

AUTISM AND JUVENILE COURT: RECOGNITION AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Sponsored by

The Autism Services and Resource Center

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The CT Autism Services Resource Center

- Support groups
- Phone assistance, resource direction
- Newsletter, state *Resource Guide*, website
- Legislative initiatives
- Recreation, social skills groups, and other services (limited offerings – check with ASRC)
- Workshops, on-site workshops, learning groups, advisement to agencies and private providers
- Annual Walk for Autism, Autism Resource Fair, public awareness campaign

Objectives

- Give you an understanding of autism so that you will be more likely to recognize adults and children affected by autism
- Give you a set of guiding principles and strategies to promote more positive outcomes

Who may have autism?



THANKS TO NATIONAL AUTISM ASSOCIATION



Demographics

- Autism crosses all racial, geographic and socio-economic boundaries
- Autism affects more males than females (4:1 ratio)
- Current incidence rate is estimated to be 1 in 88 (rising)
- Autism can be found in all age groups



Autism Spectrum Disorder



Severely
affected

Less noticeably affected

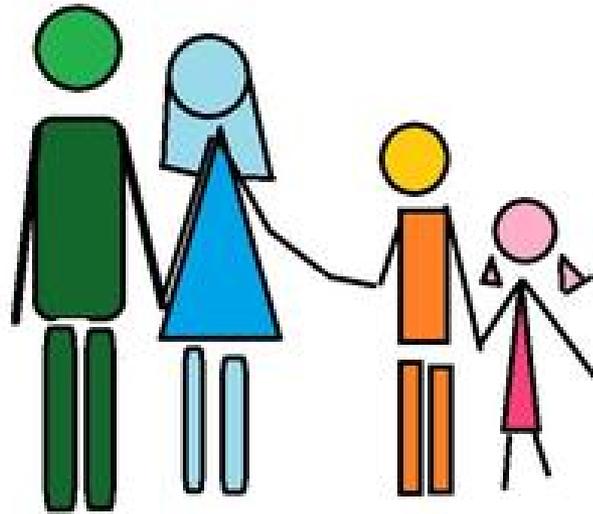


Terms people may use for autism

- ***Autism Spectrum Disorder*** (ASD)
- Low or High Functioning Autism (HFA)
- PDD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder)
- PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified)
- Aspergers Syndrome

Why is this important to you?

- Families affected by autism are under unique stressors, causing them to behave in unexpected ways



Families, some ways we cope....

- In our homes ***you may find...***
 - ▣ Additional locks on doors – both internal & external
 - ▣ Windows locked or nailed shut
 - ▣ Alarm systems
 - ▣ Lack of furniture in bedrooms
 - ▣ Strong cleaning products
 - ▣ Fences with locked gates
 - ▣ Desired / necessary objects made inaccessible
 - ▣ A “safe room” or safe place for the child

Families, some ways we cope....

- Some things *we may do*. . .
 - Stay home
 - Home-school our kids
 - Serve the same foods day after day, after day, after day
 - Try biomedical interventions (supplements, diets, therapies, “quack” doctors, refuse vaccinations, etc.)
 - Physically restrain our kids
 - Enable our kids (meltdown prevention)
 - Live in denial
 - Neglect non-ASD issues (think housework, spouses, bills, etc.)
 - Search obsessively for a cure, or at least someone to blame

Families, some ways we cope....

- **Attitudes** you may encounter. . .
 - Lack of trust (Keep your #@&% jack!)
 - Defensive
 - Victimized
 - Empowered
- Note: Autism has a genetic component. We may have difficulty with many of the same things our identified family members do.



Autism Spectrum Disorders Impact

- Language
- Social Relatedness
- Restricted Interests
- Cognition & Emotion
- Sensory Processing



Language

□ Language clues:

- Lack of spoken language
- Uneven receptive & expressive language skills
- Use of assistive communication technology / tools
- “Robot” talk, flat affect, halting or repetitive rhythm
- May appear to be rude or arrogant
- Very literal understanding of language
- Echolalia: immediate, delayed or partial
- Use & understanding of language decreased by stress

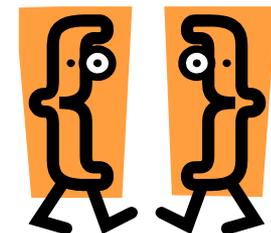


Social Relatedness



□ Social clues

- Exhibits poor timing and unexpected behaviors when approaching others
- Seems to ignore nonverbal messages
- Seems to ignore others' comments or contributions
- Appears not to perceive or appreciate others' perspectives
 - Literally thinks others see what they see
 - Seems blind to what others may think or be motivated by
- Looks away during verbal exchanges



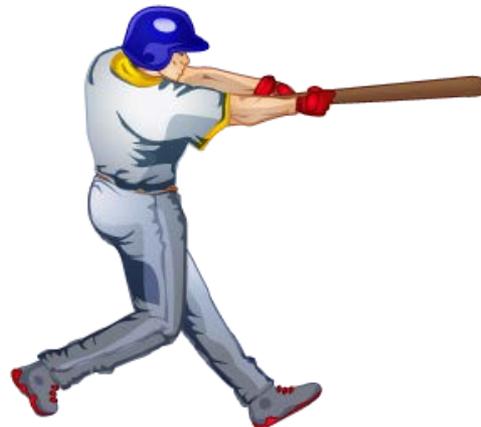


Restricted Interests



□ Clues

- Narrow or obscure focus of interest
- Repeatedly turns conversation to same topic
- Demonstrates surprising level of knowledge about a given topic or subject



Cognition & Emotion

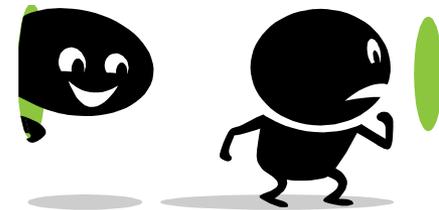


□ Cognition Clues

- May not know the things that “everyone” knows
- Demonstrates “spiky” skill / knowledge pattern
- Shows strict adherence to literal interpretation of rules
- Difficulty tolerating ambiguity (black/white – not grey)

□ Emotion Clues

- Appears worried or anxious much of the time
- Displays affect incongruous with situation
- Emotional responses disproportionate to situation
- Rapid changes of emotional state



Sensory-based Clues



□ Sensory Clues:

- Reacts negatively to environments with high sensory loads
- Attraction to preferred sensory input
- Repetitive behaviors used to balance sensory experience (rocking, flapping, vocalizing, etc.)
- Withdrawal from touch
- Unexpected or monotonous clothing choices
- Frequent use of headphones, earbuds, hats, hoodies, blankets, etc (to mitigate sensory load)
- Restricted food choices



Summary of ASD behavior profile

- Due to deficits / differences in ...
 - Perspective taking
 - Reading & using non-verbal communication
 - Verbal language use & understanding
 - Sensory perception
- People with ASD have trouble “connecting the dots”
 - Missing dots
 - Distorted dots
 - Extra, non-salient dots

Assessing the Situation: Looking at Behavior



- All behavior serves a function or purpose
- Unwanted behaviors can be replaced by adaptive behaviors that serve the same function more successfully
- Determining function is central and often difficult when working with families and individuals with ASD
- Family members have “trained” each other in behavior patterns

Impact of Physical & Social Environment

Pro's

- Built-in cues for expected behavior
- Promotes development of routines
 - Daily
 - Within activities
 - Within communication
- Environments can be modified

Con's

- Environmental triggers can be hard to identify
- Changes can produce unexpected consequences
- New environments often result in at least temporary loss of function

Guiding Principles for Transitions



Increase Clarity



Increase Predictability

Assumptions



Assess & Manage Environment

Clarity & Predictability –The How

- Do...
 - Use short, clear sentences
 - Support communication with static, visual supports
 - Pictures – people, places, transport
 - Flow charts or social stories – sequence of events
 - Calendars, lists
 - Limit the number and frequency of transitions
 - Build routine whenever possible
 - Allow / encourage person to ask questions

Clarity & Predictability –The How

□ **Don't...**

- Assume people know something
- Make implementation of a plan dependent on “judgement calls”
- Rely on person’s understanding or reading nonverbal communication or non-literal language
- Expect people to remember things without visual supports
- Include more transitions than necessary

Clarity & Predictability –The What

- What is going to happen – sequence
 - Beware of time-specific references
- Describe environments to be expected (pictures too)
- List people who will be involved
 - Their role (identify a “go-to” person for each setting)
 - Their relationship to the individual and others in environment
- Expected language and behaviors
 - For each environment / person
 - State this more clearly than you think you need to

Managing the Environment



- Get a sensory profile of the individual
- Assess environments for triggers and overall sensory load
- When in doubt – simplify & reduce sensory load
- Allow for adaptive tools and behaviors
 - Hats / hoodies
 - Headphones
 - Movement
 - Breaks
 - Fidgets
 - Preferred seating

Managing the Environment



- If child is moving to new environment, bring along or reproduce positive environmental cues or tools
- Allow familiar objects to accompany child
- Using sensory profile, ensure there is a “safe” place for de-escalation
- If specific language cues are necessary, make sure new caregiver knows how to use them
- Share sensory, interest, and communication profiles with new caregiver

Summary

- People with autism can display differences in language, social relatedness, cognition, emotion, sensory processing and special interests.
- The physical & social environment plays a key role for people with autism
- Behaviors can be replaced by more effective behaviors serving the same function
- People with autism benefit from clarity and predictability – especially during transitions

Resources

- **Autism Services and Resources of CT (ASRC)**
(203) 265-7717, www.ct-asrc.org
- **Family Problems, DCF, and the Law:
A Guide for Parents**
by
Lynn B. Cochrane and Jill Davies
Greater Hartford Legal Aid, Inc.