

Internalising and Hidden Anxiety



Here are some further tips and strategies that can be used to identify and help manage anxiety in autistic girls:

- ➔ **Provide trigger warnings for topics that may cause her distress at school. She may tend to be more empathetic and may become overly sensitive during class discussions. For example about injured animals or people who died in the war.**
- ➔ **Try not to over stimulate the classroom with too many posters or visuals as she may become overwhelmed. Keep these items to a minimum. As sensory overload may directly contribute to her increased anxiety.**
- ➔ **If she “stims” in class as a way of managing her anxiety do not to stop her if this is what she finds comforting. For example rocking, clapping, vocal humming, hair twirling. Her stimming is most likely assisting in her ability to self regulate and concentrate.**
- ➔ **Manage emotions in the classroom by having an “anxiety box” that she as well as other students can put notes in to and the teacher can check regularly.**
- ➔ **Be aware of perfectionist traits that can come out when she is stressed or anxious. For example she may want to complete a task even after the bell has gone or she may be overly critical of a mistake that she has made.**
- ➔ **Check in with her regularly. It's best to be discreet and offer her a variety of ways she can approach you. For example, in early years, a visual sign that girls can use to identify that she needs help is effective, and in older years being allowed to email the teacher directly can improve communication.**
- ➔ **Get to know her. Understand her individual triggers for anxiety and dig deeper if they are not obvious - she may be camouflaging them. It is also worth checking in with parents as they will have great suggestions as to what is helpful for their daughter.**

Internalising and Hidden Anxiety

- ⇒ Establish a safe haven or quiet place for her to access in the classroom or on the playground and provide her with a discreet exit strategy to access these when needed.
- ⇒ Allow her to have her comfort items close to hand e.g., fidget or sensory tools, soft toys.
- ⇒ Lastly, requesting or forcing eye contact can increase her anxiety and make it harder for her to complete work. A common misconception is that avoiding eye contact may signify a lack of interest when in fact it is helping her to process information, and keep focused on the task at hand.

For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, which is a supplement to 'Spotlight on Girls with Autism: Supporting Autistic Girls at School' website, we are using the pronouns 'she/her'. Yellow Ladybugs recognises all gender identities and we emphasise that this information may also be relevant to autistic cis-boys and gender diverse autistic individuals, and equally that this information may not always be applicable to all autistic girls/women.