

# Can Autism hike?

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● See video: What is Autism



# Why Autism *doesn't* hike?

What if...I haven't  
planned  
everything?

Responsibility

What if... someone  
get hurts?

Safety

What if...autism  
can't hike?

Prejudice

What if..it costs  
more?

Cost

What if...hiking  
with autism is  
dangerous?

Fear

What if....something  
goes wrong?

Uncertainty



# Definitions

A photograph of a forest stream. The water flows over rocks, creating small rapids. The banks are covered in fallen brown leaves. Several trees with moss-covered trunks stand in the foreground and background. The sky is visible through the bare branches.



# Autism /Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



- Severe and diversified neurological development disorder
- The disorder affects three areas of development:

- Social skills
- Communication
- Behaviour

(Wing & Gould, 1979).



## **Patterns of behaviour**

**Specific routines or rituals (and getting upset when a routine is changed, even slightly)**

**Extreme sensitivity to touch, light, and sound**

**Aggressive behavior, both with self and others**

**Lack of coordination, clumsiness**

**Impulsiveness (acting without thinking)**

**Repetitive behaviours like hand-flapping, rocking, jumping, or twirling**

**Fussy eating habits**

**Short attention span**

**Fixations on certain activities or objects**

**Constant moving (pacing) and "hyper" behaviour**



# ASD - ASPERGER

Part of the broader category called **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** and is technically no longer a diagnosis on its own. This group of related disorders shares some symptoms.

ASD is now the name used for a wide range of autism-like disorders. Some providers may still use the term Asperger's Syndrome, but others will say "ASD – without intellectual or language impairment".

The condition is what doctors call a "high-functioning" type of ASD. This means the symptoms are less severe than other kinds of **autism spectrum disorders**.



# For a person with Asperger's Syndrome, you may see one or more of the following symptoms:

Inappropriate or minimal social interactions

Can have problems with attention span and organization, but they usually have average intelligence.

Difficulty making eye contact

Lack of empathy

Having less facial expression than others

## **Asperger's syndrome**

Memorizing preferred information and facts easily

Difficulty managing emotions, sometimes leading to verbal or behavioral outbursts, self-injurious behaviours or tantrums

Speech that sounds unusual, such as flat, high-pitched, quiet, loud, or robotic



## Patterns of communication

Delayed speech and language skills

Not using or rarely using gestures (pointing or waving), and not responding to them

Problems with pronouns (saying "you" instead of "I," for example)

Echolalia (repeating the same phrase over and over)

Trouble expressing needs and emotions

Not getting signals from body language, tone of voice, and expressions



A close-up photograph of autumn leaves, primarily in shades of yellow, orange, and brown, with some green blades of grass visible. The leaves are covered in numerous small, clear water droplets, suggesting a recent rain or dew. The word "Methodology" is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the middle vertically. The text is clearly legible against the darker, wet leaves.

# Methodology



# Before hiking

## Preparatory activities

Personal information  
from parents

Personal  
information from  
educators

Health problems  
Eating habits  
Limits  
Favourite items  
Favourite activities  
Possible obsessions



**Indicative  
Personal  
information**

What's his/her  
favourite  
toy/activity?

Has he/she  
ever hiked?

How does  
he/she  
communicate  
his/her  
desires/interests?

Which  
management  
behaviour is not  
effective?

How do you  
anticipate  
his/her  
behaviour?

Is he/she able to  
use verbal  
speech to  
communicate?

How does  
he/she react if  
something  
changes in  
his/her routine?

-What time of the  
day does he/she  
eat?  
-What, where and  
how much does  
he/she eat?  
-Are there any  
environment  
factors?



# Planning

**Small groups of four or five persons**

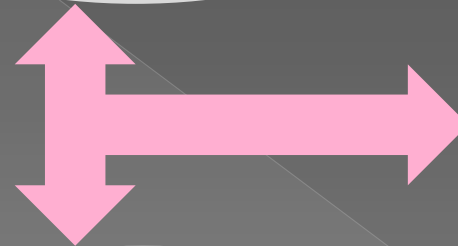
Groups with  
severe/multiple  
disabilities?

Mountain guide+  
Expert one to  
one (or a family  
member)

Groups of Asperger?

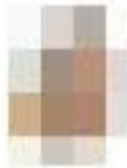
One mountain  
guide for four/five  
+  
One expert

Mixed  
groups?





**On Wednesday (22 Jun), a mother of two boys with autism took to the [Singapore Hikers](#) Facebook group seeking volunteers to hike with the brothers.**



8h · 🌐



Hi, I am [redacted]. I am a mum of 2 autistic boys. One is 11 years old, the other is 14 years old.

I am asking help if anybody going for hiking and ok for me to bring my 2 boys to follow the group.

July onward when school starts, we are available on weekdays afternoon, Sunday morning and afternoon ok, sometimes Saturday also ok.

I also need volunteers to help me sometimes during hiking activities.

Bringing my boys will slow down the group hiking pace. Also when my boys could not follow instruction. We would turn back and go home.

Please pm me if you are keen to help. Very appreciated your kindness.



# Design a mindful trail

## **Explain the trail**

How long it is, if there are any climbs or steep areas and any cool things they will get to see or do on the hike

## **Show picture symbols**

By taking a quick minute to go over the hike with the autistic person we are reinforcing the plan for the hike and building up his/her expectations for what's coming up.

## **Signs**

Arrows, signs of right, left, straight etc.

## **Building up a routine**

Just like in our everyday, building up a routine helps to minimize the stress and anxiety that is so characteristic of autistic persons.



# Organising





# Meltdowns

A photograph of a forest during autumn. The ground is covered in a thick layer of fallen brown leaves. Several trees with bare branches stand against a clear blue sky. The word "Meltdowns" is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.



# Meltdowns

A meltdown is an intense response to an overwhelming situation. It happens when someone becomes completely overwhelmed by his/her current situation and temporarily loses control of his/her behaviour. This loss of control can be expressed:

- **verbally** (shouting, screaming, crying, refusing to interact),
- **physically** (kicking, lashing out, biting, pulling hair, withdrawing from situations) or in both ways.





**What may cause a  
meltdown?**



## **Anxiety**

- With its unwritten rules and unpredictable nature, the world can be an extremely challenging environment for autistic persons and many experience anxiety

## **Change in routine**

- Consistent, predictable routines and structure are very important for autistic persons and a change to routine can be very distressing

## **Communication difficulties**

- Autistic persons can find it difficult to express their wants and needs, from a non-verbal child struggling to express the need for a drink to a teenager finding it hard to express his/her emotions



A photograph of a forest floor covered in a thick layer of fallen autumn leaves in shades of brown, orange, and yellow. In the background, there are tall, thin trees with some green and some yellowing foliage, suggesting a late autumn or early winter setting. The sky is visible through the tree canopy.

**What to do to prevent  
a meltdown**



# Distinct sequence of components

## Antecedent

Is the event that precedes the behaviour. It includes the instruction and any form of prompting given before the person is expected to respond

## Behaviour

The behaviour is what the person does in response to the instruction (positive, negative, no response)

## Consequence

What occurs after the behaviour



Many autistic people will show signs of distress before having a meltdown, which is sometimes referred to as:

**"The rumble stage"**

**Indicative Signs of anxiety**

**Indicative Strategies**

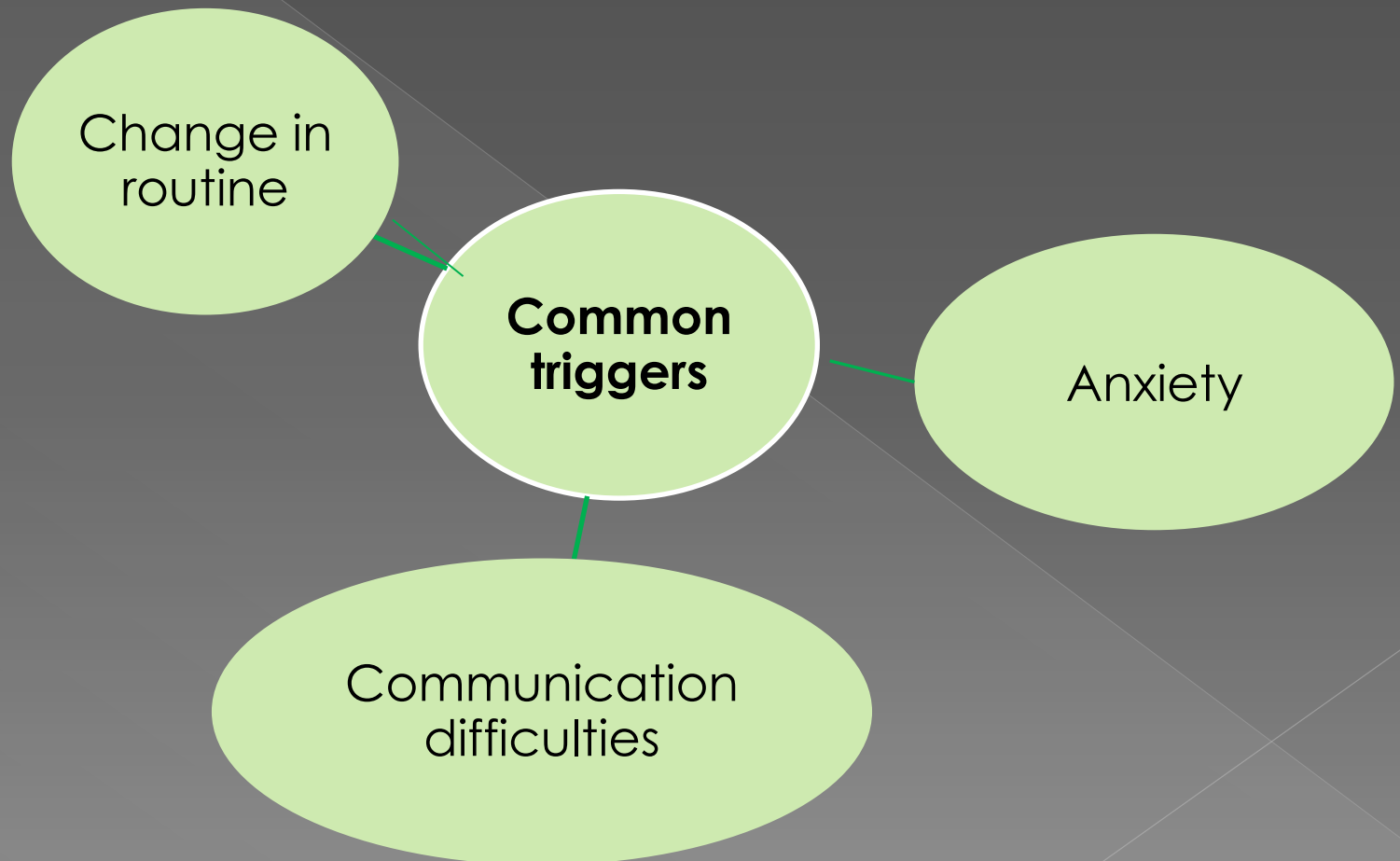
- Fast pacing
- Repetitive questioning
- Rocking
- Becoming very still

- Distraction
- Fiddle toys
- Music
- Removing/minimize triggers
- Staying calm yourself



# Minimising triggers

Every autistic person is different but....







# Change in routine

The use of a picture symbol to explain the change

A chance to  
express any  
frustration  
appropriately



followed by  
an activity  
that is  
known to  
calm the  
person



Taking deep breaths  
Listening to calming  
music  
Going for a walk  
Squeezing a stressing  
ball

Increase structure such as a clear timetable explaining when the transitions will be, using timers to count down to transitions



# Communication difficulties

Support the person to find ways to understand and express his/her emotions appropriately before he/she gets overwhelmed, and find ways to make our own communication more easily understandable. Things we can try include:



visual supports:  
pictures, symbols, words or photographs



written information



using technology such as tablets, instant messaging etc



modifying our verbal communication eg by speaking in short, clear sentences



# Anxiety



- **Bugs**
- Picture symbols
- can laugh about it and pick the little bug off calmly, the autistic person is going to learn there is nothing to be afraid of and all he/she needs to do is pick it off.



- **Water**
- Picture symbols
- Set your expectations for how they will behave around the water
- reinforce it again when you arrive at the trail
- “remember the stream”



- **Cliffs and steep areas**
- Talk to the autistic person before reaching a high place.
- Keeping a close eye
- Safety and paying attention are up to us



# Opportunities for relaxation

**Encouraging the person to look at:**

- bubble lamps
- smell essential oils
- listen to music
- use a swing

**Distressed behaviour can often be diffused by an activity that releases energy or pent-up anger or anxiety:**

- punching a punch bag
- running around for a few minutes



They don't know and likely don't care about what's at the end when there are all kinds of cool stuff along the way.

You can start by just pointing out any kind of wild animal. Song birds or even bugs can be a big event for an autistic person and you may even get to see something you wouldn't have noticed

**Don't rush the autistic person getting to the end of the trail**

For an autistic person a long and challenging hike can leave him/her drained physically and mentally

Some autistic persons do not enjoy social attention. In these circumstances, verbal praise can cause distress and actually stop the person engaging in the desired behaviour in the future.



# Use rewards positive enhancers

Using rewards and motivators can help to encourage a particular behaviour

Even if the behaviour or task is very short, if it is followed by lots of praise and a reward, the person can learn that the behaviour is acceptable.

Rewards can take the form of:

- verbal praise
- attention
- preferred activities
- toys
- small amounts of favourite foods or drinks

Ensure:

- that you clearly name the behaviour that you are rewarding, eg "Jane, that's good waiting!"
- that rewards are provided immediately after the behaviour that you wish to encourage



# Behaviour triggers

Shouting

Touching

Rushing

Processing  
information

Unstructured  
time

Sensory  
differences

Change in  
routine

Too much  
information

Pressure

Transition between  
activities

Physical reasons  
(feeling unwell, tired  
or hungry)

Lack of ability to  
communicate these  
difficulties

**anxiety**

**anger**

**frustration**

**outburst**



A photograph of a forest stream with a small waterfall. The water flows over rocks, creating white rapids. The surrounding forest is dense with trees, some of which have bare branches, suggesting autumn or winter. The ground is covered with fallen leaves in shades of brown and orange. The sun is visible through the trees in the background, creating a bright spot. The text "How to face a meltdown" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

**How to face a meltdown**



# What to do

Give them some time - it can take a while to recover from information or sensory overload.

Calmly ask them if they're OK, but bear in mind they'll need more time to respond than you might expect

Keep distances and make space - try to create a quiet, safe space as best you can

Replace the undesirable behaviour with positive enhancers that calm



# Provide sensory opportunities

## Physical outbursts

For a person who:

**bites**

chewy  
tubes,  
gum,  
carrots,  
raw pasta  
or sultanas

**pinches**

play-  
dough

**hits**

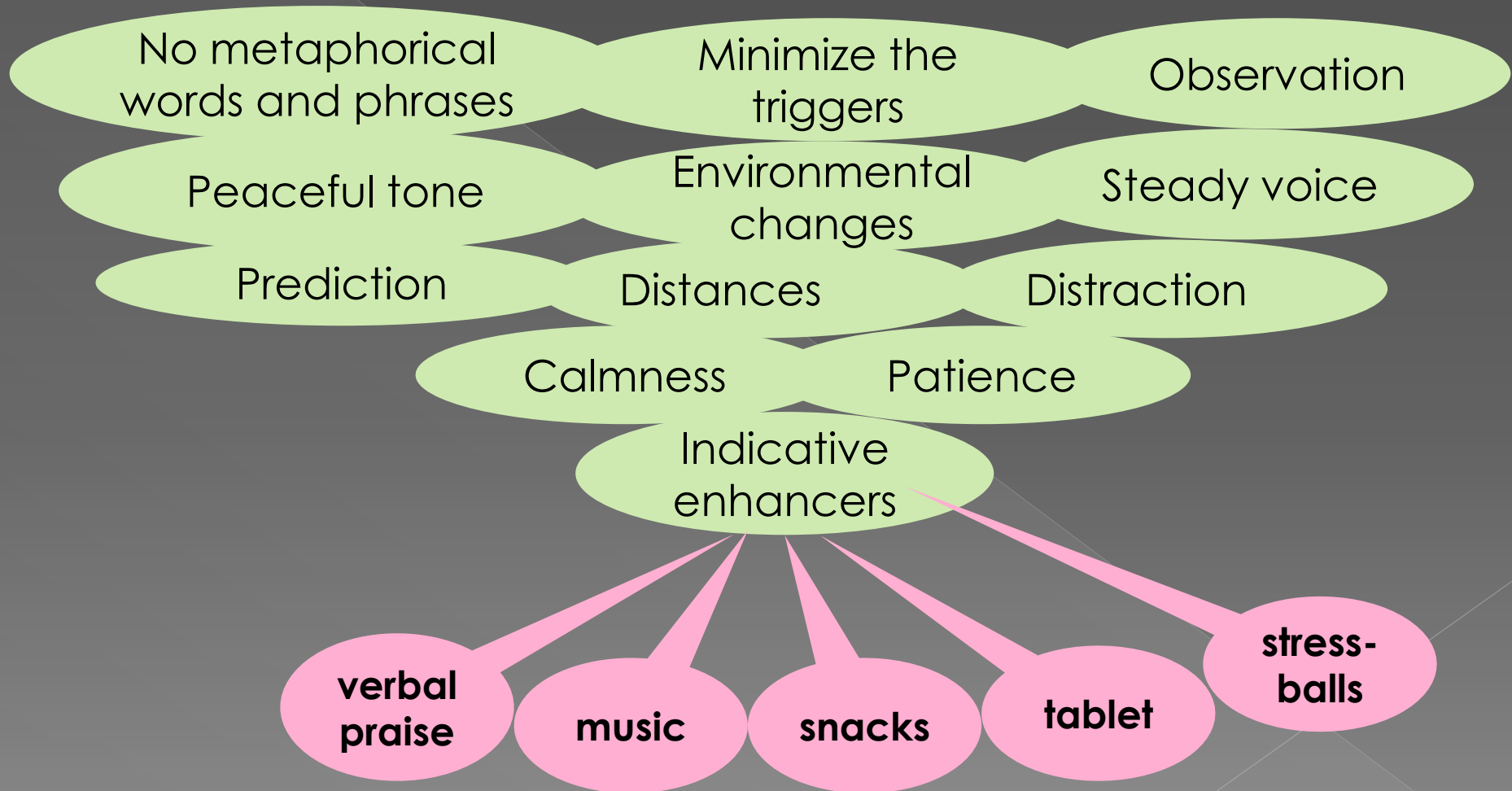
Piece of  
foam,  
clapping  
song-rhyme

**pulls hair**

Tie long hair back and  
find something to  
replace the pulling  
sensation, eg. tug of  
war, a rope



# Behaviour management







# Conclusions



**Autism  
makes me  
nervous?**

**Autism  
makes me  
feel pity?**

**Why  
should I  
hike with  
autism?**

**To deal with  
an autistic  
person  
requires  
medical  
expertise?**

**A hike  
with  
autism  
costs ?**

**Can an autistic  
person follow a  
typical hiking  
trail?**

**Autism  
frightens  
me?**



# Hiking with autism is....

## A learning experience

### For the autistic person

- Exploring nature
- Physical exercise
- Mind-body connection
- Joy in movement
- Opportunity to go out
- Social skills
- Sensory skills
- Learning activities
- Balance

### For us

- Physical exercise
- New experience
- Social skills
- Excitement for the unknown
- Personal satisfaction
- Reconsideration of our prejudice
- Appreciation of life
- Awareness of disability in the field
- Challenge
- Satisfaction of helping a family







# Bear in mind

Each hike  
with the  
autistic  
person will  
be easier  
than the last

Coordination is not  
required for hiking  
with autism. It's the  
other way around.  
Hiking improves  
coordination and  
balance

Mountains  
are for every  
neurotype  
(every type  
of brain)



● See Video: District Spotlight -- Autism  
Nature Trail Visit



## Self-assessment

Getting very anxious about social situations

Finding it hard to make friends or preferring to be on your own

Finding it hard to say how you feel

Seeming blunt, rude or not interested in others without meaning to

Taking things very literally

Having the same routine every day and getting very anxious if it changes

Not understanding social “rules”, such as not talking over people

Noticing small detail, patterns, smells or sounds that others do not

Liking to plan things carefully before doing them

Using the same route to go to work every day



# Find the difference

## **We...**

..can learn  
can walk,  
can see, can hear,  
can smell,  
can feel,  
act differently from one  
another, according to our  
point of view, our social  
skills, our senses, our  
potential, our opportunities

## **Autistic persons....**

...can learn  
can walk,  
can see, can hear,  
can smell,  
can feel,  
act differently from us,  
according to their point of  
view, their social skills, their  
senses, their potential,  
their opportunities



Can autism hike?







Can we hike with autism?





**Thank you for your attention!**