Anxiety FAQs

What is anxiety?

• Interfering feelings, worries, anxiety and/or fears

Types of anxiety

• Social anxiety disorder
• Generalized anxiety disorder
• Separation anxiety disorder
• Specific phobia

How common is anxiety in people with ASD?

• About 40% of people with ASD will also have an anxiety disorder

What can anxiety look like in a person with ASD?

• Anxiety in people with ASD, at times, can look different from people without ASD

Examples

• A stronger insistence on following a routine or having everything be the same
• Increasing stereotypical behaviors (stimming)
• Excessively seeking reassurance
• Meltdowns, tantrums, and outbursts
• Increased cognitive inflexibility “getting stuck”

What treatments are available for anxiety?

Non-medication treatments

• CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) is a highly effective non-medication treatment for anxiety.
• CBT tends to work better in individuals that have more language.

Medications

• Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are considered first-line treatments for anxiety. People with ASD, more so children with ASD, can be more sensitive to side effects of medications and may do better with other anti-anxiety medications, i.e., buspirone.

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I think my loved one or I have anxiety. What should I do?

- If already connected with a developmental specialist or psychiatrist, speak with them.
- Reach out to you or your child’s primary care physician.