

Embracing True Self: A Parent's Guide to Supporting Masking and Regulation in Autistic Girls

Surrey Educational Psychology Service

Saya Dunford, Educational Psychologist
Anna Haworth, Trainee Educational Psychologist
Rhiannon Brito, Assistant Educational Psychologist



What is masking?

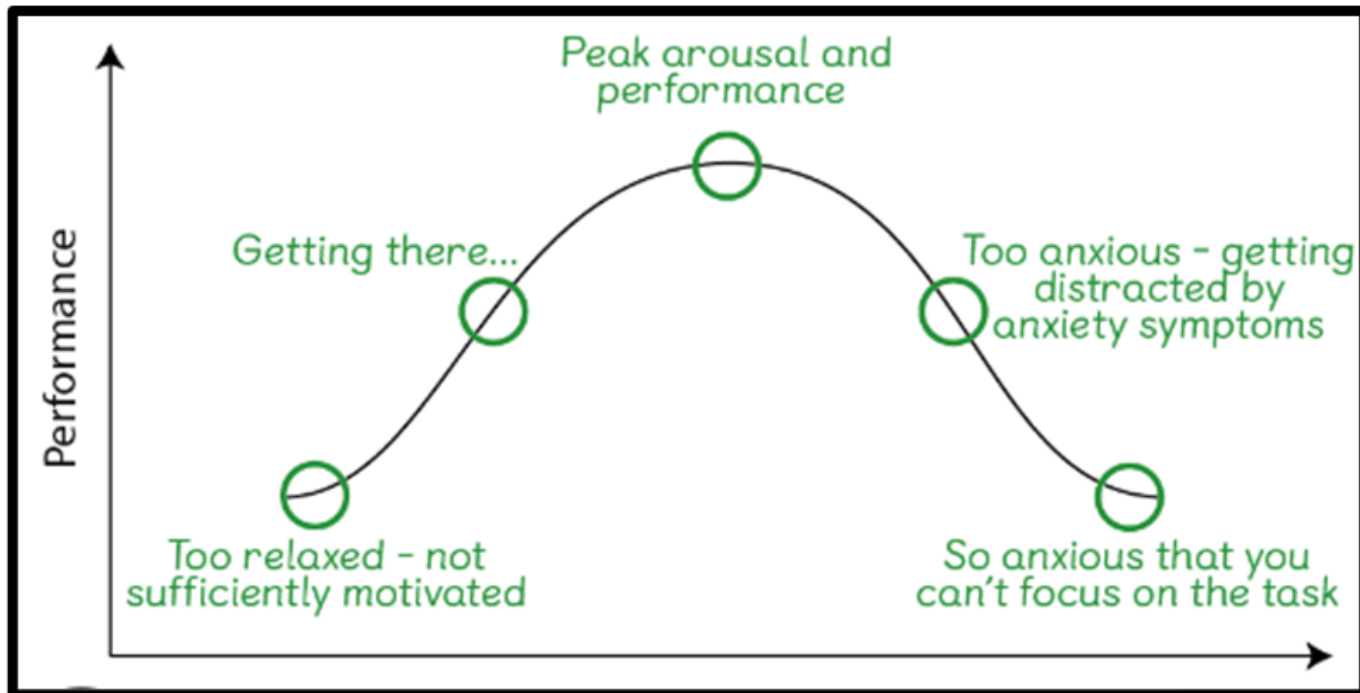
- From “Different, not less: A neurodivergent’s guide to embracing your true self and finding your happily ever after” by Chloe Hayden

“...Autistic females tend to be extremely socially aware, self-aware, and aware of who they’re supposed to be. Thus, they may try to mimic and copy other girls to fit in better, and hide their own natural traits. This can be seen in the way they force eye contact, hold back stims, pre-prepare jokes and scripts, and mimic how others walk, dress and speak.”

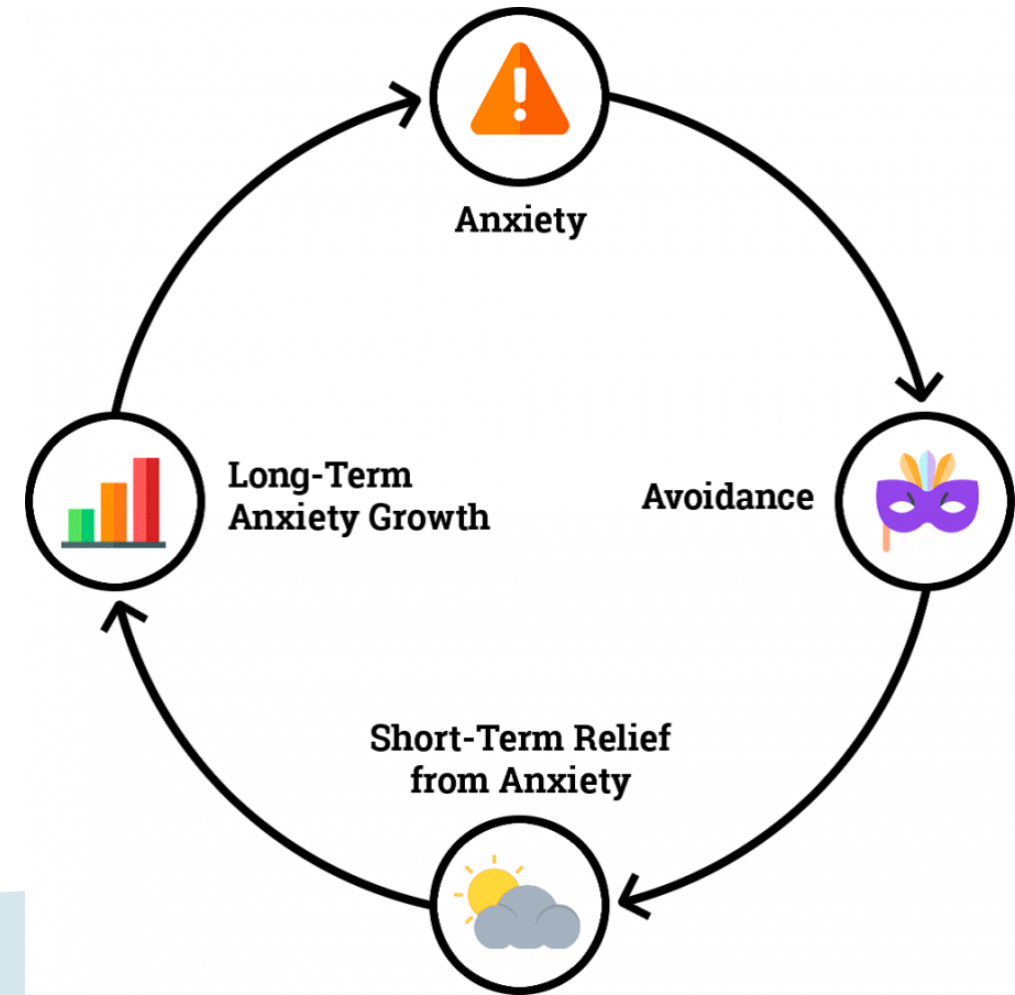


Anxiety

A degree of anxiety can be useful as it helps us alert to, prepare for, and respond to a challenging situation.



Cycle of anxiety

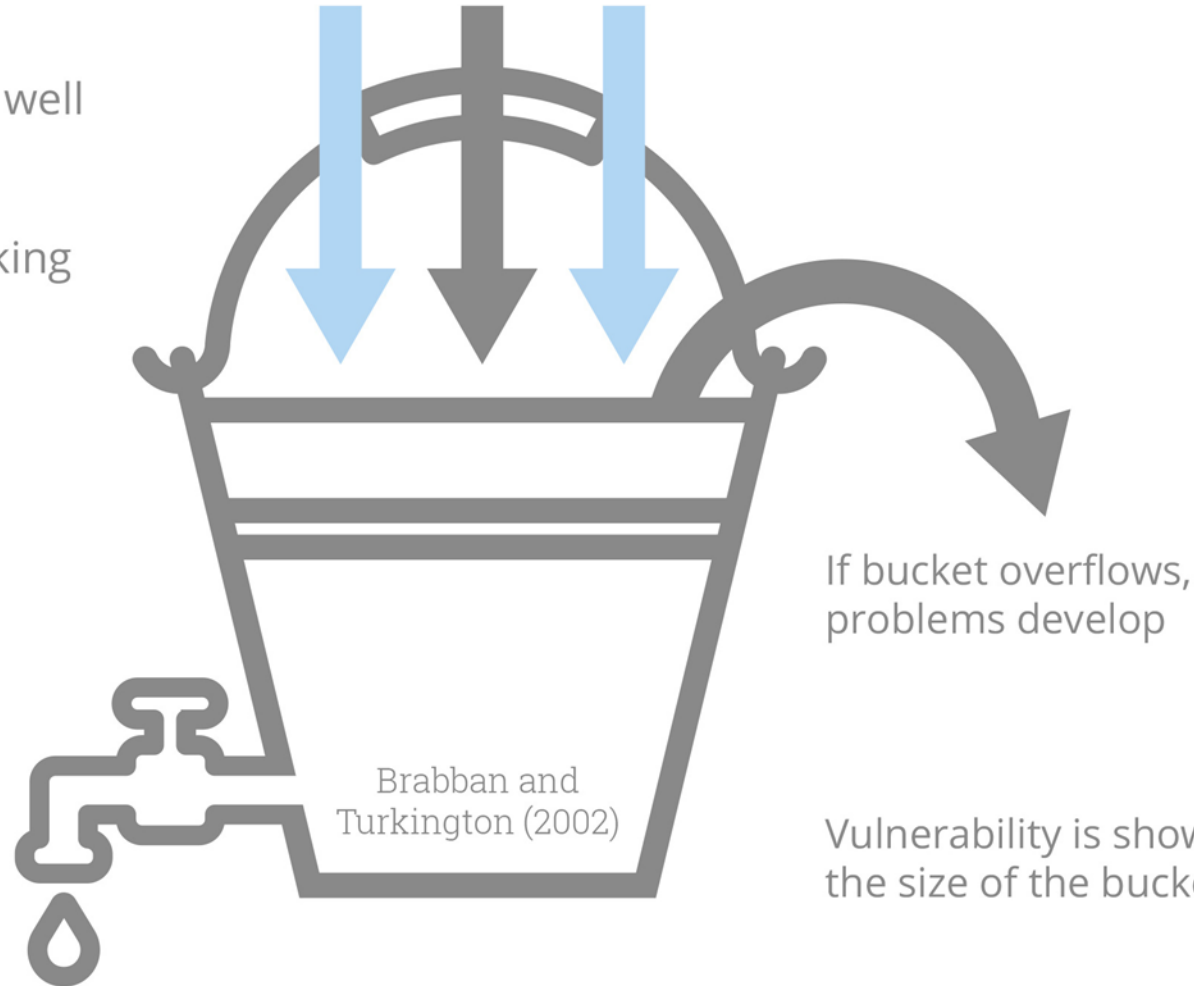


The stress bucket

Stress flows into your bucket

Good Coping
= Tap is working well

Bad Coping
= Tap is not working well



Vulnerability is shown by the size of the bucket

The Neurodivergent Spoon Drawer



EXECUTIVE
FUNCTIONING SPOONS



PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY SPOONS



SOCIAL SPOONS



FOCUS SPOONS



SENSORY SPOONS



LANGUAGE SPOONS

Spoon theory

Different activities require a different number of spoons.



Get out of bed



Read/Study



Socialize



Go to work



Dressed



Drive



Light
housework



Go to school



Watch T.V



Shower



Go to
medical visits

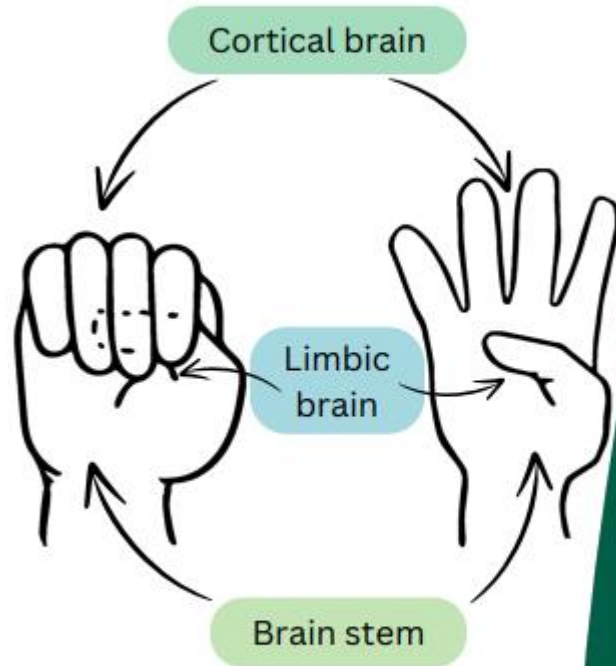


Attend social
event

The hand model of the brain and the 3Rs

Hand Model of the Brain

Siegel, D., 2010

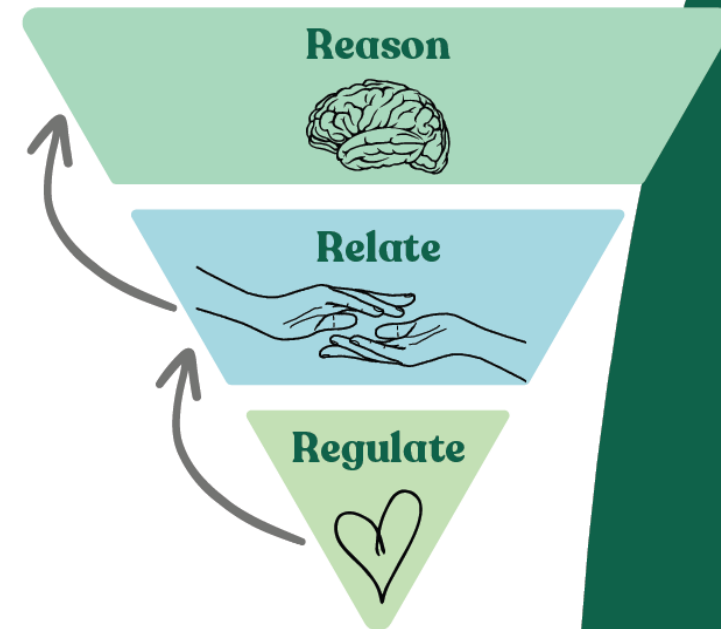


Educational Psychology Service



The 3 Rs: Regulate, Relate and Reason

Perry, B., 2006



Educational Psychology Service

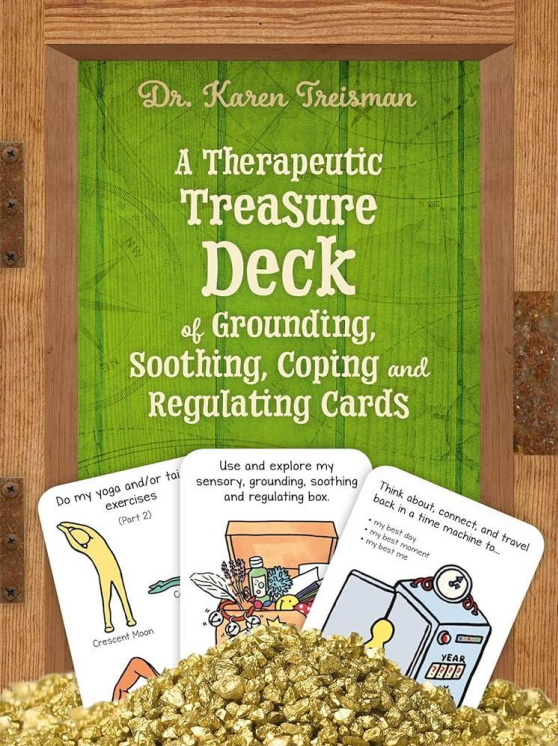


Regulate- Brainstem calmers

Brain Calming Activities

Thanks to Dr Bruce Perry & his Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics





For ages 7-11

DON'T WORRY,
BE HAPPY



Poppy O'Neill

Regulate- coping strategies and CBT approaches



1	(hardest task)
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	(easiest task)

Preventing the bucket from filling up...

- Meeting their basic needs.
- Consistency of structure and routine.
- Visual timetables and schedules.
- Preparation for changes and transitions.
- Check-ins with key adults.
- Reducing demands.
- Sensory activities and objects- e.g. fiddle objects, heavy work.
- Movement/brain breaks.
- Calm spaces and quiet corners.

Helpful resources

- “Different, not less: A neurodivergent’s guide to embracing your true self and finding your happily ever after” by Chloe Hayden
- “The Spectrum Girl’s Survival Guide: How to Grow up Awesome and Autistic” by Siena Castellon
- A Therapeutic Treasure Deck of Grounding, Soothing, Coping and Regulating Cards (Therapeutic Treasures Collection)- by Karen Treisman
- The relational regulation game- Beacon House
- “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” by Poppy O’Neill
- “Starving the Anxiety Gremlins” by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- Brainstem calmers- Beacon House

Helpful resources

- Kooth- <https://www.kooth.com/>
- Apps such as Calm (for meditation), Clear Fear (for managing anxiety), Smiling Mind (for wellbeing), Happify (tools for wellbeing and happiness), SAM (for mental health).
- APPEAR- <https://www.appeer.org.uk/>
- The Curly Hair Project- <https://thegirlwiththecurlyhair.co.uk/>