

INTERVENTION (PROFESSIONALS)

Many people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) benefit from evidence-based treatments targeting trauma symptoms, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). However, providers should adapt these treatments to the individual's needs, given communication difficulties, cognitive abilities, or developmental level. Here are some tips for providers to adapt evidence-based treatments for individuals with ASD:

- Some individuals may not have the attention span to participate in 50 minutes of traditional “talk therapy.” Maintain their attention by offering regular breaks and incorporating their interests into therapy.
- Include plans and goals that focus on changing behaviors that are distressing for the patient.
- If the individual agrees, involve a family member, partner, or caregiver in treatment to support the treatment at home, school, and in the community. Regular practice of concepts learned in therapy is important for progress.
- Use clear, concise language. Avoid jargon, excessive use of metaphors, or figures of speech. For instance, instead of saying “makes you feel warm inside,” say “makes you feel happy.” Make sure that role-plays and social stories are concrete, relatable to the person, and easily understood.



Individuals with autism may need more support to identify their thoughts and feelings. It may be helpful to use written and visual information through components such as:

- Worksheets
- Fill-in thought bubbles
- Thermometer image to help visualize the strength of feelings/symptoms
- Prepared images that display key therapeutic concepts
- Development of visual ‘tool boxes’ that depict skills taught in therapy. Make any ‘rules’ or guidelines taught in therapy explicit and explain their context.



Computerized and app-based treatment components may be helpful to reinforce concepts.

Examples include:

The TF-CBT Triangle of Life App:

<https://tfcbt.org/tf-cbt-triangle-of-life/>

Web-based videos that provide psychoeducation:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/amans-story/>