



Introduction

"If you ain't worried, you ain't right"—Taj Maha

- · Global pandemic!
- · Looming ecological disaster!
- 24/7 news of shootings, violence, political chaos, disasters!
- Divorce, isolation, loss of community, job stresses!
- Apocalypse now!!!







Autism & Anxiety

The Resilient Child





Introduction "If you ain't worried, you ain't right"—Taj Mahal

- · ASD is the poster child for the study of anxiety
 - "I have autism. I must keep the world the same or I will feel overwhelmed and anxious/fearful."
- The theme of this talk: <u>Using</u> anxiety and upset to promote coping, resilience, and improved development
 - Two-edged sword: The higher development, the more fears and anxieties
 - · If not recognized and handled well it can impair developmental progress
- · Among Deep Brain Structures (Panksepp)
- He comes by it honestly: The Genetics of Anxiety
- Socially there are so many demands and stresses!!!
- · How do we help our poor kid with all of his worries?



Autism & Anxiety

Introduction

Wouldn't it be better if I could just watch this glowing screen of repetitive, predictable images?!*



*Answer: No, not really.



Autism & Anxiety

Definitions: Fear

- Fear: One of the longest definitions in the Oxford dictionary!
 - From Old English 'calamity, danger and revere'
- Fear goes back to our biological beginnings = SURVIVAL
 - See Panksepp
- · Fear of:
 - Anything new, sudden and strange
 - The dark, monsters and nightmares
 - The future
- · Fear becoming anxiety









Anxiety & Autism

- 40% of autistic children, adolescents and adults are thought to have at least one and often more anxiety disorders (van Steensel et al., 2011), with specific phobias and social anxiety among the most common forms.
- Unfortunately, it can be difficult to identify anxiety disorder in autism because it frequently presents in an unusual way (Kerns et al., 2014).



Autism & Anxiety

Definitions: Anxiety

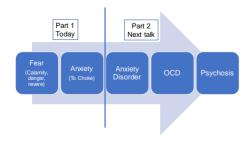
- · Anxiety: From the Latin 'to choke'
- Definition: "A feeling of worry or fear that we experience when we expect that a situation might have adverse consequences for our psychological or physical well-being."
- · Common Anxieties
 - · Anticipatory: What if?
 - Performance anxiety: Can I do it?
 - Social Anxiety: What if they don't like me?
- Worried about everything; worried about nothing
- On a scale of 10, how worried are you?
- From fear to anxiety to DSM 5 'Disorders'







The Progression of Fear





Anxiety: DSM 5 Diagnoses

- · Separation Anxiety Disorder
- · Social Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobias (e.g. heights or spiders)
- · Panic Disorders
- · Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- · Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- PTSD



Autism & Anxiety

From Anxiety to Resilience

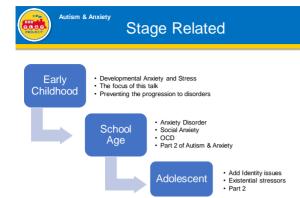




Autism & Anxiety

Overview

- Introduction: Preventing the Progression of Fear
- Start with the end in mind: Resilience!
- 6 Sources of anxiety for children with autism
 - Part 1: "Normal" anxiety
 - · Part 2: Pathological anxiety
- · The developmental approach
 - How to <u>use</u> anxiety to help the child improve in their functional emotional development
- · Case studies by FDL Profile
- · Biopsychosocial frame





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 - How to <u>use</u> anxiety to help the child improve in their functional emotional development
- · Case studies by FDL Profile
- · Bio-psycho-social framework
- · Let's start with the end in mind: Resilience



The Resilient Child





Resilience

- · Research on 'resilience' is extensive
- · Resilience: 'Positive adaptation despite adversity.'
- · Factors both within and outside the child
 - · Biopsychosocial approach
- · Individual Level
 - · Social responsiveness/attachment
 - · Positive temperament
 - Intelligence/Academic achievement

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2956753/



Autism & Anxiety

Individual Resilience

- · Tolerance for negative affect
- · Self efficacy/self esteem/sense of self
- · Internal locus of control
- · Sense of humor
- · Hopefulness
- · Perspective: Don't sweat the small stuff
 - (And it's all small stuff.) How dangerous is life really?
- Flexibility
- · Fortitude, persistence
- · Creative, imaginative, playful
- Enduring set of values

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2956753/



Autism & Anxiety

Family Factors That Promote Resilience

- · Parent warmth
- · Marital and extended family support
- · Belief in child
- · Accepting the child for who they are
- Recognizing the validity of the child's feelings
- Non-blaming
- Non-punitive
- · Message of competence/philosophy of 'can'
 - · High expectations/Not 'infantilizing'

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2956753/



Other Resilience Factors

- · Positive school experience
- · Good teachers, friendly peers
- The 'cultural surround'
 - · Religion/Spirituality
- Avoidance of trauma
 - · Loss/death of a parent
 - School shootings
- · Stressful life events
 - Divorce
 - Poverty
 - Illness
 - · Immigrant status
 - · Cultural/historical events—colonialism, racism,

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2956753/



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Resilience

"Happy are those who don't have to think about happiness!"







Autism & Anxie

Serenity Prayer

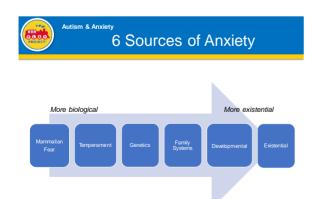
"God grant me the serenity to accept things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

-Reinhold Niebuhr











The 6 Main Sources of Anxiety

- Biological
- Fear is built in
- Temperament
 - Easy going vs easily stressed
- Genetic
 - · The Family Tree of anxious relatives
 - The tendency to be worried, anxious, nervous, moody, sensitive
- · Family systems and family support
 - Siblings
 - Parental conflict or harmony
- · Development and Anxiety
 - Functional Emotional Developmental Levels
- · Existential stressors
 - · Demands and expectations



Autism & Anxiety

Jaak Panksepp's Emotional Brain Tracks

	Panksepp's	CORE Sell	- Based or	Emotion
**				

BASIC EMOTIONA SYSTEM	MAMMALIAN PROTOTYPE AFFECTIVE STATES	HIGHLY COGNISED HUMAN VARIANTS			
SEEKING	Motivation, motor patterns, interest, frustration	Desire to win/succeed, extreme sports, addictions, cravings, obsessions			
RAGE	Anger, irritability	Contempt, hatred			
FEAR	Anxiety, phobias, panic, psychic trauma	Worry			
PANIC	Separation distress, sadness	Guilt, shame, shyness, embarrassment, poo self image			
PLAY	Joy, glee, happy playfulness	Laughter, sense of humour			
LUST	Erotic feelings	Jealousy			
CARE	Nurturance, attraction	Love, romantic attachment, the pain of broken relationships			
In humans t images and	Table 1: Prototype affective state and their human variants In humans the haair mammalian prototype affective states become midded with more complex self- images and images of the intentions of others towards us. For example shame, where we field defect in the eyes of others, is derived from the PAMIC system (data from Watt_2005, & Paniscepe, 2006).				

Autism & Anxiety Temperament
Individual Differences—Removes Blame



Activity Level Sensitivity Regularity Approach/Withdrawal



(Slow to warm up)
Adaptability
Mood
Intensity
Persistence
Distractibility



http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/briefs/wwb_23.pdf



Genetics of Anxiety

- Am J Med Genet C Semin Med Genet
- 2008 May 15;148C(2):118-26.
- doi: 10.1002/ajmg.c.30174.
- The genetic basis of panic and phobic anxiety disorders
- Jordan W Smoller¹, Erica Gardner-Schuster, Jennifer Covino
- PMID: 18412108
- DOI: 10.1002/ajmg.c.30174
- Abstract
- Panic disorder and phobic anxiety disorders are common disorders that are often chronic and disabling.
- chronic and disabiling.

 Genetic epidemiologic studies have documented that these disorders are familial and moderately heritable. Linkage studies have implicated several chromosomal regions that may harbor susceptibility genes; however, candidate gene association studies have not established a role for any specific loci to date.

 Increasing evidence from family and genetic studies suggests that genes underlying these disorders overlap and transcerid diagnostic boundaries.
- Heritable forms of anxious temperament, anxiety-related personality traits and neuroimaging assays of fear circuitry may represent intermediate phenotypes that predispose to panic and phobic disorders.



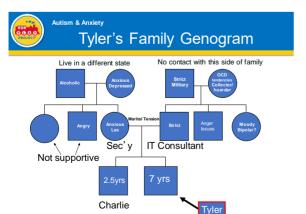
The Family Tree & System: Tyler

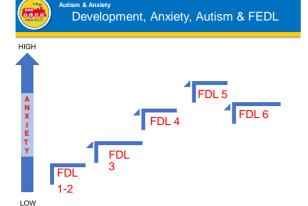
- 7 years old, with high functioning autism
 FDL 6-7: Normal language but black and white/rigid

 - Worries about nothing, worries about everything
- 1st grade
 - A reader with limits to comprehension
- · Overwhelmed by the social demands of school
- OCD
 - Choked on a donut
- Now is obsesses about choking multiple times per day
- Anxiety disorder
 On Zoloft
- · Anxiety runs in the family











Developmental Stressors/Risk Factors

- · Absence of nurturing
 - Parenting losses/nannies
 - Overwhelmed, depressed, and/or traumatized parents
- Sensory overload
- · Demands of living
- Transitions
 - · Change and daily losses
- · Sibling rivalry
- · Social demands
- · Development itself





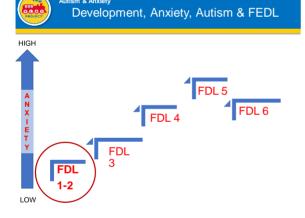
Autism & Anxiety

Development Itself: Erik Erickson

Life Stages

- 1. Trust vs. Mistrust (Hope)--B-12m
- 2. Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt (Will)—1-3 yrs
- 3. Initiative vs Guilt (Purpose)-3-5
- 4. Industry vs. Inferiority (Competence)-6-10
- 5. Identity vs Confusion (Fidelity)—Adolescence
- 6. Intimacy vs Isolation (Love)-18-40
- 7. Generativity vs Stagnation (Care)-40-65
- 8. Ego Integrity vs Despair (Wisdom)-65+







- · Autism at FDL 1-2: Keeping the world the same comfort, habit, repetition
 - Not easily engaged
 - · 'Slow movers'
- · Ironically, these children are protected from anxiety by their autism!
- Main sources of anxiety at FDL 1-2
 - Sensory overload, sudden changes, +/- transitions
 Giving in to repetition/not engaging/screens
 Playing too high, not using PLAY methods and techniques

 - Parental grief
 Parental disagreements
 - Parental pressure on themselves and on the child



FDL 1-2: Case Study—Juan, Maria and Elisa

- Juan called, they have been working with Elisa, an only child, for over a year now doing PLAY and her progress has been slow
- Dad is a dentist heady, rational, controlling, a little eccentric. I deal with him more than his wife, Maria
- Elisa is already 3 and 'not talking'. They are fixated on words!
- Both parents are anxious players always trying to increase Elisa's progress and not really 'seeing her'
- There is often a lot of anxious 'pushing' and 'leading' with parents opening a lot of circles. Not having fun!
- · Elisa toe walks, hums, and flaps hands when excited
 - · These 'stimming' behaviors bother parents. They want them stopped
- · I suspect that grieving/sadness is interfering
- · I encourage dad to take the pressure off themselves



Autism & Anxiety

FDL 1-2: The Approach

- Listened to and mirrored mom and dad's disappointment in progress. Joined their wishes
- Long discussion with dad about ageism, 'meeting Elisa where she's at', and 'Language Mountain'
- Turns out Elisa *loves* throwing, chase, musical games, bubbles, and horsey back rides on daddy's shoulders
 - But they have been focusing on words when she's NOT there developmentally!
- You guys are going to get the 'Dr. Rick Chinese Finger Puzzle Award'
 - The more you pull the "stucker" you get!
- You guys need to take the pressure off yourselves and have some fun!
- Using PLAY Project Principles, Methods, and Techniques will reduce the anxiety of BOTH the parents and Elisa







Autism & Anxiet

5 methods

- 1. Reading the child's cues
- Slowing down the pace to wait and observe: wait, watch, and wonder
- 3. Following the child's lead, intent, idea
- 4. Getting circles of back and forth interaction1000 pennies a day
- 5. Expanding on the child's idea



The Six Rabbit Hole Techniques

- · Being With
- Narrate with feeling the child's behavior and/or intention
- · Help him do it better
- · Parallel play what he is doing
- · Theme and Variation
- · Change the sensory mode



Autism & Anxiety

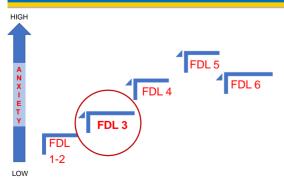
FDL 1-2: The Approach

- · Family does better at accepting where Elisa is at in her FDL
- They play more at the sensory and cause and effect levels
- · Begin TRULY using PLAY methods and techniques
- Juan reported being happier in play with Elisa
- She was connecting more!
- With parental anxiety reduced, connections are made
- Good example of how family systems, parental anxiety, developmental level all interact to create risk factors
- · Erikson's trust vs mistrust
 - "When you accept me exactly where I am at, I feel more secure."



itism & Anxiety

Development, Anxiety, Autism & FEDL





FDL 3: Sources of Anxiety

- Here are where the very roots of anxiety begin
- They now have the FDL 3 capacity to 'want' something. One of the hallmarks of FDL 3 is 'purposefulness'
- These children understand, need, and like 'routines'
 - The absolute need to explore, seek safely
 - · Erickson's 'autonomy vs shame and doubt'
- These are the children who can get anxious when insecure and/or frustrated
 - · Caught between need for security and exploring
- Think of the 1-year-old typical child. Moving around. Exploring. Wanting. Seeking (Panksepp)
 - · But from a 'secure base'



FDL 3: Case Study-Molly, Ben and Jack

- What you warned me about, Dr. Rick, has happened."
 PLAY Project has 'created a monster'
 "He won't leave us alone. He used to be so easy."
 But he won't stop playing in the toilet!

 - Loves to watch the water spin
- Jack 3 yrs old. FDL 3: 75% FDL 4: 25%.
 - · In early intervention with plans for special ed pre-school
 - · Parent anxious about upcoming school

 - Both parents working professionals.
 'Aunt Leelee' (Eilene) babysits Jack and his 1-yr old
 - She lets him watch a lot of screens, iPad.
 Throws frequent brief temper tantrums.
 - - Gets over them quickly. Easy temperament.



Jack Loves the Toilet









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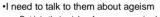


The Approach: FDL 3

•Jack is 3 years old, but at FDL 3



- •Parents expect compliance and following rules
- •Mom plays too high: Reading books!
- •Dad: He's messing with my stereo! A lot of 'No's!"



•But join their wishes for progress, give hope ·Because he is purposeful, he is capable



- · But anxiety, frustration, and tantrums are increasing
 - · Discipline is not helpful yet
- - Distraction and structuring the environment to be safe is best
 - Understands 'No' and doesn't like it! Too many 'No's' = anxiety
 - Beware of causing shame or doubt



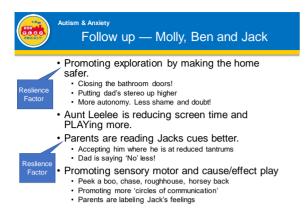


The Approach: FDL 3

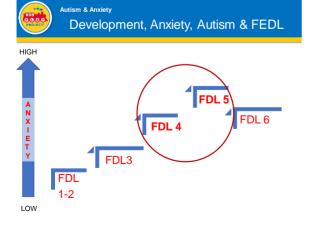
·Signs of anxiety are subtle and obvious

·Reading gestural cues important

- •Ignoring, walking away, shutting down •Stimming—walks in circles—when stressed
- •Tantrums
- ·Labeling subtle feelings and actions is important!
- •Important to discuss honoring the child's FDLs
 - •Join the parents wishes for progress
 - •Talk about 'ageism': Age does not equal FDL
 - •Beware non-contingent play. Playing too high (or not playing
 - •PLAY at the right level
- ·One key to the case is more fun 'circles of interaction'
- ·Beware sensory overload, demands, changes/transitions and need for routines









Sources of Anxiety at FDL 4-5+

- With good intervention, children will reach a fairly solid FDL 4-5+ profile, placing them at risk for anxiety
 - Lower FDLs fairly solid. 'With' us, easy to engage/interact with
- · Holes at FDL 4.

Still not fluid in their interaction

 Places them at risk for disconnection socially. Lose the thread Language

- 2-3 (4-5) MLU phrase speech.
 Can easily follow 1-2 step commands
- · Social imaginations/pretend emerging
- Strong feelings/anxiety enhance interactive process
- FDL 5 kids are often anxious b/c they can't express their feelings in words
 - Opportunities for resilience and prevention



Sources of Anxiety at FDL 4-5+

- They understand 'what, who, where' but not 'why, when, or how'.
 - · Sense of time is just 'emerging.' Live in the present
 - Thus, they do not live in time, or understand cause and effect placing them at risk for anxiety.
 - Strong feelings/anxiety can be used to help them understand cause and effect if you know how. . . .
- This is, in part, why their anxiety is so high.
 - They are rigid with fixed ideas and cling to repetition and comfort zone when stressed (go back to FDL 1-2)
 - · They are easily overwhelmed by demands, transitions, feelings which seems to come out of nowhere.
 - · This often leads to tantrums & aggression
 - · Classic 'Terrible two' behavior



Case Study: FDL 4-5+: Lakshmi, Jay, and Krishna

- · Krishna, 7 years old, 1st grade with IEP and an
- · School is stressful and he dawdles: 'No school'.
 - · But well behaved in school. Can control himself.
 - Stress builds up at school and he takes it out on his mother.
 - She is safe and he is secure with her (Trust)
- Starting to talk more in short sentences.
 FDL Profile
 - - FDL 4: 75% FDL 5: 75% FDL 6: 25-50%
- · Smart with numbers and letters and 'a reader' but poor reading comprehension.



FDL 4-5+: Lakshmi, Jay, and Krishna

- Temperament: Demanding, impulsive, sneaky, persistent
- · HWWHWWHW and knows how to get attention
- · Mom: "He's hitting everybody!"
 - He hits with a smile. He knows what he is doing. It's becoming a pattern. He's getting rewarded by attention.
 - Be aware, I said, that whatever you pay attention to will increase.
 - "A habit in motion stay in motion."

 On the other hand, what is triggering his upsets?
- · Indian family. Very loving. Indulgent. Anxious to please K
- · Lakshmi has recent onset cancer
- MGM came from India to help and give care to K
 - Parents explained that mommy is sick, and MGM is here to help
 Importantly: They miss his feeling!! What is his feeling?



FDL 4-5: The Approach

- · See K's misbehaviors as a real opportunity to help him make progress in his development.
 - . Dr. Rick: "This hitting is bad but it will better if we do the right thing."
 - Mom and Dad: "You really think so?"
 - "Absolutely. Krishna's smart. He just needs some help with his feelings."
- · Mirror feelings and honor the child's feeling life
 - · Parent were ignoring K's feelings by moving to correct his behavior first
 - Once in tantrum mode mirroring feelings will not work. Read early cues.
- · Teach K to use 'good negative' feeling words.







FDL 4-5: The Approach

- FDL 5 anxiety can be severe but when handled correctly will help K make it next developmental level
- · Maintain your sense of humor and perspective
 - · Give a 'message of competence. "Let Daadi help you. Mommy will help too. You can do it."
- Control misbehavior. Hitting cannot be allowed and definitely not rewarded
 Dr. Rick: "How do you handle his hitting?"

 - Jay: "We hold his hands."
- Dr. Rick: "Correct. Don't let him hit. He wants/needs limits"
- Predictability is important for 4-5+kids to reduce anxiety
 - · Maintain routines, picture schedules, 'Transition tricks'
 - "Daadi will put on your socks, mommy will help with your shoes then when you are dressed you will go to school."

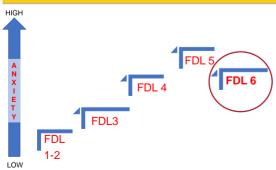


Follow up: Lakshmi, Jay, and Krishna

- · Lakshmi and Jay 'got it' right away
- Ignored most behaviors the were 'ugly' so as not to give a lot of attention and create a habit in motion
- Controlled misbehavior with non-punitive time away and holding when necessary
- Labeled feelings in words he could understand
 - · Speaking 'to the child' vs 'for the child'
- · Krishna wanted his mother back to care for him
 - · We used structure and a transition.
 - We had mom and grandma help him, so he got used to grandma. Then weaned mom out
 - · It worked!



Development, Anxiety, Autism & FEDL





FDL 6: Sources of Anxiety

- At FDL 6, the child has gained two main cognitive abilities that can increase anxiety or reduce it. . .
 - · if you know what to do!
 - · Can recall the past and predict the future
- · Can put two ideas together logically
- Typically, this makes it easier to explain things, so anxiety reduces
 - But the child can imagine fears, so anxiety increases
 - Ironically, when parents and school increase the demands, this leads to more anxiety!
- · Erickson's 'Autonomy vs Guilt'
 - Typical 3 yr olds are seeking autonomy if parents promote it
 - · Don't overwhelm them with demands and 'shoulds'



Autism & Anxiety

Case Study: FDL 6+: Jean and Bob and Willie

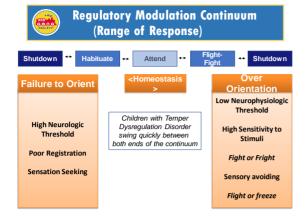
- Willie is 8, 2nd grade, in an ASD classroom because of outbursts.
 - · Peers are afraid of Willie. No real friends
 - · Struggling with academics and avoidant of schoolwork
- · FDL Profile:
 - FDL 1: 75% Thomas, Dinosaurs, iPad, video games (simple)
 - FDL 2: 100% Easy to engaged. Well attached
 - FDL 3: 75-100% Interacts well for 5-10 circles but loses interest, very busy, easily distracted
 - FDL 4: 75% Trouble sustaining long continuous flow.
 - FDL 5: 75-100% Loves pretend. Swords, doctor, Thomas Trains. Loves Pixar movies
 - FDL 6: 75% Recalls the past. Puts 2 ideas together logically. Not yet asking or answering why questions
- · Physically big and strong



Autism & Anxiety

Case Study: FDL 6+: Jean and Bob and Willie

- HWWHWWHW and if he doesn't get it—watch out!
- He yells/screams, runs away, major tantrums increasing with hitting 1x/week
 - · Psychiatrist wants to put him Risperidone
- Temperament is difficult, demanding, impatient
- · Loves his iPad because it calms him down
- I diagnosed him with 'Autism' and 'Temper Dysregulation Disorder'
- Dysregulation characterized by avoidance at one end and explosive temper at the other end of the self regulation continuum





Case Study: FDL 6+: Jean and Bob and Willie

- Strong family history of anxiety, depression, alcoholism, bipolar disorder
- · The parents are divided
 - Mom is tenderhearted and has trouble placing limits on Willie
 - Dad is a workaholic and mom suspects 'He is on the spectrum'
- There are two siblings one younger sister who is angry that Willie gets so much attention
- · One older brother who is going through puberty
- Willie worries a lot about his schedule/the future
- · Signs of OCD behavior
 - · Counts steps. Food can't touch on plate



tism & Anxiety

FDL 6: The Approach

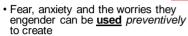
 Working with this family creates anxiety in his professionals!

Stay tuned for the approach to Willie and his family in Part 2 of Autism & Anxiety



Summary

- · Anxiety is:
 - Biological
 - Inheritable
 - Part of the child's inherent temperament
 - · Affected by life stressors and risk factors



- · Better functional emotional development
- Resilience
- · Family cohesion...if







Autism & Anxiety

Summary

- The parents are supported to. . .
 - Tolerate negative/anxious affects
 - Recognize that 'Misbehavior is the immature expression of a legitimate feeling'
 Mirroring the child's feelings and intentions help the child become more mature in expressing them
 - · Create a structure of rules and expectations that give the child a 'message of competence'.
 - · Address the Ericksonian needs for
 - Trust,
 - Initiative, and

 - AutonomyCompetence



Autism & Anxiety

Conclusion





Bobby McFerrin

A Prayer for the Stressed!

A Prayer for the Stressed!

A Repair to the servine to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I cannot accept, and the windom to hide the bodies of those people! had to kill tooly because they pisade me too kind took and the san that I may have to kind to the tool is step on tooley as they may be connected to the san that I may have to kind took to the san that I may have to kind took to the san that I may have to kind took to the san that I may have to kind to the san that I may have to the san Tuesday.

And he may be to the san that I may be to the san that I take the s



Autism & Anxiety

Thank you

- Thank you for attending!
- We'll send out a link to the recording of this webinar, and post it within the PPC portal on our website

Mark your calendars! Next Licensed PLAY Project Webinar is: February 16th, 2022 @ 12pm ET