

LEARNING ABOUT AUTISM

March 28, 2012

Indianhead Federated Library System Workshop

Emily Bedford

Agenda

- ⦿ Learning About Autism
 - 9:30-10:30
- ⦿ 10 minute Break
 - 10:30-10:40
- ⦿ Sensory Processing and Autism
 - 10:40-11:40
- ⦿ Sample Story Time
 - 11:40-12:00
- ⦿ Questions
 - 12:00-12:15

What is Autism?

⦿ Federal Definition

- Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interactions, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Core Deficits:

- Qualitative impairment in social interactions
- Qualitative impairment in communication
- Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities.
- Onset before age 3

Autism may interfere with:

- Functional communication (verbal and nonverbal)
- Social interactions and relationships
- Behavior
- Cognitive processing
- Motor skills
- Self help/daily living skills

What Causes Autism?

- Neurologically based disorder that affects the functioning of the brain
- Correlations, but no known causations
- Not caused by psychological factors
- Hypothesis refer to chemical imbalance, genetic factors, environmental conditions, specific brain abnormalities
- Genetic predisposition may be present

Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Occurs more commonly in boys than girls
- May occur in as many as 1 in 100
- Third most common developmental disability
- May occur in association with other disorders

Autism Umbrella

- ⦿ Asperger Syndrome
- ⦿ Autism
- ⦿ Rett Syndrome
- ⦿ Pervasive Developmental Disorder –
Not otherwise specified (PDDNOS)
- ⦿ Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)

Autism Concepts

- Theory of Mind
- Joint Attention
- Pointing
- Language difficulties
- Sensory Issues
- Difficulty with social interactions
- Solitude
- Rigid Thinking

Theory of Mind

- I need a volunteer

Theory of Mind (continued)

- ◎ Understand that other people have different:
 - Intentions
 - Thoughts
 - Desires
 - Feelings

The ability to infer the mental states of others which allows us to anticipate, comprehend, and predict social behaviors of others.

Theory of Mind (cont.)

- Is the ability to “mind read” or figure out what others are thinking, feeling and doing
- Is the ability to realize that others are not thinking and feeling exactly what you are thinking or feeling

People who lack Theory of Mind have difficulty with the following:

- Predicting
- Reading intentions
- Explaining own behavior
- Understanding that behavior impacts others
- Referencing or perspective taking
- Reading and reacting to others interests
- Understanding social interactions

Implications for lacking Theory of Mind

- ⦿ Lack of social skills
- ⦿ Preferences for the known
- ⦿ Difficulty choosing and prioritizing
- ⦿ Appear to have a lack of compliance
- ⦿ Difficulty with the hidden curriculum

Joint Attention

- Looking at a person, looking at an object of interest and then looking back at the object
- Used to draw another person, nonverbally, to an object/person we're interested in

Joint Attention (cont.)

- Involves the ability to follow another person's line of attention, to coordinate eye gaze and gestures with another person
- Can be used to communicate needs and share interests
- Children with Autism do not do this naturally

Pointing

- ① What do you do to get someone to look at something you can't reach?
- ① What do you do when someone you're talking to points toward something?

Pointing (cont.)

- Children with Autism may have difficulty following a point, especially if it is to an object farther away
- Rather than point, a child with Autism may move your body to focus your attention on something they want rather than point it out to you

Language Difficulties

- Take out a pen and paper. Draw what I tell you to draw.

Language Difficulties (cont.)

- Does yours look like the persons next to you? Why not?

Communication Difficulties

- ⦿ Absence or delay of spoken language
- ⦿ Difficulty initiating or maintaining conversation
- ⦿ Odd production of speech, including intonation, volume, rhythm, or rate
- ⦿ Limited understanding of nonverbal communication skills such as gestures, facial expressions, or voice tone
- ⦿ Repetitive or idiosyncratic language

Restricted, Repetitive or Stereotyped Patterns of Behavior, Interests, & Activities

- 4 categories of repetitive behaviors
 1. Stereotyped motor mannerisms
 - Self-stimulatory behavior
 2. Preoccupation with nonfunctional objects or parts of objects
 - May line up objects in precise order
 3. Patterns of interest that are unusual in the narrowness and/or intensity of their pursuit
 - Preoccupation with a limited range of play, interests, topics or objects
 4. Extreme rigidity and insistence on sameness
 - Distress/resistance to change
 - Routines/rituals and rigid, rule-bound thinking

Restricted Range of Interest, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior

- Demonstrating distress or resistance to change
- Lack of true imaginative play vs. reenactment
- Intense, focused preoccupation with a limited range of play, interests, or conversation topics
- Rigid or rule-bound thinking
- Insistence on following rules or routines
- Repetitive hand or finger mannerisms

Self-Stimulatory Rituals

- Body movements: rocking, flapping hands
- Vocalizations and Verbalizations: unusual sounds, nonsense words, echolalia

Play Patterns

- Spinning objects, twirling string
- Lining up toys
- Obsessively watching same part in video

Communication

- Reenacting segments from book/video verbatim
- Asking the same question
- Talk intensively about preferred item/activity

Functions of Rituals

- Means to regulate sensory stimulation
- Expression of fear or anxiety
- Manifestation of impaired cognitive functioning
- Expression of poor inhibition (neurological)
- Expression of enjoyment

Sensory Issues

- Overly or under-responsive to certain sounds, sights, textures, odors, or tastes
- May prefer certain types of clothing or food and be bothered by sounds, smells, or lights that no one else may notice
- Sensitivities may result in behavioral problems and social difficulties

Social Interactions

- ⦿ Social relating to others is not natural to those with ASD, it is an exhausting task
- ⦿ Stress from social situations increases as the number of people increase
- ⦿ Truth is more important than other peoples feelings, so individuals with ASD may say some inappropriate (things (lack of theory of mind)
- ⦿ Understand the concrete world more than the social world, so they may appear insensitive at times

Social Interactions (cont.)

- Notice objects and facts rather than thoughts, feelings and intentions.
- When young kids with ASD enter a room, they see a room full of potential toys, not a room full of potential friends.

Social Interactions (cont.)

- Typical children read a face to see how someone is feeling. Children with ASD are confused by a face, so turn away.
- Asking a child with ASD to look at you while you're talking may lead to them having even a lesser understanding of what you're saying as they are so confused by your face
- Can teach students to tell others "I need to look away to help me to concentrate on 1) what you're saying"

Impaired Social Interaction

- ⦿ Impairment in the ability to make friends
- ⦿ Preference for isolated or solitary activities
- ⦿ Difficulty interpreting others' behaviors and social cues
- ⦿ Difficulty relating to people
- ⦿ Vulnerability and safety issues due to social naiveté

Solitude

- ⦿ In an overwhelming situation, solitude might be a desirable thing
- ⦿ Establish an area of your library that a student can go to be alone if things are getting overwhelming (sensory area)
- ⦿ Kids with autism generally prefer to learn alone. Group projects tend to be very difficult for them (remember theory of mind, they're the only ones who really got the instructions right, know who's best suited to do which part of the project, etc.)

Solitude (cont.)

- For younger kids, the time they spend alone (in solitude) may be what keeps them functioning during the social stress of the rest of the day

Rigid Thinking

- ◎ The salami sandwich that your mom prepared for you is missing from your lunch box. You suspect one of your friends took it because he smells like salami.
- ◎ You should:
 - ◎ A. Ask him if he saw your sandwich
 - ◎ B. Take his lunch box and search it.
 - ◎ C. Steal his lunch.
 - ◎ D. Tell him your sandwich smells like salami but really is dog food.

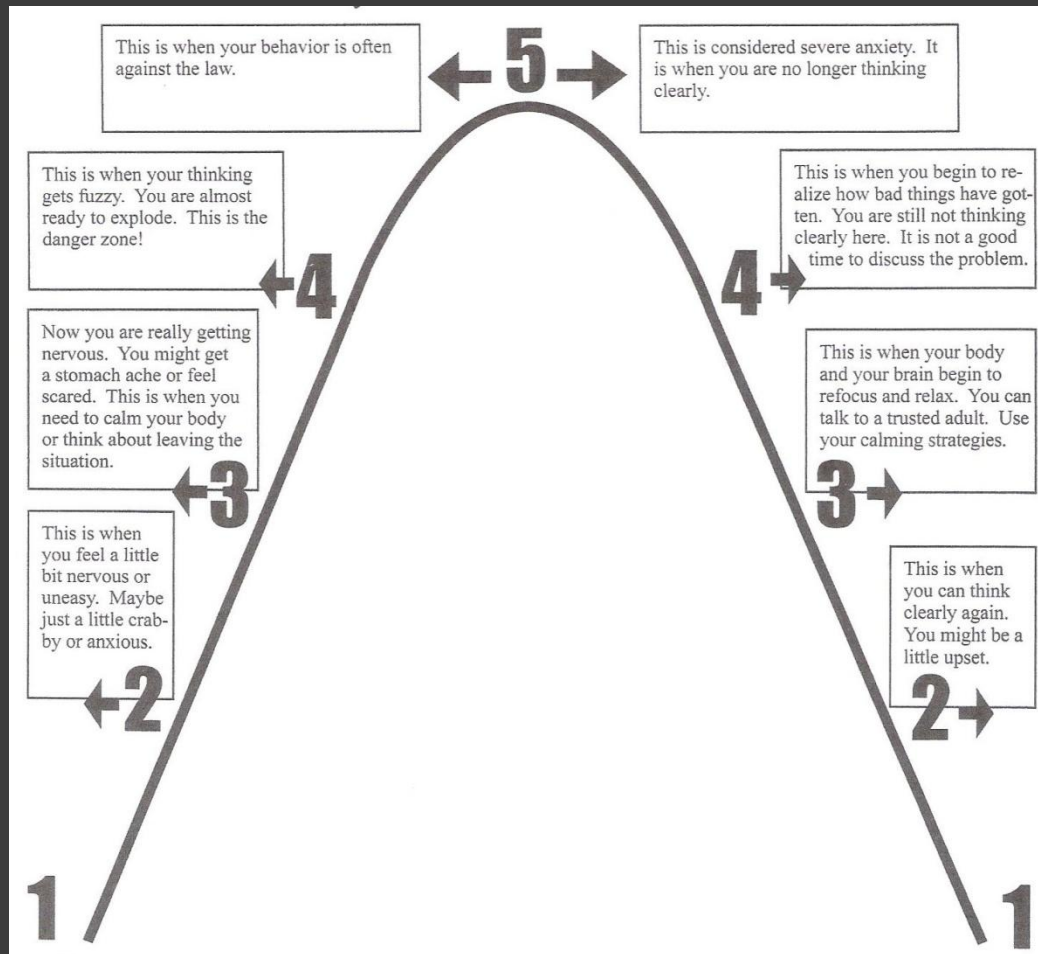
Rigid Thinking (cont.)

- ⦿ $2+2=:$
- ⦿ A. 4
- ⦿ B. 12
- ⦿ C. 6
- ⦿ D. L

Behavior

- ⦿ In a stress situation the frontal lobe shut down as the amygdala flares up and the adrenaline level goes up. In that situation none of us can think.
- ⦿ You think in the frontal lobe, you feel in the amygdala. Can't access both areas at once.
- ⦿ Research has shown your IQ can drop up to 30 points when you leave the frontal lobe.

Anxiety Curve



Final Thoughts

- Brains work differently
- Think of behavior as communication, not misbehavior. What is the child trying to tell you?
- Don't personalize the behaviors