

Anxiety and ASD and the Power of Preventative Breaks

Research has shown that more than 75% of all children with an ASD experience INTENSE anxious feelings. Today education is full of choices, open ended tasks and constant changes. For most students this makes learning interesting BUT for students with an ASD, ADHD, ODD, etc this creates many challenges and one of these is anxiety.



Anxiety can look like:

- Avoidance of new situations
- Preference for sameness
- Rigidity
- Insisting on same rules/routines
- Social withdrawal
- Anger
- Meltdowns
- Repetitive noise, movement or sentence



Excerpt from the **NEW**
'Teacher Assistants BIG BLUE
BOOK of Ideas' by Sue Larkey
& Anna Tulleman

What programmes can help manage anxiety?

- Emotional Education
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy see page 65
- Relaxation Therapy
- Sensory Integration Therapy see page 48



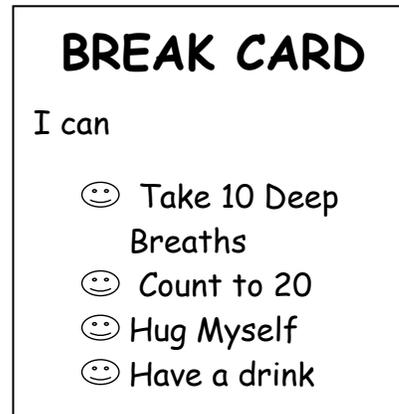
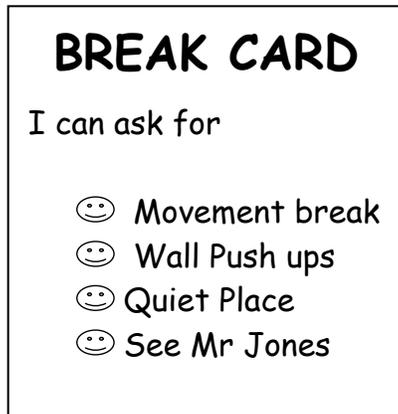
The POWER of Preventative BREAKS

- Students self regulating their anxiety is a VERY important part of their behaviour management programme
- A student being able to request a break before a meltdown is a fantastic strategy.
- You will need to teach them a range of strategies to calm themselves. When you are teaching them, you will begin to notice which ones are more effective at calming. You can then write social stories and use visual cards to help them remember what to do when they feel anxious.

Break Cards

Remember sometimes, when anxious, students have difficulty communicating effectively, this is why we use visual cards to request a break. You can use them in two ways:

- 1) The student requests the break
- 2) You give the student the card as you see anxiety rising



There are a range of strategies you can use for breaks and here are some to get you started:

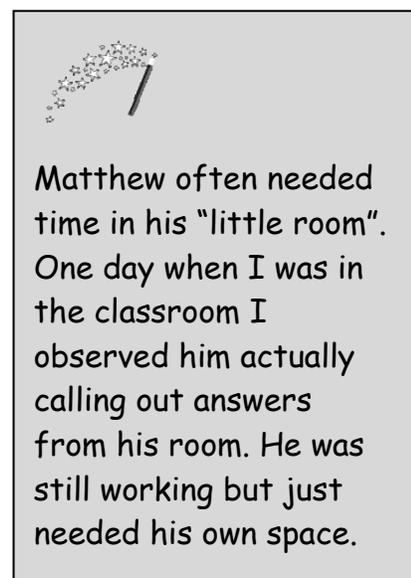
Sensory Breaks

Remember that some children become **hypo** aroused while others **hyper** aroused.

- Chewing (allowing to chew gum, chewy tube etc)
- Quiet area
- Listening to music
- Watching liquid timer
- Humming, rocking
- Sit under a table with blanket over it
- Carry heavy books, box
- Lying under a gym mat, weighted vest etc

Physical Breaks

- Mini trampoline
- Rolling on large exercise ball
- Star jumps, jumping
- Push up against wall
- Walk, run

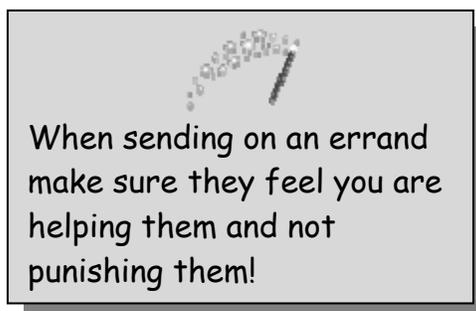


Relaxation Breaks

- Counting
- Breathing
- Music
- Imaginary world (some students escape into an imaginary world, this is particularly common for girls on the spectrum)

Non Threatening Withdrawal: Diversion before Meltdown

- Send on an errand
- Get them to do a job for you



Solitude Suggestions

- Safe haven
- Special interest time
- Book to read
- Sit away from group. For example: If you are on the mat, let them sit at a table away from the group or if you are doing group work and the room is noisy, send their group outside
- If you are lucky enough to have a small room off your classroom, create a space for them to work there

Other Strategies

- Toilet break, Drink and / or Food
- Talking to mentor
- Time breaks

Remember: All of this need to be practiced and taught.

You'll find more ideas on Levels of Anxiety and signs of meltdowns in: The Teacher Assistants Big RED Book pg. 35 - 38

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