



Forensicare

The Application of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy with Autistic Clients with Challenging of Offending Behaviours

Dr Joseph Sakdalan
Principal Psychologist

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Types of Offending and Challenging Behaviours associated with ASD

- **Challenging or Offending Behaviours are often associated with ASD characteristics**
 - Physical Assault type behaviours
 - Inappropriate social/sexual behaviours
 - Verbally Abusive behaviours
 - Preoccupations/fixation → can lead to issues around sexual or violent offending (e.g., obsession with child pornography, arson, stealing, specific objects, etc.)
 - Substance misuse issues, particularly for individuals with ASD who 'self-medicate' to manage their anxiety problems and other mental health issues



Current psychological/psychiatric treatment/interventions for Autism Spectrum Disorder

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**
- **Behavioural interventions**
- **Social Skills intervention**
- **Sensory-based therapies**
- **Psychiatric medications**



Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

- **Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT)** is a cognitive behavioural treatment originally designed by Marsha Linehan (1993) as an outpatient treatment for people diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).
- The DBT approach balances therapeutic **validation** and **acceptance** of the person along with cognitive and behavioural change strategies.
- In DBT, the therapist aims to accept and validate the client's feelings at any given time while informing the client that some feelings and behaviours are maladaptive and showing them better alternatives.



(Linehan, 2005)

Biosocial Theory of BPD

- It comes from a biological propensity to their emotional state and an invalidating environment that, through its negative reactions, reinforces their dysfunctional behaviour.
- The disorder is characterised by heightened sensitivity to emotion, increased emotional intensity and a slow return to emotional baseline.

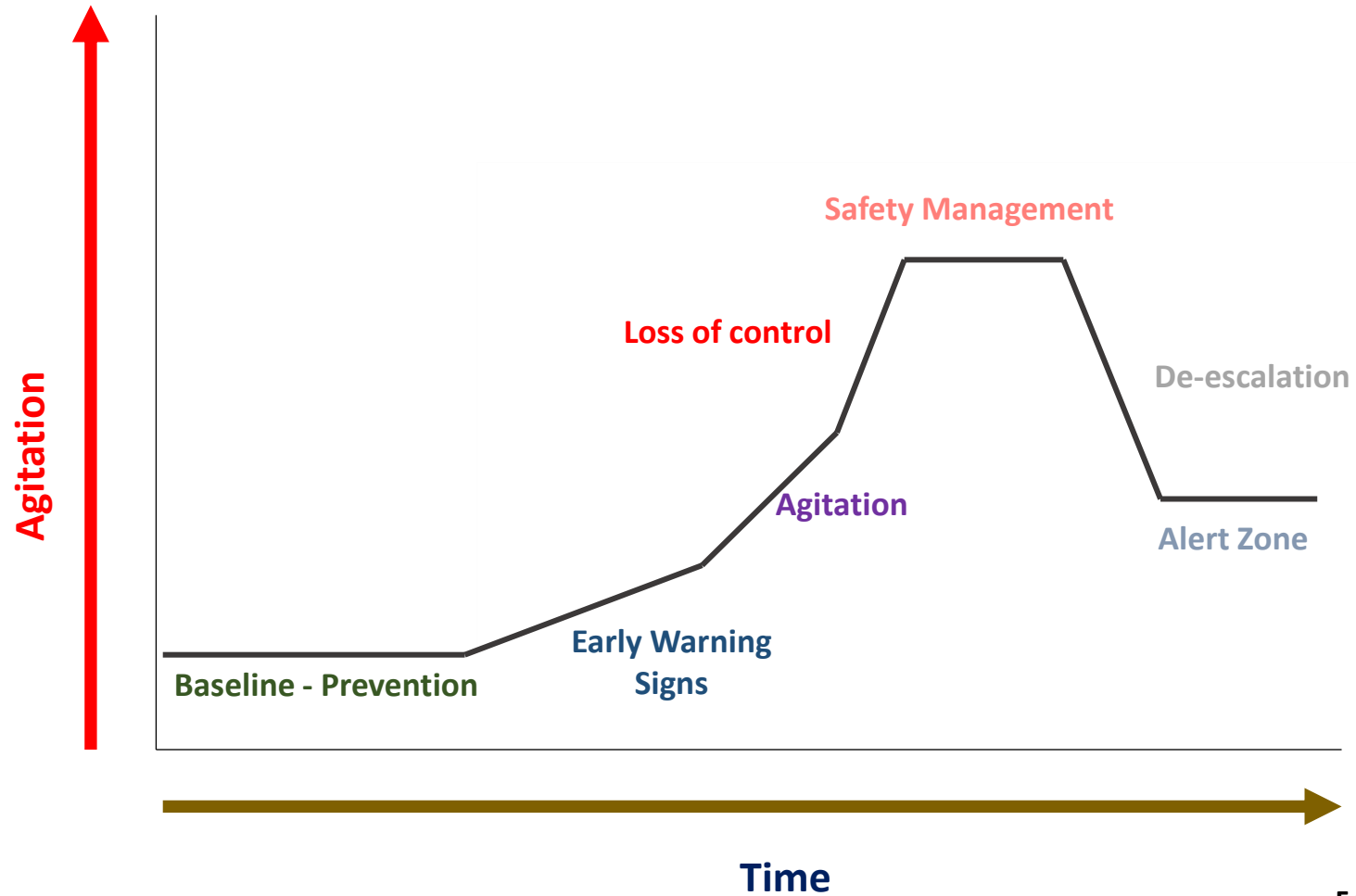


Invalidating Environments

- Refers essentially to a situation in which the personal experiences and responses are disqualified or "invalidated" by the significant others in their lives.
- Characterised by a tendency to place a high value on self-control and self-reliance. Any failure on the part of the individual to perform to the expected standard is therefore ascribed to a lack of motivation or some other negative characteristic of their character.

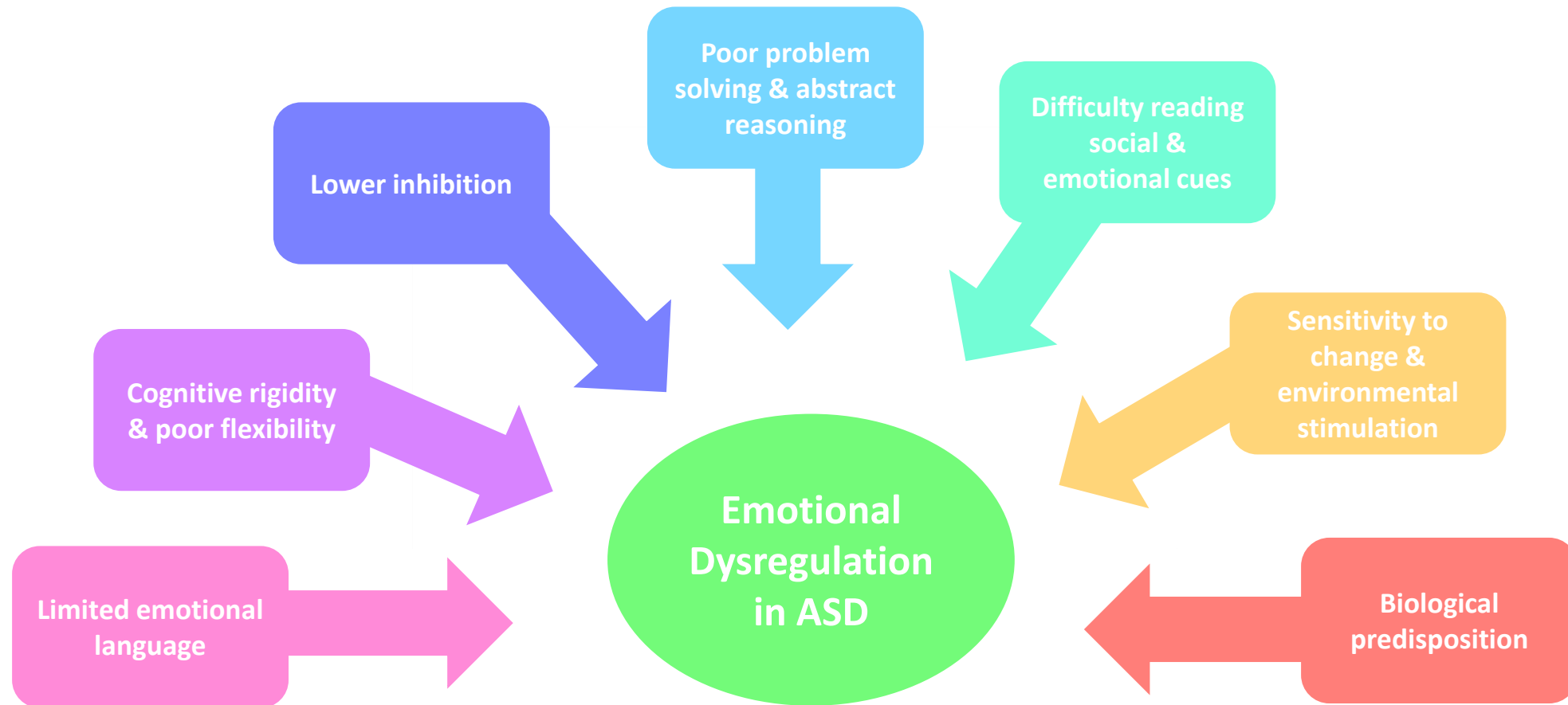


Emotional Regulation Baseline



From Prof. Matt Siegel

Emotional Dysregulation in Autism Spectrum Disorder

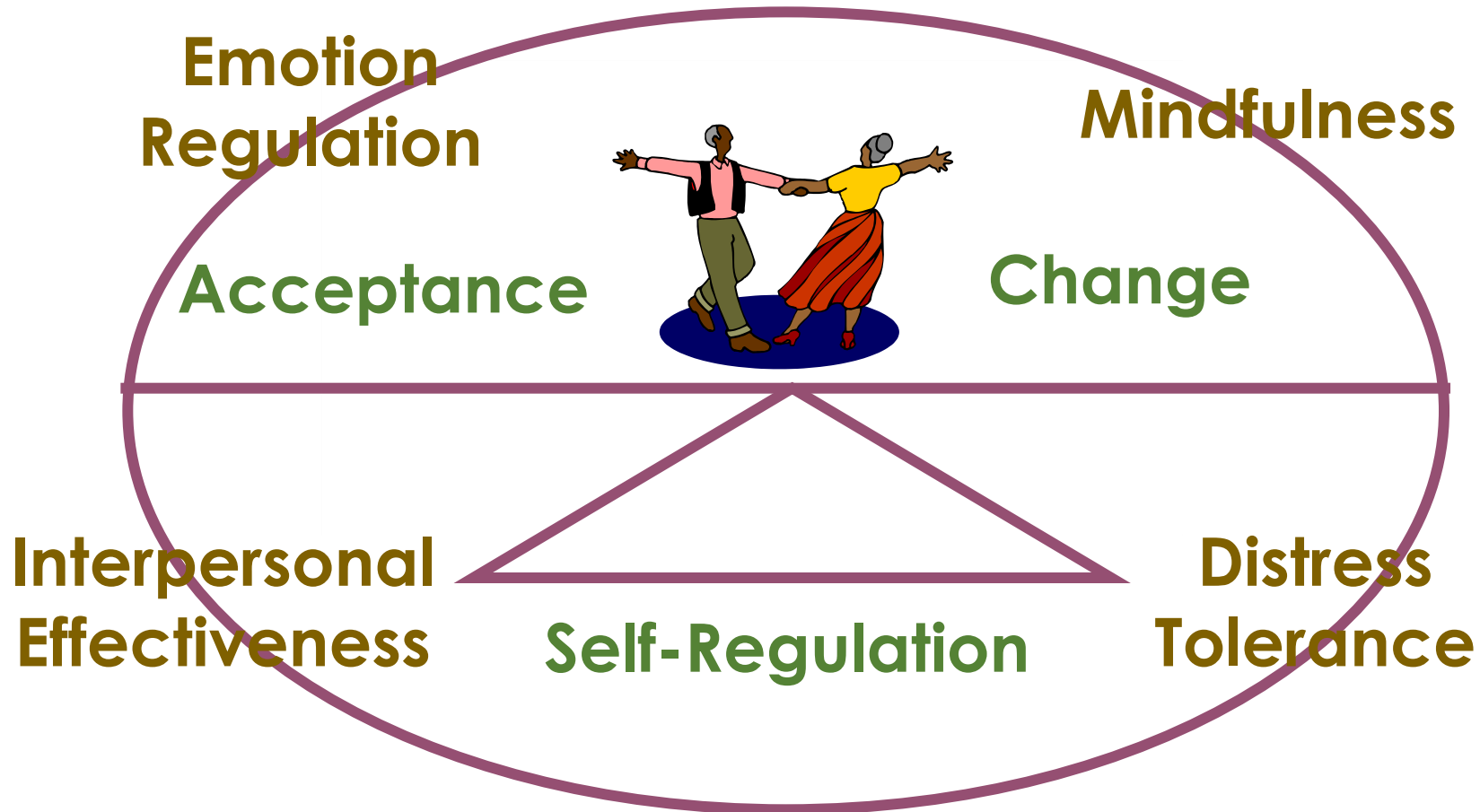


Why use Dialectical Behaviour Therapy with Autistic Clients??

- Issues around emotion dysregulation
- Impulse control problems/emotional reactivity
- Cognitive rigidity
- Poor interpersonal skills/poor problem-solving skills
- Poor coping skills
- Poor distress tolerance and self-harm behaviours
- Problems with empathy/perspective-taking skills



Dialectical Behaviour Therapy allows for balancing of skills

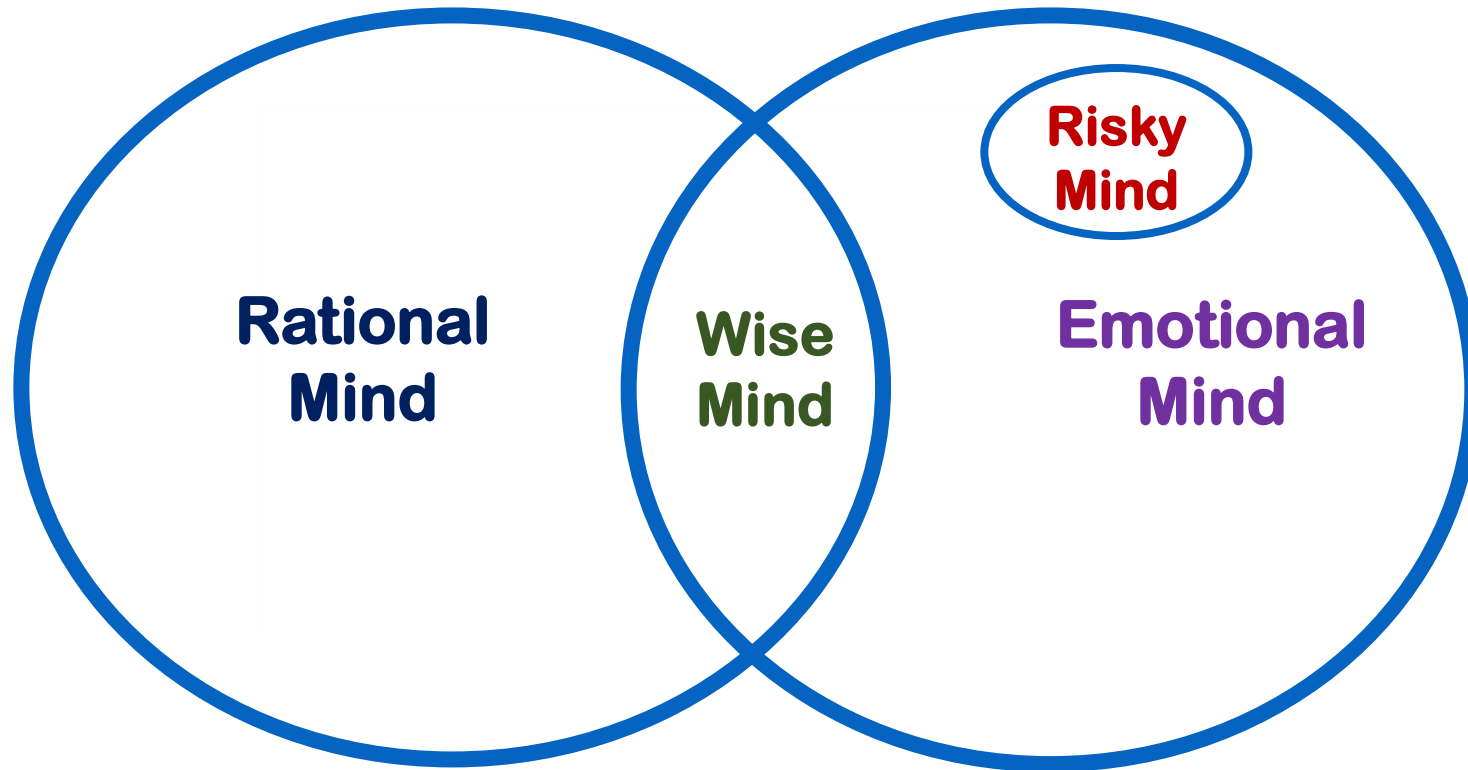


(Linehan, 2005)

Case Study Client: Jim

- Jim is a 23-year-old male client who has a diagnosis of autism and Mild Intellectual Disability.
- He was convicted of Unlawful Assault and Possession of Cannabis.
- He was placed under a 12-month Community Corrections Order.
- A long history of problematic behaviours (e.g., verbal abuse, swearing) since early adolescent years.
- He has difficulties coping with any changes in routine.
- Jim is very sensitive to banging noises. He has sleeping difficulties.
- He does not have any close friends. He struggles to maintain friendships and has poor personal boundaries.

DBT Modes of Mind



States of Mind

Reasonable Mind

This is the part of your mind that thinks, plans and helps you solve problems. It helps you be more reasonable about things.

Emotional Mind

This is the part of your mind that reacts to your feelings, particularly when they become so intense that they take control of you.

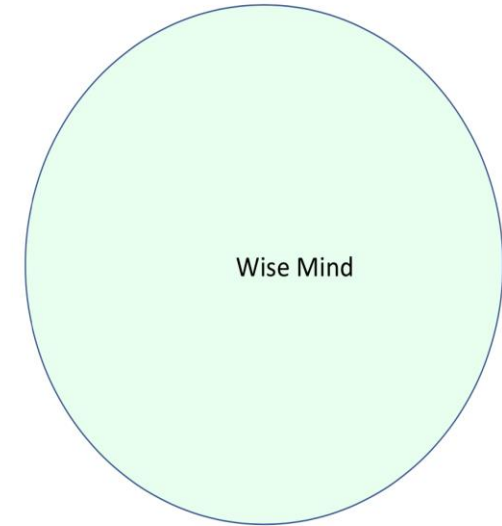
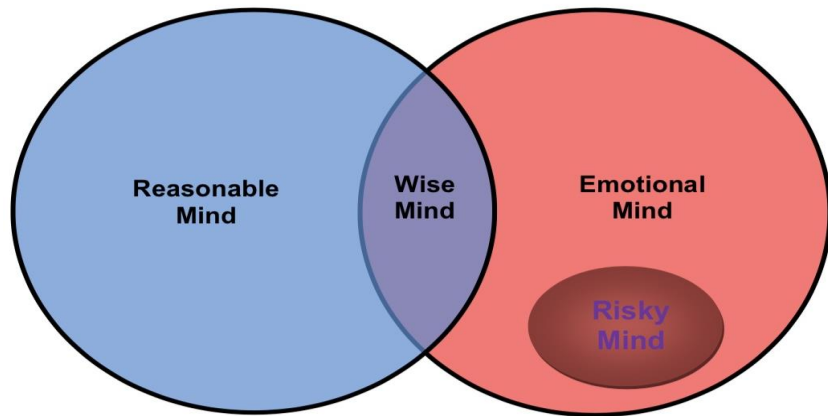
Risky Mind: (not officially included in Linehan's model)

This is the part of your mind that reacts to feelings, particularly when your feelings become so much that they take control of you and can get you into serious trouble (police, hospital).

Wise Mind

This is where your rational and Emotional minds combine. A wise mind stays in the “here and now” and makes wise choices.

Applying States of Mind



Reasonable Mind:

- Plans and organises
- Problem solves
- Ignores feelings

Emotional Mind:

- Emotions in control
 - Stops you from thinking clearly
- ## Risky Mind:
- Stops you from thinking clearly
 - Make risky choices that gets you in trouble with the police

Wise Mind:

- Uses **both** your reasonable and emotional mind together.
- Staying in the “here and now”
- Making wise choices.

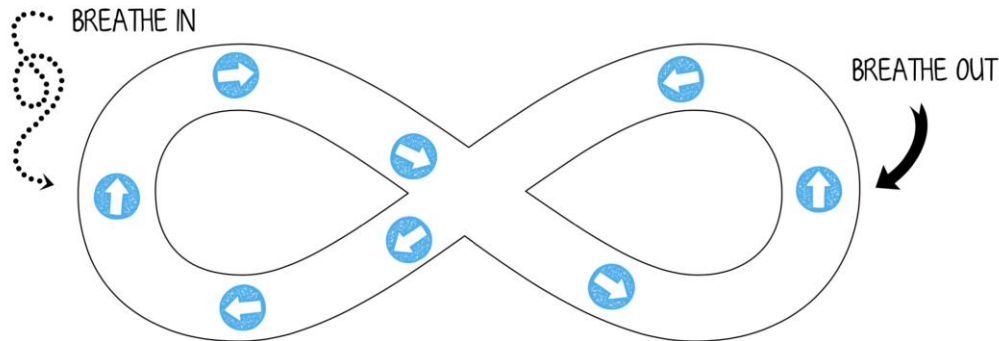
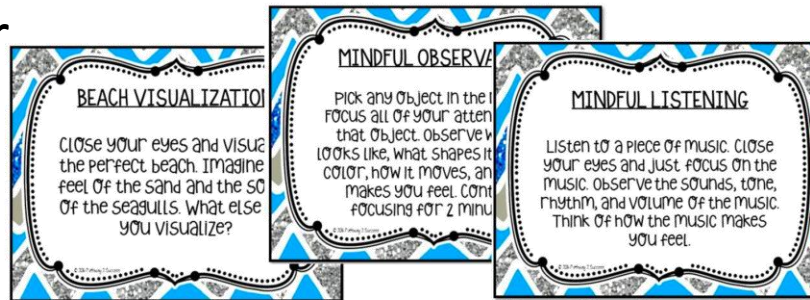
- For Jim, the concept was too confusing
- To make it simple, we reduced the state of mind
- We also printed them and placed them on the floor
- Jim will step between the minds during sessions to discuss situations that are either “risky” or “wise.”
- Support staff are also taught the language to help Jim learn this in other settings.

Mindfulness Skills

- The aim is to improve autistic clients' ability to 'ground' themselves, revert to or orientate to the present moment without judgment about themselves or a given situation.
- It can help as a method to lessen sensitivity to their environment. While people who have ASD will possibly cope sufficiently in low-stress environments, the level of sensitivity to sensory stimulation.
- Mindfulness can be a guiding force for autistic clients, helping them move towards a state of balanced and wise decision-making, often referred to as their 'Wise Minds '.
- Being able to stay in the “here-and-now” rather than ruminating or being preoccupied with the past and the future.

Applying Mindfulness skills

- At the start of each session, Jim and his support worker complete a mindfulness activity before the support worker leaves the room.
 - Try to make it practical/concrete.
 - Mindfulness Fortune Teller
 - Drawing our breath
 - Mindfulness card game
 - Smiling Mind App



BE HERE PRESENT NOW
Mindfulness Fortune Teller

Distress Tolerance Skills

- Autistic clients are prone to anxiety, depression and other mental health issues with a high prevalence of completed suicide.
- DBT skills are behaviourally based and can be tailored to autistic clients; however, the language needs to be changed to be more neuro-affirming. Focusing on distraction techniques and implementing improved adaptive coping skills would aid in reducing ASD-based sensory overload.
- The value of radical acceptance → accepting that some things are beyond their control/they can't control their environment.
- Using soothing activities → utilises sensory processing → useful with autistic clients.

Applying Distress Tolerance Skills

- Using sensory items to help Jim manage difficult periods.
- Jim needs help with changes in routines or plans.
- Jim chooses an item to try in session and for the week.
- In the next session, we will identify whether it is calming and will be added to the sensory kit.
- Staff help ensure Jim practices using the item every day for the week.

HANDOUT 29
COPING WITH DISTRESS

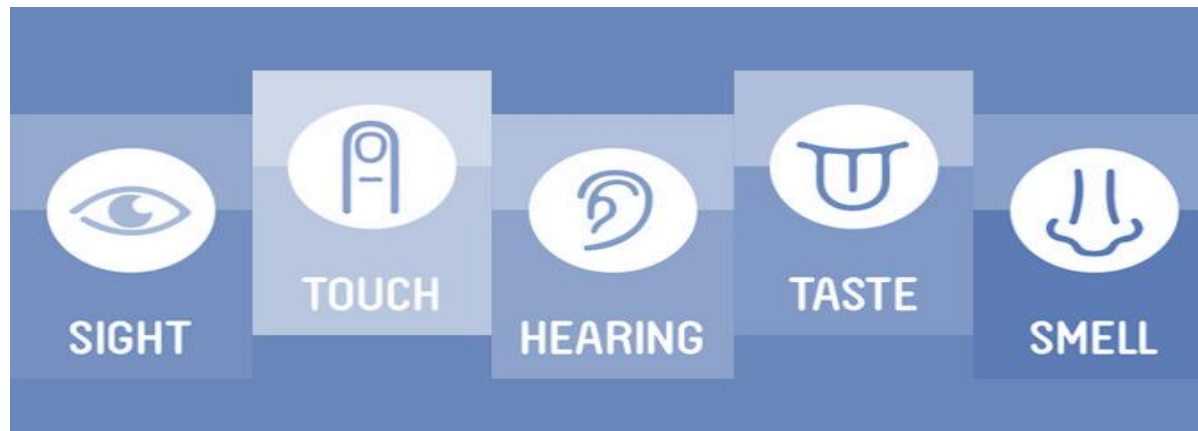
Calming the senses

Trialling items I might find helpful:

| Item used | Is it calming? | I'd like this in my tool box |
|---|----------------|------------------------------|
| Massage cushion  | YES NO | |
| Bubbles  | YES NO | |
| Windmills  | YES NO | |
| Essential oils  | YES NO | |
| Bean bag tapping  | YES NO | |
| Rocking chair  | YES NO | |
| Rice in a bowl  | YES NO | |
| Lotions/creams  | YES NO | |

Sensory Modulation

- Sensory modulation is utilised when practising mindfulness skills, emotional regulation, and distress tolerance and can be used by autistic clients for stimming.
- Calming the Senses combines Mindfulness, emotional regulation, and Distress Tolerance skills. In this practice, the senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste, proprioception, and vestibular are focused on in the present moment.



Emotion Regulation Skills

- Autistic clients need to learn how to regulate their emotions. They often talk about high levels of distress, which can be attributed to autistic anxiety and low distress tolerance.
- Autistic clients tend to have difficulty understanding their emotions and emotional states. The treatment should focus on improving the ability to identify and manage different types of emotions.
- There should also be a focus on improving understanding of the effects of biological factors (e.g., lack of sleep, substance use) that may affect them and what sensitivities they may have to them.



Applying Emotional Regulation Skills

- Using Feelings Uno to help with emotional language – helps resistant/unmotivated clients
- List of behaviours to do to change angry feelings
 - Use an ice block
 - Run to the end of the hall and back
- Jim always picks the pictures to use



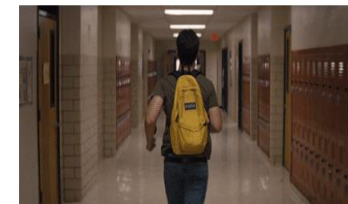
MANAGING OUR EMOTIONS

How to change upsetting emotions fast!

- Get an ice block and put it in my mouth



- Running as fast as I can to the end of the hallway and back



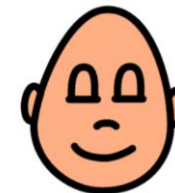
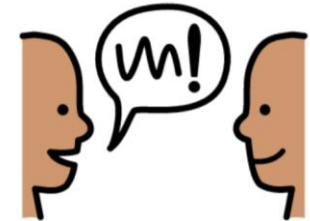
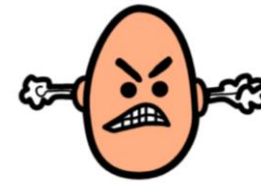
Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

- Autistic individuals generally have difficulties with social interactions.
- A more neuro-affirming approach does not generally focus on teaching clients to 'mask' but on understanding issues related to interpersonal effectiveness, such as validation, double-empathy problems, dialectics of neurodivergence, and understanding communication styles, problem-solving, negotiating, and assertiveness skills.



Applying Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

- What made you angry?
- What could you tell the person?
- What could you do to stay calm?
- What could you do to feel confident?
- What could you do to solve the problem?
- What could make the relationship better?



Conclusions

- DBT holds some promise in addressing emotion dysregulation issues that can result in challenging or offending behaviour in autistic individuals (and those with cognitive impairment).
- DBT provides a more cohesive and integrated approach to developing DBT skills with autistic individuals to address the challenges that contribute to problematic behaviours.
- It utilises a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach.
- DBT utilises the different evidence-based therapeutic approaches for autistic individuals (e.g. behavioural interventions, mindfulness, multi-sensory treatment, CBT, etc.)

Future Directions

- Ways to adapt DBT for autistic clients
 - Concrete examples
 - Focus on behavioural skills
 - Repetition and visuals
 - Address specific ASD issues, e.g. rigid thinking style, use of radical acceptance, sensory issues, etc.
- We have started running a neurodiversity-affirming DBT group for autistic adults (non-forensic) and plan to modify the manual for forensic clients
- Conducting research on the effectiveness of DBT with autistic adults

Reference

- Sakdalan, J. & Maxwell, Y. (2022). The application of adapted dialectical behaviour therapy concepts and skills in the treatment of adults with autistic spectrum disorder who display challenging or offending behaviours, *Advances in Autism*, 9(2). 132-149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-01-2022-0002>

Any questions??

- **Contact email address: joseph.sakdalan@forensicare.vic.gov.au**