

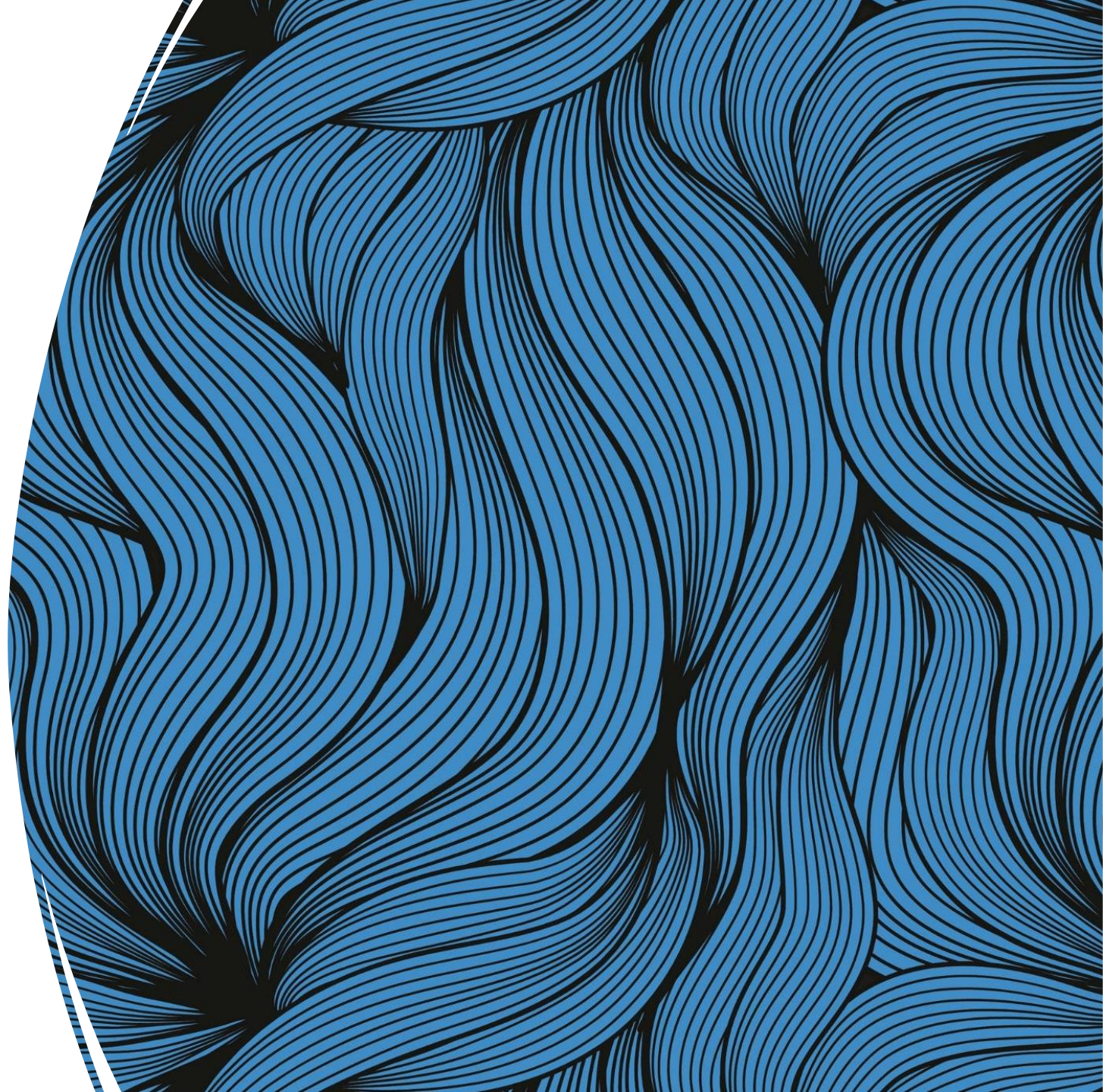
Emotion regulation & Energy accounting

Isabelle Hénault

psychologist & sexologist

Autism/AS Clinic at

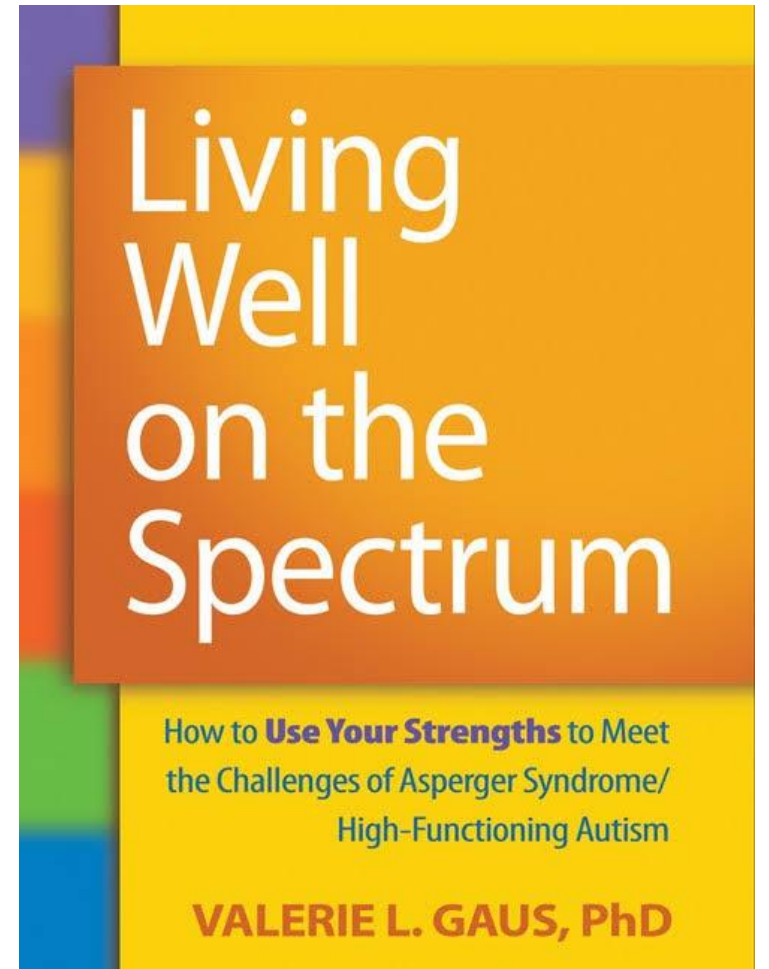
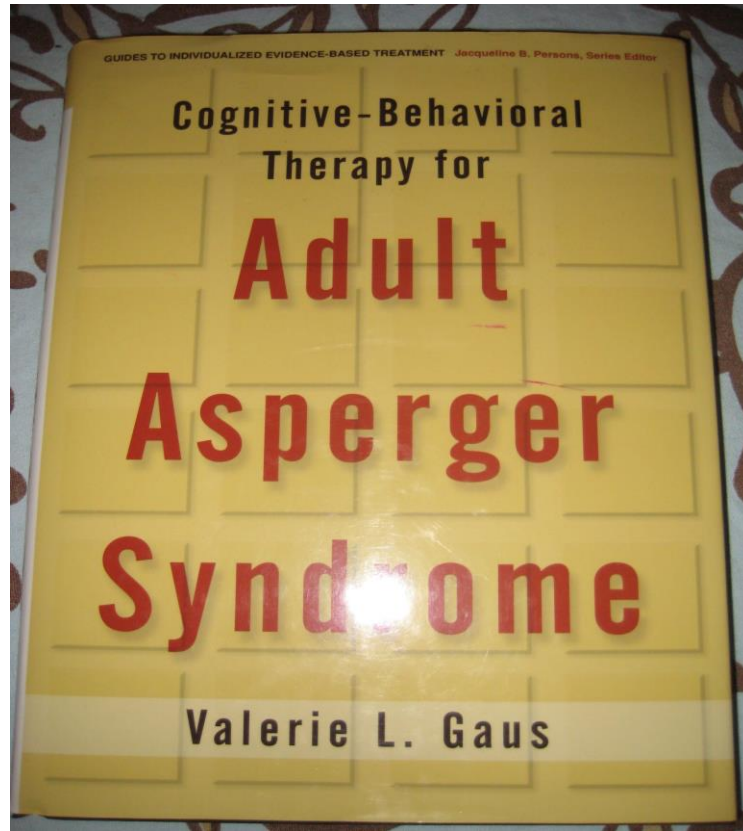
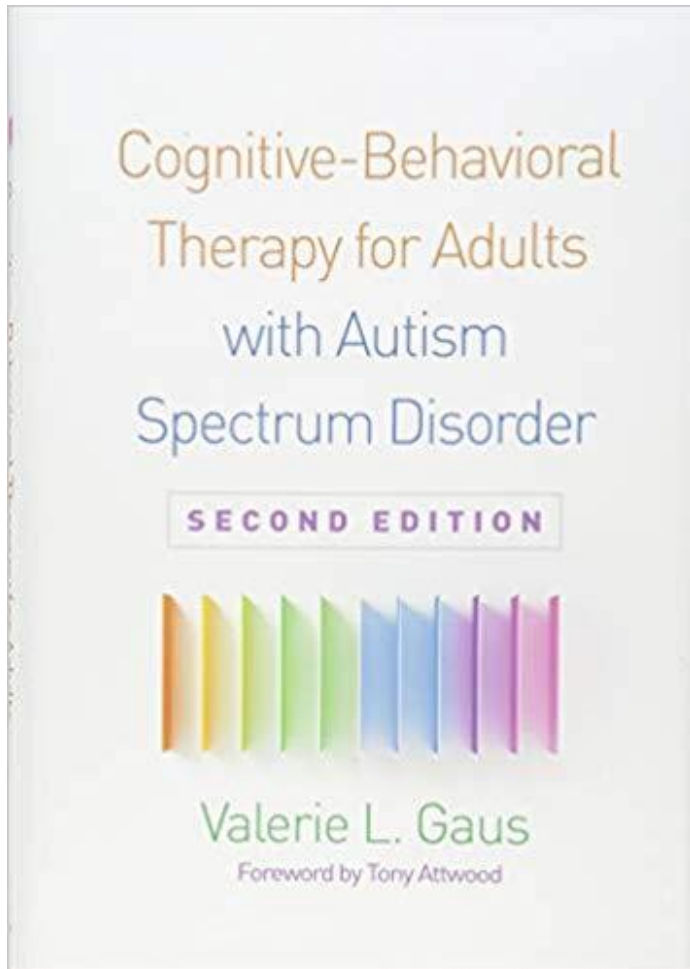
Montreal, Canada



Regulation of emotions


Valérie Gaus, Living well on
the spectrum (2011)






Particularities of autism

- Developed long term/factual memory: trauma takes root, permeates
- Thinking in pictures
- Hyper-sensibility and intensity of emotions: all or nothing
- Rapid escalation
- Loss of feelings
- Neocortex (high level abilities) communicate/poor connection with the Limbic system (primitive brain of emotions)
- Consequences: Less power; Reduced ability to influence control over emotions when thoughts take hold, intervene and interact
- Hinders the thought process, 'think and ponder' and the brain's ability to influence and control the emotions.

A large orange circle on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Resulting difficulties Gaus, 2011

1. Recognition of physiological state and emotions (signs and symptoms)
 2. Identification of needs indicated by the emotion (fight or flight)
 3. Notice important environmental cues/context
 4. Use the appropriate behavior to modulate the emotion
 5. Use cognitive strategies to adapt to intense emotions and traumas
- 
- A decorative blue dashed line in the bottom right corner, consisting of several curved segments.

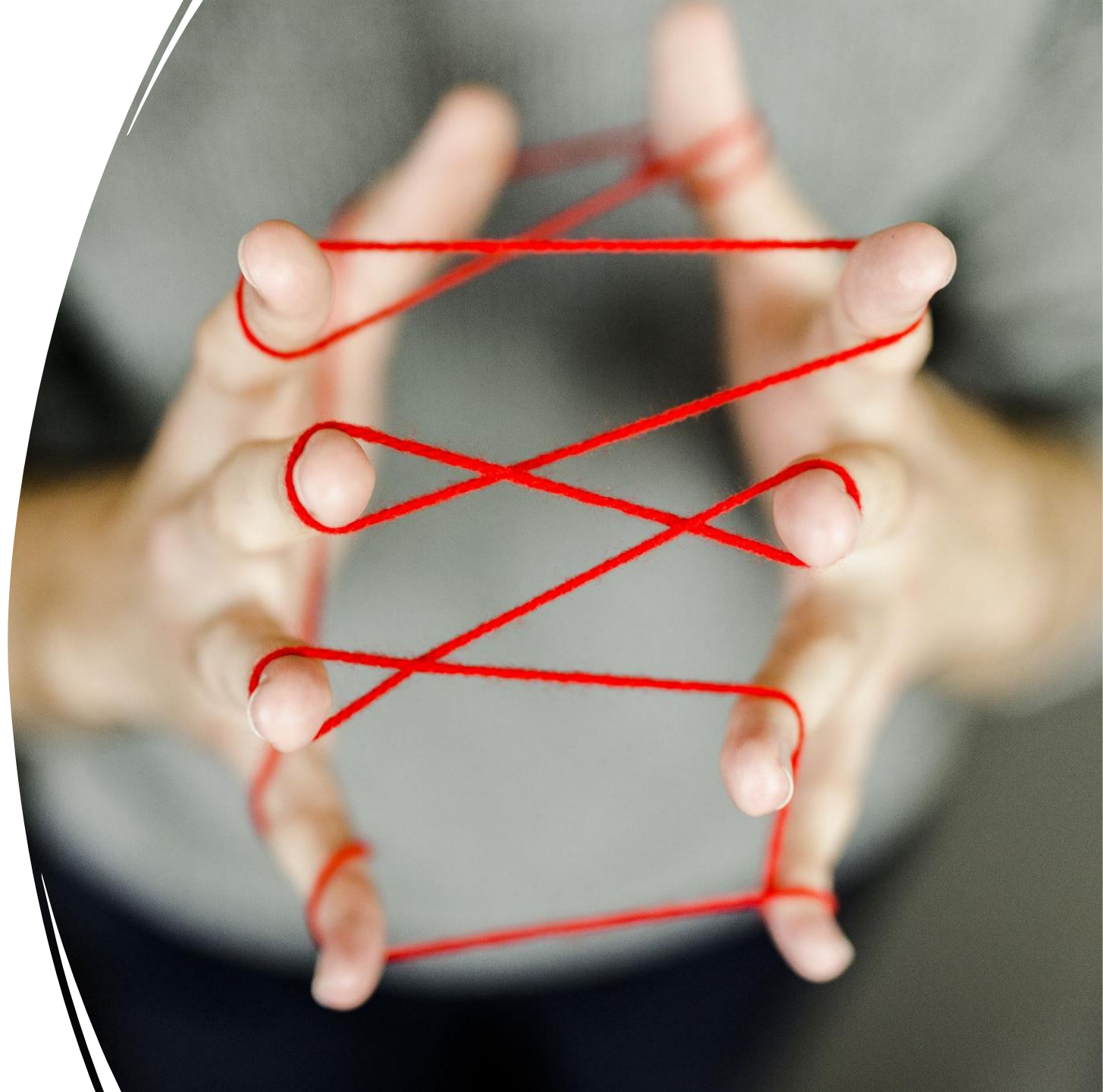
*Fight or
Flight
In response
to stress*

In response to acute stress: the body's sympathetic nervous system is activated due to the sudden release of hormones. It stimulates the **adrenal glands** triggering the release of catecholamine, in particular **adrenaline and noradrenaline**.

The hypothesis of a third behavior in a situation of stress or danger is proposed in humans: **sociability**. In fact, a socializing behavior would be a reflex response favoring stress control. This social behavior also increases the chances of **protection in a situation of danger**.

Physical reactions & cues

- 1. Difficulty to recognize cues
- 2. List of reactions
- 3. Mismatch with emotion/delay/expression



Why autistic individuals are more at risk of meltdown

Depression, anxiety, PTSD, ...



Edited by
Tony Attwood,
Craig R. Evers and Anita Lesko

Been There.
Done That.

TRY THIS!

AN ASPIE'S GUIDE TO LIFE ON EARTH

*Aspie Mentor Advice on Overcoming Daily Stressors from Temple Grandin,
Liane Holliday Willey, Anita Lesko, Stephen M. Shore,
Jennifer Cook O'Toole, Lars Permer, and many more.*

includes recommendations and commentary from Dr. Tony Attwood

Stress Factors

- Attwood, Evans & Lesko (2014). **Been there, done that, try this!**. London: JKP Publishers.
- Study on 322 autistic adult without Intellectual Disabilities (ID) aged 20 to 60 years +
- 57% women and 43% men
- List of 17 stress factors

17 Stress Factors

- **Anxiety:** reported by the subjects in 98% of cases
- Self-esteem and identity causes distress in 98% of cases
- Aversion to change: 87%
- Anxiety attacks: 87%
- Depression: 86%
- Sensory sensitivities: 86%



Non-acceptance and recognition of the diagnosis

Depression following the symptoms of anxiety

Avoidance of social situations and isolation

Navigation in a non autistic world

Huge mental energy to regulate emotions

Self-medicating (alcohol and drugs)

Contributing Factors



Contributing Factors

Inadequate environment

Family History of depression/anxiety

Psychological/psychiatric comorbidities

History and experience of repeated failures

Sensory sensitivities

A Different Sensory System

(T.ATTWOOD)

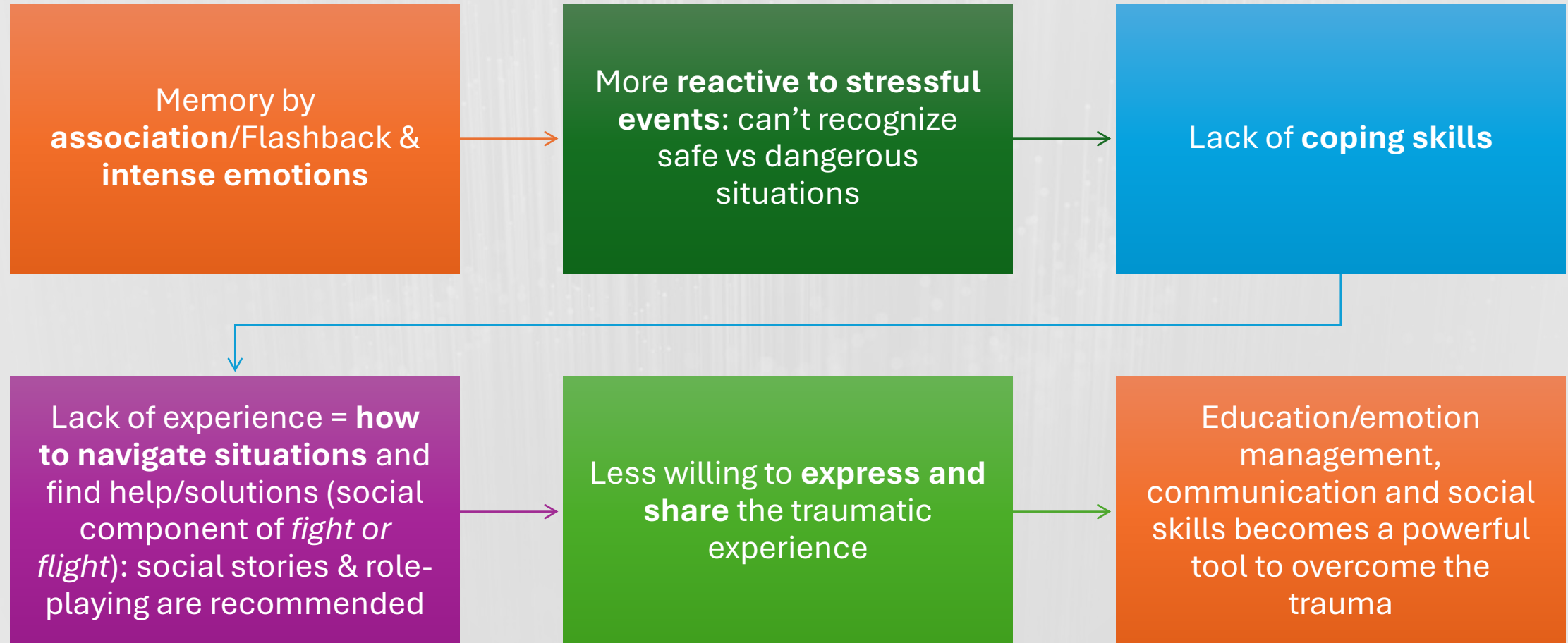
Exteroception

- Sensing the **outside** world
- Sound
- Sight
- Touch
- Smell
- Taste
- Negative emotions

Interoception

- Sensing the **internal** world
- Pain, illness (vomiting)
- Heart rate
- Hunger
- Temperature
- Emotions
- Alexithymia

ASD & Trauma: overview




Depression

- Symptoms described in 66% of autistic individuals
- Difficulties naming and expressing emotions: Alexithymia
- Difficulties in recognizing associated symptoms
- Tendency towards emotional escalation

Autistic burnout

- Processing information/ cognitive fatigue/train of thoughts
- Emotions (intensity & alexithymia)
- Sensory overload
- Social saturation
- Bullying
- Toxic environment
- Adapting to the NT world....
- Masking/camouflaging
- Performance anxiety

Autistic burnout (Attwood & Garnett, 2024)

- Being autistic in a **non-autistic world**
 - **Double empathy**
 - Coping with **social expectations** (Gore et al. 2024 *Neurodiversity* 2)
 - Lack of **social connection**
 - **Camouflaging**: Not the authentic self (Tomczak and Kulikowski 2023 *Current Psychology* 43)
 - **Multiple roles** in the family and work/study (Mckinney et al. 2024 *JCPP Advances* 4(4))
- 

Autistic burnout consequences



Memory issues



Loss of words/involuntary mutism



Executive functions challenges



Low motivation



Neurodivergence

- Sensitivity
- Definition of wellbeing
- Being me!
- Acceptance
- Need for **eclectic** approaches/adapted strategies

New program for Improving Communication!

Effective
for
All Ages

The CAT-kit

Cognitive Affective Training

Developed by

Dr. Tony

ATTWOOD

Dr. Kirsten Callesen and Dr. Annette Møller Nielsen

A Balance: my toolbox (T. Attwood)

• ***Stress***

- Socialize
- Sensory experiences
- Changes and the unknown

• ***Strategies***

- Relaxation
- Physical activity
- Solitude
- Special Interest



EXPLORING DEPRESSION AND BEATING THE BLUES

A CBT Self-Help Guide to Understanding and Coping with Depression in Asperger's Syndrome (ASD-Level 1)

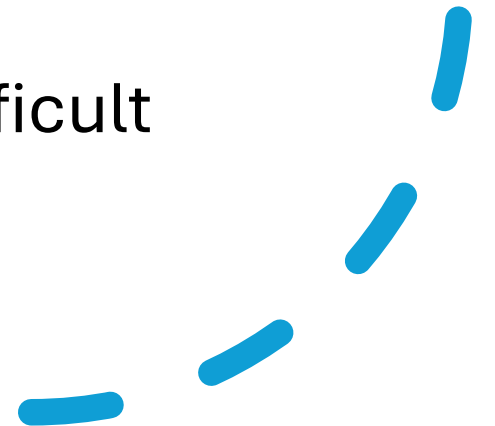


Tony Attwood and Michelle Garnett

Illustrations by Colin Thompson

Content & activities Attwood & Garnett

- Change in special interest: monitoring, morbid interests/cry for help
- Anger as an expression of depression
- Alexithymia
- Masking emotions
- Suppression of emotions
- Mind/body disconnection
- Self recognition/reflexion is difficult



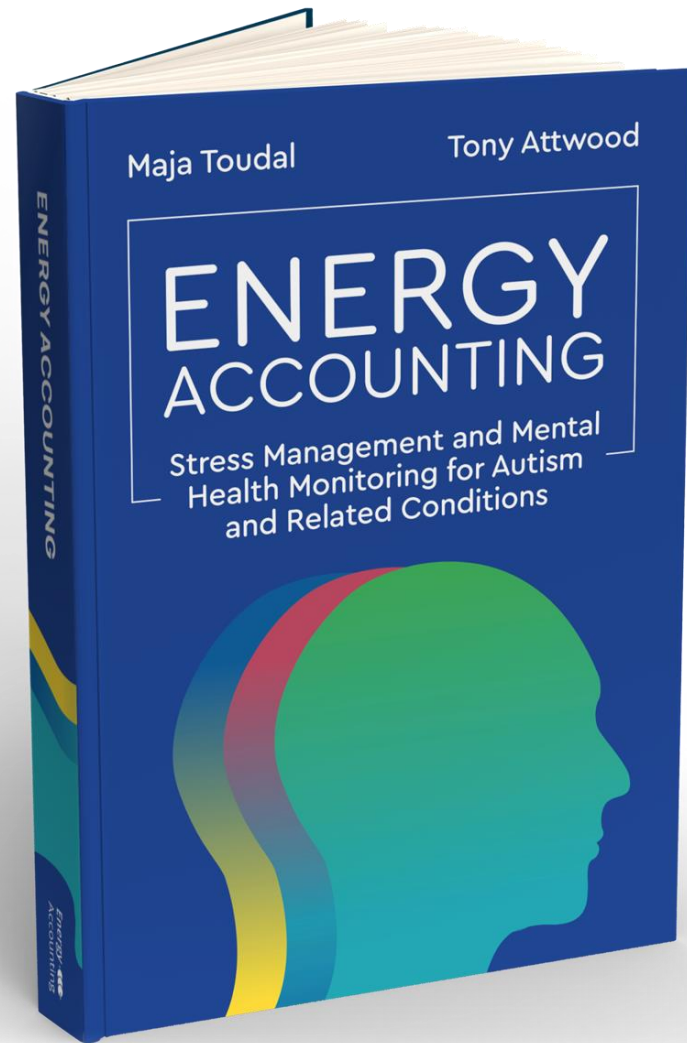
Expressing
feelings
Attwood &
Garnett

Questions & descriptions of mood

Pleasure list (activities, animals, memories, dreams, booklet, etc.)

Strengths

Diary



Energy Accounting



- Maja Toudal: Concept of an **energy bank account**
- Energy **withdrawals and deposits** throughout the day
- Risk of **energy depletion** leading to burnout and depression
- *When I am emotionally depleted, I need to be disconnected to look after myself*

Maja Toudal & Tony Attwood's book/Handouts:
<https://energyaccounting.com/handouts/>



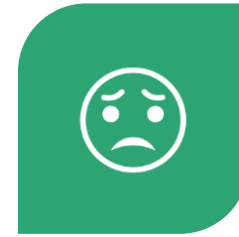
ACUTE STRESS
SYMPTOMS



DAILY ENERGY
ACCOUNT FORM



EVALUATION SHEET



MY STRESS
SYMPTOMS



WELLBEING
SYMPTOMS &
WORKSHEETS

Energy Bank Account: Withdrawals and Deposits

Withdrawal

- Socializing
- Change
- Making a mistake
- Sensory sensitivity
- Daily living skills
- Coping with anxiety
- Over analysing social performance
- Sensitivity to other people's moods
- Being teased or excluded
- Crowds
- Government agencies
- Body shape
- Perceived injustice
- Certain people

Deposit

- Solitude
- Special interest
- Physical activity
- Animals and nature
- Computer games
- Meditation
- Caring for others
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Reading Harry Potter books
- Mental health vacation day
- Information on the Internet
- Being with pets
- Certain people

Energy Accounting

Currency: numerical measure or value of how much an activity or experience is energy draining or refreshing from day to day

Energy range rated from one to 100 for each activity or experience in the withdrawal or deposit columns

On some days, socializing can drain energy at a value of around 20 but on other days could be 100



Range of Energy Depletion and Refreshment: 15-Year-Old Autistic Girl

Withdrawals

- Late to school 10-40
- Crowds 20-60
- Mum being cranky 30-100
- Friends not being nice to each other 20-30
- Friends' own problems 20-90
- Noise in class 20-30

Deposits

- Reading Harry Potter 30-80
- Dancing freestyle in bedroom 30-50
- Talking to boys at school 10-30
- Quiet time in bedroom 20-80

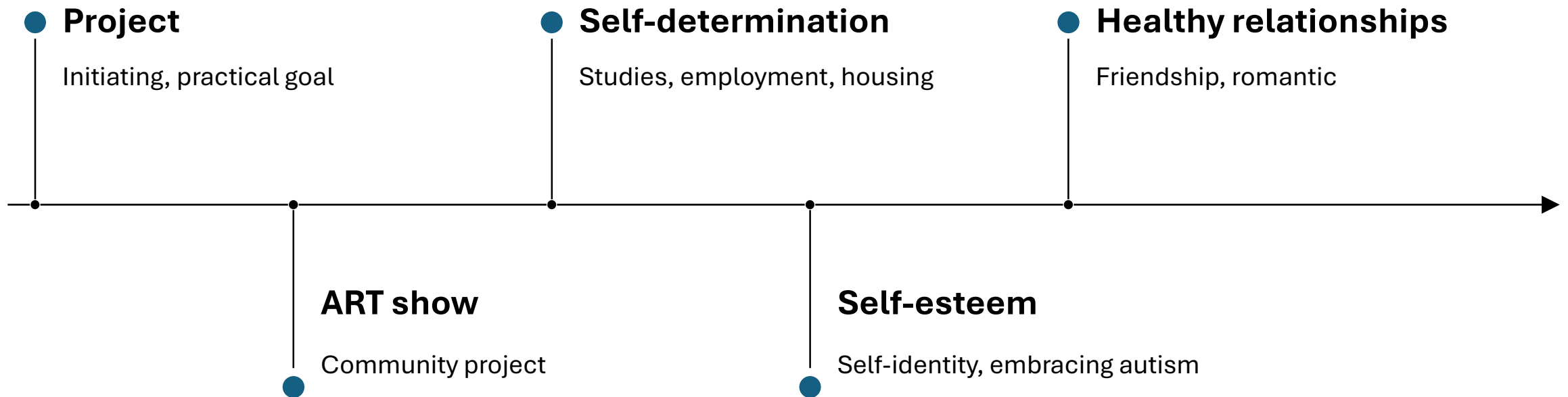
Extra
strategies

Sensory
accommodations

Acceptance

Mentor/help

In vivo....







Research papers

- Measuring autistic burnout: A psychometric validation of the AASPIRE Autistic Burnout Measure in autistic adults by Mackenzie Bougoure & coll. (2025).
- Camouflage, Burnout Exhaustion, and Depression in Autistic Adults by Joy Benatov, Ella Sarel-Mahlev & Shahar Bar Yehuda (2025).
- “Measuring and validating autistic burnout by Jane Mantzalas, AmandaL., Rich Dale, XiaLi & Cheryl Dissanayake (2024).
- “It Has Shown Me How Much I Am Capable Of”: An Exploration of Autistic Burnout Experiences in Motherhood by Ashton Ferguson, David Martin & Amy Pearson (2024).