#### FRAGILE WORLD ON THE SPECTRUM

#### MY WORLD IS "CONFUSING" AND "OVERWHELMING"!!

# OVERWHELMING ENVIRONMENTAL DEMANDS

- Too much, too fast!
- Too loud, too bright!
- ∘ I don't understand!
- o What do they mean?
- o I don't know how to act!
- What is expected?
- o How should I respond?

### WEAK & FRAGILE \_ NERVOUS SYSTEM

- Sensory defensive; over-reacting to stimulation.
- o Poor registration of information.
- o Problems integrating senses.
- o Becomes overloaded easily.
- Poor digestive and weaken immune systems
- Areas of brain do not work well together to give meaning to event.

o Build up of stress

chemicals.

**STRESS** 

**OVERLOAD!** 

- o Feeling confused, overwhelmed.
- Feeling frustrated, anxious and scared.
- Break down of thought processes and ability to regulate emotions.

- FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE!
- Shut-downs: Withdraw; unresponsive; nervous system shuts down in order to rebound.
- Meltdowns: Tantrums, aggression, property disruption, self-abuse, all in attempt to release stress chemicals and to escape/avoid stressors.

#### PLEASE HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND AND FEEL SAFE, ACCEPTED, AND COMPETENT!!

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#### **SOURCES OF STRESS**

#### I Don't Understand! Cognitive Deficits

- Delayed informational processing.
- Difficulty processing multiple information.
- Focus on detail, often missing the big picture.
- o Rigid, inflexible thinking.
- Problems processing rapid change, shifting gears
- Difficulty planning, organizing and following a plan of action.
- Trouble understanding what is required.
- Must process too much, too fast!
- Need simple, concrete, visual instructions.

#### **Sensory Overload!**

- Too bright, too loud, too strong, too much!.
- Difficulty integrating sensory input.
- o Over or under aroused.
- o Sensory overload!
- Physical demands too difficult.

CONFUSED!
OVERWHELMED!
FRUSTRATED!
SCARED!
ANXIOUS!

## **Social Performance Expectations!**

- o Strong social anxiety
- Difficulty reading and interpreting social cues.
- Impaired ability to understand intent and perspective of others
- Hard to coordinate and repair interaction.
- o What is expected?
- o What is he saying?
- O What does he mean?
- o What should I say?
- How should I act?. Interaction moving too fast!
- o I DON'T WANT TO STAND OUT!
- Often unaware of how behavior is seen by others.

#### Poor Emotional Control

- o Poor frustration tolerance.
- o Poor self control.
- Often anxious, easily upset, disorganized.
- Unpredictable emotional outbursts.
- Difficulty identifying, interpreting, & regulating emotions.

#### Communication

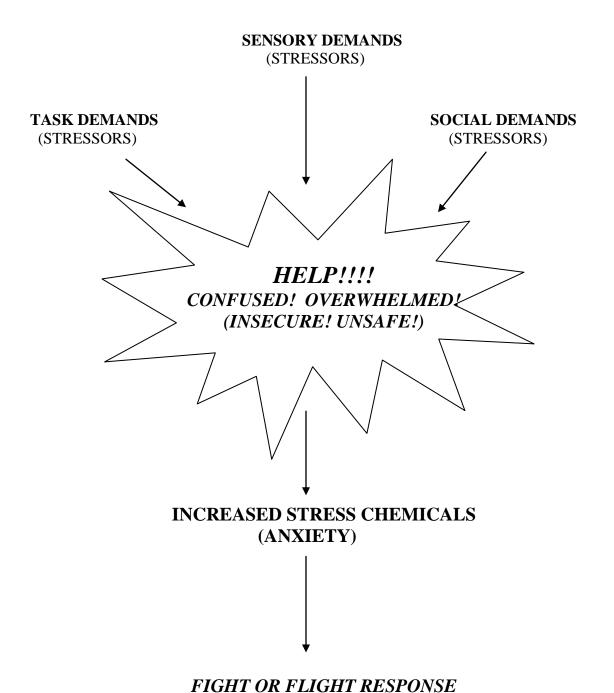
- Difficulty processing what others are saying.
- Problems reading nonverbal communication.
- Very literal; cannot read between the lines.
- Trouble formulating a verbal response.
- Problem communicating feelings, needs and wants.
- Verbal skills deteriorate when upset!

#### **Structured Routine**

- Demands of routine, too much, too fast.
- o Transitions/change is hard.
- Difficulty understanding rules, roles & expectations.
- Need rigid schedule that is familiar and predictable.
- o Avoids novelty and change.
- o Difficulty with mediating time and schedule
- o Unexpected shifting gears.
- Unstructured time causes stress.

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### **STRESS REACTION**



(SHUT DOWN OR MELT DOWN)

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#### STRESS REDUCTION

#### Calm and Organize Nervous System

- o Reduce stimulation
- o Provide calming input
- o Deep pressure to calm
- o Proprioception to organize
- Slow vestibular as tolerated.
- Physical activity to release stress chemicals
- Sensory diet to calm and organize nervous system

## Reduce Social Demands

- Encourage and support, but do not pressure.
- Help interpret intent and expectations of others.
- o Assume social anxiety.
- Role play and/or guide through interaction
- o Use social stories
- Awareness training for peers.

#### **Reduce Confusion**

- o Reduce demands
- Slow down, one step at a time.
- Keep directions simple, concrete, with visual cues.
- Don't assume child understands; provide added support.
- o Preview and review often.
- Ensure concrete beginning and end to tasks.

# Support When Agitated

- Intervene/support at first signs of agitation.
- o Remove demands, slow down, stay calm.
- o Be supportive not punitive
- Help child calm and feel safe.
- Coach alternative responses.
- o Provide "safe area" to escape to when anxious
- Help problem solve if calm enough.

PLEASE HELP ME....

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FEEL SAFE & ACCEPTED!!

FEEL COMPETENT!!

#### **Structured Routine**

- Consistent, predictable routine.
- Visual schedule
- Slow down, space out activity.
- Tailor demands/expectations to maximize success.
- Minimize fatigue, sensory overload
- o Support for transitions
- Preparation for novelty/change
- Patterned routine and demands to individual needs