Addressing the Social and Emotional Needs of Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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Social and Emotional Needs

* Clinical Overview
* Addressing Social Needs
* Addressing Emotional Needs
Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD)
Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
Autism

- Autistic Disorder (Autism)
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder, NOS (PDD-NOS)
- Asperger’s Syndrome

- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)
- Rhett’s Syndrome
- Nonverbal Learning Disability (NLD)
Symptoms of Autism in the DSM

1. Socialization Impairments
2. Communication Impairments
3. Restricted Interests; Need for Sameness; Perseverative & Stereotypical Behaviors

Autism = all 3
Asperger’s = 1 & 3
PDD-NOS = 1 + 2 and/or 3
Autism Spectrum

low functioning --- MR (IQ<70) --- high functioning

CDD

PDD-NOS

Asperger’s

Seizures
Normative Social Development

* Infants come into the world “pre-wired” for social engagement

* Human face/voice are the most interesting stimuli in the environment

* Early emergence of
  * Selective attention
  * Social engagement
  * Social reciprocity
  * Attachments
  * Social-communication skills
  * Relationships
Autism in Infancy

* No babbling or cooing by 12 months
* No single words by 16 months
* No spontaneous two-word phrases by 24 months (not including echolalia/scripting)
* No use of social gestures by 12 months (point, wave, grasp)
* No response to name
* Loss of any language/words or social skills at any age
Developmental Trajectories

Experts on people

Experts on things
Thinking about people

Thinking about things

It is a social disability!
Eye Tracking Studies

American Journal of Psychiatry

WINNER OF 5 ACADEMY AWARDS

Elizabeth Taylor
Richard Burton
in Ernest Lehman's Production of
Edward Albee's
Who's
Afraid Of
Virginia Woolf?

Viewer with autism
Age: 38
FSIQ: 119
Vineland Social: 69

Typical Viewer
Age: 27
FSIQ: 110
Tracing a Romantic Love-Triangle

American Journal of Psychiatry
Toddler’s viewing Toddlers
MRI vs fMRI

(Courtesy of Jody Culham's fMRI for Newbies website)

MRI studies brain anatomy.

Functional MRI (fMRI) studies brain function.
The Neuroanatomy of Face Recognition: The Fusiform Gyrus

Typical Individuals   Individuals with Autism
Addressing Social and Emotional Functioning
Social Skills Training

* **Toddlers:** (24-36 months)
  * **Play skills:** prepare for parallel play: functional play skills with toys, attention to another child

* **Young children:** (preschool and early elementary):
  * **reverse inclusion:** bring typical peers into 1:1 setting to work on social skills training
  * **small peer groups:** practice skills in small groups
  * **inclusion setting:** dyads and groups
Established Curriculum

- Behaviorally Based
- Skills Based
- Relationship Development Intervention (RDI)
Social Skills Groups

Components

- FUN!!
- Teach skills and make friends
- Help children work together
- Devise individual goals
  - Eye contact, on-topic talking, etc.
- Teach and reinforce skills
- Communicate with parents and teachers
Social Skills Groups

Activities

- Scavenger Hunt
- Hot & Cold Game
- Voice Modulation
- Emotion Thermometer
- Twister, Ungame
- Staying on-topic games (Jenga)
Importance of Addressing Emotional Needs

* Immature regulatory systems: difficulty with emotional and behavioral regulation
* Can not consistently use people as source of regulation

* Language delays: can not understand or express needs and experiences

* Parts-whole processing: difficulty synthesizing and making sense of world around them
Mental Health Services

* Help child develop coping skills

* Support parents: understand child’s behaviors, parenting guidance

* Help parents and school personnel develop and implement interpersonal and environmental supports
Emotion Regulation

- Awareness of internal state
  - “You feel __ because ____.”

- Build replacement skills (coping skills)
  - Deep breathing, take space
Environmental Support

- Structure unstructured time
- Preparation for transition and change
- Schedule
  - Words and Pictures
  - Mayer-Johnson, Boardmaker
  - Clip Art
ART

RECESS

SCIENCE
Environmental Supports

- Planned breaks
- Breaks when needed
- “Safe place”
- During difficult times - allow child to engage in preferred activity
- Support during transitions
Learning Readiness Skills

- Work Routine
- Adult-led Activities
- Affect Modulation
- Tolerating Frustration
- Waiting between Activities
- Eye Contact
- Vocal and Motor Imitation
- Contingency System
Sensory Integration

* Jane Ayres – *Tactile Defensiveness*
* Distinguishing SI from OT
  * *Fine motor deficits*
  * *Sensory processing impairments*
* Overreactivity & Underreactivity
* Seeking out sensory input
* “Sensory Diets”
  * Deep pressure, weighted vests, joint compression, swinging, jumping
  * Planned schedule vs. reinforcement
Research Studies at YCSC

**Simons Simplex Consortium Genetics Study**
Ages 5-17 with at least one unaffected sibling > age 4
Contact: Monika.Lau@yale.edu

**Simons Baby Sibs Project**
*Infant Siblings of Children with Autism*
Contact: monika.lau@yale.edu

**MRI Studies**
Ages 10–30 Contact: Julie.Wolf@yale.edu
Infants Contact: Julie.Wolf@yale.edu

**Early Social Cognition**
Ages 1-2 years
Contact: suzanne.macari@yale.edu

**Language Studies in ASD**
Pragmatics (Ages 9-17): daria.diakonova@yale.edu
Prosody (Ages 4-7) Contact: Allison.Lee@yale.edu
Recommended Resources

*Asperger Syndrome*
Guilford Press

National Research Council:
*Educating Children with Autism*
http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10017.html

Volkmar & Wiesner (2004)
*Healthcare for Children on the Autism Spectrum*
Woodbine House