How Are You Feeling?

Managing Feelings in an Overwhelming World, Through the Lens of ASD

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Agenda

• Emotional processes - experiencing and expressing

• Identifying emotions in ourselves and others

• Stress management strategies - proactive and reactive

• Connection between emotions and relationships
Defining Emotion

- American Psychological Association (2020):
  - “Complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event . . .”

- Something occurs that is meaningful to the person that leads to one or multiple emotions

- Different people may have different emotions in response to the same experience
Experiencing Emotions

- Physiological responses include both autonomic and hormonal changes
  - Eyes
  - Heart Rate
  - Breathing
  - Sweating
  - Salivation
  - Digestion
  - Bladder

Carlson & Birkett, 2017
Expressing Emotions

- Behavioral Responses
  - Facial expressions
  - Body posture
  - Verbal statements
  - Nonverbal sounds
  - Body actions

- Feelings of emotions

Carlson & Birkett, 2017

(Matsumoto, 2008)
Emotion Identification – Self

- Physical sensations
- Environmental experiences
- Thoughts
Emotion Identification – What to do About it?

- Make a change in our behavior
- Make a change in our environment
- Advocate for change
- Stay the same
Emotion Identification – Others

- Skills involved in identifying others’ emotions:
  - Label emotions
  - Distinguish emotions
  - Perspective taking
  - Identify verbal and nonverbal cues in others

- We teach these skills:
  - Discussion
  - Observation
  - Role play
  - Natural experiences
Emotion Identification in Others - What if we Still Don’t Know?

Asking does **not** mean you have to manage the other person’s feelings
Continuum of Stress

- Totally relaxed, maybe disengaged or even sleepy
- Alert, present, engaged, maybe a little stressed, but ready to learn
- Too stressed for learning, need to de-escalate
Stress Management Techniques - Proactive

• Have a plan
  • Visual schedules
  • Develop routines
  • Careful pairing of activities
  • Scheduling of positive, enjoyable activities

• Modify physical environment
  • People present
  • Lights
  • Noise
  • Seating/Comfort
  • Eliminate distractions during tasks
Stress Management Techniques - Reactive

• Recognize how I am feeling:
  • Physical sensations
  • Thoughts
  • Emotions

• What to do?
  • Tell somebody how you are feeling
  • Ask for help
  • Change your environment
    • Reduce task demands
    • Take a break
Function-Based Stress Management Behavior Plans

• What is the function of the behavior?
  • Attention
  • Tangible
  • Escape/Avoid
  • Automatic

• Functional behavior assessment
  • Identifies hypothesized function(s) of behavior

• Function-based behavior plans include individually-tailored and appropriate function-based:
  • Prevention strategies
  • Replacement behaviors to teach based on function(s)
  • Responses to behaviors

Brosnan & Healy, 2011; Horner et al., 2002; Matheis, Estabillo, & Matson, 2017
Emotion and Relationships

• Emotions can be the glue in our relational systems

• We may have the same or different emotions than others about the same experience

• How we manage emotions can strengthen or weaken our relationships

• Being able to identify and navigate our emotional differences is functional emotion management

• Differentiation

Jankowski & Hooper, 2012
Same Feelings – Different Brains

Excerpt about how a couple manages their differences in experiencing and expressing feelings
Final Thoughts

Even though we may experience and express emotions differently and live in different emotional worlds, we can still see each other and coexist in harmony.

Barger, Walsh, 2021
References


• 9 Differences between Sympathetic Nervous System and Parasympathetic Nervous System [Online Image]. https://www.major differences.com/2017/03/09/differences-between- sympathetic.htm#.YAbyUTpKg2w
Resources

• Center for Healthy Minds:  
  https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/your-well-being

• Autism Society Stress Management:  

• Games that could work on feelings:  
  • Bubble Talk  
  • Empathy Game  
  • The Ungame