

AUTISM 101: A CRASH COURSE

GOALS

- To gain a basic understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Establish a better understanding of the learning styles and challenges to learning for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Know/Wonder??

PDD is an Umbrella Term

- Autistic Disorder (Autism)
- PDD - Not Otherwise Specified
- Asperger's Disorder
- Rett's Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

Autistic Disorder (Autism)

Because any two children may have different combinations of characteristics of autism, there is a wide variability in presentation.

PDD-NOS

- atypical autism
- severe and pervasive impairment in some areas, but the strict criteria for autistic disorder are not met

Asperger's Disorder

- difficulties with social behavior
- restricted and repetitive activities and interests
- general language (not pragmatics) and cognitive development are not delayed

Rett's Disorder

- rare progressive disorder which occurs almost exclusively in girls
- after a period of normal development (between 5 to 30 months) there is a deceleration of head growth and skill loss
- severely impaired language and psychomotor skills

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (also known as late onset autism)

- normal development for at least 2 years
- loss of previously acquired skills before age 10

How common is autism?

- affects 3-4 boys for every 1 girl
- 1 in 500 for autism; 1 in 150 for the entire spectrum
- number of cases is increasing...

From the eyes of the Parents

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDMMwG7RrFQ&feature=fvw>

ASSESSMENT/CHARACTERISTICS

- observation of child's behavior
- parent consultation
- review developmental history for:
 1. communication impairment
 2. delays in social interaction
 3. atypical behaviors
 4. learning deficits

Communication Impairment

- speech absence or delay, or regression
- poor understanding of gestures
- difficulty with abstract concepts
- perseveration (obsession with one topic)
- echolalia (repetition of what was said)
- difficulty initiating/sustaining conversation
- may have motor speech disorders (e.g. apraxia or dysarthria)

Non Verbal Communication

- persistence
- proximity
- eye gaze
- body language

Delays in Social Interaction

- lack of response to people, words, sounds or physical contact
- little or no appropriate play with toys
- preference for being alone
- inappropriate laughter
- or screaming
- strong, inappropriate attachment to objects

Theory of Mind

- The ability to "mind read"
- The ability to make accurate guesses about what others are thinking
- An almost intuitive understanding of the mental states of other people

Components of Theory of Mind

- Inferring a person's internal mental state based upon the external behaviour that s/he exhibits
- Modifying/adjusting one's own behaviour based upon one's "reading" of other's mental state
- Predicting someone's future behaviour based upon inferences about his or her mental state

Executive Function

- Doing all that it takes to accomplish a given task
- Maintain attention & control our impulses
- Keep ourselves free from distraction

- Engage in mental planning and problem solving
- Be flexible and change plans if there is a glitch
- Transition to new situations, activities, or perspectives when necessary
- Apply skills
- Self-monitor

EF Deficit Looks like:

- distractibility
- inflexibility/rigidity
- impulsivity
- transition difficulty

Atypical Behaviors

- strong resistance to change in routine
- self-stimulatory behavior
- hyper or hypo sensitivity to sounds, touch, sight, taste and/or smell
- insensitivity to pain, cold or heat
- self-injurious behavior
- limitation of interests and activity repertoire

Sensory Activity

Sensory Disturbances

Information coming in through the sensory nerves may be distorted. Imagine a radio...

Tactile Sense

Hypersensitive

- does not like being touched
- dislikes certain clothing or tags
- dislikes hair or teeth brushing
- does not chew food
- avoids certain textures of food or play materials
- dislikes having dirty hands
- uses finger tips instead of hands
- walks on tiptoes

Auditory Sense

Hypersensitive

- startles to noises
- covers ears
- distracted by background noises
- does not like being in a crowd
- protests at certain sounds
- crinkles or tears paper

Taste Sense

- picky eater, may know one brand from another
- eats only strong-flavoured or only bland food
- mouths or chews on objects
- strong gag reflex

Olfactory (Smell) Sense

Hypersensitive

- sniffs objects
- smells food before eating it
- complains (or gags) at certain smells
- avoids crowds

Vestibular (Motion) Sense

- anxious in water
- can not sit still (may interfere with listening)
- gets motion sickness
- likes to jump and spin
- dislikes being upside down, walking up and down hills or stairs
- uncoordinated

Proprioceptive (Body Awareness) Sense

- likes deep pressure
- enjoys hanging by arms, falling down, jumping
- difficulty with fine motor skills, planning and executing motor tasks
- assumes odd body positions
- clumsy, plays roughly
- often breaks toys

Learning Deficits

- difficulty relating learned skills from one environment to another (i.e., problems with generalization)
- uneven learning patterns (poor skills in some areas; exceptional abilities in other areas)

Communication Enhancement Continuum

Teach what is easiest to understand...

- concrete words referring to familiar objects
- names of familiar people
- one-step instructions
- action words (e.g., jump, climb, throw)
- “What?” and “Who?” questions
- “readiness” skills
- focus on what to do not what not to do

Expressive Language (Production) Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

- enhances comprehension and expression
- supports speech development

- includes:

Addressing Learning Style and Needs

1. strong visual skills
2. process one sense at a time
3. learn by cause and effect
4. sensory differences

1. Strong visual skills

- Visual supports can be very helpful.
- Pictures should be as clear and uncluttered as possible.

2. Process one sense at a time

- Reduce distractions.
- Be aware of the child's strongest senses and use these in teaching activities.

3. Learn by cause and effect

- Learning by imitation is difficult.
- "Hands on" activities can be easier than trying to learn by watching.
- They may need reinforcers built into an activity.

4. Sensory differences

General Information

- **Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD)**
- www.autismoutreach.ca
- Offers elearning modules, services and, and course information.
- **Autism Community Training B.C.**
- www.actbc.com
- Information on workshops and training in British Columbia