

Understanding Mental Health and ASD

Recognising and exploring the relationship between ASD and mental health difficulties is vital, **so each can be addressed successfully.**

As Tony Attwood said *“people with Asperger’s Syndrome appear especially vulnerable to feeling depressed, with about one in three adolescents and two out of three adults with Asperger’s Syndrome having experienced at least one episode of severe depression in their life”.*

(Page 10 of Exploring Depression, and Beating the Blues by Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett).

I now stock a wide range of fantastic books which are invaluable sources to help **with both** understanding and recognition – as well as guide you to strategies to support both at school and at home.



Yenn Purkis has kindly shared some tips on Mental Health for Individuals with ASD. These tips are invaluable to read for people with ASD and those supporting them with Mental Health. (I have edited for the purpose of this newsletter but highly recommend Yenn’s (aka Jeanette) books for more information)

Mental health and Autism Tips for individuals on the Autism Spectrum

by Yenn Purkis (previously known as Jeanette Purkis)

UNDERSTANDING ALEXITHYMIA

Many people on the Autism Spectrum have ‘Alexithymia’. Also known as emotion blindness. Essentially this means that **they find it hard to understand what emotion they are experiencing.** They might know that they feel ‘bad’ or ‘scared’ but not be able to elaborate further than that. If you know anyone who experiences alexithymia, it can help for them to write down what they are feeling in their body, in other words what they feel like doing (such as ‘I feel like running away’ or ‘I want to get in bed and hide under the covers’) and relay these to their mental health worker.

GETTING A DIAGNOSIS

Although, mental illness and Autism are two separate entities they tend to impact dynamically on one another. People on the Autism Spectrum can experience all the same mental health conditions. However, **mental illnesses can present differently in those on the Autism Spectrum** which often can result in harmful misdiagnoses and inappropriate treatments.

STRATEGIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

Mental health crises** can be intense and overwhelming, sometimes resulting in self-injurious behaviour or extreme emotions. It is important to learn some strategies for managing a crisis when it happens. For example:

- 1 **DISTRACTION** is a very helpful technique for managing mental health symptoms and crises. Distraction involves focusing on an activity they enjoy in order to distract their mind from mental health distress. This is not a permanent fix and you may need to distract several times over the course of a day. Perhaps make a list of distractions that you have been found to be helpful and refer to this list when required.
- 2 **MINDFULNESS** and other related techniques can be very helpful. In essence, mindfulness involves viewing emotions and mental health distress as things which are fleeting. Mindfulness practice focuses on being aware of the present moment - not dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. There are some great apps too that can be very helpful to support mindfulness.

You can now complete a **“Mental Health First Aid Course” which provides specialised training for helping people in distress with mental health issues. MHFA can help you to recognise signs and symptoms quickly, respond to crisis situations, communicate better with distressed people, and find the right professional help.



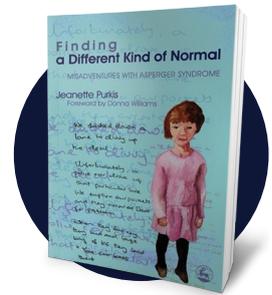
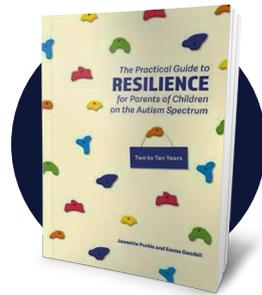
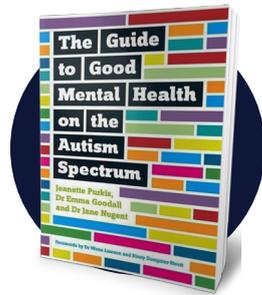
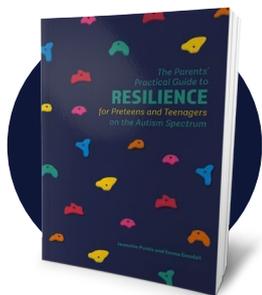
FINDING A PSYCHOLOGIST

The **most important thing you can do is find a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health worker**. This is a long term solution where this person will provide a number of solutions and strategies to dealing with tough times.

FINALLY REMEMBER

Many people have a mental health condition as well as Autism. While more needs to be done, understanding around Autism and mental illness is growing. You can find some more useful strategies for managing and supporting people with mental health issues in these great books.

- ✔ **The Guide to Good Mental Health on the Autism Spectrum** (Jeanette Purkis (aka Yenn), Dr Emma Goodall & Dr Jane Nugent), RRP \$39.95
- ✔ **The Parents' Practical Guide to Resilience for Preteens and Teens on the Autism Spectrum** (with Dr Emma Goodall) \$32.95.
- ✔ **The Practical Guide to Resilience for Parents of Autistic Children aged 2-10 years**, Jeanette Purkis (aka Yenn) & Dr. Emma Goodall \$32.95.
- ✔ **Finding a Different Kind of Normal: Misadventures with Asperger's Syndrome**, Jeanette Purkis (aka Yenn) \$39.95.



EXPLORING DEPRESSION AND BEATING THE BLUES

By Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett

This book is designed as a self-help manual with a range of activities for the creation of a positive and resilient self-identity. It is a great resource for teachers and parents to implement in the school and home.

The reasons people with Asperger's Syndrome become depressed are:

- Feeling rejected and not respected or valued by peers.
- Finding socialising mentally exhausting.
- Internalising and believing peer criticisms and torments.
- Focusing on errors and what could go wrong.
- Believing that change is aversive and unattainable.
- Not being able to cope with specific sensory experiences.

