

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

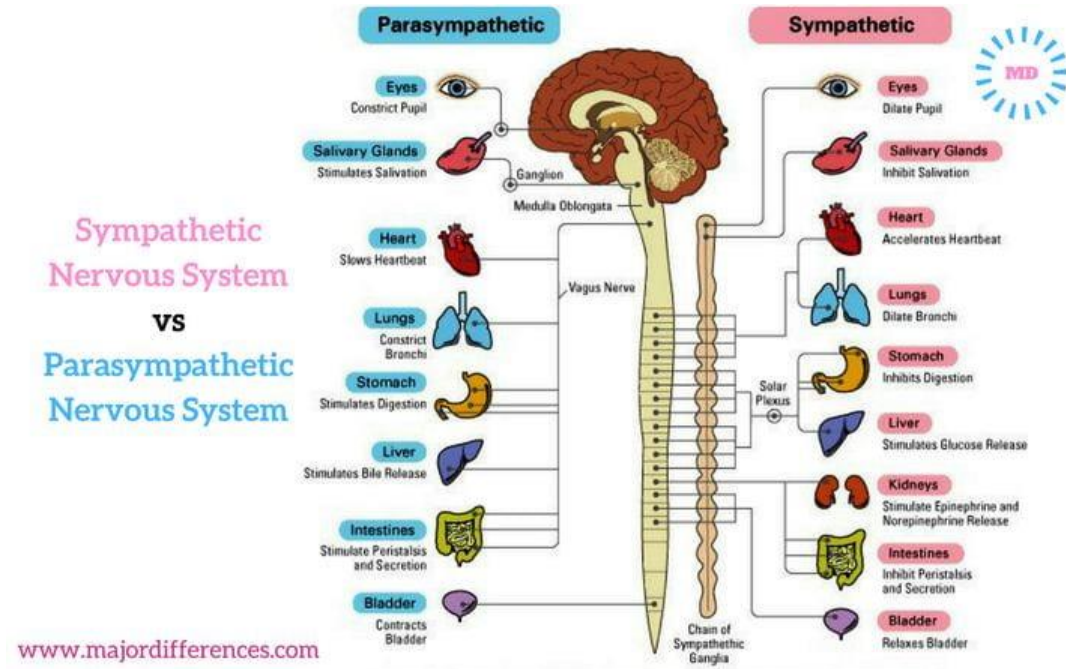
Defining Emotion

- 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



(c) David Matsumoto 2008

(Matsumoto, 2008)

Carlson & Birkett, 2017

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?

Ask!

*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, Estabillio, & 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.

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Resources

- Center for Healthy Minds:
<https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/your-well-being>
- Autism Society Stress Management:
 - <https://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/autism-and-your-family/stress/>
- Games that could work on feelings:
 - Bubble Talk
 - Empathy Game
 - The Ungame