



Adapting **cognitive
behaviour therapy
(CBT)** for Autistic
people



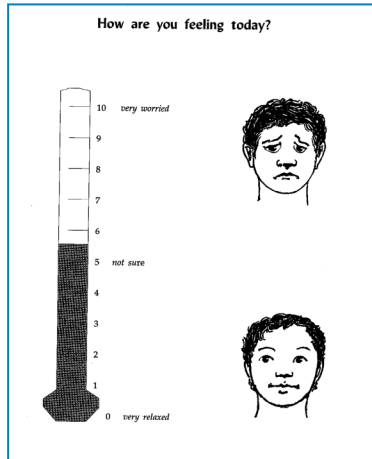
aspect
Autism Spectrum Australia

Visual supports

Typically, individuals on the autism spectrum have difficulties with identifying and reporting their own emotions. It is important that students/participants accessing cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) are provided visual supports to help them understand CBT concepts and to serve as prompts to elicit information.

Visual support	Example
<p>Present a range of emotions visually and ask, <i>Which one of these might you be feeling?</i> Alternatively, ask the individual to type, write or draw their answers.</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div data-bbox="517 486 794 976"> </div> <div data-bbox="954 497 1318 954"> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Understanding emotions, Hill (2009)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Visual support to prompt choice of emotion, Rapee et al. (2000)</i></p>
<p>Use body outlines to support identification of physical signs of emotion and anxiety</p>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div data-bbox="549 1095 740 1464"> </div> <div data-bbox="970 1099 1289 1480"> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Body outline</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The SAS visual support for physiological anxiety symptoms</i></p>
<p>Use record sheets to promote identification of situation, thoughts and body signs.</p>	<div data-bbox="517 1588 815 2042"> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>My Body & My Worries template – Cool Kids Child Anxiety Program: Autism adaption (2011)</i></p>

Teach using visual rating scales to estimate emotion intensity



Feelings rating scale, Rapee et al. (2000)

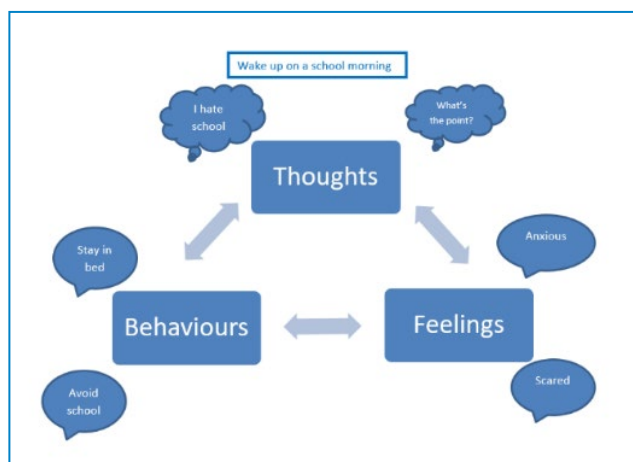


Feelings Strength Bar – Westmead Feelings Program, Ratcliffe et al. (2017)

Explicit teaching of emotion words and expressions

SAS visual activity on degrees of emotion

Provide visual descriptions of unhelpful thinking that can lead to anxious thoughts



Visual support for the cycle of anxiety

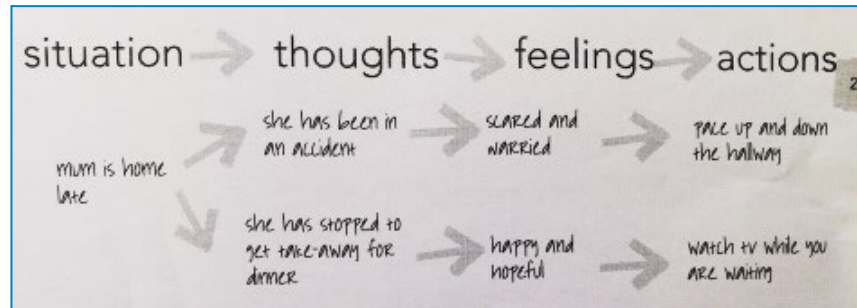
Explicit teaching of emotion words and expressions

2. When I felt upset, these thoughts raced through my head:



Thought bubble template to prompt thoughts

Provide visual descriptions of unhelpful thinking that can lead to anxious thoughts

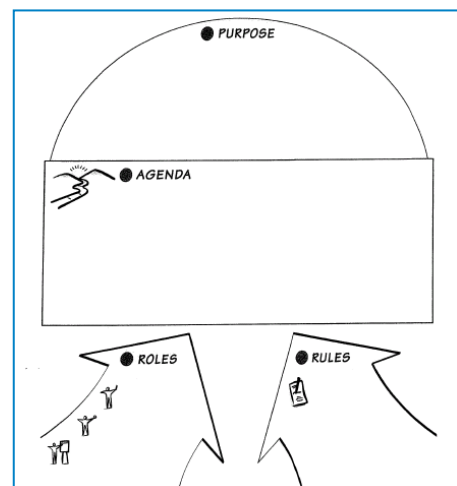


Thoughts and feelings visual support – Chilled the Cool Kids Anxiety Program – Adolescent workbook, Lyneham et al. (2006)

Embed structure into a CBT program

The purpose of including structure into a CBT program is so expectations are clear, the session is predictable and the sequence of activities is understood.

- Use session outlines, structured worksheets, workbooks to make clear the expectations of a session.
- Incorporate a visual agenda for the session.



Session plan template

Flexible program delivery

It is important that CBT sessions:

- are scaffolded and use visual supports to make concepts more concrete
- revisit CBT concepts as needed
- include in the CBT program role plays and practice in real-life situations
- involve parents/carers in all aspects of CBT program; provide parents/carers tip sheets to support CBT strategies and home practice between sessions
- involve peers for opportunities to generalise skills
- repeat tasks engaged in during a session in the home
- offer additional booster sessions
- extend CBT therapy over a longer period of time to aid generalisation (such as 6 months versus 12 weeks).

Manualised CBT programs for individuals on the autism spectrum

There are several autism-specific manualised cognitive behavioural programs including:

[Secret Agent Society \(SAS\)](#)

[Cool Little Kids](#)

[Cool Kids ASA](#)

[Chilled Out](#)