Autism Spectrum Disorder and Social Skills Development

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Neither I nor my spouse/partner has a relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.
Challenges

• No current treatment for core autism features
• Skill deficits are only part of the problem
• “Pull out” treatment limited in efficacy due to core deficits
High IQ ≠ Social Success

THE FRIENDSHIP ALGORITHM

PLACE PHONE CALL

HOME

LEAVE MESSAGE

WAIT FOR CALLBACK

WHAT IS THE RESPONSE?

DINE TOGETHER?

BEGIN FRIENDSHIP!

Case:
- Have tea
- Have coffee
- Have cocoa

DR. SHELDON COOPER, PH.D
Today’s Workshop Content

• Developmental Model
• Three Legged Stool
• Examples of Interventions
• Questions and Answers
Aspire is a nonprofit organization of the Massachusetts General Hospital and the Lurie Family Center for Autism.

We provide:
- Social Skills/Thinking Groups
- After-School & Saturday Programs
- Summer Programs
- Internships and Career Counseling
- Parent Coaching
- Trainings/Workshops/Consultation
Developmental Milestones

Language Development
("in children")
The Learning Process for Children with ASD

Knowledge

Understanding

Embedded Practice

Embedded Experience with Feedback

Transfer/Generalization of Skills & Strategies
3S model

- Develop strategies to manage stress and frustration
- Practice using these strategies in a supported social environment

- Learn and apply skills to interact expectedly with others across contexts
- Build relationships with peers using shared experiences and common interests

- Improve capacity to identify strengths and develop strategies for challenges
- Engage in self advocacy
Aspire’s ‘3S’ Model

• Self-Awareness
• Stress Management
• Social Competency

• The 3S’s support all that we do and are a part of our landscape/goals for individuals
• Without these three ingredients life is a challenge
• Multi-disciplinary approach
Self-Awareness

- Know my personal strengths and challenges
- Recognize and express my likes, dislikes, passions
- Acknowledge and control my habits
- Set goals
- Understand and manage my emotions and behavior to achieve goals
- Recognize when effort/perseverance is required and be able to apply it
Social Competency

- Recognize that social competency is needed in life
- Understand my social strengths/challenges
- Develop social thinking and social skills
- Apply this knowledge in various contexts/relationships
- Show empathy for others
- Form positive relationships, work in teams effectively, deal effectively with conflict
Stress Management

• Understand stress is a part of life—neither good nor bad
• Know, recognize, and predict internal and external triggers
• Link thoughts, feelings, and behavior
• Manage stress responses (reactively and proactively)
• Develop and utilize a coping tool box of self-regulation and stress management strategies
Definition of Theory Of Mind

- ToM - the ability to appreciate that other people have different mental states: intentions, needs, desires, beliefs that may be different that your own

- ToM - the understanding that other people have thoughts & feelings and that these people can reflect on their thoughts/feelings and can reflect on others people’s thoughts/feelings and change their thinking and behavior

- ToM - involves: joint attention, representation, transitioning, inferring, categorizing, abstraction, pretending, etc.
Importance of Theory of Mind

• "I know you think you understand what you thought I said, but I am not sure you realize what you heard is not what I meant."

• Alan Greenspan
Theory of Mind
Teaching Social Skills (Traditionally)

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<th>Commonly Used Direct Instruction Tools:</th>
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Talk the Talk
Teaching Social Skills

• *How do we get students to ‘Walk the Walk’?*

We also have to teach and practice:

– What does it FEEL like to do this?
– WHEN should I do this?
– What if I’m nervous to do this?
– Can I do this INDEPENDENTLY?
– How do I make adjustments in the moment?
A Spectrum (Michelle Garcia Winner)

- Severely Challenged Social Communicator
- Emerging Social Communicator
- Neurotypical Social Communicator
Middle School Example

Brain Based Learning Curriculum
Brain-Based Learning

• Class periods 1 -2 times a week
• Year Long
• Structured like other classes (readings, HW, quizzes/tests, labs/experiments, etc.)
• Listed as a class on the student’s schedule
• Content explicitly & implicitly taught
• Individual and group learning
Brain-Based Learning

- Multi-Modal Instruction
- Connected to real life situations
- Technology usage integrated
- Biofeedback
- Reflection/Data Collection
- Cumulative Projects (behavior analysis of self, videos, Me Binder etc.)
Brain-Based Learning

• Students learn introductory content related to neurology, cognition, meta-cognition and behavior

• Introduction to
  – Neuroanatomy & Neuroscience
    • Form & Function of Brain Structures
    • Nervous System
    • Bio-Chemistry
    • Parasympathetic/Sympathetic Systems
Brain-Based Learning

– Cognition
  • Learning styles
  • Optimistic/Pessimistic Styles
  • Executive Functioning
  • Memory
– Sensory System
– Connection between Behavior and Neurology
– Use of Technology & Biofeedback
Brain-Based Learning

- Mind/Body Connection
- Anticipatory Anxiety
- Physiological Sensations
- Eutress vs. Distress
- Social Thinking
  - Communication
  - Hidden Curriculum
College and Career

• 80-85% unemployment
• College drop out rate high
• Autistic features do not change over the course of one’s life
Adult Programming

• Bring curricula to the work site or college
• Train receiving staff/school about ASD and the individuals being supported
• Change culture of businesses to see person with ASD with greater appreciation
Autism Spectrum

- Social-emotional reciprocity
  - Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
  - Social-Emotional Reciprocity
  - Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors
    - Highly restricted interests
    - Resistance to change
  - Nonverbal social communication
    - Repetitive movements and speech
    - Seek or avoid sensory stimulation
Neurodiverse Strengths

Reciprocal conversation on work projects

Strong sense of loyalty to a workplace

Social Communication Challenges

Capacity to develop content expertise

Restricted/Repetitive Behaviors

Strength with protocols and procedures

Direct communication style

Strength with repetition

Heightened perceptual abilities
Companies Investing in Neurodiversity

- Microsoft
- Fidelity Investments
- Liberty Mutual
- National Grid
- Turner
- WGBH
- EY
- P&G
Contact Information

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Disclosures

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