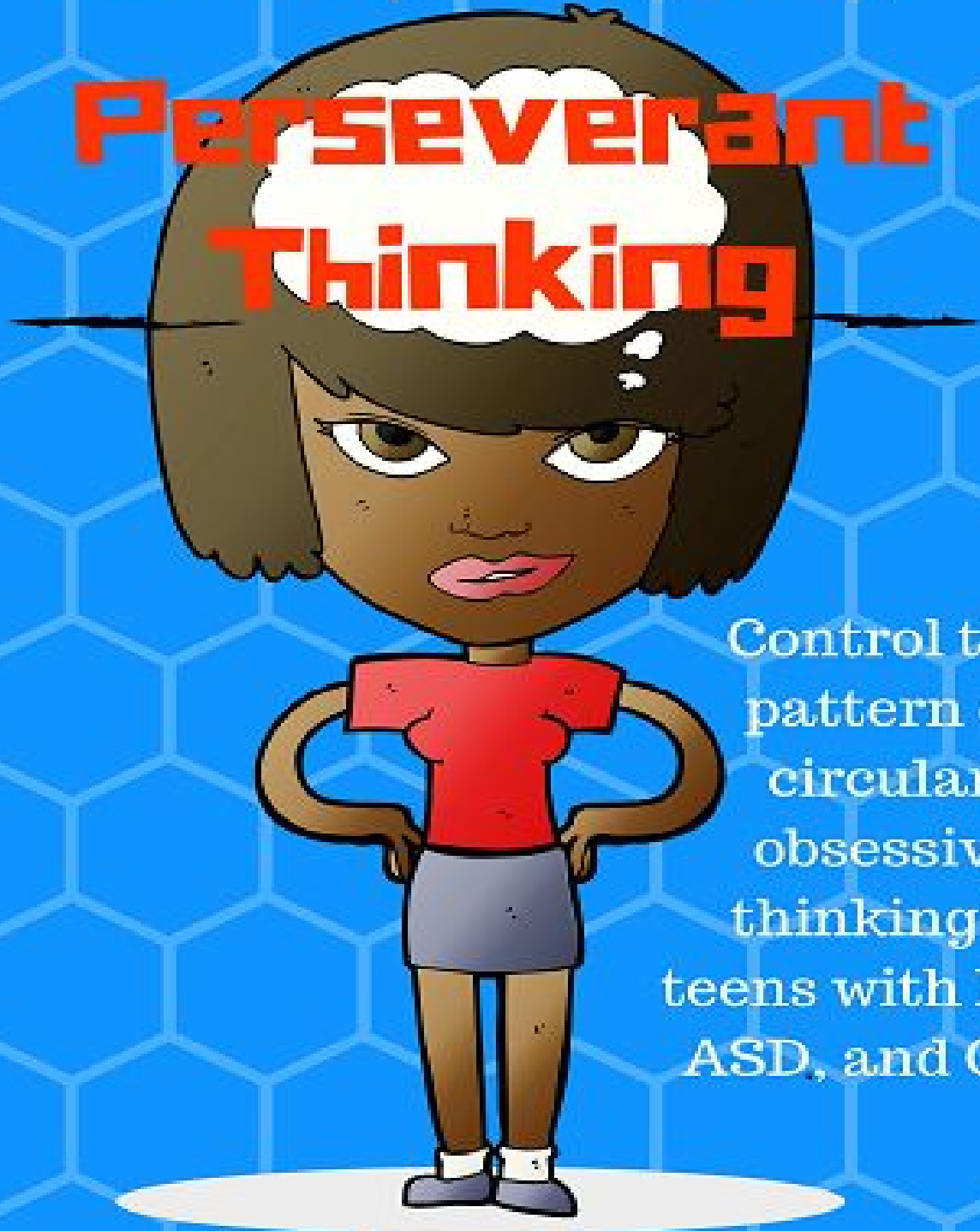


Breaking the Cycle of

**Perseverant
Thinking**



Control the
pattern of
circular,
obsessive
thinking in
teens with EBD,
ASD, and ODD

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Breaking the Cycle of Perseverant Thinking

If you've ever had the experience of lying awake in bed at night, replaying an event from the day and thinking about how you wish you'd done it differently, you've got some experience in perseverant thinking. For most of us, perseverant thinking is an occasional nuisance. For students with ASD, anxiety, and related disorders, perseverant thinking can be a daily struggle that damages self-esteem and relationships with others.

Supplies

- Tennis balls (one per student)
- Timer
- Paper
- Candy/gum
- Markers
- Whiteboard and whiteboard markers

Intro Activity

Go outside and give each student a tennis ball. Ask each student to bounce a tennis ball (just to himself). Bounce it over and over again. Ask the students how it feels to bounce the ball (some may say "boring," some may say "fun" or "addictive"). As the students bounce the ball, tell them to stop immediately. Note who stops right away...and who doesn't. Collect the tennis balls.

Mid-Activity Discussion

If you were able to stop bouncing the ball right away, why do you think you were able to do that (ex. Didn't like the activity, was bored, likes to follow directions). If you weren't able to stop bouncing the ball right away, why do you think you weren't able to do that (ex. It felt good and I didn't want to stop, I had a certain interval in mind and felt compelled to finish it, transitions are hard for me, I don't like following directions).

Activity Part 2

Repeat the ball-bouncing activity again. This time, tell students that when you say "stop," that they will get a piece of candy/stick of gum if they stop right away; if they don't stop right away, they will not get the candy/gum. Allow them to bounce the ball for a few minutes again. This time, reward the people who stopped right away.

Post-Activity Discussion

Did the promise of getting gum/candy motivate you to stop right away? Why or why not? If you kept bouncing the ball and didn't get the candy, why did you decide to keep bouncing? How did you feel about not getting the candy?

Discussion

What does it mean to "persevere" at something? When are some times when it pays off to persevere--why is being "perseverant" a good thing at these times?

The word “perseverant” can also be used to describe a negative behavior. Have you ever found yourself caught in a cycle of “circular thinking” (going around and around with the same illogical idea, ramping yourself up and not solving the problem).

***Draw a large circle on the whiteboard. Talk the students through an example. I use the example of perseverant worrying that a lot of people have when they try to go to sleep at night. Show the cycle of stress, physical tension, and negative thinking. Explain how each of the problems feeds the next one...creating a cycle of escalation that can be difficult to break.

What are some strategies that you can use to break that cycle? Examples: meditation, distraction, physical activity, etc.

So...if people KNOW that this sort of cycle is negative/damaging and people KNOW there are strategies they can use to get OUT of that cycle, why do they refuse to engage in those deescalation strategies? (Ex. Feeling of power in a relationship because the other person feels afraid of your upset or rage, fear that the strategy won't work--then what will you do, etc.)

Activity

Provide each student with a piece of paper and a marker. Have each student map out the cycle of perseverant thinking for a behavior or emotion where they know they engage in this behavior. After they have completed their cycle diagrams, ask student to collaborate to come up with a list of at least three possible tactics that could be used to break each cycle. Write these lists in the center of the circles.