

FUNCTION JUNCTION: BEHAVIOR MATTERS

September 2022 Research Recap

September has already brought us some important research regarding anxiety in autistic children. The [European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#) (2022), published a study by Danielle Baribeau and others ([Developmental cascades between insistence on sameness behavior and anxiety symptoms in autism spectrum disorders](#)) which found that although we know children with autism express a strong preference in “sameness” in their daily lives (e.g., wearing the same clothing, taking the same routes, following routines exactly), they may be prone to anxiety.

The authors stated that anxiety disorders affect 20 to 60 percent of autistic children by middle childhood (about ages 6 to 12), in contrast to an estimated 2.2 to 27 percent of typically developing children. However, “what is so unclear is why anxiety is so common, who is most at risk, and if there anything that can be done to prevent anxiety before it becomes a problem.”

“Autistic children with a high need for sameness or behavioral rigidity may be more vulnerable to mental health challenges such as anxiety as they grow up,” according to the authors. One possible explanation for the change over time is that younger children may prefer insistence on sameness as a strategy for coping with anxiety, whereas older kids may have difficulty using or finding other methods to help deal with it (e.g., Zones of Regulation, 5-Point Scales, Social Narratives, Power Cards).

Cissy and Susan found this interesting because most of us understand that learners on the spectrum prefer sameness and routine; but what some might not appreciate is that this preference could result in anxiety as they mature. This is so important for parents and educators to familiarize themselves with some of the strategies mentioned above.

