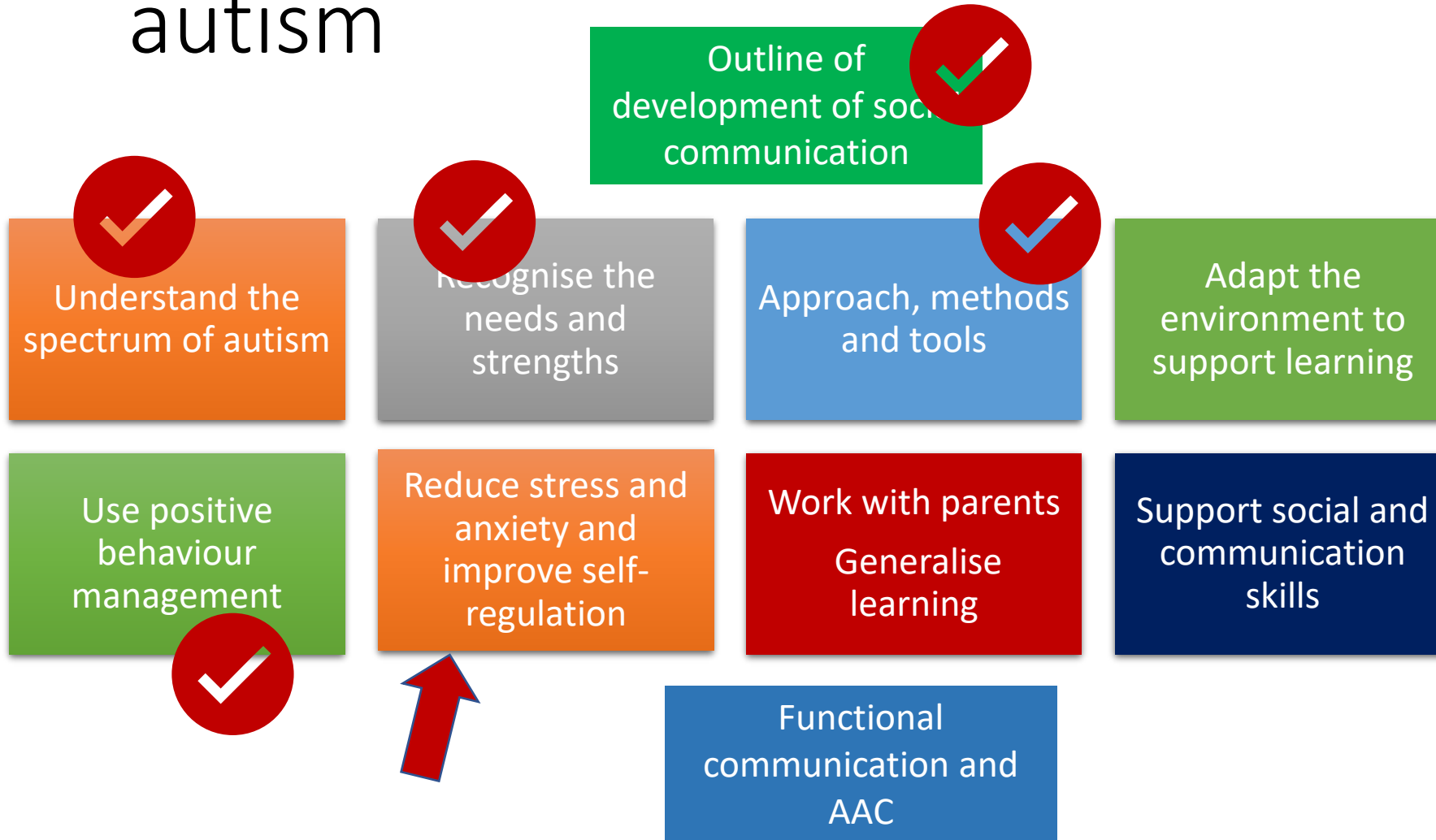


Supporting stress,  
anxiety and self-  
regulation



# Components of educating children with autism



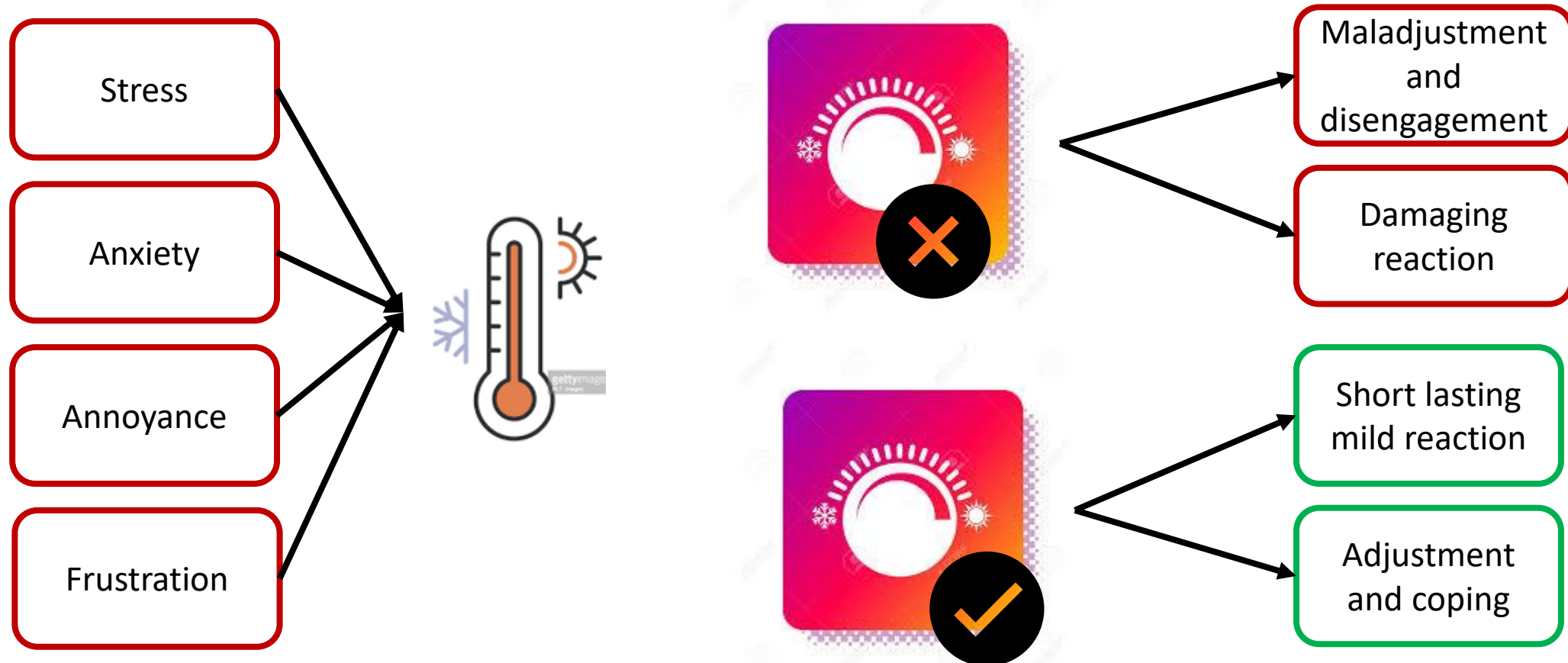
# What needs to be done – a framework

Area:		
Dimension	What needs to be done?	How?
✓ Attitude and expectations		
✓ Competencies		
✓ Resources and Preparation		
✓ System and processes		
✓ Parental involvement and collaboration		
✓ Review		



Stress and anxiety in children is a major hindrance in learning, and is often the underlying reason of difficult behaviour.

# Stress, self-regulation and adjustment



# What does stress and anxiety in children look like?

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Meltdowns or emotional outbursts

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Avoid or withdraw from social situations

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Increased obsessions and rituals

---

Increased stimming

---

Increased insistence on routines

---

Hurt themselves

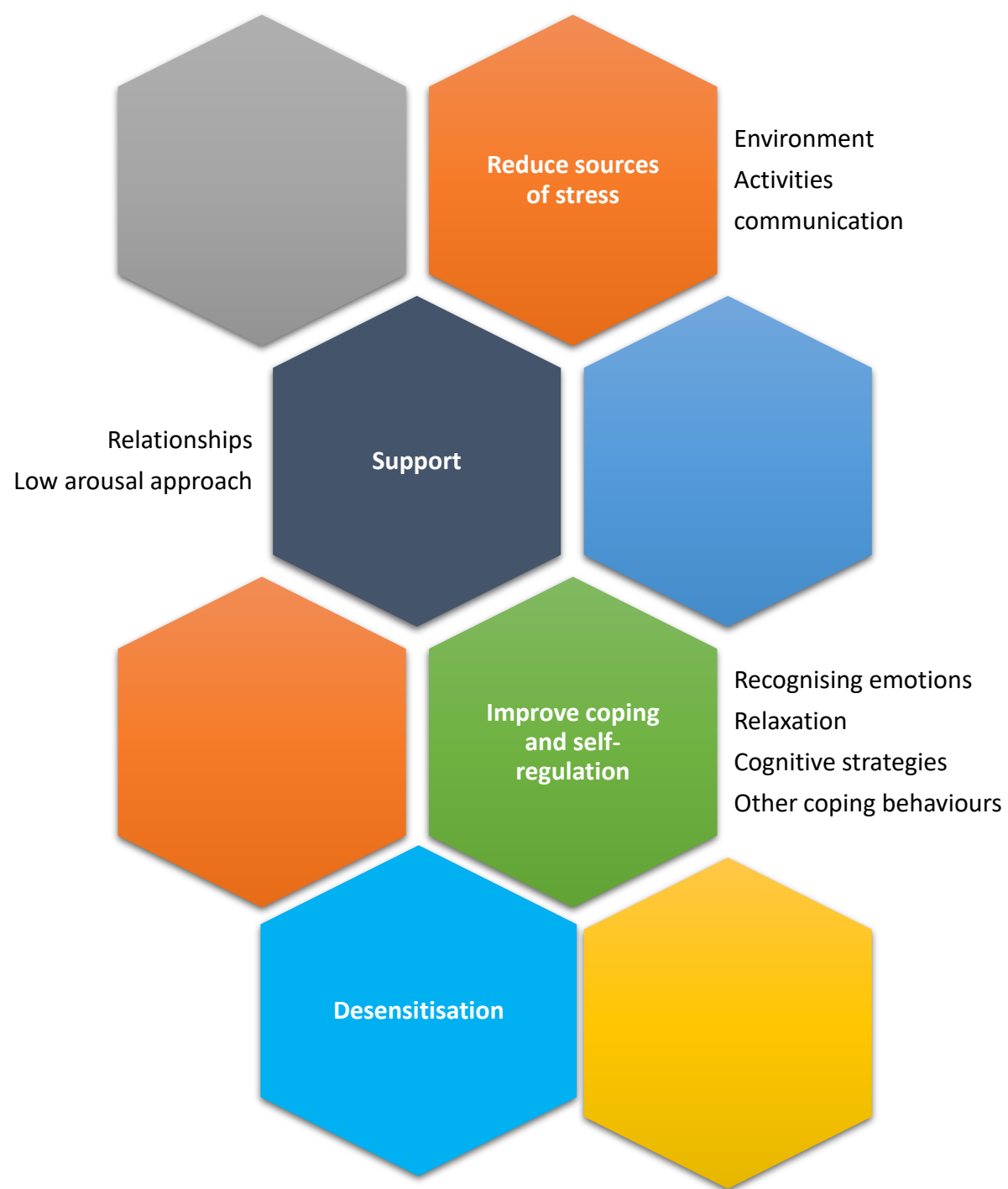
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Have more trouble sleeping

# What causes stress and anxiety?



# Components of a stress reduction strategy





Remove/reduce the sources of stress- the environment

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As discussed in “Adapting the environment to support learning”.

Remove/reduce the source of stress - activities

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**If a specific activity creates anxiety** (e.g., assembly, the playground, participation in a trip or a play)

limit the amount of time, and gradually increase it over several weeks.

---

It is worth considering the purpose of the activity and if it can be achieved through an alternative activity.

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# Remove/reduce the source of stress - activities

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## **If the student becomes anxious in certain subjects:**

- differentiate the work to reduce the demands placed on the student.
- Use a differentiated timetable to give extra time and support for that subject.

## **If homework is causing anxiety**

- reduce the expectations, give more time and consider the purpose of the activity and if it can be achieved through an alternative activity.

# Remove/reduce the source of stress - activities

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## **If social interactions are a source of anxiety for the student**

- Limit the amount of group work; alternate with quiet time.
- Remember that if the student has participated in group work in the class, he/she may need quiet alone time at Break or Lunch to calm down.

# Creating supportive environments – examples

**If the child becomes distressed at some activity and tries to get out of it.**

- Use a **visual timer** to show the student you only expect participation in that activity for that much time, and then very gradually increase this time each day.
- Remember that even this gradual approach will slightly increase anxiety so always follow with a favourite activity to assist the student to calm down.

# Creating supportive environments – examples

**If the child becomes very anxious in busy corridors and has been reported to push and hit other pupils.**

- Allow the child to come or to leave class 2 minutes early when corridors are quiet.

**If the student puts hands over ears and cries when teacher raises voice.**

- Ensure silence in classroom before giving instructions; indicate use visual signal rather than raising voice.

# Creating supportive environments – examples

**If the child spends break-time standing alone in a corner of the playground and screams if other children come too close.**

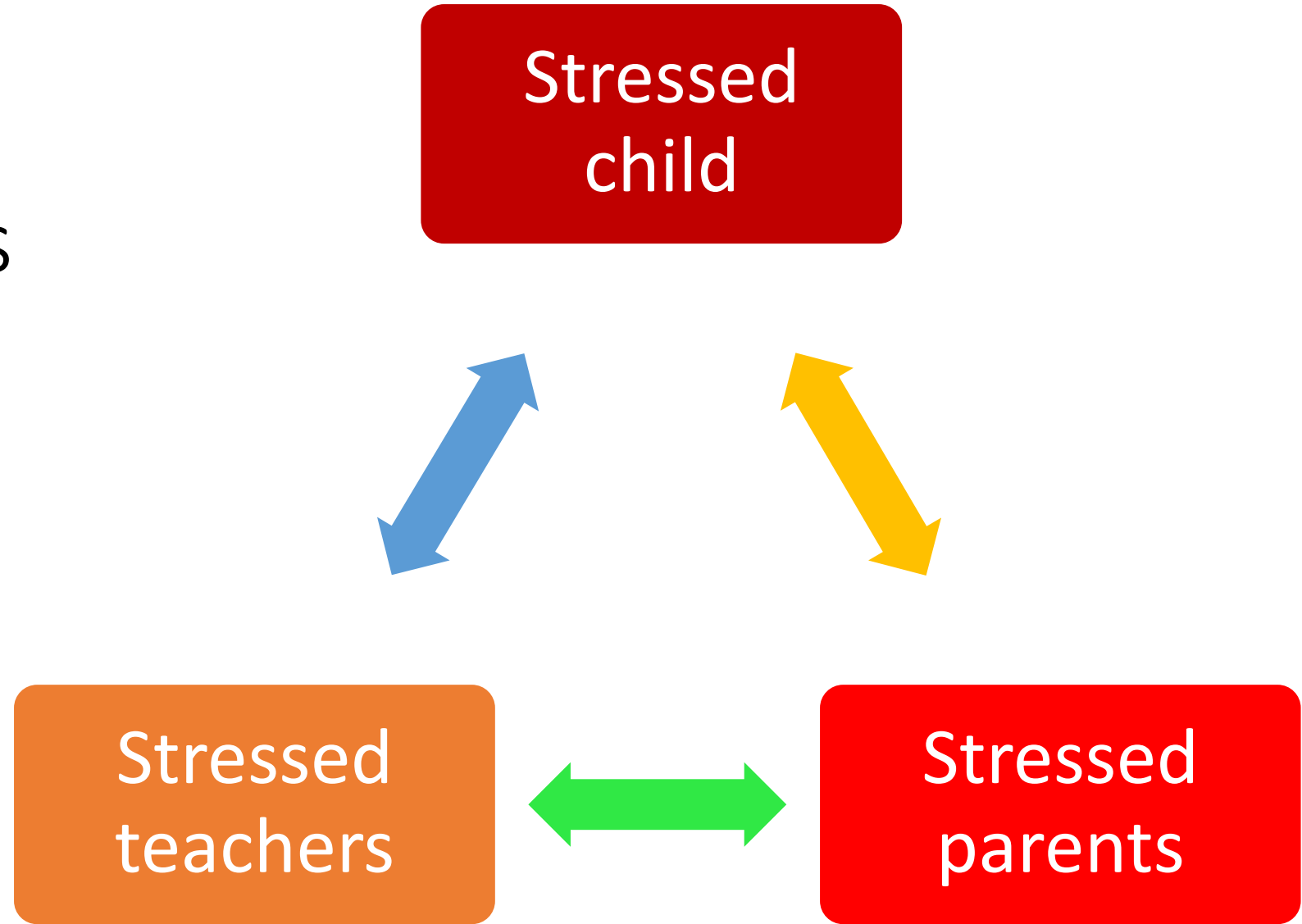
- Section off an area of the playground and limit the number allowed in this area but ensure this student is included; provide non-contact games in this area.

# The role of communication

- communicating feelings, desires and needs
- understanding others communicative cues
- understanding and responding to instructions and requests
- participating in activities



Stressful relationships



# How do we deal with a crisis situation?

The four key areas of the LA approach are:

- (a) reducing demands and requests in a crisis;
- (b) the adoption of verbal and non-verbal strategies that avoid potentially arousing triggers
- (c) the exploration of staff beliefs about the short-term management of challenging behaviours;
- (d) the provision of emotional support to staff working with challenging individuals.

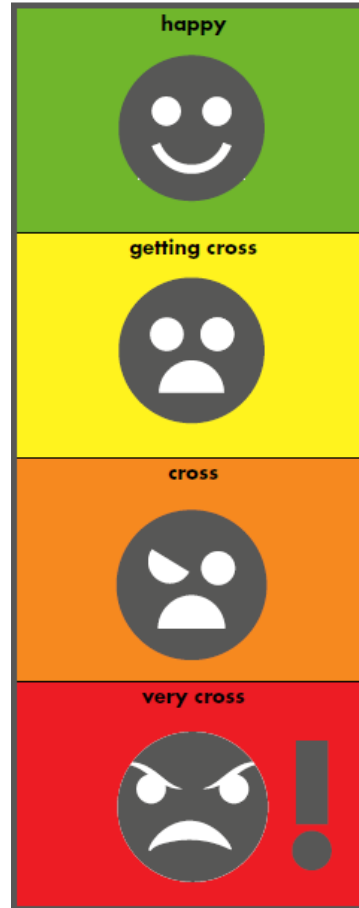
# Improving coping and building self-regulation

Children can be helped in building self regulation and cope with stressful situations.

It takes time practise and support but it can be done.





It begins with helping them understanding their emotions, learn the right responses and regulate their behaviour.

# Recognising and communicating emotions

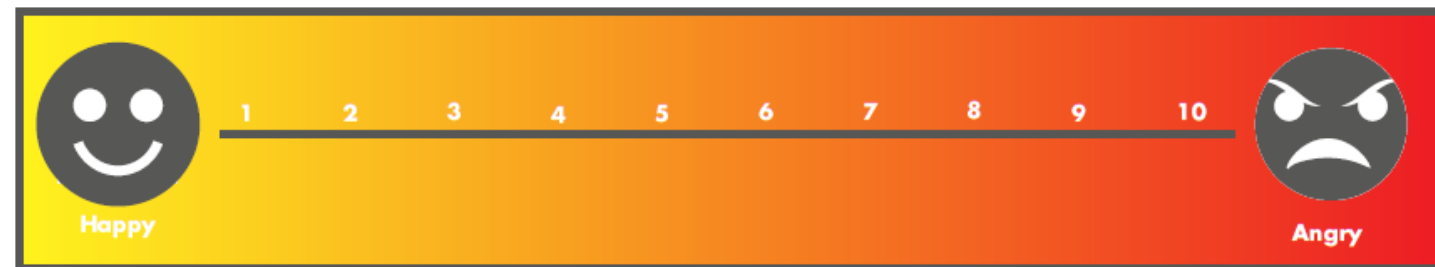
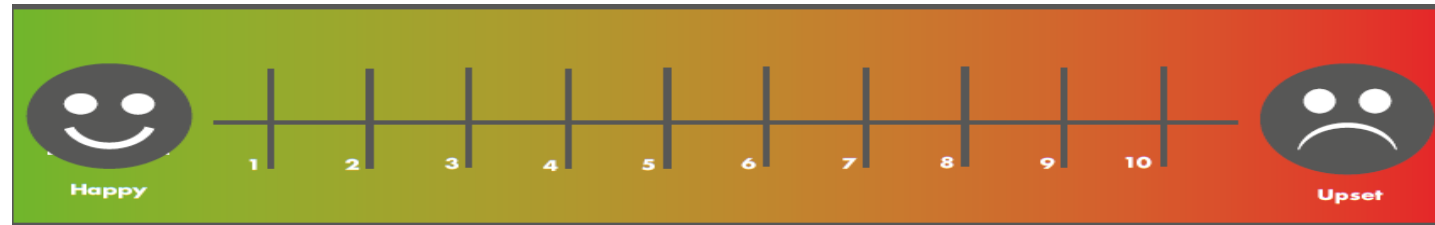


# Recognising emotions: emotion cards

- Ask/observe situations that make them feel specific emotional levels.
- Show pictures or point out in situations how they feel.
- Make cards:
  - I feel happy: picture or icon
  - I feel upset: picture or icon
- Use the cards with the child to ensure understanding

Emotional Level	I feel this way when...
 feeling good	
 a little upset	
 upset	
 very upset	

# Recognising emotions – sliding scales



# Recognising emotions – sliding scales

How do I feel?



# Recognising emotions – sliding scales

Rating	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
	Swearing Breaking stuff clenching teeth Wide-eyed	I have to break something Feels like I need to leave Like I will explode.	Help me leave Take a walk with me
	Swearing	Mad	Leave the room with permission to go to a safe place
	Not talking Pacing A little swearing	Upset	Go get a drink
	Not happy Keeping to self Still interacting with others	?	Talk to a safe person Use deep breathing
	None?	None?	Talk to a safe person Use deep breathing



# Relaxation / coping activities

- Identify a suitable strategy: what to do, when and where
- Role play
- Practice in natural settings
- Create rewards: motivational interesting activity, golden time



Taking deep breaths



Counting to 20



Asking for help



Talking to a friend



Thinking of a compromise



Walking away



Letting it go



Thinking of something that makes the learner

# Relaxation activities

- Physical activity
  - running around the yard five times
  - doing 50 jumps on the trampoline
- Sensory activity
  - going to a quiet part of the house.
  - Listening to music
  - Fidget objects e.g. blu tac, textured ball, paperclip, coins
  - Resistance items e.g. stress ball
  - Weighted items e.g. weighted lap cushion, weighted belt, weighted blanket
- Preferred interest
  - looking at a collection of favourite or special things: bubble tube, fiberoptic lights
  - reading a favourite book
- Mindful activity
  - Deep breathing
  - closing eyes for a few moments

# Calm breaks

Calm breaks are a way of ensuring the student stays regulated throughout the day.

- **Introduce calm breaks at regular intervals** throughout the student's day and include on the timetable/visual schedule. This will then assist the student in coping more effectively with challenges as he/she will be in a calmer state when approaching activities.
- The following tips are useful when establishing calm breaks:
  - When used as a proactive strategy, calm breaks should be a consistent part of the student's daily routine and should be given even when the student is having a 'good' day.
  - Identify the potential trigger points for the student's anxiety and schedule calm breaks **before** these trigger points. **Do not wait until the student is in a heightened state of anxiety.**
  - Calm breaks can also be scheduled for times **after** an activity which you know will be challenging for the student to allow them time to calm down and regulate.

# Calm breaks

- Calm breaks are not a 'reward' and therefore should not be used as a contingent which can be removed the student. The student will need calm breaks even more on a challenging day.
- Students with adequate self-awareness who can self-regulate, can request calm breaks when they require them, rather than being scheduled for them. These students will need to have insight into what anxiety feels like and relate this to a need for a break.
- The frequency and duration of calm breaks will be dependent upon the individual needs of the student. The key factor is to be flexible as some days the student will require more breaks and longer breaks than on other days.

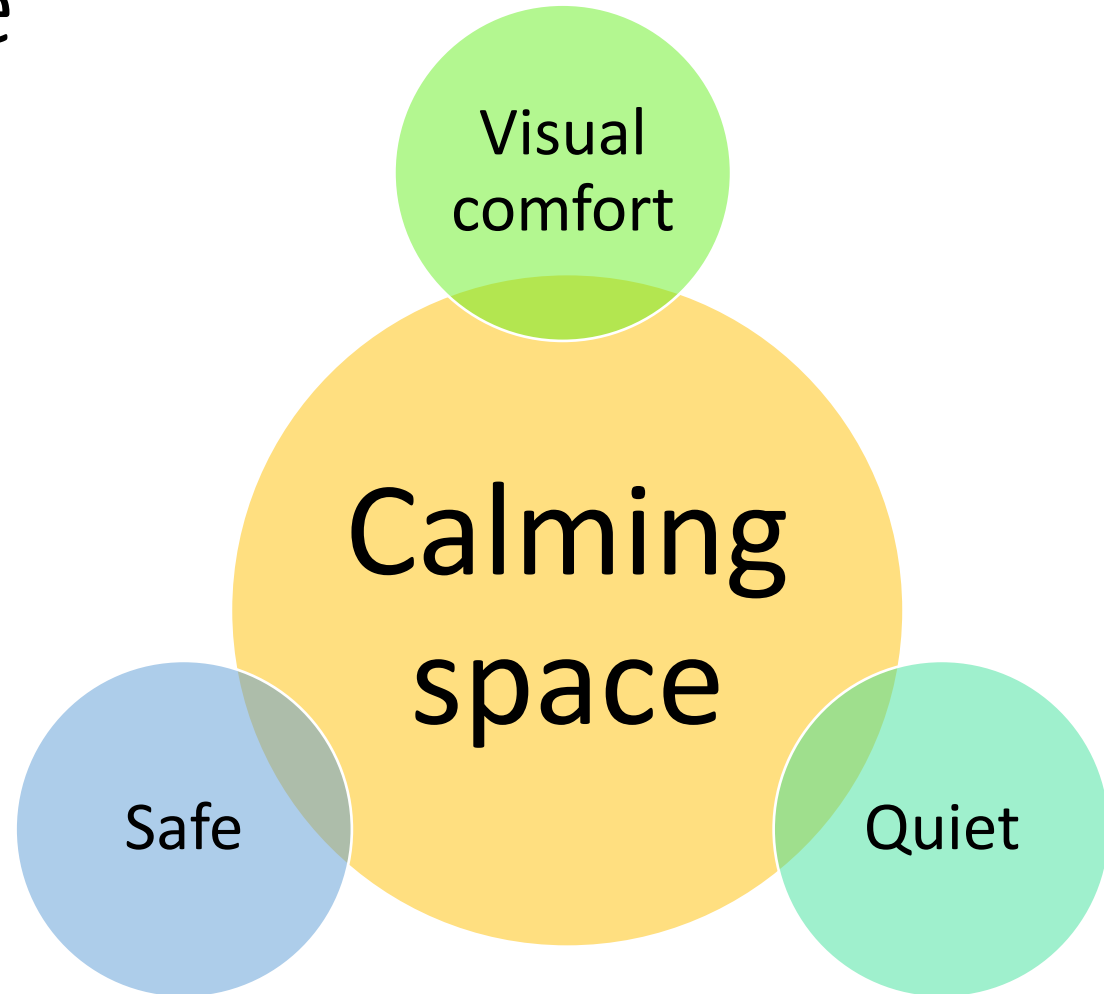
# Access to calm breaks

- **Calm tokens:** the student can use a calm token to request a calm break. The number of tokens available to the student each day can be limited but ensure an adequate number is provided to meet his/her needs and increase the number of tokens available on more challenging days.
- **Self-regulation prompt cards:** The student can be given a card with options for calming activities to remind him/her what to do when feeling anxious.

# The quiet/calm space

On occasion some pupils will need to access an area entirely free from distractions or sensory input, at other times they may need sensory input (e.g. movement or deep pressure) from items such as therapy balls or tactile toys or weighted blankets. The space can be:

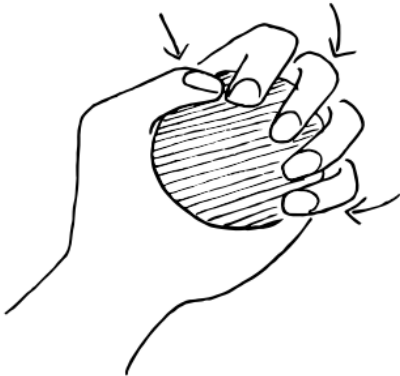
- A room specifically allocated as a calm room
- A screened off corner of a classroom



# My relaxation book

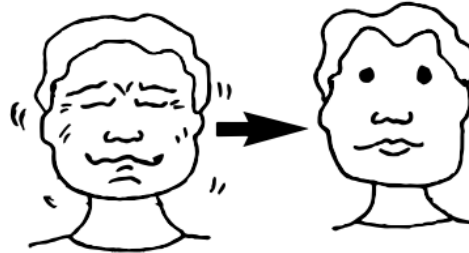
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1. Hold the ball and squeeze tightly.



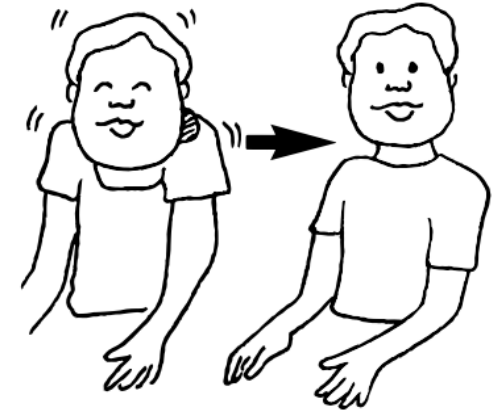
Now let go; relax.

2. Make a "monster" face.



Now let go; relax.

3. Squeeze the ball with your shoulders.

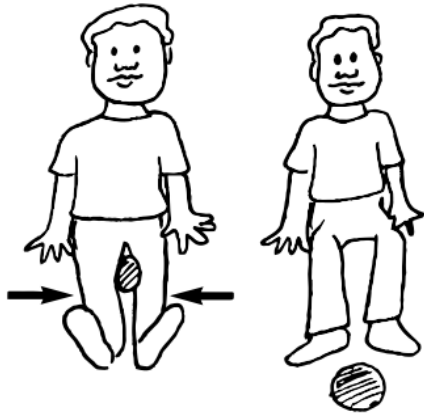


Now let go; relax.

# My relaxation book

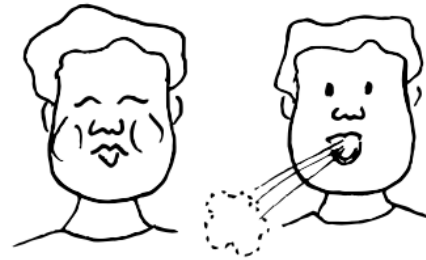
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4. Squeeze the ball with your knees.



Now let go; relax.

5. Now hold your breath.



Blow out and relax...

6. Now you are nice and relaxed.





# Cognitive picture rehearsal

A way of understanding a situation and learning a response.

Identify what you want to teach the pupil to do) e.g. breathe and relax

Create the specific cognitive rehearsal scene (written script)

build in positive reinforcers which are based on the pupil's interests

Provide plenty of opportunities to practice the skill/behaviour

## Sometimes the routine changes

For example, insert image of pupils timetable



## I'm fine

insert image of emoticon or of pupil looking calm



## I breathe in deeply, count to 3, breathe out slowly and relax










Insert image of pupil breathing deeply or other eg:



## Then I listen to my music for 5 minutes (1 song)



# Cognitive picture rehearsal

<b>1 At the end of the day I get my bag</b> (insert picture of pupil's bag in location stored, photo of school bag or other image as shown)	
<b>2 I take a deep breath</b> (Insert image of pupil breathing deeply or other)	
<b>3 I put on my coat</b> (Insert image of pupil's coat, pupil putting on coat or a generic image of someone putting on a coat)	
<b>4 I take a deep breath</b> (Insert image of pupil breathing deeply or other)	
<b>5 I line up for the bus</b>	
<b>6 I take a deep breath</b> (Insert image of pupil breathing deeply or other)	
<b>7 I get on the bus</b>	
<b>8 I take a deep breath</b> (Insert image of pupil breathing deeply or other)	
<b>9 Mum or dad are there to meet me</b>	

# Cognitive picture rehearsal

- Ensure that each time the strategy is successfully implemented the pupil receives immediate reinforcement
- Introduce and practice in a positive and safe environment, so that the pupil builds confidence and skills in using it before applying it to the difficult situation

# Allowing the individual to deploy their coping mechanisms

- Giving time and space to individuals to deploy preferred **cop**ing mechanisms.
- This may seem counter-intuitive, especially as it may involve 'allowing' a person to engage in periods of repetitive behaviour, but is based on an understanding of how the individual may use such behaviour to enter 'flow states' that are associated with decreased arousal and reduced measurable, physiological indicators of stress (such as heart rate).

# Desensitisation

- Desensitisation is a way of very gradually introducing the student to the source of their anxiety and increasing their tolerance of it, for example:
- Gradually increasing the time the student spends in the environment/activity which causes anxiety e.g. playground, dining hall, Assembly, messy play activities. Use a visual timer and very gradually increase the time over several weeks or months.
- Allow the student to wear ear defenders, headphones or ear plugs in noisy environments, but ensure the student removes these for the last minute in the environment, and then the last two minutes, the last three minutes etc, and gradually work backwards until he/she can tolerate the full required time in the noisy environment.
- When using desensitisation methods, always monitor the student's reaction and stop the activity if he/she is showing signs of distress. Ensure the student has a way of communicating anxiety and then follow with a calming activity.

## Stress Reduction Plan

Area of concern	Consider including the following in the daily routine of the child
<b>Difficulty in communicating needs and feelings</b>	
<b>1. Can the child convey needs and anything upsetting him/her?</b>	If not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organise use of appropriate means of communication, such as using gestures/signs or pictures.</li> <li>- Help the child learn to use these means to express needs and feelings.</li> <li>- Teach the child a way of asking for help and make sure that all around the child understand that method -practise it.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Does the child understand what others say to him/her?</b>	If not: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use gestures and expressions to help the child understand.</li> <li>- Keep your language quite simple.</li> <li>- Use short sentences and divide an instruction in small chunks.</li> <li>- Use signs/gestures and/or pictures.</li> </ul>
<b>Sensory difficulties</b>	
<b>Does the child become upset or anxious due to noise, light, touch or crowd?</b>	If yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Turn off or cover fluorescent lights when possible</li> <li>- Minimise noise by speaking in a softer voice, turning down the volume for the radio or TV.</li> <li>- Avoid using loud noises, such as shouting, clapping or whistling, to get the child's attention.</li> <li>- If the noise cannot be reduced, consider using earmuffs or headphones to reduce the sound perceived by the child.</li> <li>- Give the child experience of handling and playing with different textures, for example, mixing dough, making sandcastles, counting beans or hand-painting to get used to multiple simultaneous sensations</li> </ul>
<b>Fears and anxieties</b>	
<b>Does the child become angry and upset by new things, situations, or people?</b>	If yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gradually supported exposure and preparation is the key to reducing the impact of the child's fears and anxieties, for example, in a safe environment, when the child is with the mother or a known carer, first using a picture of the fear generating situation and talking about it.</li> <li>- Introducing the child to the new place, one step at a time, for example, first showing the picture of the place, then just going to see the outside of the area and then going in briefly may help the child overcome the fear.</li> <li>- First showing the child the fear inducing things from a distance and then supporting the child by reassuring.</li> <li>- Using something to distract the child in such situations may help; the distractor must be something that the child likes, like a squeezey ball or a picture book or a toy that the child likes.</li> <li>- Giving child some time and space to get over the stress.</li> </ul>
<b>Making change tolerable by increasing predicatibility</b>	
<b>Does the child get upset or anxious by</b>	If yes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepare your child for any change in the situation by using pictures in a sequence to show the child what to expect</li> </ul>

# A Stress reduction plan

<b>change of situation?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating routines so that the situations become predictable for the child</li> <li>- Explaining to the child what is going to happen next or after some time. Using activities such as counting to five or clapping hands to indicate change and practising these activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Attention and activity level</b>	
<b>Does the child find it hard to pay attention? Is the child overactive?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do regular and varied fun physical activities with the child, such as running, jumping, moving stuff, lifting weight, and playing on swings.</li> <li>- For a child who dislikes physical activities, starting with a brief fun routine of a chasing or ball game, and gradually increasing the time, may help.</li> <li>- For a child who finds it difficult to sit still, start with doing an activity that the child likes initially for a brief period, such as looking at a picture book, keeping the general tone and environment calm. Gradually increase the time; reward and praise the child for every increase of a minute.</li> </ul>
<b>General calming measures</b>	
<b>General stress-reducing measure for all children with autism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Help the child learn to relax by practising calming routines, such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Slowly counting to 10</li> <li>o Taking five long breaths</li> <li>o Listening to music</li> <li>o Taking short breaks from activities</li> <li>o Lying down and relaxing the whole body</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Reduce the impact of stress on the child by:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Getting the child to do regular physical exercise for at least 30 minutes a day</li> <li>o Making a calming sleeping routine: avoiding exciting activities before bedtime, avoiding mobiles/TV before falling asleep, reading a book or listening to some calming music</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# A stress reduction plan

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**EmPOWER for Autism page (Hindi and English)**

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Your child's Profile



The stress reduction plan



Creating a suitable learning environment

