

Autism & Eating Disorders

Small Ways to
Make a BIG Difference

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Misunderstood-autism
drives illness

Understood-autism
can drive wellness



Anxiety

Meltdowns/shutdowns

Highly focused interests

Repetitive/restrictive behaviour

Over/under responsive senses

Social communication & interaction challenges

Autism

A lifelong difference that affects how people interact with the world

High Functioning?

Aspergers



Eating Disorders



Food, weight, shape or exercise are used as a way of coping with difficult thoughts, feelings or experiences

Anorexia Nervosa

Bulimia Nervosa

Binge Eating Disorder

Orthorexia: 'clean eating' (not recognised)

ARFID: Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder

OSFED: Other Specified Feeding & Eating Disorders



Mental Illness

Pretty?

Don't discriminate

Autism + Eating Disorder =

Treatment resistant

Poor outcomes



Comorbidity Toolbox



Comorbidity Toolbox

Comfort
Audit





**What might make a setting
uncomfortable for an
autistic young person?**



Would you want to eat
your dinner here?

**FEET
SCUFFING**

**LIGHTS
FLICKERING**

**SMELL OF
LUNCHES**

**CUTLERY
CLANGING**

**SQUEAKY
FLOOR**

**BREEZE
FREEZE**

**RADIO
RUMBLING**

**LABEL
ITCHING**

**CLOCK
TICKING**

**WIND
WHISTLING**





For the
Child

WITH the
child

Step into a child's shoes and take in your surroundings

I SEE

I HEAR

I FEEL

I SMELL

anything else...

What small things might make a big difference to them?

Comorbidity Toolbox

Comfort
Audit

Boring is
Brilliant



A young woman with long, straight, reddish-pink hair is sitting on the left, wearing a light blue t-shirt and black overalls. She is smiling and looking towards the right. A young woman with long, straight, dark brown hair and glasses is sitting on the right, wearing a white sleeveless top with a small pattern and blue pants. She is holding a smartphone in her hands and looking towards the left. The background is a solid purple color with a white outline around the women.

What do you expect of
ME?

What can I expect of
YOU?

- Rules -

- Routines -

- Rituals -



Does it matter if our
world is small and
predictable at first?

Comorbidity Toolbox

Comfort
Audit

Boring is
Brilliant

Clear
Communications



Clear Communications

Concrete
language

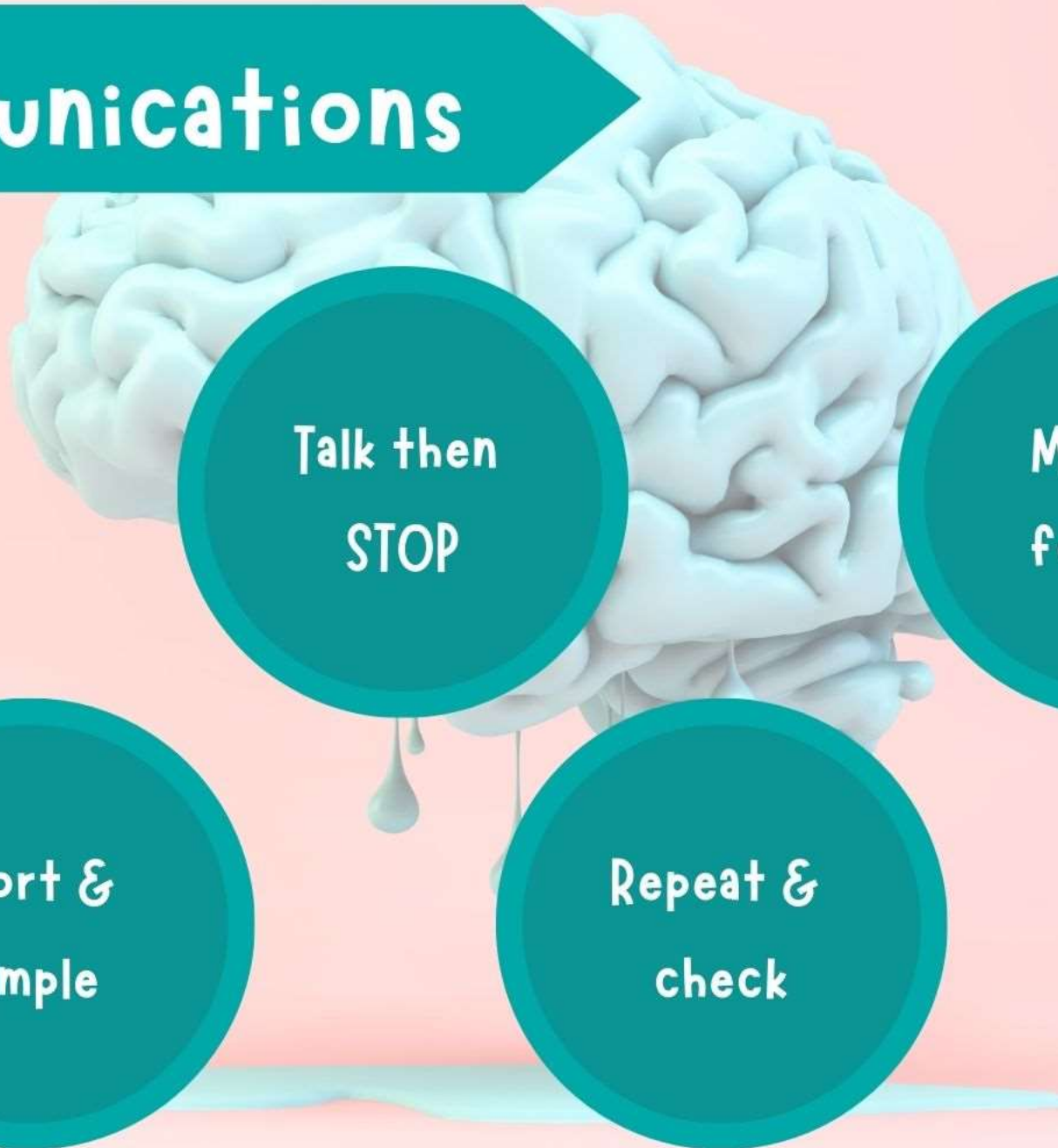
Talk then
STOP

Multiple
formats

Short &
simple

Repeat &
check

Give me
TIME



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Brilliant

Clear
Communications

Build
Special Interest
Bridges





**Have you ever connected
with a young person via a
deep interest of theirs?**

Special Interest Bridges

Way in...

Recovery
motivation

More than ED

Suspend
disinterest

Childlike
curiosity

LISTEN



What if their special
interest is food?



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Boring is
Brilliant

Get to the
WHY

Clear
Communications



Eating
Disorder



Autism

Unless we
understand the
'Why' we're
unlikely to get
the 'What next?'
right



Getting to Why

Listen

Find listening moments, use open questions and prompt further talk

Lists

Use lists or ranking exercises as a way of getting to the heart of things

Journal

Drawing, writing or voice recording responses to prompts can provide insight

Patterns

Look for patterns in mood or behaviour, be curious about highs and lows



Focus

Be curious

Reflect

Silence

10 Ways to Prompt Further talk

-1- Why?

-2- Tell me more...

-3- What happened next?

-4- How did that feel?

-5- Was that expected?

-6- Did anything surprise you?

-7- Would you do it that way again?

-8- What went well?

-9- What could have been better?

-10- Keep going...

- Ten Foods I'd like to Try -

1 -

2 -

3 -

4 -

5 -

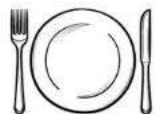
6 -

7 -

8 -

9 -

10 -

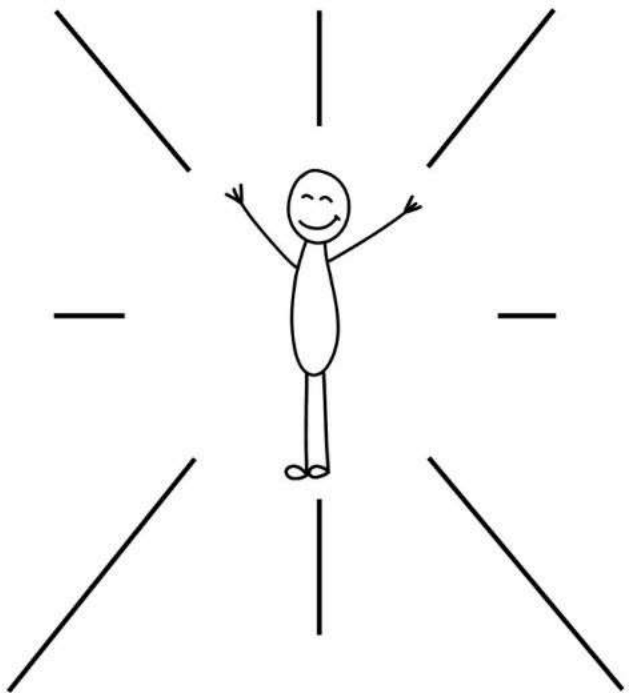


Statements to Rank & Explore

- I feel well supported
- I have good coping strategies
- I have a lot of worries
- I have adults I can trust
- There are places I feel safe
- Sometimes I feel calm and/or happy
- I am often angry
- No one understands me
- I have kind friends
- I have things to look forward to

Rate each statement, 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is absolutely

I'm more than my eating disorder.. I am...



Helpful

Unhelpful



When it comes to meal times and snack times, what helps you cope and what makes things feel worse?

Mood Tracker

7am 8am 9am 10am 11am 12pm 1pm 2pm 3pm 4pm 5pm

Monday

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Tuesday

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Wednesday

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Thursday

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Friday

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Build
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Bridges

Boring is
Brilliant

Get to the
WHY

Clear
Communications

Anxiety First



I need to feel
SAFE before I can
lean into recovery





**How can we enable young
people to manage their
anxiety and feel safe?**

Trauma Informed

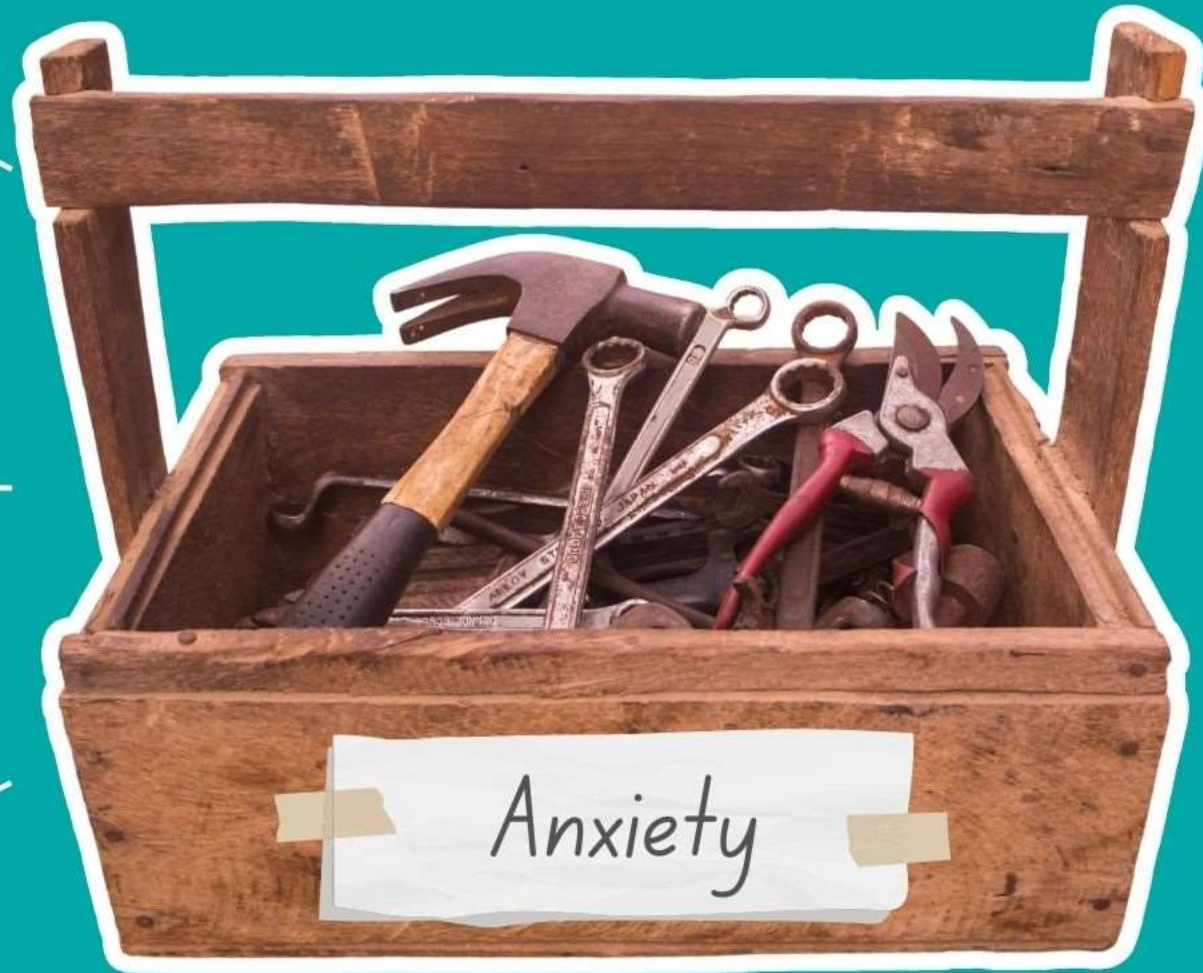
Behaviour Experiments

Grounding

— Self-Soothe

Breathing

Thought Traps



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See
Strengths

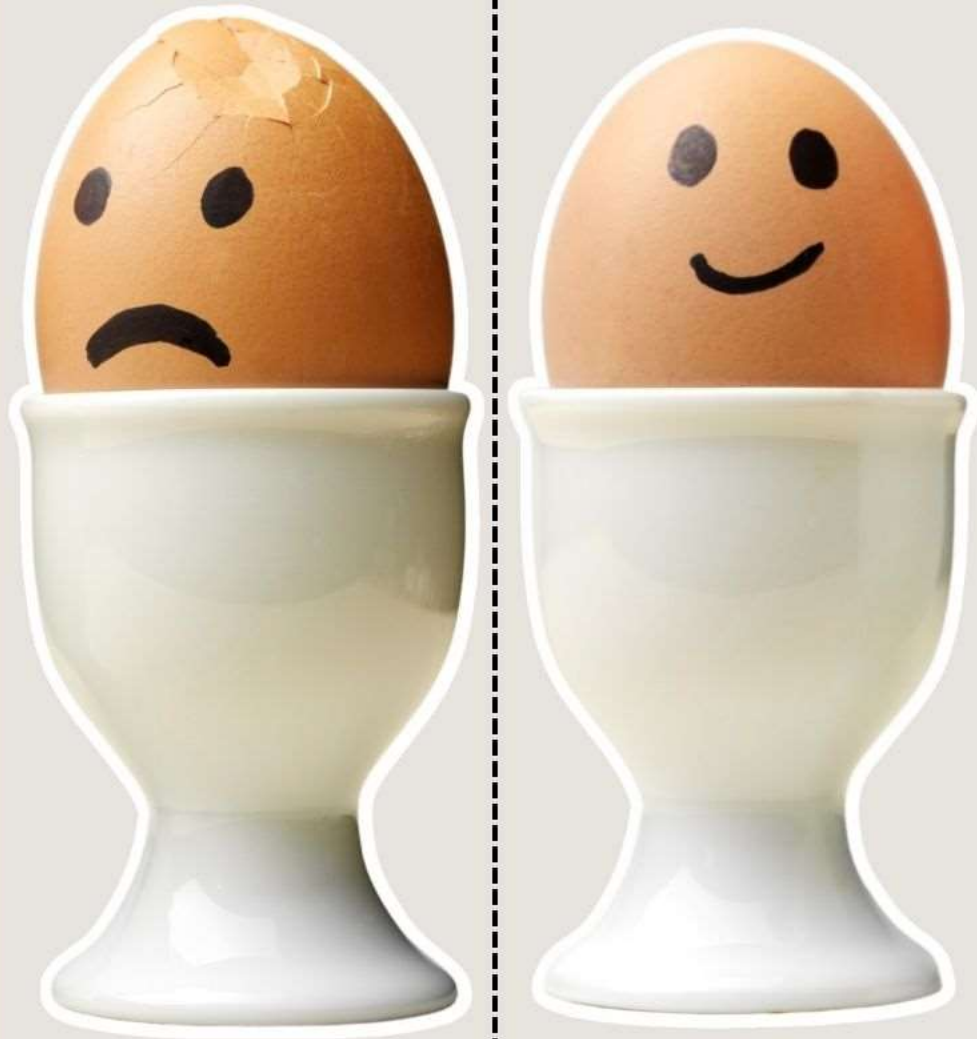
Boring is
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Get to the
WHY

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**JM has AN and
ASC. She
experiences
GAD with panic
attacks. History
of abuse. Risk
of SH. Suicidal
ideation with
low intent**



**JoJo loves to
draw animé, she
has taught
herself
Japanese. She
loves dogs and
has a great
relationship
with her Dad**



**The story we tell about
a child is the story they
will tell about
themselves**

**Make sure they know
they're a good egg...**



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See
Strengths

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Get to the
WHY

Befriend
Autism

Clear
Communications

Anxiety First

I AM autistic... I HAD anorexia

- Identity first -

- Person first -



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Get to the
WHY

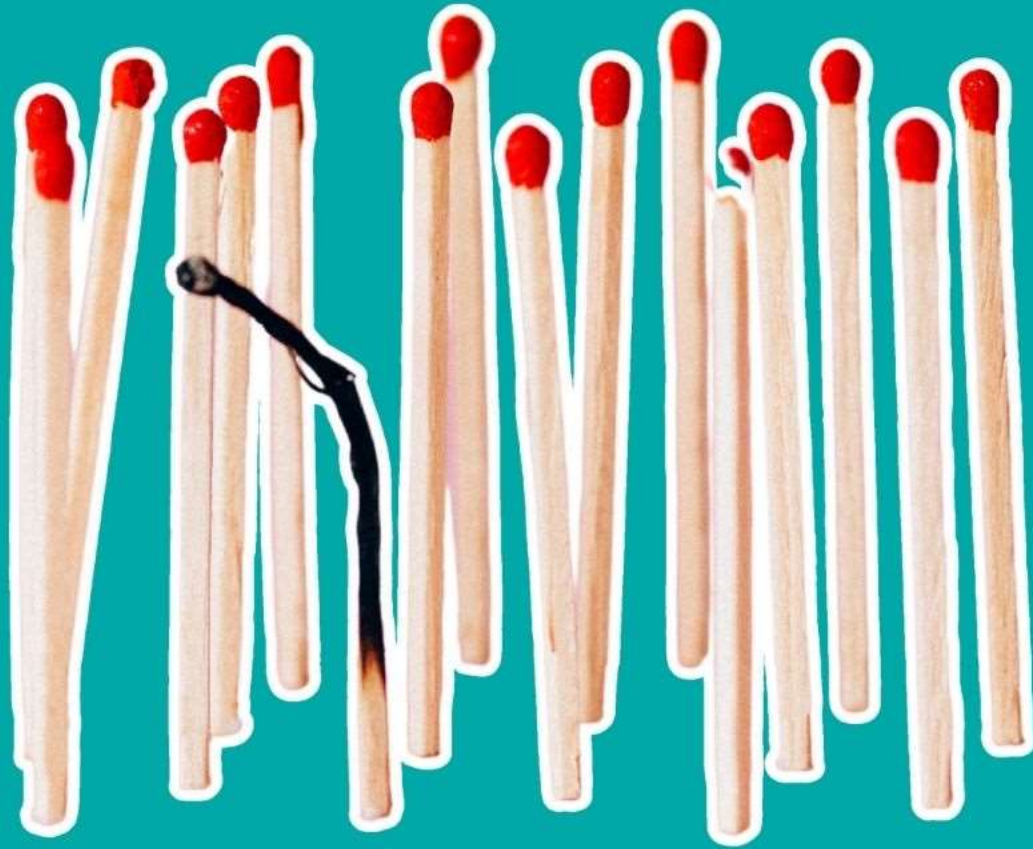
Befriend
Autism

Clear
Communications

Anxiety First

Self-Care &
Coping

Autism – SelfCare = Burnout





**What might self-care look like
for an autistic young person
with an eating disorder?**

Autistic Self-Care

Sleep

Unmask

Super senses

Reset &
regulate

Find their Tribe

Flow & Special
interests



Proactive
self-care
reduces
eating
disorder
relapse rates

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