Helping Students with ASD Succeed: Challenges and Strategies for Success Beyond High School
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Today’s Objectives
• Participants will identify challenges young adults with ASD face in finding employment and living independently.
• Participants will identify strategies they can use to support individuals with ASD to be more successful in social-communication, executive functioning, and self-regulation.
• Participants will identify ways to support an individual with ASD that engages them in identifying solutions versus being dependent on others to solve problems for them.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?
• Brain-based disorder resulting in difficulty with:
  • Social skills and interactions with other people
  • Communication skills – including social communication
  • Restrictive or repetitive behavior
The number of children identified with autism in Oklahoma

Children served under Autism Category in Oklahoma
Child Count by Age Group, OSDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age 3-5</th>
<th>98-99</th>
<th>09-10</th>
<th>10-11</th>
<th>11-12</th>
<th>12-13</th>
<th>13-14</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 6-11</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>1,281</td>
<td>1,405</td>
<td>1,674</td>
<td>1,923</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>523</td>
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<td>Age 12-17</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>1,540</td>
<td>1,816</td>
<td>2,067</td>
<td>1,431</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18-21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1,350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL (Age 3-21) 454 2,651 3,062 3,586 4,121 4,389 867

Reported by State of Oklahoma in accordance with section 618 of IDEA, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Services.

Prevalence of Autism

- 1 in 68 children in US have an ASD, with variability from one region or area to another
  - CDC, 2014
- Prevalence of ASD in U.S. children increased by 119.4% from 2000 to 2010
  - CDC, 2014

Predictors of Better Outcomes for Students with ASD

- Early language development
- Higher IQ (>55)
- One study found verbal IQ is the best predictor of outcome (Eaves & Ho, 2008)
A Little Bit about Autism: Autism and Adulthood

- Overall symptoms of ASD typically improve with age
  - Social interaction, communication skills, restricted and repetitive behavior
  - Adolescence can be a challenging time and period of regression or increase in problem behavior for some youth.

Autism and Secondary-Outcomes

- One study of 66 adults (19 – 26 y/o)
  - 14% post-secondary degree
  - 6% competitive employment
  - 12% supported employment
  - 56% sheltered workshop or day activity center
  - 12% no regular activities
  - Taylor, 2011

Oklahoma Autism Needs Assessment Survey – 2015 (OANAS)

- Full report available at:
  - http://okautism.org/
Oklahoma Autism Needs Assessment Survey - 2015

- 18.4% of parents who responded to the survey have a child with ASD 15 years of age or older

Oklahoma Needs Assessment Survey - 2015

Student’s Plan for After High School

Employment at Time of Survey

- Four of the seven individuals who self-reported were employed. Three were employed full-time and 1 was employed less than 30 hours per week.
- Three individuals who self-reported indicated the following job titles best described their type of work: science, engineering and computer professionals; production operative workers; protective service workers.
- Nine caregivers reported their adult children were employed. Two were employed full-time and seven were employed less than 30 hours per week.
- Four caregivers indicated the following job titles best described their adult child’s type of work: laborers and helpers and protective service workers. Two caregivers commented their adult child works in a sheltered workshop and two others commented their adult children used supported employment.
Can determine the success or failure of a person in adulthood

**ADAPTIVE SKILLS**

**Autism and Adaptive Skills**

- Cognitive skills often improve more than adaptive skills
- Regardless of IQ, individuals with ASD often have fewer gains in adaptive skills through adolescence and adulthood
- Adaptive skills can decline in adulthood for individuals with average IQ and autism based on opportunity to use and learn new skills.
By the time students with ASD come to your program…

• Diagnosis
• Intervention
• Education program
• Family support

You can make a difference

Life of isolation

Life with meaning

Time is limited…

• Your time with students is limited
• Make the most of every day you have to help them gain new skills, with an opportunity for gainful employment and a more meaningful life as an adult.
Be Thoughtful About Goals and Interventions
“Despite how evidence-based your interventions are, teaching inconsequential skills well is really no better than teaching essential skills poorly.”
Gerhardt, Oklahoma Statewide Autism Conference, 2010

Building Capacity or Creating Dependency
• How do we support students to be as independent as possible?
• How do we support them to be problem solvers?

Understanding Challenges for Students with ASD that Affect Learning
• Language delays/deficits
• Executive functioning deficits
• Sensory processing differences
• Emotional regulation difficulties
Language Delays/Deficits

- Individuals with ASD have delays in language processing
  - May not be able to effectively express their needs, concerns, or ask questions to get the information they need to complete their work
  - May not understand the instruction provided related to their job
  - Related social challenges interacting with co-workers and supervisors

Questions to consider?

- Does the person have a functional means of communicating with those who do not know him well?
  - Yes – great…can he use these skills in novel situations?
  - No – what is the current communication skill level? How can we develop a functional means of communication with others? Pictures? Voice output device?

Strategies for Communicating

- Simplify instructions/directions
- Use visual supports
  - Written task lists
  - Video models of task
  - Technology
- Help students with scripts and practice communicating in a variety of settings with a variety of people
Executive Functioning

• The executive functions are a set of processes that all have to do with managing oneself and one’s resources in order to achieve a goal. It is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills involving mental control and self-regulation.
  • [http://www.ldonline.org/article/29122/](http://www.ldonline.org/article/29122/)

Difficulty with Executive Functioning

• Results in:
  • Difficulty coming up with solutions to problems
  • Staying focused on tasks
  • Remembering multiple steps to completing a job task
  • Difficulty regulating emotions
  • Difficulty with Time Management
  • Inflexibility
    • Smart but Scattered

Strategies for Difficulty with EF

• Identify weak areas first, then base supports on those individual needs
• Task lists
• Timers/reminders to check for participation/engagement
• Teach self management skills
• Use video modeling or other strategies to help person remember components of work task
• Break tasks down into smaller components
• And the list goes on and on…
Create opportunities

- For students to develop and practice executive functioning skills every day.
- Provide support as needed but fade yourself out of the situation as much as possible.
- Goal is for person to rely on cues in natural environment to complete tasks.

SENSORY PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES

What is sensory processing?

- The ability to take information from the environment, movement, touch, taste, smell, hearing, and vision, and use that information to function in the environment.
  - Ayres, 1979
Sensory Preferences

• “Every person has a unique pattern of taking in and responding to information from the senses about their world and their bodies—an individual profile of sensory preferences and tolerances”.
  • Williamson & Anzalone, 2001

When is a preference a problem?

• Is the preference interfering with one or more of the activities the person engages in (eating, sleeping, hygiene, socialization)?
• Is the preference negatively impacting the person’s interactions with others (challenging behavior, isolation)?
• Is the preference limiting participation in a variety of natural environments (work, school, leisure activities)?

Strategies for Sensory Processing Difficulty

• First understand the person’s sensory preferences, help them understand and learn to identify what they need to be successful
• Identify work environment that is best match when possible for sensory preferences
• Help individual develop coping strategies to ‘deal’ with sensory aversions in environment in the most socially appropriate way possible
Important note to remember…

- Not all behavior has a sensory basis—negative behavior could be due to a variety of reasons
  - Environment
  - Demands
  - Skill level of the person
  - Level of expectations placed on person relative to his abilities

Emotional Regulation Difficulties

- Brain differences in amygdala impacts individual's ability to regulate emotions
- Other areas of difficulty contribute to emotional regulation difficulties (executive functioning, sensory processing, language issues)

Emotional Regulation Difficulties

- Students may not have been taught socially appropriate strategies to cope when frustrated, overwhelmed, or upset
Strategies for Difficulty with Emotional Regulation

• Teach person strategies for dealing with frustration, anger, disappointment in a socially appropriate way.
• Some students may need a specific intervention plan to learn strategies from professional trained in this area.

Building Capacity or Creating Dependency

• How do we support students to learn to navigate life…work and independent living?
• How do we support them to be problem solvers?

Being Reflective versus Directive

• John is working in a clothing store. His current job task is to sort the men’s shirts by color and hang them in the appropriate place on the rack. His job coach sees that he has wandered over to the men’s cologne area and is talking to a peer.
  • Capacity building response…
    • John, what is the job you are doing right now?
Being Reflective versus Directive

• Susan is working at Ross. She has been asked to create a display for the housewares section for the upcoming holidays. She is stuck and isn’t sure what to do next.
  • Capacity building response…
  • What have you done so far?
  • What do you think you could do next?
    • If the student is not sure, provide two choices.

Reflective Questions

• Engage the student in being part of the solution
• Creates opportunities for them to practice solving their own problems in a safe environment where they have the support of the a teacher or job coach.
• Once students are in a job, employers will expect them to have this skill.

Reflective Questions

Build **CAPACITY**

versus

Creating **DEPENDENCE**
Examples of Reflective Questions

• What do you think you should do?
• What have you tried already?
  • How did that work?
• What do you think you could do differently?
• How do you think you could solve the problem?
• What will help you?
• How well did it work when you…?

Cont Examples of Reflective Questions

• Who can you go to for help?
• What will you do if he/she is not available?

Providing Additional Support

• If a student are not able to answer the reflective question(s) you can provide support as needed:
  • Provide two choices and have him determine which choice would work best
  • Prompt them to use a support you have helped them learn (eg: note on their ipad, visual support, self-calming strategy, video model or role play practiced in class, etc)
Resources for Information

- Web resources
  - Centers for Disease Control
  - National Institute of Health
  - Association for Science in Autism Treatment
    - http://www.asatxonline.org/
  - Autism Speaks
    - http://www.autismspeaks.org/
  - Autism Society of America
    - http://www.autism-society.org/
  - Smart but Scattered
    - http://www.smartbutscatteredkids.com/

Resources for Employment

- OCALI: The Employee with Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - http://www.ocali.org/project/employee_with_asd
- United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
  - www.dol.gov/odep
    - www.autismspeaks.org
- Getting Hired: Careers and Community for Talented People with Disabilities
  - gettinghired.com
- Think Beyond the Label: Workers & Employees with Disabilities in the Workplace
  - thinkbeyondthelabel.com
- JAN: Job Accommodation Network
  - askjan.org
    - www.autismspeaks.org

Questions?

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