

Dr. Tony Attwood on Covid-19, Autism and Anxiety

3/25/2020

Anxiety:

Anxiety is contagious, family to be calm, confident and optimistic

News reports; Doom and gloom and the ‘killer’ virus, number of people killed by the virus is rising, yet to reach the peak

‘Feel the pain’ of the world

Autism:

Fear of uncertainty – we are experiencing uncertain times

Increase in the signs of ASD- many of the characteristics of autism are coping mechanisms for anxiety

Sensory sensitivity

Social withdrawal

Routines and rituals

Increased engagement in the special interest – Thought blocker

Intense anxiety:

Parents:

Stay calm

Validate feelings: “I can see you are really upset”

Explain that the intense anxiety will go and then we can do something that you really enjoy

Do not ask why the child is so distressed. There will be a lack of eloquence, coherence and sequence in any attempt to explain why he/she is so distressed. The child needs to move away from the distress, not return to when it began.

If the child is being unreasonable, then reason will be ineffective.

Consider a pleasurable distraction or ‘thought blocker’ perhaps engagement in a special interest together.

Praise and encourage with gratitude being calmer

Information:

Social Stories by Carol Grey and Siobhan Timmins on the Internet

Carol: *My Story about Pandemics and Coronavirus*

Siobhan: *Learning about the Corona Virus*

Information informative, reassuring, practical

YouTube: Peter Vermeulen: *Corona, autism, uncertainty* - video

Honest and age appropriate with the information

Teach by example and demonstration

Risk categories: children and adolescents at less risk in the general population

Autism medical factors: difficulty perceiving low level illness signs, need to check body temperature for objective information

Corona virus will end, it is just that we do not know exactly when

To be aware of:

Explaining temporary changes in daily life and how to accommodate change -
Autism associated with difficulty coping with change

Changes in daily routine, not going to school, seems like a holiday but you can't do what you like to do in a holiday – cinema, theme parks, McDonalds

Not seeing grandparents and family gatherings and outings

New timetable for the weekday

More free time, but not more Minecraft time

Concern for elderly relatives and their vulnerability and mortality

Conflict within the family from being cooped up

Strategies:

Exercise and yoga/meditation

Continue therapy sessions via Skype or Zoom if possible -

Adults with autism: Have to do something, not shopping and hoarding but de-cluttering the attic or basement, order out of chaos

Watch the news once a day – not continuous 24-hour news

Life now more autism friendly, no touching and hugs on greeting and no crowds

Vaccines are being developed by scientists, many of whom have autism, they will save lives