

Alexithymia and Emotions

1. Descriptions of alexithymia
2. Alexithymia scales
3. Alexithymia strategies
4. Emotion education
5. Energy accounting

Alexithymia

- Alexithymia: “no words for emotions” in Greek
- Children and adults who can't put words to their feelings
- The ability to focus **attention** on and accurately **appraise** their own emotions
- An inability to recognize emotions in their subtleties and textures



Alexithymia

- **“How are you feeling”**
- **“I don’t know”**
- ‘I don’t know how to mentally grasp the intangible negative emotions swirling in my mind, identify and label them accurately and communicate those feelings in speech so that you will understand’
- *“I need a language for my worries”*
- *I’m not good at wording things*
- **Emotional intensity**
- *If something happens to make me happy or upset, then I quickly become extremely happy or upset. I don’t have many intermediate states, and I find it almost impossible to moderate my internal emotional response.*

Alexithymia and Emotion Regulation

- Alexithymia was first described in **1972** by Peter Sifneos (psychoanalytical literature)
- Tendency to focus on **external rather than internal experiences**
- Emotions that you have **difficulty identifying would be difficult to regulate**
- Contributes to worse anxiety and depression
- Emotional intelligence is considered the inverse of alexithymia
- In ASD, difficulty with **emotional labelling**
- Important to **focus on alexithymia in emotion regulation programmes**

Alexithymia

- **Prevalence** of Alexithymia in ASD varies according to the studies
- Estimates range from **33% to 63%** -NT **5%**
- Autistic individuals are more likely to claim **not to feel any emotion**
- Poorer **memory** for **emotionally significant** information
- Spontaneously **mention emotion less in conversation**
- Direct fewer attentional resources towards emotional stimuli
- **Internal emotions flying under the mental radar**
- Emotions build up and then need to be **released in a meltdown**

Toronto Alexithymia Scale

The longer version, 26 items, TAS-26

- 1-5 point Likert Scale, agree to disagree
- Score of 61 and above associated with Alexithymia
- TAS-20 has three subscales
 1. Difficulty identifying feelings (DIF)
 2. Difficulty describing feelings (DDF)
 3. Externally orientated thinking (EOT)

What is Alexithymia?

- difficulty identifying feelings (DIF)
- difficulty describing feelings (DDF)
- externally oriented thinking (EOT)

Alexithymia

8 Item General Alexithymia Factor Score

- Williams and Gotham (2021) *Molecular Autism* 12;56
- Reduced the Toronto Alexithymia Scale to 8 items
- 743 autistic adults and 721 controls

- **8 Items**

1: I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling

2: It is difficult for me to find the right words for my feelings

3: When I am upset, I don't know if I am sad, frightened or angry

4: I have feelings that I can't quite identify

Alexithymia

8 Item General Alexithymia Factor Score

5: I find it hard to describe how I feel about people

6: People tell me to describe my feelings more

7: I don't know what is going on inside me

8: I often don't know why I am angry

Free online score calculator

<https://asdmeasures.shinyapps.io/alexithymia>

Perth Alexithymia Questionnaire

- Preece et al. (2018) *Personality and Individual Differences* 132, 32-44
- **Negative and positive emotions**
- 24-item self-report questionnaire
- Adults and adolescents
- Equal number (8 items) corresponding to DIF, DDF and EOT
- Subscales and composite scores

PAQ

This questionnaire asks about how you perceive and experience your emotions. Please score the following statements according to **how much you agree or disagree that the statement is true of you**. Circle one answer for each statement.

Some questions mention *bad* or *unpleasant* emotions, this means emotions like sadness, anger, or fear. Some questions mention *good* or *pleasant* emotions, this means emotions like happiness, amusement, or excitement.

	Strongly disagree	----	----	Neither agree nor disagree	----	----	Strongly agree	
1	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> (feeling an unpleasant emotion), I can't find the right words to describe those feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , I can't tell whether I'm sad, angry, or scared.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	I tend to ignore how I feel.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> (feeling a pleasant emotion), I can't find the right words to describe those feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> , I can't tell whether I'm happy, excited, or amused.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	I prefer to just let my feelings happen in the background, rather than focus on them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , I can't talk about those feelings in much depth or detail.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , I can't make sense of those feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	I don't pay attention to my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> , I can't talk about those feelings in much depth or detail.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> , I can't make sense of those feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12	Usually, I try to avoid thinking about what I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree	----	----	Neither agree nor disagree	----	----	Strongly agree	
	When something <i>bad</i> happens, it's hard for me to put into words how I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , I get confused about what emotion it is.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	I prefer to focus on things I can actually see or touch, rather than my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When something <i>good</i> happens, it's hard for me to put into words how I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> , I get confused about what emotion it is.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	I don't try to be 'in touch' with my emotions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , if I try to describe how I'm feeling I don't know what to say.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When I'm feeling <i>bad</i> , I'm puzzled by those feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	It's not important for me to know what I'm feeling.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	When I'm feeling <i>good</i> , if I try to describe how I'm feeling I don't know what to say.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Children's Alexithymia Measure (CAM)

- Way et al. (2010) *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma* 3: 303-318
- Relationship between alexithymia and trauma
- An observer-related instrument with 23 items

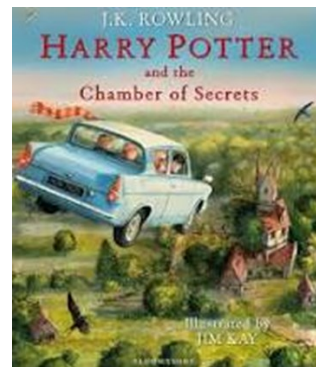
What Alexithymia is not ?

- Lack of feelings;
- Refusal to disclose feelings;
- Repression of emotions;
- Shyness and social phobia;
- Apathy;
- Sociopathy.

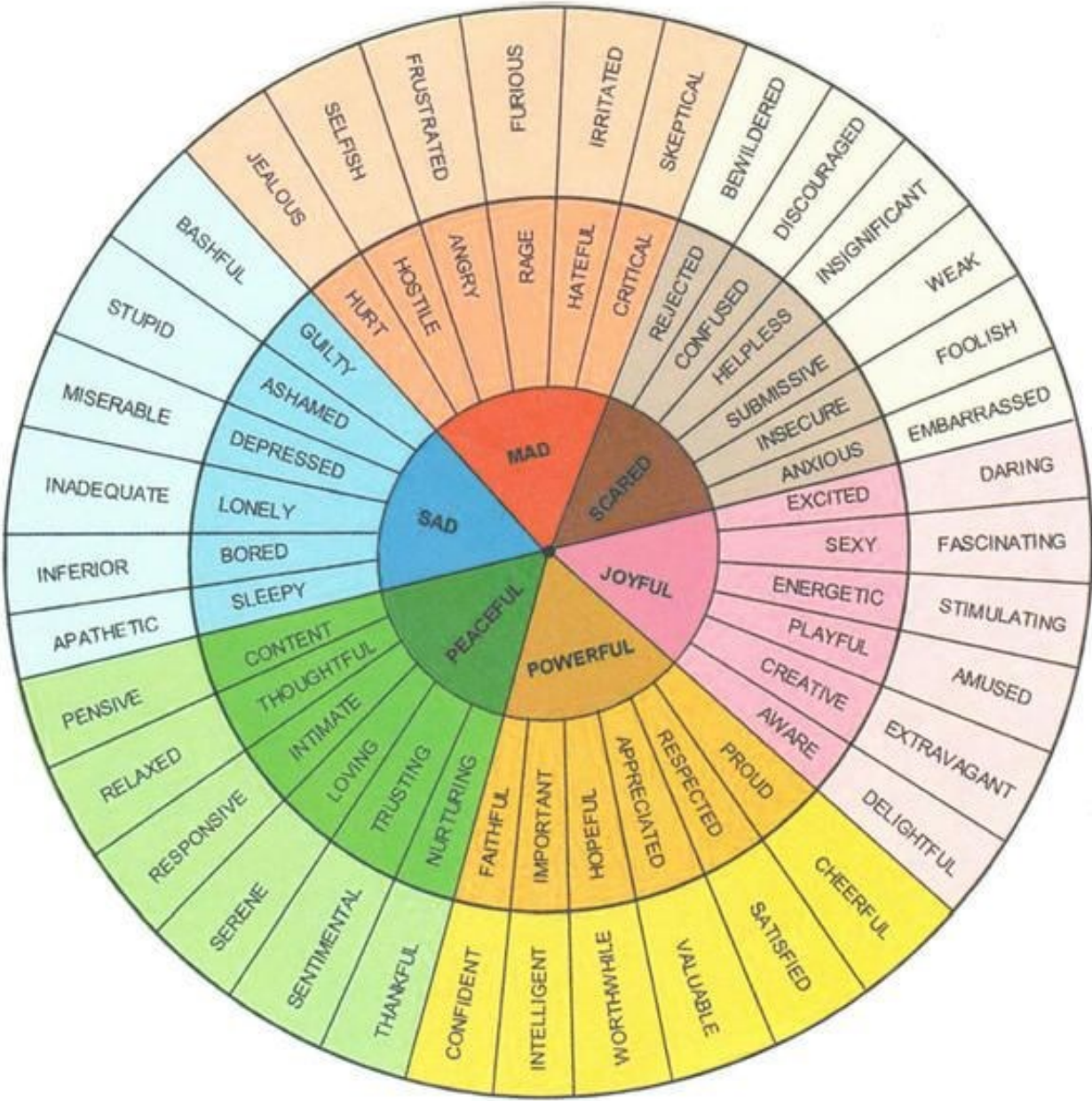


Alexithymia Strategies

- **Art, music and dance** therapy (career)
- Music play list, Google images, scenes from a movie
- ‘Close your eyes. What music comes into your mind?’
- **Typing** and poetry
- **Fiction** (Hermione, Harry Potter)
- Projects on internal signals and emotion identification



Wheel of Emotion



Emotion Education

- **Happy- Sad.**
- **Relaxed-Anxious.**
- **Affection-Anger.**
- Problems with emotional arousal for both **negative and positive** emotions.
- Rapid expression of extremes of emotion (Interoception)



Emotion Education

- A **project** on a specific emotion.
- Create a scrapbook that illustrates the emotion.
- **Signs of that emotion in actions and thoughts**
- Diary of experiences.
- Compare and contrast other students' scrapbooks.
- **Start with happiness** or pleasure.

Emotion Education

- A '**thermometer**' to measure the degree of intensity
- Place **photographs and words** at the appropriate point on the 'thermometer'
- Increase precision and accuracy in verbal expression *Alexithymia*

CAT-kit Developed in Denmark

Kuroda et al (2022) *PLOS ONE* November 2022

- Japanese study of 31 autistic adults
- 8-week group programme based on the CBT activities developed for autistic children
- Used the **CAT-kit Japanese version** for emotion regulation
- Improvements in the ASD knowledge and attitude quiz, **Toronto Alexithymia Scale** and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations

With the CAT kit I can connect with my feelings and see the feelings I feel. (Ase)



Emotion Regulation

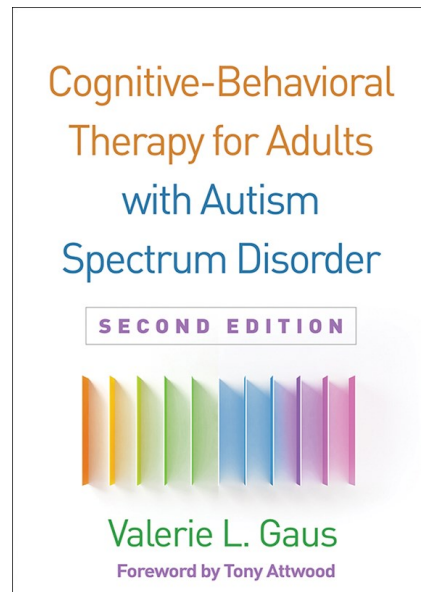
Adapted from Valerie Gaus

- **Stage 1**

- **Perceive** an internal emotion
- **Labelling it correctly**
- Assessing the **level of intensity**

- **Stage 2**

- Decision the emotion **warrants modification**
- Knowing and using strategies to **regulate the level of expression**
- To **access** those strategies
- To apply them flexibly and **appropriately**



Maja Toudal: Energy Accounting



- Concept of an **energy bank account**
- Energy **withdrawals and deposits**
- Energy depletion contributes to **depression**
- **Physical and mental health**

Energy Bank Account: Withdrawals and Deposits

Withdrawal

- Socializing
- Change
- Making a mistake
- **Sensory sensitivity**
- Daily living skills
- Coping with anxiety
- Over analysing social performance
- **Sensitivity to other people's moods**
- Being teased or excluded
- Crowds
- Government agencies
- Body shape
- Family gatherings
- Perceived injustice
- Certain people

Deposit

- Solitude
- Special interest
- Physical activity
- Animals and nature
- Computer games
- Meditation
- Caring for others
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Reading Harry Potter books
- Mental health vacation day
- Information on the Internet
- Being with pets
- Certain people

Energy Accounting

- **currency:** numerical measure or value of how much an activity or experience is energy draining or refreshing from day to day.
- **energy range** rated from one to 100 for each activity or experience in the withdrawal or deposit columns.
- On some days, socializing can drain energy at a value of around 20 but on other days could be 100

Energy Accounting

Add all the numerical values in each of the two columns to see if the energy bank balance at the end of the day is in **debit or credit**

If needed, **schedule more energy-infusing activities** for the next day/week

Colour coding system

- Neutral
- Recharging
- Physical
- Social
- Draining
- Other

August / September 2015				Uge 36			
	Morning	8-12	12-15	15-18	18-20	Evening →	
							Mærkedage
31 Mandag	Make lunch Walk dog	Classes/ School	Classes/ School	Homework Dance/yoga		Walk dog TV/Gaming	Steak & potatoes
1 Tirsdag	— —	— —	— —	Homework Work out		Walk dog TV/Gaming	Spaghetti & meatsauce
2 Onsdag	— —	— —	— —	Homework Dance/yoga		Walk dog TV/Gaming	Chicken & curry
3 Torsdag	— —	— —	— —	Shop for party Work out	Homework	Walk dog TV/Gaming	Veggie lasagne
4 Fredag	— —	— —	— —	Shop for party Work out	Homework (catch up) Home work/ write assignment	Walk dog TV/Gaming	Tuna salad
5 Lørdag	Sleep in	Walk dog	Start cooking	Walk dog Get ready	Birthday party	Birthday party	29!  Big dinner Cheesecake
6 Søndag	Sleep in	Walk dog	Time off	Walk dog Dance/yoga	Time off	Time off	Noodles

Energy Accounting: Balancing the Books

- Knowing when to **stop 'spending'**
- New sources of **energy 'income'**
- Having enough **energy reserve** in the account
- **Risk of energy depression**

