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Addressing Anxiety: A Common Barrier to Social Inclusion

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Learning Outcomes:

- To understand the purpose of anxiety
- To understand how anxiety is a barrier to inclusion
- Identifying practical tools and resources that can help to manage anxiety

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The Purpose of Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

- **Anxiety** is an organized response by which a person senses, evaluates, anticipates, and responds to cues of threat or danger in one's internal or external environment
- In other words, anxiety is like a **smoke detector** for us

Find a Healthy Balance

Cues us to our context and encourages us to act accordingly

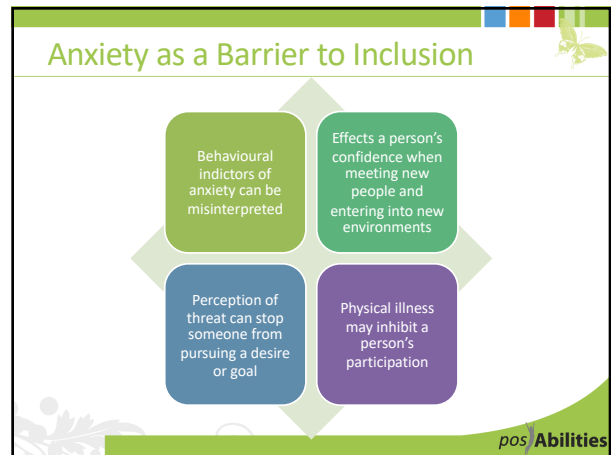
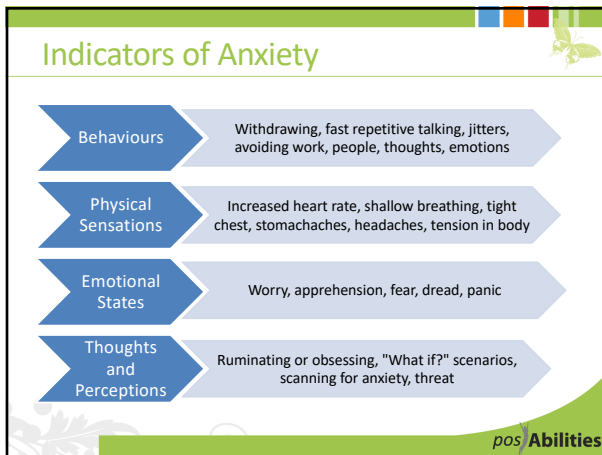
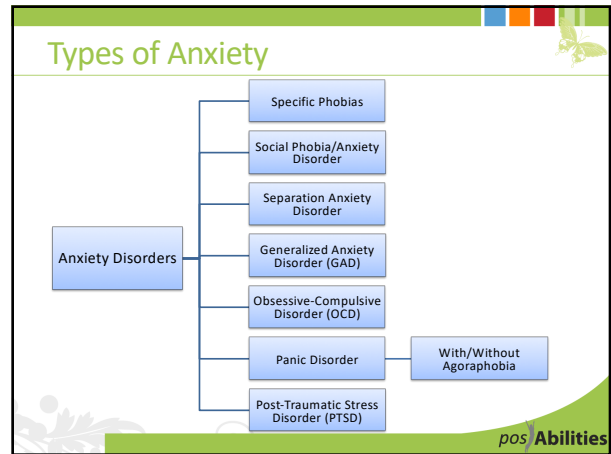
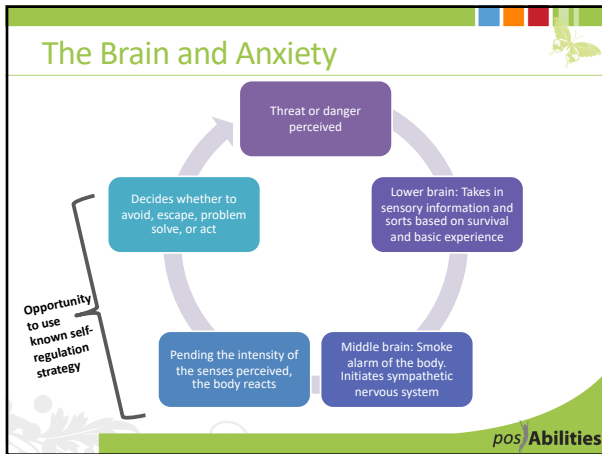
Need to rest and recuperate the body

Anxiety

Relaxation

The Two Nervous Systems

<p>Sympathetic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fight or Flight” response • Pupils expand • Fast and shallow breaths • Heart pumps faster • Gut inactive 	<p>Parasympathetic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest and recovery • Pupils shrink • Slow, deep breaths • Heart slows • Gut active
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Practical Tools and Resources to Teach and Help Manage Anxiety

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Important to Note

Regardless of the strategy the person served needs **awareness, skills, and support** to learn to cope with their anxiety

When teaching new skills remember:

- Adapt strategies for the individual based on their capacities and preferences
- Create opportunities to practice
- Choose the right place and time for teaching (e.g., when calm and ready to learn)
- Use meaningful and familiar examples
- Reinforce all efforts!

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Setting Event Strategies

- **Setting events** are events that make it more likely that challenging behaviour may occur
- We want to create the best conditions for a body to take information in and attend effectively and efficiently
- Consider:
 - Nutrition
 - Activity Levels
 - Sleep

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Nutrition, Activity Levels, and Sleep

- **Nutrition**
 - Increase whole, natural, and unprocessed food → helps reduce stress on body to metabolize food and impact of toxins
 - Increase water → dehydration adds stress to the body
- **Activity Level**
 - Regular activity eases anxiety → aerobic exercise shown to reduce sensitivity to elevated heart rate and breathing rates
 - Movement and stretching helps with tension reduction
- **Sleep**
 - Regulate sleeping schedule
 - Black out curtains, white noise machine, reduce stimulation prior to bedtime, minimize caffeine 6 hours prior to bedtime

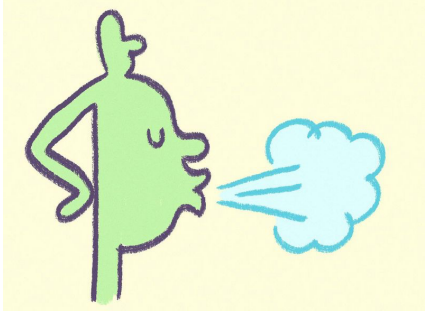
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Medication

- Medications can be used as one tool to alleviate or manage symptoms
- It is important to keep in mind that they do not necessarily address the underlying cause
- Always have a proper assessment to ensure the right medication and dosage

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Breathing



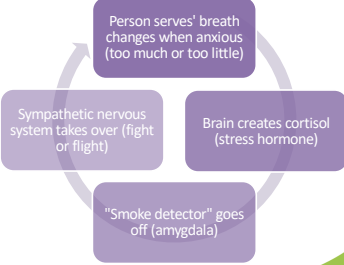
A simple line drawing of a person's head and shoulders in profile, facing right. A blue cloud-like shape representing air is shown coming out of the mouth, with three lines indicating the direction of the breath.

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Breathing Changes When Anxious

- When a person changes their breathing rate...

By focusing on regulating breathe, it is letting the body know that everything is okay, and can calm down (therefore, escalation decreases and challenging behaviour reduces)



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    graph TD
      A[Person senses' breath changes when anxious (too much or too little)] --> B[Sympathetic nervous system takes over (fight or flight)]
      B --> C[Brain creates cortisol (stress hormone)]
      C --> D["Smoke detector" goes off (amygdala)]
      D --> A
  
```

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Sensory Tools



A central blue brain icon is surrounded by six orange circular icons, each representing a different sense: eyes, mouth, nose, hand, ear, and another hand. Lines connect the brain to each of these sensory icons.

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Sensory Items

Sound: Ear plugs, headphones, preferred sound making items (music, white noise machine)

Sight: Sunglasses, hat/visor, dark place, different lights, looking at a sunset, clouds, preferred pictures

Smell: Deodorant, candles, lotions, incense, flowers, coffee, baking

Touch: Clothing, fabrics, massage, water, vibrating, warm rice bag, cold pack, stress balls

Taste: warm or cold food and drink, solid, chewy, blended foods, sour, sweet, tangy

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Body Movement



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Body Movement and Anxiety

- What happens to the body when a person becomes anxious...

By focusing on purposefully relaxing the body, it is letting the body know that everything is okay, and can calm down (therefore, escalation decreases and challenging behaviour reduces)

Person served perceives a threat or challenge







Sympathetic nervous system continues to take over (fight or flight)

Body tenses (among other things)

When body is braced, it tells the body that it is not safe

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Body Movement Strategies

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)
- Stretching
- Rhythmic Movement

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Redirecting to Something Positive



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Example

I have a job interview and I'm worried I'll talk too fast

I can do my deep breathing exercises before I go in

I can remind myself that I am good enough and I will try my best

I will think of times in the past where I have slowed the pace of my voice

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Red and Green Thoughts

GREEN & RED THOUGHTS

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Red and Green Thoughts

Red thoughts are worrisome, pessimistic, negative, and unhelpful

Green thoughts are helpful, positive, optimistic, and powerful

Examples:

- "I can't"
- "This is going to be a disaster"
- "Nobody likes me"

Examples:

- "I will try my best"
- "I can handle this"
- "I'm stronger than I think"

Goal is to have more green self-talk statements

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5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Activity

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Senses - 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

- Name 5 things you see
- Name 4 things you can touch or feel
- Name 3 things you hear
- Name 2 things you smell or taste
- Take 1 mindful breath

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Realistic Thinking Form

REALISTIC THINKING FORM (E.g.)

Situation	Feeling (0-10) 0 = no emotion 10 = most intense emotion	Anxious Thoughts	Realistic Thoughts	Feeling after Realistic Thinking (0-10)
Important interview tomorrow	Anxiety - 8	I always get so nervous about job interviews. I'm going to mess up tomorrow and I'll never get a job.	There is a chance that I might not do well in tomorrow's interview, but not performing perfectly on a job interview doesn't mean I won't get the job. Even if I don't get this job, it doesn't mean I will never get a job. I have always been able to find work. I can always get feedback on what I can do to improve my chances of getting another similar position.	Anxiety - 3

Adaptation: Use visuals instead of words, complete with transcriber

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Work on Social Skills: Role Play and Video Models


role play

Video Modelling

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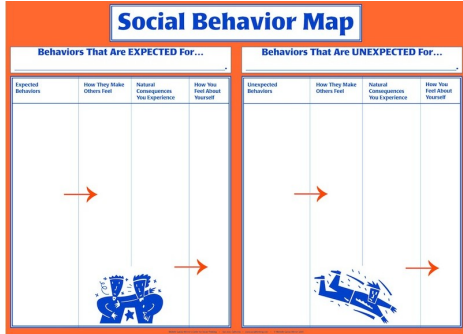
PEERS Video Models

- Conversation skills
- Starting individual conversations
- Entering group conversations
- Exiting conversations
- Electronic communication
- Appropriate use of humour
- Good sportsmanship
- Get togethers
- Handling arguments
- Handling teasing
- Handling rumors and gossip
- Dating etiquette



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Social Behaviour Mapping



Courtesy of Google Images

Michelle Garcia Winner (2007)

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Helpful Apps

- Breathe2Relax
- Mindshift
- Headspace
- Relax Melodies
- Zen View
- Fluid
- Fluid Dynamics
- Bla Bla Bla
- Simply Yoga
- ...and more in your handout!

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Considerations for Others

- Be aware of your escalation cycle and anxiety
- Develop your own sensation-awareness
- Anxiety is contagious – therefore, we need to catch our own reaction
- Brainstorm strategies with person served and/or staff team to help with anxiety
- Consider dosage (when someone is learning something new, you need to take it slowly)
- Any attempt is beneficial
- Persistence is key

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Take Home Message


It is unlikely that an individual can avoid or escape all things they fear

Avoidance/escape of these fears could compromise future experiences that could benefit them and increase quality of life

We can support the individual by teaching them how to confront and tolerate what they fear and work through their anxiety

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Any Questions?



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Thank you!

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Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding the presentation please feel free to contact:
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For information about our services please contact our Service Coordinator at
laurel@posabilities.ca or 778-945-1435

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Resources

- BC Children's Hospital Family Support & Resource Centre:
<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/KidsTeensFam/FamilyResourceLibrarydefault.htm>
- CAN Provincial Resource Centre: <http://opac.libraryworld.com/opac/home.php>
- Social Thinking®: <https://www.socialthinking.com/books-products>
- Anxiety BC : <https://www.anxietybc.com>
- Calm – Medication techniques for sleep and stress reduction:
<https://www.calm.com>
- PEERS video models for young adults:
<http://www.routledge textbooks.com/textbooks/9781138238718/videos.php>
- Breathe2Relax App:
<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/breathe2relax/id425720246?mt=8>
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.t2health.breathe2relax&hl=en>
- Mindshift App: <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/headspace/id493145008?mt=8>
- Headspace App: <https://www.anxietybc.com/resources/mindshift-app>

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