PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Part 1: ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorders: Awareness Training Module
Putting the Pieces Together

Awareness Module for Autism

Part 1: Autism Spectrum Disorders

Definition

Observable Characteristics

Underlying Characteristics

Sensory

Theory of Mind

Executive Functioning

Learning Styles

Part 2: Strategies

Communication

Visual

Social Stories

Structured environment

ABA
# Autism Continuum

## Measured I.Q.
- Severe
- Gifted

## Social- Emotional Interaction
- Aloof
- Passive
- Active but Odd

## Communication
- Non-verbal
- Verbal

## Motor Skills
- Gross
  - Awkward
  - Agile
- Fine
  - Uncoordinated
  - Coordinated

## Sensory
- Hypo
- Hyper
ASD are a group of brain disorders that may interfere with:

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills
- Academic Skills
- Daily living
ASD appears to have a:

- Neurological/chemical basis.
- Strong genetic component.
  - Identical twins
  - Parent-child
  - Grandparent-grandchild
  - Siblings
Suspected links include:

- Vaccines
- Unidentified toxins
Under the Umbrella

Medical Community may diagnose as PDD

Schools may label as ASD

Aspergers Syndrome

Autism

PDD-NOS

Rett’s Disorder

Childhood Disintegrative Disease
Under the Umbrella:

Autistic Disorder:

- Onset before age 3
- Significant delays with social interaction
- Significant delays or differences with communication
- Restrictive interests or repetitive behaviors
Under the Umbrella:

Asperger’s Syndrome:

- High functioning form of autism.

- Language skills develop but there are impairments in social interaction and social communication.
Under the Umbrella:

**PDD-NOS:**

- This category is used when the criteria for autistic disorder are not met.
- However, there are severe and pervasive impairments in social interactions, communication, or stereotypical behaviors.
- It has also been called “atypical autism”.


Under the Umbrella:

Rett’s Disorder:

- Is diagnosed only in girls.
- Normal prenatal and perinatal development.
- Normal psychomotor development for the first 5 months.
- Head growth ceases between 5-48 months, with loss of previously acquired skills.
- Poorly coordinated gait and trunk movements and severely impaired expressive and receptive language development with severe psychomotor retardation.
Under the Umbrella:

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder:

- Extremely rare.

- When listed in DSM-IV, there were only 100 cases diagnosed.

- Display normal development for at least the first 2 years after birth and then display clinically significant regression in communication, motor, and social interaction skills.
Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Age of Onset/ Development

Social

Communication

Behavioral Characteristics
Age of Onset/Development

- Deficits usually noted by three years of age
- Delay in onset of first words
- Delay in onset of first phrases
- Uneven skill development
Social

- Understanding social interactions
- Joint Attention
- Sharing/turn-taking
- Offering/seeking comfort
Communication

- Functional language difficulties
- Social “chat”
- Imitation of language
- Idiosyncratic language
- Auditory Processing and Comprehension
- Appropriateness of language
- May be non-verbal
Behavioral Characteristics

- Restricted interests
- Unusual preoccupations
- Compulsions/rituals
- Unusual sensory interest
- Hand/finger mannerisms
- Self-injury
- Special skills
Miscellaneous Information

- 1/4 to 1/3 have epilepsy
- 4 out of 5 will be boys
- Girls usually have more severe characteristics
- Same incident rate in all countries, socio-economic status and races
- Some have poor motor skills
Characteristics unique to Asperger’s Syndrome

Asperger’s Syndrome is a “high functioning” form of Autism
Communication

- Perseveration on specific topics of interest
- Difficulty with reciprocal conversations
- Pedantic speech
- Vocabulary usually great; comprehension poor
Social and Behavior

• Problem-solving abilities tend to be poor
• Inability to make friends
• Poor coping strategies
• Restricted range of interest
• Selective concentration
• Emotional vulnerability
Academic

- Fine motor difficulties
- Poor organizational skills
- Difficulties with abstract concepts
- Difficulty working in large groups
Underlying Theories:

- Sensory Processing
- Theory of Mind
- Executive Functioning
- Learning Styles
Many students with Autism and Aspergers Syndrome have sensory issues.

**Hypersensitive** --
Extremely sensitive

**Hyposensitive** --
Weak or Non-existent
Sensory Systems:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Olfactory
- Taste
- Tactile
- Proprioceptive
- Vestibular
Theory of Mind

Is the ability to “mind read” or figure out what others are thinking, feeling and doing.
Students with ASD have difficulty noticing and responding to:

- Social
- Verbal
- Nonverbal cues
People “Mind Read” to:

**Infer** a person’s internal mental state based upon the external behavior that they exhibit.

**Predict** future behaviors based upon one’s inferences regarding mental state.

**Modify/adjust** one’s own behavior upon the judgements made.
Difficulties with “Theory of Mind” may lead to:

- Not recognizing another person’s perspective
- Not recognizing other viewpoints
- Inability to predict the behavior of others
- Avoidance/fear of people
Individual with ASD may have difficulty:

- understanding “pretend”.
- differentiating fact from fiction.
- prefer concrete facts. dealing with nuances and shades of gray.
Executive Functioning is the ability to:

- Maintain Attention
- Control Impulses
- Mental planning
- Problem Solving
- Think Flexibly
- Self-Monitor
- Stay Goal Directed
- Transition from one task to another
Neurotypical Processing Center
Differences in Motivation:

- Lack of competitive motives.
- Perception of lacking pride and shame.
- Lack of desire to “stand out” or be different.
- Limited responses to “typical” reinforcers.
differences in Imitation:

- may lead to difficulty copying actions.
- generalizing actions to other settings.
- parrotting/echoing words and actions.
- may not internalize the meaning.
Attention difficulties may appear as:

- narrow and/or obsessive focus
- specific and not general concepts

They may see the trees but not the forest.
Memory difficulties may lead to:

- Episodic memory
- Events that are stored in different context than which they occurred
- A lists of facts stored without a meaningful framework to link them
Sequencing difficulties may lead to:

- Difficulty following sequences
- Inability to go beyond the model and to abstract the rule or principle on which it is based
- Difficulty adapting to changes in the sequences of events
Problem Solving difficulties may lead to:

- learning a set of responses for a set situation
- a set of strategies, but inability to select a strategy for a new situation
- limited ability to ask for help when it is needed
The ability to generalize information may be limited.
There are many different strategies that can be individualized to meet the needs of the ASD student.

Putting the Pieces Together- Part 2 will address different ASD strategies
Putting the Pieces Together

Part 1

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Resources

Attwood, Tony -  *Asperger’s Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*  
*(book and/or video)*

Cumine, Leach, and Stevenson - *Asperger Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Teachers*

Grandin, Temple - *Thinking in Pictures*


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