

## **Autism and Anxiety:** *From Stress to Success*

### **Suggested Audience:**

parents, siblings and peers, educators, therapists, support staff, First Responders, health care professionals

**Time:** different formats available, from 90-minute intro to 3 hour in-depth workshop

### **TRAINING DESCRIPTION:**

Parents and professionals have long been aware that most individuals on the autism spectrum experience a high degree of daily, chronic anxiety. This anxiety may manifest itself in activities that are mistaken for “behaviors” or “traits” of autism, leading to unproductive responses that may intensify the anxiety by directly targeting its symptoms for “extinction.” Anxiety is also associated with other mental health challenges frequently found among people with autism, such as obsessions and compulsions, and when unrecognized or improperly treated it can lead to depression. The identification and alleviation of anxiety can provide a gateway to the prevention or reduction of these closely related conditions. While some people respond well to medication and medical management, the mental health community emphasizes the importance of fostering the habits and attitudes of personal awareness and emotional resilience as sustainable approaches to coping with anxiety. People with autism, as well as their families, teachers, and supporters, can benefit greatly from exploring and adapting positive mental health strategies that can be implemented in typical everyday settings.

### **TRAINING OBJECTIVES** Participants will:

1. Identify the signs and symptoms of anxiety, and explore the experience of anxiety in their own lives and through the words of self-advocates with autism
2. Understand the “brain basis” of anxiety, and its connection with the sensory and motor challenges associated with the autism spectrum

3. Recognize the environmental factors that can trigger and exacerbate anxiety, and consider practical strategies to reduce their impact
4. Consider a wide range of supports and strategies that can help people on the spectrum become more self-aware and resilient in the face of anxiety
5. Explore socially valued activities that respect and use the positive aspects of vigilant behavior to achieve desired goals.

**METHODS TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES:**

Training content can be delivered via webinar incorporating lecture and discussion (app. 1½ hours). This training also can be delivered in person in a traditional training or classroom setting incorporating lecture, videos, discussion, and interactive group exercises (1-1/2 to 3 hours).

**PREPARATION AND MATERIALS NEEDED:**

PowerPoint

Copies of the non-annotated PowerPoint are participant handouts.

Annotated PowerPoint is Trainer's Guide.