Students within the Autism Spectrum in Higher Education Settings

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What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

A neuro-developmental disorder that impacts learning, communication and socialization. This includes social skill development, language, attention, perception and motor activity.
## DSM-5 (May 2013)

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<thead>
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<th>Change</th>
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<td>New diagnostic category:</td>
<td>Includes;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neurodevelopmental Disorders</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
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<td>ADHD</td>
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### DSM-5

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<tr>
<td><strong>New Disorder: Autism Spectrum Disorder</strong></td>
<td>Disorder severity based on degree of social communication and restrictive or repetitive patterns of behavior.</td>
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<td>Encompasses previous disorders such as: Pervasive Developmental Disorder and Asperger’s disorder</td>
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The Autism Spectrum

Social Interaction
- In own World
  - Nonverbal
  - Stereotypical Behaviors
  - High Sensitivity

Communication
- Nonverbal
  - Active but Inept
  - Verbal but Inept

Restricted Interests/Repetitive Behaviors
- Limited flexibility
  - Restricted interests
  - Rigid routines

Response to Sensory Experiences
- Preferences in Response to anxiety

Asperger’s Syndrome
Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder have difficulty with what is known as the “hidden curriculum”

- These are the rules that we all seem to know without being told because we observe and model and learn.

Great Resource:

The Hidden Curriculum by Brenda Smith Myles
Socialization

• Difficulty with conversation: how to enter; turn-taking; topic choice; inappropriate responses

• Have a hard time interpreting social cues and body language

• Unaware of how their behaviors and/or comments affect others

• Do not ask others questions or their opinions

• Limited or inappropriate facial expressions and eye contact
Underlying Characteristics
Communication

- Typical development of language is seen in the Asperger range of the spectrum. Delayed language development is common in the moderate range.

- In conversations: loud volume, monopolize, off-topic, advanced vocabulary, limited range of topics, lectures rather than converses, pedantic speech
Communication

- May be very literal
- Difficulty understanding that other people may have a different perspective (anger outbursts, tantrums, refusal, etc.)
- Difficulty understanding sarcasm, humor, figures of speech, metaphors
- Misinterpretation of teasing as intentional insults
Restricted Patterns of Behavior, Interests, and Activities

- Need for consistency and structure
- Routines are helpful and preferred
- Narrow area(s) of interest
- Repetitive motor behaviors
Sensory Differences

• Senses: Sensory sensitivity (clothing, lighting, heating/cooling, noise, smell, touching, etc.)

• Experience information to the senses in different ways

• Seek or avoid activities that provide input
Cognitive Differences

- Problem solving skills
  - experienced vs. novel situations
- Generalization
- Executive functioning
  - Remembering to check mailbox
- Special interests
- Average to above average intelligence, are often gifted in their area of intense interest
Emotional Vulnerability

- Difficulty identifying and understanding feelings
- Trouble reading emotional situations
- Co-morbid mental health issues
  - Anxiety/depression
  - Low frustration tolerance
  - Need for bullying awareness and prevention
- Boundary issues related to interpersonal relationships
Strengths

- Punctual
- Attention to detail
- Comfort with repetitive tasks
- Honest
- Loyal
- Follow procedures consistently
- Do not like to break rules
- Rare absences
- Avoid gossip
- Creative
- Think outside the box
- Excellent memory
- Predictable
- Precise and Informative
Students on the Autism Spectrum at Wright State University

Students with ASD registered with ODS

- 2006 – Fewer than 30 Students
- 2010 - Approximately 60 Students
- 2015 – Approximately 100 Students

(WSU database, 2015)
Office of Disability Services at Wright State University

Services and support for students with ASD

• Psycho-educational Assessments
• Autism Spectrum Disorder Support Group
• RASE Transition Coach Program
• Outreach
Strategies

• Proactively educate the student on the rules and guidelines for specific encounters; meetings with faculty, classroom behavior (specifically asking questions and talking during class), roommate concerns.
Use scripting or behavior etiquette planning for class time or any time that there is an expectation of a certain type of behavior. It provides clarity and consistency for the student.
Strategies

- Be aware that students with ASD may need more personal space than is typical.
- Be sensitive to and aware of sensory environment (noises, odors, volume of audio, heating/cooling, etc.).
Strategies

• Employ strategies that emphasize these three areas of focus:
  • Be literal in communication and planning
  • Be logical to clarify the rational for an expectation. This can positively impact student buy-in which is critical for success.
  • Use behavioral hands-on learning and modeling to teach and reinforce new skill sets.
Strategies

- Students with autism typically respond to and seek to know what the rules are for situations that they encounter.

- State communications verbally that might ordinarily be communicated non-verbally

- Make corrections in the moment in a clear and concise manner and directly refer to an established rule.
• It will also be important to be very direct about how the current behavior is not acceptable; whether it is because it is disrupting the environment of the other individuals or is not indicated for a specific situation. This also provides the “why” which clarifies the situation and the logic associated with the expectation.

• It is **okay** to be direct, and this is preferred by students with autism, because ambiguity and extra words to soften things often cloud the picture and confuse the student.
Strategies

- Offer a suggestion to the student to quietly get up to excuse himself for a restroom/composure break when he is feeling frustrated. That way the other person will not need to redirect the student and potentially have the student behavior escalate.

- An important thing to keep in mind - the student needs to be actively involved in the process of creating a plan for his success to ensure that he will be compliant.
  - If he is not actively involved, he may initially agree, but later be non-compliant because he doesn’t see the value in doing the activity. Student buy-in is critical for success.
Questions?
References


