The page features several decorative elements: a large orange circle with blue diagonal stripes in the top center; a large orange circle with horizontal white stripes on the left side; and a large orange circle with blue diagonal stripes in the bottom right corner.

MANAGING EMOTIONS AND ANXIETIES

A quick, positive guide for parents and careers of autistic teens and young adults to help understand anxiety, spot triggers, and use simple tools to feel calmer and more in control. It's supportive, practical, and designed to make everyday life feel a little easier.



The language and terminology used in this resource has been carefully co-produced with individuals with lived experience and are what we believe to be the most up to date terms at the time of production, based on our research and professional experience. This may not reflect everyone's experience but, we do not wish to cause any offence

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a natural response to stress or perceived danger, while emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in a healthy way.

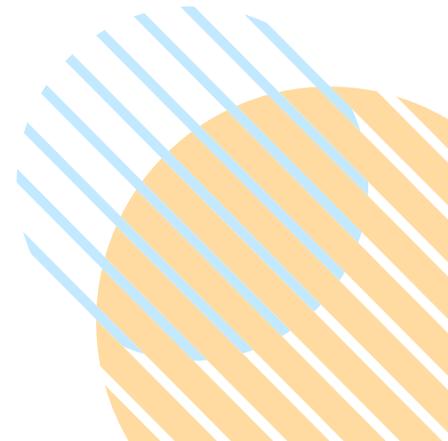
Autistic people may experience anxiety and emotions differently due to differences in sensory processing, communication, and social interaction. These differences can make it more challenging to identify, express, and manage emotions.

It's important to remember that every autistic person is unique, and their experiences with anxiety and emotions can vary widely.



ANXIETY & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- **Anxiety** is a natural response to stress or perceived danger.
- Neurotypical anxiety is more likely to be about something that might happen.
- Autistic anxiety is often more of a direct response to unpredictability or tangible sensory or cognitive overload for example. Autistic people may have a higher baseline anxiety level than non-autistic people.
- Anxiety can make it more difficult to regulate emotions.
- **Emotional regulation** is the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in healthy and adaptive ways.
- Autistic people may experience differences in sensory processing, communication, and social interaction which can make it more challenging to identify, express, and manage emotions.
- It's important to remember that every autistic person is unique, and their experiences with anxiety and emotions can vary widely.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

- Executive functions are a set of mental skills and cognitive processes that allow us to manage ourselves and our tasks.
- Executive function challenges are common for autistic people and can impact their processing, responses and behaviour.

Signs of executive function challenges include:

- Low tolerance for frustration
- Challenges starting or completing tasks
- Challenge with self motivation
- Needing a lot longer to process information
- Trouble prioritising, organising and problem solving

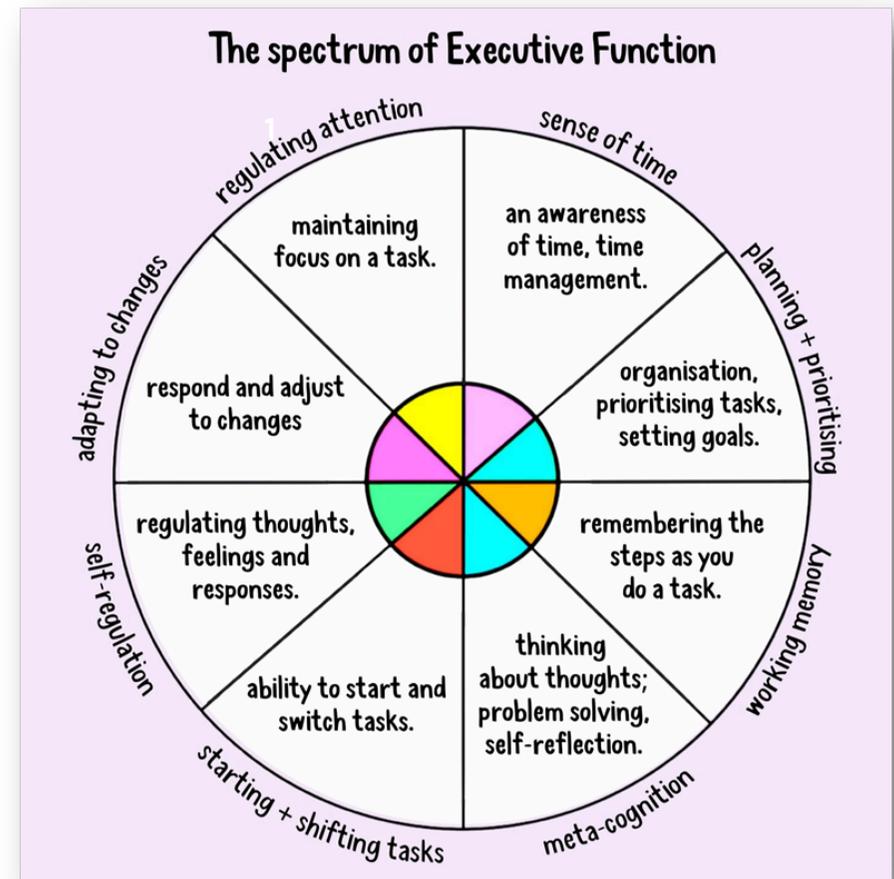


Image credit - Sonny Jane, Lived Experience Educator

- Challenges in areas of executive function can make it more challenging to manage emotions and contribute to frustration and anxiety. This can lead to heightened emotional responses, which may look disproportionate to the situation.

HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED

Anxiety and emotional regulation are interconnected in various ways e.g.:

- Intense sensory experiences or a build up of sensory experiences e.g. a bright lights, very loud noises and crowded environments can lead to sensory overload (when the brain receives more information than it can process). This can cause considerable anxiety and can make emotional regulation very difficult. Sensory overload can trigger a meltdown or a shutdown.
- Impact of communication and social challenges - social situations can be anxiety provoking as they can be unpredictable, daunting and overwhelming for some. This can cause anxiety about entering social situations or communicating.



UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS

Triggers are events or situations that can lead to heightened anxiety or emotional distress. These can be internal (thoughts, feelings) or external (environmental factors). It is important that you understand your young persons triggers to reduce their anxieties

COMMON TRIGGERS

- Sensory overload (e.g., loud noises, bright lights)
- Unpredictable changes in routine
- Communication difficulties or misunderstandings

EXAMPLES OF TRIGGERS

- A fire alarm going off unexpectedly
- A sudden change in plans without warning
- Difficulty understanding social cues in a conversation



TIPS FOR ANXIETY AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

- Giving ample processing time with instructions, questions or expectations can be helpful - this image by autistic content creator Erin Human can help to put it into perspective.
- Ensuring processing, communication and sensory needs are being met.
- Create routines and timetables so that they always know what's happening and what to expect
- Have your tools ready. Whether you need fidget toys, sunglasses or ear defenders. Have these items with you so that you can meet sensory needs.

