as needed.
- e. Address the trigger: once the child has calmed down, engage in a discussion about the underlying issue that prompted the emotional reaction, helping them to understand and cope with the situation effectively.

Providing support can refer to one or more of the following strategies and coping mechanisms:



1. Incorporate sensory integration activities

- Integrate sensory integration activities into daily routines to provide calming sensory input for young people with ASD. Techniques such as brushing therapy, joint compressions, or weighted vests can help modulate sensory responses and promote a sense of calmness. These activities provide deep pressure input to the body, which can have a regulating effect on the nervous system, helping young people feel more grounded and organized.
- Engage youth in physical activities such as swinging, jumping on a trampoline, or going for a walk to help regulate their sensory system and release pent-up energy.

2. Utilize special interests as a coping mechanism

- Recognize the therapeutic value of young people's special interests and hobbies as a form of self-soothing and relaxation. Special interests often serve as a source of comfort and predictability for youth with ASD, providing a familiar and comforting outlet for managing stress and anxiety.
- Whether it's collecting rocks, memorizing train schedules, or learning about dinosaurs, encourage youth to immerse themselves in activities that offer a sense of security and enjoyment.

3. Provide a variety of options

- Offer a range of activities and materials that cater to youth's diverse interests and preferences. Provide access to art supplies, musical instruments, books, and toys that align with their individual tastes and passions.
- By providing a variety of options, you empower young people to explore their interests and express themselves in meaningful ways, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-expression.

4. Deep breathing exercises

- Deep breathing exercises are a fundamental self-regulation technique that can help young people with ASD calm their minds and bodies. Teach them to take slow, deep breaths, filling their lungs with air and exhaling slowly.



- Encourage them to focus on their breath and notice how it feels as it enters and leaves their body. Practice deep breathing exercises in different settings and situations to reinforce the skill and make it readily available during times of stress or anxiety.



5. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR)

- Progressive muscle relaxation involves systematically tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in the body to release tension and promote relaxation.

Source: canva.com

- Guide young people with ASD through a series of muscle groups, starting from their toes and working their way up to their head. Encourage them to notice the sensations of tension and relaxation in each muscle group and practice PMR regularly to enhance their ability to manage stress and anxiety.

6. Mindfulness meditation

- Mindfulness meditation teaches youth with ASD to cultivate present-moment awareness and acceptance of their thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. Start by introducing simple mindfulness exercises, such as mindful breathing or body scan meditation.
- Encourage them to observe their thoughts and sensations without judgment and gently bring their attention back to the present moment when their mind wanders.
- Practice mindfulness meditation regularly to strengthen their ability to stay grounded and centered, even in challenging situations.

7. Visualization techniques

- Visualization techniques involve imagining peaceful and calming scenes to promote relaxation and reduce stress. Guide youth with ASD through visualization exercises where they visualize themselves in a serene and tranquil environment, such as a peaceful meadow or a quiet beach.
- Encourage them to use their senses to create vivid mental images and engage in guided imagery to evoke feelings of calmness and inner peace.
- Practice visualization techniques regularly to build their capacity to access a sense of relaxation when needed.



8. Employ counting techniques

- Counting can serve as a powerful tool for emotional regulation, offering a simple yet effective way to redirect attention and manage overwhelming emotions.
- Encourage young people to engage in counting strategies, such as counting cracks on a sidewalk or tiles on a ceiling or floor. For some of them, the act of counting provides a mental distraction from distressing thoughts or feelings, facilitating the process of emotional regulation and promoting a sense of calmness.

9. Create calm down kits

- Discover youth preferences and what brings them comfort or joy, then assemble personalized “calm down kits” tailored to their individual needs.
- These kits, often referred to as “sensory toolkits” or “comfort kits”, are designed to engage their senses and foster positive emotional responses. Consider including a variety of items such as tactile toys, stress balls, soothing essential oils, calming music or soundtracks, favorite books or comforting objects, and any other sensory-friendly items that youth find calming and enjoyable.
- By tailoring the calm down kit to their individual preferences, you provide them with a valuable resource to help manage stress and promote emotional regulation in times of need.

10. Take a pause

- Taking a break can be a valuable strategy for individuals, especially youth with ASD, to regain composure and regulate emotions effectively. Encourage young people to recognize when they need a moment to step away from a situation and find a quiet space to collect themselves.
- Whether it’s retreating to their designated calming area or seeking solace elsewhere, taking a break allows young people to implement other self-regulation skills and regain a sense of control over their emotions.



Source: canva.com



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