

RELAXATION

CHARACTERISTICS OVERVIEW CHART

Verbal Skills	Grade Levels	Cognitive Level	Areas Addressed
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonverbal	<input type="checkbox"/> PK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classic	<input type="checkbox"/> (Pre)Academic/Cognitive/Academic
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mixed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Elementary	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Verbal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle/High	Functioning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Behavior
			<input type="checkbox"/> Communication/Speech
			<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Emotional

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Many behavior problems are commonly associated with severe stressors or anxiety. Thus, stressful situations severely magnify the difficulties caused by the characteristics of autism (AU). To deal with those challenging situations, various relaxation strategies may be implemented.

DESCRIPTION

Students with autism struggle to manage change and unpredictable situations because of poor adaptive functioning, which is typically manifested as a lack of social awareness, social understanding, and problem-solving skills. When students cannot manage stressful situations, they may experience tantrums, rage, and meltdowns.

Relaxation strategies help students with autism manage their internal or external stress and create more predictable environments. As a cognitive and behavioral approach, relaxation strategies help avoid these problem situations. Research suggests that the use of active, problem-focused coping strategies can be successful in helping individuals with autism adapt to their environment (Renty & Roeyers, 2007). Several strategies have been suggested to deal with emotionally difficult situations (Myles, 2005).

Antiseptic bouncing. A teacher can remove a student from the difficult situation. This strategy is different from the punishment known as timeout. For example, the teacher asks the student to go to

the library to get a book. During the time spent doing this errand, the student can relax or rethink the difficult situation. In this way, the student may calm and return ready to learn again.

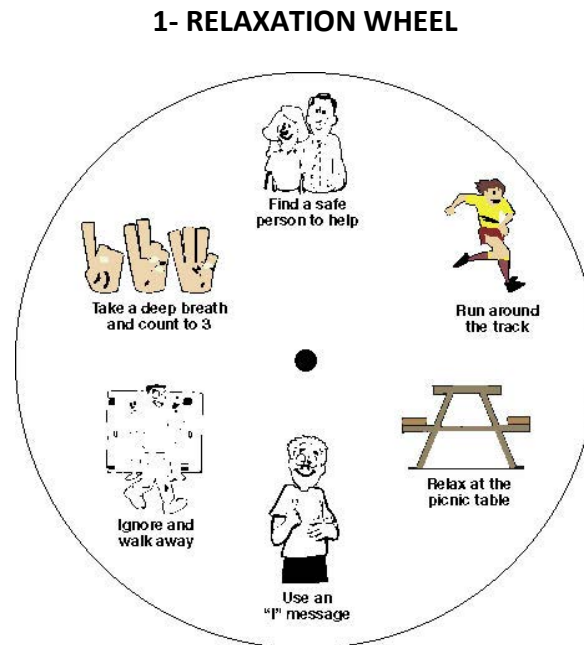
Support from routine. Unexpected changes often cause anxiety, especially for students with autism. Because of their predictability, structured environments have been acknowledged as an effective approach to teaching students with AU. Providing information about the routine can help the student predict and be prepared for the next situation or activity. Activity schedules or other visual supports are useful in providing information about the routine (see Rules and Routines).

Redirection. When a student is stuck on a task or challenging situation, the teacher may redirect the student's focus to something else. Drawing or cartooning about the situation can give the student an opportunity to rethink and understand the problem (see Drawing/Cartooning).

Home base. Home base is a place where students can escape from stress. Home base should be a quiet place, away from the problem situation. It is important to note that home base should be a positive place different from a time-out zone or any place used for punishment.

Self-calming. The teacher can teach simple strategies to release stress or to relax the body. Taking a deep breath or stretching arms can also help the student calm. In a regular routine, the teacher can remind the student of the strategy when the student is upset and seems to be very stressed.

The following visual shows relaxation options a student may choose from.

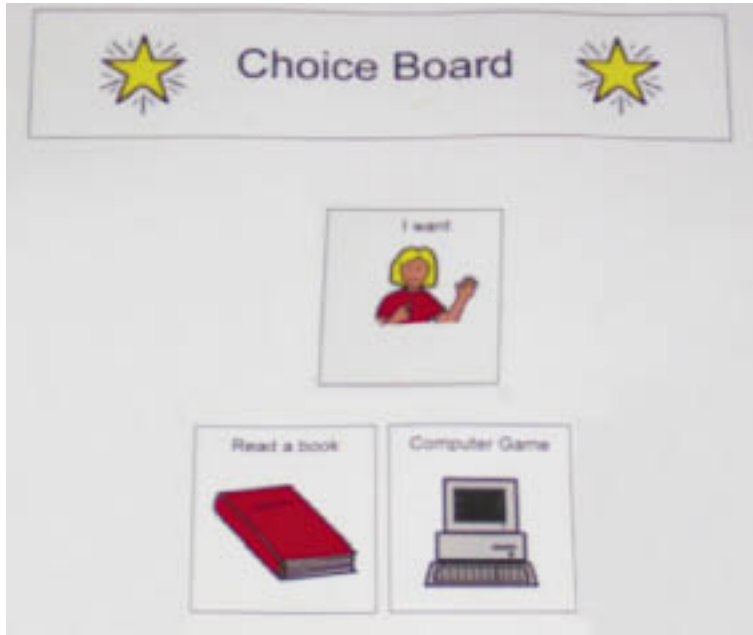


BRIEF EXAMPLE

Jonah, a 5-year-old with autism, has limited verbal language and communicates by pointing and using simple symbols, such as yes/no pictures. During free time, he usually roams the classroom without engaging in play with peers. Throughout the day, he engages in self-injurious behavior or throwing things.

Ms. Garcia performed a functional behavior assessment to identify the antecedent and the consequences of Jonah's behavior. She found that he almost always engaged in self-injurious behavior when given a difficult task to complete. Ms. Garcia decided to provide choice-making opportunities for Jonah when he was given a task. The appropriate choice response was defined as pointing to one of two pictures when the teacher presented a picture choice board (see below). Ms. Garcia also used verbal and physical prompts based on Jonah's response. When Jonah gave the appropriate response, he was given free time to walk around the room (a favored activity) for five minutes. After collecting data about the frequency of the target

behavior, Ms. Garcia was excited to see how Jonah’s self-injury behavior and throwing had decreased.



SUMMARY

Problem behaviors are often associated with various stressors experienced by students with AU. Relaxation strategies can be effective in alleviating students’ stress by providing options, including time for relaxation.

RESEARCH TABLE

Number of Studies	Ages (year)	Sample Size	Area(s) Addressed	Outcome
2	11-12	2	Relaxation, disruptive behavior	+

STUDIES CITED IN RESEARCH TABLE

1. Mullins, J. L., & Christian, L. A. (2001). The effects of progressive relaxation training on the disruptive behavior of a boy with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 22*, 449-462.
This study examined the effects of progressive relaxation training on the disruptive behaviors of a 12-year-old boy with autism. Results indicated that the boy acquired progressive relaxation skills, displayed more relaxed behaviors, and showed a decrease in disruptive behaviors.
2. Orr, T. J., Myles, B. S., & Carlson, J. K. (1998). The impact of rhythmic entrainment on a person with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Development Disabilities, 13*(3), 163-166. This study sought to teach an 11-year-old girl with autism to relax (defined as decreasing excessive movement and screaming) using metered music, also known as rhythmic entrainment (Hoffman, 1995). Following the use of music, the girl's negative behaviors decreased.

REFERENCES

- Hoffman, J. (1995). *Rhythmic medicine: Music with a purpose*. Leawood, KS: Jamillan Press.
- Mullins, J. L., & Christian, L. A. (2001). The effects of progressive relaxation training on the disruptive behavior of a boy with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 22*, 449-462.
- Myles, B. S. (2005). *Children and youth with Asperger Syndrome: Strategies for success in inclusive settings*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Orr, T. J., Myles, B. S., & Carlson, J. K. (1998). The impact of rhythmic entrainment on a person with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 13*(3), 163-166.
- Renty, J., & Roeyers, H. (2007). Individual and marital adaptation in men with autism spectrum disorder and their spouses: The role of social support and coping strategies. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 37*, 1247-1255.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Incredible 5-Point Scale: <http://www.5pointscale.com/>
This page includes links with additional ideas/suggestions for using the scale.
- Management of Surface Behavior:
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3934/is_200105/ai_n8946033/

This article provides extensive information and examples of how to cope with surface behaviors.

- Buron, K. D., & Curtis, M. (2003). *The Incredible 5-Point Scale: Assisting students with autism spectrum disorders in understanding social interactions and controlling their emotional responses*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- Endow, J. (2009). *Outsmarting explosive behavior: A visual system of support*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- Gagnon, E. (2001). *The power card strategy: Using special interests to motivate children and youth with Asperger Syndrome*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.
- Groden, J., & LeVasseur, P. (1995). Cognitive picture rehearsal: A system to teach self-control. In K. Quill (Ed.), *Teaching children with autism* (pp. 287-306). New York: Delmar Publishers.
- Groden, J., Cantela, J., Prince, S., & Berryman, J. (1994). The impact of stress and anxiety on individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. In E. Schopler & G. B. Mesibov (Eds.), *Behavioural issues in autism* (pp. 132-145). New York: Plenum.
- Myles, B. S., & Southwick, J. (2005). *Asperger Syndrome and difficult moments: Practical solutions for tantrums, rage, and meltdowns* (2nd ed.). Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

GENERAL RESOURCES

- Autism Internet Modules (AIM) www.autisminternetmodules.org. The Autism Internet Modules were developed with one aim in mind: to make comprehensive, up-to-date, and usable information on autism accessible and applicable to educators, other professionals, and families who support individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Written by experts from across the U.S., all online modules are free, and are designed to promote understanding of, respect for, and equality of persons with ASD.
- The Autism Web Course: http://cdd.unm.edu/swan/autism_course/about/index.htm. This web course was developed out of materials from the Interactive Collaborative Autism Network (ICAN). The Autism Programs at the University of New Mexico has updated and added information to this web course.
 - Characteristics
 - Assessment
 - Academic Interventions
 - Behavioral Interventions
 - Communication Interventions
 - Environmental Interventions
 - Social Interventions
 - Family Support Suggestions

- Indiana Resource Center for Autism (IRCA)
<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/fmain1.html>. The Indiana Resource Center for Autism staff's efforts are focused on providing communities, organizations, agencies, and families with the knowledge and skills to support children and adults in typical early intervention, school, community, work, and home settings.
 - IRCA Articles: <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/index.php?pageId=273>

- Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism www.txautism.net. The Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism in conjunction with the network of Texas Education Service center with a grant from the Texas Education Agency has developed a series of free online courses in autism. Please check the training page, www.txautism.net/training.html, for update lists of courses, course numbers and registration information. Current courses include the following:
 - Asperger Syndrome 101
 - Augmentative and Alternative Communication and the Autism Spectrum
 - Autism for the General Education Teacher
 - Autism 101: Top Ten Pieces to the Puzzle
 - Classroom Organization: The Power of Structure for Individuals with ASD
 - Communication: The Power of Communication for Individuals with ASD
 - Futures Planning for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Navigating the Social Maze: Supports and Interventions for Individuals with ASD
 - Solving the Behavior Puzzle: Making Connections for Individuals with ASD