

# Social Behavior and Self-Management

*5-Point Scales for Adolescents  
and Adults*

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*We dedicate this book to our wonderful friend,  
colleague and co-author, Lisa King,  
in support of her fight against  
the beast that is breast cancer.*



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# Foreword

**B**oy, do I wish I had something like this when I was in my adolescent through younger adult years, as I worked my way through college and into my first “real” jobs. Although I did not externalize meltdowns, there are a number of times when I could have used the help provided in this latest of the growing series of 5-Point Scale books for managing my social behavior and my emotions, thereby bringing about greater understanding of my feelings and more successful interactions with others.

This resource fills a yawning gap in the toolbox of interventions that typically have been so heavily weighted towards children on the autism spectrum. Eventually, those children grow up to become adults on the autism spectrum, suggesting an imperative to develop interventions, methods, and techniques for supporting the ever-increasing population of people with autism transitioning through adolescence and into adulthood.

Traditionally, efforts to address the challenges people with autism and related conditions have in understanding the social and emotional aspects of life have focused on shoring up weaknesses. In contrast, this book joins others in a new paradigm of employing the strengths of people on the autism spectrum to help them become more fluent in this important aspect of life. Logic and ranking of data or information are strengths for many on the autism spectrum. The authors take advantage of this characteristic to systemize and bring order by rating the most vexing parts of social interaction and emotional regulation in ways people on the autism spectrum and related conditions can easily process and understand.

Rather than subscribing to the myth that individuals on the autism spectrum have no or stunted emotional lives, the authors expertly address the twin challenges of understanding, verbalizing, and ranking emotions as well as the social impact of our actions. For example, ranking positive emotions from calmness to hope to pleasure, to joy and, finally, elation, helps individuals on the autism spectrum understand the “grey” areas between the two extremes. The gradations of sadness – from having no issues at all or being “a little down” to complete devastation – are addressed in the same way. Other scales related to being overwhelmed or relaxed round out the variety of emotions individuals with autism – as well as everyone else – experience in their day-to-day lives.

Another area of challenge for individuals with autism pertains to understanding the effects of one's behavior on others. There is a myth that people with autism don't wish to socialize. In reality, what seems to happen is that, due to a lack of awareness of how one's behaviors are interpreted by others, attempts to interact often go badly. Repetition of this outcome causes the person to give up trying.

For example, suppose an individual with autism is interested in dating somebody, and fails to understand that after three unsuccessful attempts to arrange a meeting, it's time to stop. Indeed, continuing to pursue the other individual could lead to stalking behavior resulting in possible involvement with the police. However, by using a 5-Point Scale as a way to interpret how others might perceive one's behavior, as is done with the *Stalking Scale*, the individual on the autism spectrum has a way of gauging how his or her actions affect others. A potentially traumatic encounter with law enforcement is now avoided in favor of a milder disappointment upon realizing that dating efforts should be focused elsewhere.

In a similar manner, the 5-Point Scale can be used to rank and differentiate between different levels of relationships – ranging from stranger and acquaintance to intimate relationship or spouse. By defining these relationships, the individual with autism can more accurately gauge and manage both behavior and emotions.

Finally, in keeping with the adage of “teaching a man to fish” as a means of lifelong education rather than giving him a fish that will satisfy him for but one day, readers are encouraged to use what they learn from this book to develop their own 5-Point Scales in the moment as situations crop up. I know I will be doing that, and I will recommend the same to my friends on the autism spectrum.

Once again, AAPC Publishing is at the forefront – this time by providing time-tested, practical solutions for the

ever-increasing numbers of adults with autism and related conditions. By capitalizing on the way individuals with autism process information and learn, this latest volume in the 5-Point Scale series brings comprehending emotions, their gradations, and managing social behavior to new heights. For those supporting individuals on the autism spectrum, as well as those with autism, this book represents an invaluable tool for making lives better for adults with autism and related conditions.

Stephen M. Shore, EdD

Assistant professor of special education, internationally renowned author, consultant, and presenter on issues related to autism; person on the autism spectrum

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# Preface

By Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis

**N**atural social order, such as who is in charge and who is supposed to follow, is not always obvious to the person with ASD (autism spectrum disorder). The world may appear chaotic, and the social rules of everyday interaction can seem confusing, unreasonable and unfair. A person on the autism spectrum may not understand nonverbal social language such as facial expressions and, therefore, miss the social cues needed to size up a social situation. Such social confusion can lead to stress and anxiety, and even offensive behavior.

We have learned that individuals with ASD tend to understand social information better when it is explained to them using visual systems. For example, Simon Baron-Cohen (2009) suggests that if individuals with ASD possess effective systematizing skills (the ability to figure out systems), they may be able to use those skills to compensate for difficulties in empathizing skills (ability to understand social and emotional concepts). An example of this would be to use a flow chart to logically work through various behaviors and the emotions they provoke. Tony Attwood (2006) lends support to this idea, stating that the more someone with ASD understands about his or her emotions, the more able that person is to express them appropriately.

*The Incredible 5-Point Scale* (Buron & Curtis, 2012) introduced the use of a scale as a way of explaining social and emotional concepts to individuals who have difficulty understanding such information but have a relative strength in understanding systems. Let's look at an example. A person who offends others with blunt or offensive remarks may learn to understand the negative effects of his behavior through the use of a scale.

Using the following scale, a support person can outline how that person's behavior influences the way others think about him and list some natural outcomes. Using the scale in this way seems to make such discussions less personal and easier to engage in without defensiveness. The key here is for the support person to be *concrete and nonjudgmental* in the use of words. It is not a character flaw you are dealing with but a lack of skills, not unlike a social learning disability.

<b>Rating</b>	<b>What You Said</b>	<b>How the Other Person Might Feel</b>	<b>What This Might Mean</b>
<b>5</b>	I could kill you! You would be better off dead!	Afraid Threatened	They might call the police or campus security. This is very serious and could get you arrested!
<b>4</b>	Swearing This assignment is ridiculous!	Nervous Possibly threatened	The person might not want to be around you. An instructor might not want you in her class. A boss might fire you.
<b>3</b>	Telling someone he is fat or stupid	Offended Sad	The person might think you are unkind and uncaring and may not want to be around you or work with you.
<b>2</b>	Talking to someone during class while the instructor is talking	Confused Worried Uncomfortable	The instructor might have unfriendly thoughts about you when the time comes to assign grades and, therefore, give you a lower grade. The person you are talking to might not want to sit near you.
<b>1</b>	Smiling at someone at work. Talking with someone at break time using kind words	Comfortable Relaxed	You might keep more friends. This can help you get along at work.

Use of the 5-Point Scale has not only been helpful for supporting school-aged students but has more recently been found to be successful with adults who continue to struggle with social and emotional information.

When adults on the autism spectrum leave the protective environment of their home or the familiar structure of

school, it can be difficult for them to find ways to effectively address their support needs. The 5-Point Scale can be used to increase communication between the person on the spectrum and her support person. It can also increase self-management skills and, once learned, can serve as a self-advocacy tool. For example, if a person unexpectedly finds herself in a confusing social dilemma, the scale can be used as a consistent format for the caregiver or support person to process the problem.

*Scales should be co-created with the person whenever possible.* They should clearly describe the behavior and strategies and types of support that he or she might need. Remember, as a caregiver, you are not “telling” the person what to do; you are jointly working out the problem and developing solutions that can increase competence and independence.

Co-creating scales increases social understanding for both parties. It sends a clear message that the support person is agreeing to take into consideration the difficulties the person with ASD may encounter and to provide reasonable accommodations to minimize discomfort and social misunderstanding. The person with ASD, in turn, receives information regarding the perspectives and actions of other people in his environment, as well as how his behavior impacts others – be it on the job, at college, on a date, or at a family gathering.

The scales can also give direction to others, such as bosses, social workers, family members and/or partners, who are interacting with the person with ASD. For example, a scale might indicate that when the person on the spectrum is highly anxious, continued talking on the part of the support person will likely increase the stress. This helps the boss or family member know how to monitor their own behavior during difficult interactions. The scale supports everyone involved and can lead to agreements about what to do, and what not to do, in a given situation.



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# Introduction

**T**his book was developed as a support tool for anyone advocating for, living with or working with an adult on the autism spectrum. *The Incredible 5-Point Scale* (Buron & Curtis, 2012) introduced this simple, yet very effective tool but gave only school-aged examples of how to use the scale. The current book includes examples of scales used to support individuals to better understand 15 different social situations. The ideas presented in these examples reflect actual situations reported by adult service providers, as well as interviews with more than 20 adults on the autism spectrum.

In Part One, common issues are discussed. These are issues that the authors have encountered while working with or interviewing adults on the spectrum. For each issue or problem, we ...

- Offer information to caregiver and support networks regarding the selected social issues and how they might affect someone's social performance. This explanation can be useful for those in legal departments, job coaches/bosses, families and teachers by helping them to understand the nature of social cognition and emotional regulation and how these issues can impact social behavior.
- Provide an example of scales that may be used to address the specific issue. **It is important to remember that the scales illustrated are examples only. They are not meant to be used verbatim.**
- Provide an example of how a caregiver or support person might explain the social situation or concept to the person on the spectrum. These suggestions use very concrete, black-and-white language, while attempting to avoid judgmental statements. They are not meant to be scripts but to serve as a guide or springboard for a more individualized discussion.

The first three topics and scales are all related to emotional regulation and control of emotions in difficult situations. Emotional regulation is so often at the root of troublesome behaviors or a person's inability to cope with day-to-day expectations that we felt it warranted being discussed from three different angles – emotional regulation, feeling overwhelmed and relaxation.

The remaining topics and scales are designed to teach social concepts that, if not mastered, can significantly disrupt a person's ability to accurately define, understand and negotiate social situations and expectations.

Part Two presents concrete examples of how, once the idea of the scale is understood, the strategy may be used to address troubling issues as they arise.

With these examples as your guide, we are hoping you will ...

- Understand the nature of ASD, and social cognition in particular
- Recognize the impact social anxiety has on behavior and judgment
- Be able to systematically process social difficulties to increase clarity from a variety of perspectives
- Be able to clearly outline specific ideas for handling future situations.



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