Strategies for Understanding and Living with ASD

by Psychological Services
Parenting children with autism spectrum disorders requires flexibility, creativity, and a willingness to change.
Overview

• Definition of Autism

• Strategies for improving home stressors

• Strategies to use at home

• Resources

• Panel
Autism is referred to as a spectrum disorder to signify similarities among a group of individuals who share a common diagnosis, but who differ in how core characteristics are manifested, and in the number and severity of specific characteristics.
Causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders

- No Specific Known Cause
- Neurobiological Disorder
- Genetic Component
- Perhaps Multiple Causal Factors
- Subtypes Based on Predicted Time of Onset
Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)

- Autism
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified
- Asperger’s Syndrome
- Rett’s Syndrome
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
Autism

- Characterized by difficulties in communication, social interaction, and imaginative play, and the presence of restricted interests and activities prior to the age of 3.
PDD NOS

- Atypical autism presentations that do not meet the criteria for Autistic Disorder because of late age at onset, atypical symptomatology or subthreshold symptomatology.
Asperger’s Syndrome

- The disturbance causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- There is no clinically significant general delay in language (e.g., single words by age 2 years, communicative phrases used by 3 years).
Rett’s Disorder

- A genetic disorder, that only occurs in girls.
- Normal development for the first 5 months. Head growth ceases between 5-48 months with loss of previously acquired skills.
- Results in difficulties in expressive and receptive communication, poorly coordinated gait and trunk movements, and cognitive disabilities.
Childhood Disintegrative Disorder

- Extremely rare.
- Develop normally for at least the first 2 years and then display significant regression in communication, motor, and social interaction skills.
Characteristics of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Social Difficulties
- Expressive and Receptive Communication Difficulties
- Restricted Repertoire
- Additional Considerations
- Sensory Processing Difficulties
- Theory of Mind
- Executive Functioning
Areas of Difficulty

- Social
- Pragmatics
- Obsessive Interests
- Black/White Thinking
- Rigidity
- Sensory

- Attention
- Motivation
- Motor
- Executive Functioning
- Emotional Regulation
- Hidden Social Rules
Behavioral Characteristics

- Obsessions/Rituals
- Compulsive Mannerisms
- Self-Stimulatory Behavior
- Refusal
- Withdrawal
- Self-Injury/Abuse
- Aggression
Sensory Processing Difficulties

- Each of us have various sensory systems which process information and assist us in making sense of the world.
- People with autism spectrum disorders have difficulty processing and using sensory input in a meaningful and relevant way.
- Some individuals are over sensitive and others are under sensitive to sensory input.
Common Stressors at Home

- Sensory
  - food
  - haircuts
  - dentists
  - medical
  - clothing
  - showers

- Completing routines
  - getting ready for school
  - doing homework
  - Chores

- Family activities
  - Adjusting “their” agenda/interests with family plans
Strategies for avoiding stressors

1. Operating on “Their Time”
2. Balance the Agenda
3. Managing the Environment
4. Set the Tone
5. Share the Agenda
6. Simplify Language
7. Manage Change of Plans
8. Provide Reassurance
9. Be Generous with Praise
Strategies for avoiding stressors (con’t)

10. Increase Opportunities to Engage in Activities of High Interest and/or Strengths
11. Listen to the WORDS
12. Recognize “Teachable Moments”
13. Increase Social Supports
14. Set up System for Monitoring
Increase Environmental Supports

- Make the environment as predictable as possible

- Provide consistency
  - Prepare the individual for any unavoidable changes
  - If a change is unavoidable, further reduce expectations/demands following the change
    - Adreon & Gitlitz, 1998
Prepare a schedule for daily routines. A calendar may be helpful!
Arrange schedules from top to bottom or left to right - allow ways to check off or remove task when done
Giving the child a checklist is particularly helpful when he/she has to complete a short series of related activities or when they need to organize a group of materials. For a chore at home, they might need a checklist for completing the steps necessary to clean their room.

- make your bed _____
- put away your clean clothes _____
- put your books on the shelf _____
- put your school notebook in your backpack _____
- put your toys in the toy bin _____
- sweep the floor _____
Students might also be able to communicate more effectively if given some structure to help talk about their day.

On the way to school today on the bus, I _________________________________.

One thing that happened in homeroom today was _________________________________.

In science and social studies today, I did two things, They were________________________ and _________________________________.

In math and English, I did two things ________________________________ and _________________________________.

One more thing that I did today was _________________________________.

A difficult thing that I did today was _________________________________.

A really fun thing that happened today was _________________________________.

Five Steps to Remember to Help Stabilize when Problems Occur

1) Gather information from a number of sources to assess the student’s emotional state.
2) Determine the stressors that exist in the environment.
3) Decrease the stressors by modifying the requirement for disliked and/or difficult tasks and temporarily eliminating any emphasis on teaching new skills (con’t)
4. Make the environment more predictable and increase the use of home base.
5. Balance stressors and learning.
Strategies to use at home
Talking to a child with autism:

- One of the characteristics of autism is difficulty processing language.
- Attention: make sure you get the child’s attention before talking to them.
- Unnecessary Language: be short and to the point (For example, instead of saying, You need to come and sit in your seat like all the other children until it’s time to go outside,” point to the chair and say, “Sit please.”
- Do vs. Don’t: Tell the child what you want him/her to do instead of what not to do. Avoid using don’t because a child with autism may not understand or catch the reversed meaning of the statement beginning with don’t.

(Crissey, 2005, p. 3)
Teaching Strategies

- Visual Schedules
- Visuals
- Social Stories
- 5 point scale
- Comic Strip Conversations/Cartooning
- Power Cards
Visual Schedules

- Providing a daily schedule in a visual format will make the day predictable, ease transitions, and reduce stress.
- A visual schedule may display a full day, or it may break the day into sections and display only a part of the day at a time.
- You may represent different activities with real objects (such as a cup to indicate snack), photos, line drawings, or words.
- When choosing pictures or objects, think about what would be most meaningful for the child. Try to use close-up shots of very recognizable objects. For example, the child would more readily associate Physical Education time with a picture of a ball, rather than a picture of the gym itself.
- (Crissey, 2005, p. 3)
Visuals

- **Cue cards, charts, and reminders** - Other types of visual supports include reminders of what to do, such as posted rules, “to do” checklists, and charts displaying consequences for inappropriate actions. Visually displaying free time or other choices helps the child to understand the process of decision making. Since presenting the card is often easier for the child than asking for help, simple cue cards should be available for the child to give to an adult or to place in a certain location indicating he/she needs help or a break.

- (Crissey, 2005, p. 4)
Social Stories

- A social skills book presents appropriate social behavior in the form of a book. It includes relevant social cues that a child might miss if not directly taught. It tells what specific behaviors/actions the child is to expect in a given situation and is used to teach a student what is expected.

- A social story can address many different behaviors from fear, aggression, obsession, etc in a positive format.

- Social stories can also be used to teach routines and changes in routines and they can be used to help teach students to understand their behaviors and the behaviors of others. It gives step-by-step directions for completing a task or how to respond to a given situation.
Social Stories

- Writing a Social Story

Social stories include the following information:
1. who, what, and where
2. Statement of desired responses
3. Reaction and feelings of others involved

- Make sure social stories are age and ability appropriate and use terms like “usually” or “sometimes” instead of “always”.

- Social stories are typically written in present tense to describe events as they take place, but may be written to describe events that will take place in the future.

- Illustrations may be included depending on the need of the student.
Social Stories

• Presenting Social Stories
  • Present the social story in a quiet place that is free from distractions
  • Rered read social story just before targeted situation
  • Review social story frequently until behavior diminishes
  • Keep the social story accessible to the student so he/she can refer back to it as needed
5 Point Scale

• The 5 Point Scale is simply a visual scale used to help students reduce abstract ideas such as emotions, feelings, or pain into simple numbers. It can also be used to address behaviors such as vocal volume, disrespect, etc.

• When using the 5 Point Scale, it is important to remember that 5 is always the highest value and 1 is always the least.

• In addition, the 5 Point Scale can be used to help students identify where they can use certain behaviors. (e.g. vocal volume level 5 is reserved for outside or in an extreme emergency when there is no one near by that can hear you)
Example of 5 point scale

- Michael is a 5th grader with autism. He is very soft spoken and often difficult to understand. He is frequently asked to repeat things because he is so difficult to understand. He is prompted constantly to “speak louder”, however, every time he was called on the teacher has to ask him to speak up again.

- We created a 5 point scale for him to use to measure vocal volume and since it is been in place the teacher no longer says “speak up”. Instead she uses phrases such as, “Say it at a 3!” or “Keep it at a 2!” In addition, she will use a visual and point the volume level she want Michael to use.
## Example of 5 point scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Scale:</th>
<th>What it looks like:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Whisper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No sound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Colton is in the 6th grade. He has problems getting along in school. He likes to be in control and gets upset if he perceives something is wrong. For example, if someone cuts in line he may feel compelled to punish that person by kicking or hitting them. Colton’s ability to control his behavior varies from day to day. Colton enjoys school despite having challenges with others who do not follow his way of thinking” (Buron & Curtis, 2003, p. 26).
### Example of 5 point scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Looks like</th>
<th>Feels like</th>
<th>I can try to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kicking or hitting</td>
<td>My head will explode</td>
<td>Call my mom to go home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Screaming or hitting</td>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>Go see Mr. Peterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Quiet, rude talk</td>
<td>Bad mood, grumpy</td>
<td>Stay away from kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Enjoy it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Playing</td>
<td>A million bucks</td>
<td>Stay that way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When Matt says "How ya doing Dog?" he is treating me like one of the guys. He is trying to be friendly. He is just joking around. He doesn't think I look like a dog. Next time I see him I'll smile and say, "How ya doing Dog?" to him.
Comic Strip Example

It makes Johnny sad when I tell him he wouldn’t be so fat if he didn’t eat so much. Johnny doesn’t like to be told he is fat. Even if I’m trying to help I shouldn’t tell Johnny that he is fat. I shouldn’t tell anyone that they are fat. When I want to help Johnny be healthy I can ask him if he wants a healthy snack like an apple or pretzels. If Johnny says, “No!”, then I should talk about something else.
"The power card strategy is a visual aid that incorporates the child’s special interest in teaching appropriate social interactions including routines, behavior expectations, the meaning of language, and the hidden curriculum.

The Power Card Strategy consists of presenting on a single sheet or in booklet form a short scenario, written in the first person, describing how the child’s hero solves a problem and a small card, the POWER CARD, which recaps how the child can use the same strategy to solve a similar problem by them self” (Gagnon, 2001, p. 19).
Components:

- “A brief scenario using the student’s hero or special interest and the behavior or situation that is difficult for the child. The scenario is written at the individual’s comprehension level.

- In the first paragraph, the hero or role model attempts a solution to the problem and experiences success. The second paragraph encourages the student to try out the new behavior, which is broken down into three to five manageable steps.

- The POWER CARD is the size of a trading card, bookmark, or business card. It contains a small picture of the special interest and the solutions to the problem behavior or situation broken down into three to five steps. The POWER CARD is provided to aid in generalization. It can be carried in a purse, wallet or pocket or it can be velcroed inside a book, notebook, or locker. It may also be placed on the corner of a student’s desk” (Gagnon, 2001, p. 21).
Where Can the Power Card Strategy Be Used?

“The Power Card Strategy is appropriate for behaviors or situations in which:

1. The student lacks understanding of what she/he is to do, such as hidden curriculum items, routines, or language use that the student has not been taught.
2. The student does not understand that he has choices.
3. The student has difficulty understanding that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between a specific behavior and its consequence.
4. The student has difficulty remembering what to do without a prompt.
5. The student does not understand the perspective of others.
Where Can the Power Card Strategy Be Used?

“The Power Card Strategy is appropriate for behaviors or situations in which:

6. The student knows what to do when calm but cannot follow a give routine under stress.
7. The student needs a visual reminder to recall the behavioral expectation for the situation.
7. The student has difficulty generalizing.
8. The student is difficult to motivate and may be motivated only by the special interest.
9. The student has difficulty accepting directions from an adult” (Gagnon, 2001, p. 21-22).
The Power Card Strategy is NOT appropriate when:

1. “The student has sensory needs such as difficulty tolerating certain noises, smells, or tastes.

2. The child is extremely challenged cognitively and appears not to understand spoken language at the sentence or paragraph level. (This doesn’t mean that the child has to be a reader.)

3. The student engages in the problem behavior only once.

4. The teacher or other adults do not have a positive relationship with the child. Remember, the Power Card strategy is not a punishment. It should not be perceived as negative in any way.

5. A child in crisis. When the child is in the rage stage, this technique will not work.

6. The child does not have a well-developed area of interest. In order to buy into the strategy, the child needs to want to follow the hero’s directions” (Gagnon, 2001, p. 22).
Example of Power Card

Student Description:

• Aaron has been acting out in class and seeking attention from his peers by saying or blurting out inappropriate comments in class. He likes the attention he gets from his peers for doing this and he thinks he’s being accepted when his peers laugh at him for doing this.

• Aaron’s special interest is Nascar and he especially likes Nascar driver, Jeff Gordon.
Power Card Story:

“Jeff Gordon and His Fans”

Jeff Gordon loves being a race car driver, but sometimes it is difficult for him to think before he speaks. At the end of a long day sometimes all he wants to do is make others laugh. Sometimes Jeff blurts things out when his boss is talking. But Jeff has learned to think before he speaks. Jeff has learned it is important not to talk when his boss is talking and not to say things to try and make others laugh when his boss is trying to talk to his pit crew and teach them the latest NASCAR rules and regulations. Jeff has learned to stop and think about the comments he makes before speaking.
Just like Jeff, it is important for Aaron to think before he speaks. It would make Jeff proud to know that Aaron is like him and that he thinks before he speaks and doesn’t interrupt his teachers in class. It is important for Aaron to remember to do the following:

1. Think before he speaks. Say it in your head first before saying it out loud. If it’s not related to what the teacher is teaching then Aaron shouldn’t say out loud in class.

2. If Aaron can’t think of something to say about the teacher’s lesson, it’s better for him not to say anything at all.

3. Always follow the classroom rules and raise your hand before you speak.
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2. If Aaron can’t think of something to say about the teacher’s lesson, it’s better for him not to say anything at all.

3. Always follow the classroom rules and raise your hand before you speak.
Curriculum and Materials

- **Super Skills: A Social Skills Group Program for Children with Aspergers Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Related Challenges** By: Judith Coucouvanis (ISBN#: 1-931282-67-6)

- **Navigating the Social World: A Curriculum for Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Related Disorders** By: Jeanette McAfee, M.D. (ISBN#: 1-885477-82-1)

- **Power Cards: Using Special Interests to Motivate Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome and Autism** By: Elisa Gagnon (ISBN#:1-931282-01-3)

- **The Incredible 5-Point Scale: Assisting students with autism spectrum disorders in understanding social interactions and controlling their emotional responses** By Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis (ISBN#:1-931282-52-8)


- **Practical Solutions to Everyday Challenges for Children with Asperger Syndrome** By: Haley Morgan Myles (ISBN#:1-931282-15-3)
Resources

- www.scautism.org
- www.autismspeaks.org
- www.futurehorizons-autism.com
- www.paulakluth.com
- www.modelmekids.com/
- Skill Building Buddies (Dvd’s)
- Autism Digest (non peer reviewed)
- www.interventioncentral.org
- www.autisminternetmodules.org
References:


Panel

Q & A
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Thank you for coming!