

Other people should understand:

How the physical environment impacts communication for Autistic youth



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Overstimulation = Your brain receives more information than it can process

Overstimulation happens for many reasons, including an overwhelming physical environment. Everyone gets overstimulated sometimes, but autistic youth may experience overstimulation differently.

Use this booklet to explore how the physical environment impacts your communication. Fill it out yourself or with someone close to you.

What can it feel like?

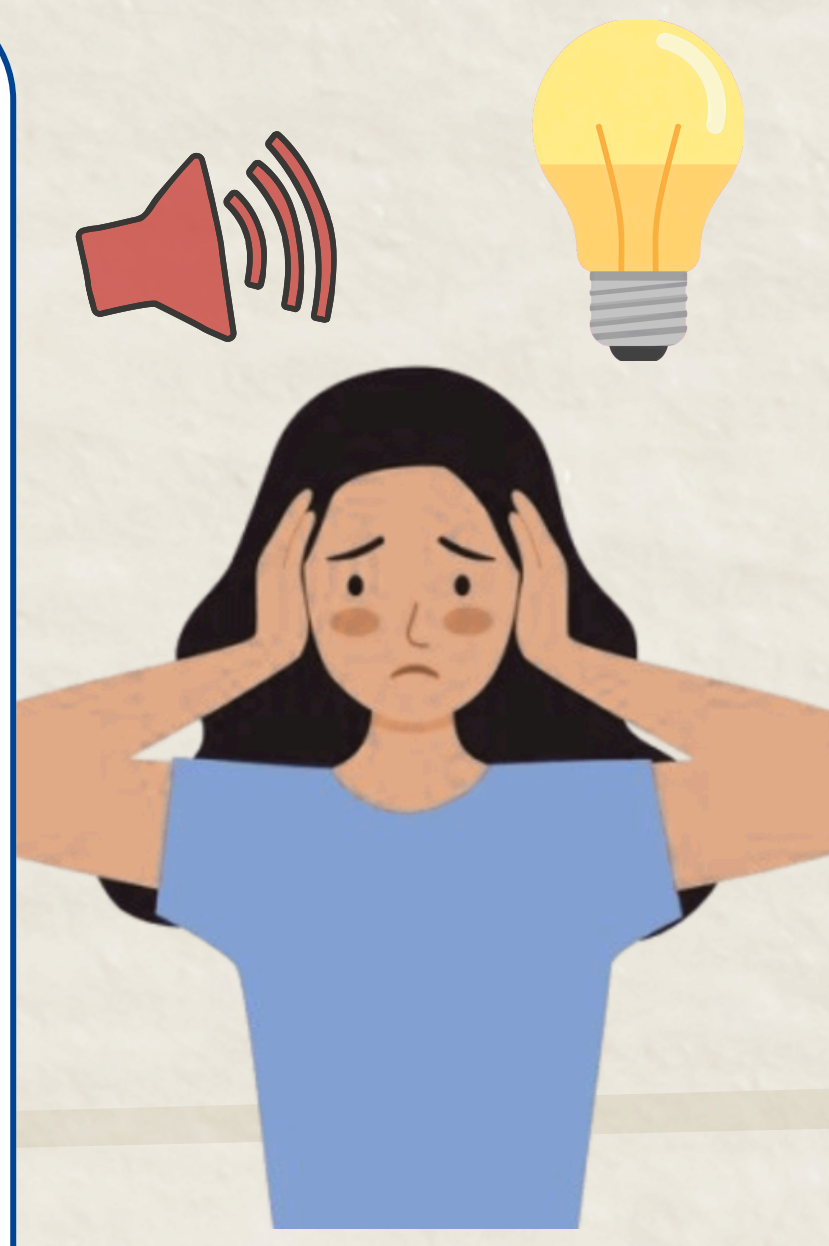
- Feeling trapped or needing to get away/escape
- Drained or shut down
- Hard to listen, focus or respond
- Inability for your brain to filter things out

Add Your Own:

What can it look like?

- Circle, Check , Or Add What Applies To You:**
- Not hearing when others speak
 - Speaking less or not at all
 - Speaking faster
 - Hands moving or touching
 - Moving your body more
 - Stumbling on words

Add Your Own:



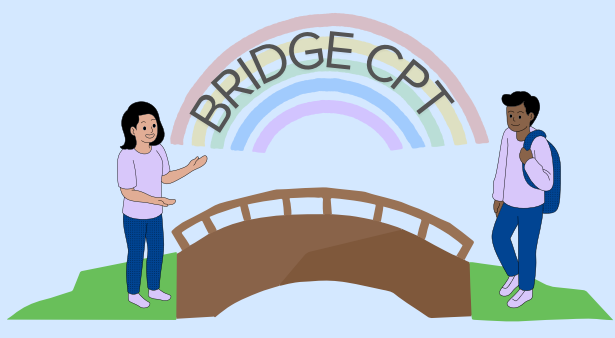
What about the environment can feel overwhelming?

- Noise - loud noises, too many people speaking at once
- Light (too bright, too dark)
- Touch (people too close, unwanted touch)
- Smell & taste (strong or unpleasant)
- Several senses/triggers at once
- Busy places, too many people at once

Add your own:

“It kind of drives me crazy in the back of my head, and I can't fully focus on what we're even talking about if I think the light is too bright where we are, or the temperature is making me uncomfortable, or there's a smell that I don't like, or even loud noise”

Autistic youth in their words...



Supporting communication when the physical environment is overwhelming

Fill this out on your own or with someone you trust to identify your cues and circle what helps.

Identifying my cues

Everyone's signs of overstimulation can look different. What are some of yours? Write them below.

I can tell I'm overstimulated when/it can look like...



What can others do? (Circle) or check what helps.

Change the Environment

AND

Provide Support

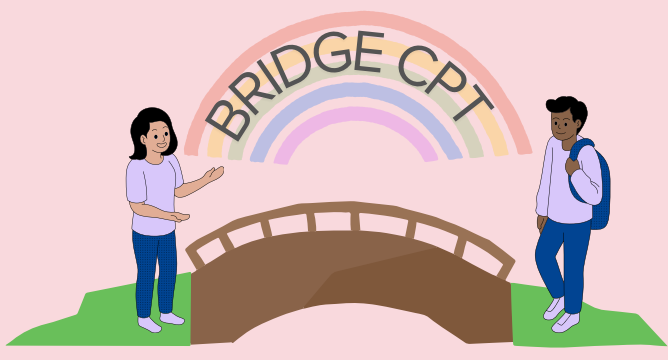
- Notice signs early to prevent overload
- Offer a walk or break
- Turn down lights
- Lower noise or move to a quiet space
- Reduce obvious distractions
- Provide a sensory-friendly space
- Reduce crowding if possible
- Limit strong smells
- Have different seating options (various places and types of seats)
- Adjust the temperature of the room if possible or have fans available

Add your own:

- Stay calm - Co-regulation
- Use affirming language
- Give space if needed
- Have fidgets available
- Offer ear defenders or headphones
- Offer choices instead of demands
- Use low-pressure conversation
- Notice and accept nonverbal cues
- Show or talk about something calming
- Do not take it personally if we need space
- Do not make assumptions about how we feel or what we need

Add your own:

Co-regulation = someone else helping us regulate our emotions by providing safe, responsive support

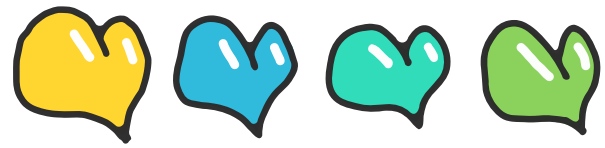


My regulation tools

Use this tool on your own or with someone you trust - you can discuss your triggers, signs of overload, and what helps you.

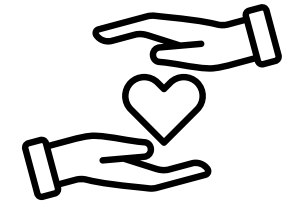
When I feel overstimulated...

I might feel...



- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much at once | <input type="checkbox"/> Like I need to escape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> It's hard to focus |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On edge | <input type="checkbox"/> It's hard to talk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed | <input type="checkbox"/> It's hard to listen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Distracted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritated | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental overload |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Tense |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restless | <input type="checkbox"/> Like things feel off |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drained | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shut down | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frozen | _____ |
| | _____ |

I might need...



- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less noise | <input type="checkbox"/> Time to regulate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lower lights | <input type="checkbox"/> Fewer questions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A break | <input type="checkbox"/> Something familiar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A quiet space | <input type="checkbox"/> Someone familiar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headphones | <input type="checkbox"/> Closed-ended questions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To move | <input type="checkbox"/> To get a snack |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A fidget | <input type="checkbox"/> My comfort item |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Space | <input type="checkbox"/> Help changing the environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A distraction | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breaths | _____ |

What helps me most?

The physical environment feels overstimulating when...

What helps me...

What other people can do to help (and what *not* to do)...