

Social Skills and Autism: Strategies for Parents

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What is High Functioning Autism?

- Neurodevelopmental condition with relative impairments in:
 - Social Relatedness
 - Speech and Language
 - Flexibility, spontaneity and inferential thinking.
 - Sensory integration, atypical arousal level, fine and gross motor and motor planning issues.

Secondary Features (Moran, 2006).

- Fine Motor and Gross Motor Issues.
- Sensory Integration
- Gastrointestinal Issues
- Loss of acquired language skills.

Two Important Concepts

- Joint Attention-Essential to developing social relationships, Language skills, Theory of Mind.
- Imitation-Builds on skills developed through Joint attention, further develops, Language skills, social skills, play skills. Motor functioning.

The CHAT (Checklist for Autism in Toddlers).

- Please fill out the following about how your child **usually** is. Please try to answer every question. If the behavior is rare (e.g., you've seen it once or twice), please answer as if the child does not do it.
- 1. Does your child enjoy being swung, bounced on your knee, etc.?
- 2. Does your child take an interest in other children?
- 3. Does your child like climbing on things, such as up stairs?
- 4. Does your child enjoy playing peek-a-boo/hide-and-seek?
- 5. Does your child ever pretend, for example, to talk on the phone or take care of dolls, or pretend other things?
- 6. Does your child ever use his/her index finger to point, to ask for something?

CHAT Continued

- 7. Does your child ever use his/her index finger to point, to indicate interest in something?
- 8. Can your child play properly with small toys (e.g. cars or bricks) without just mouthing, fiddling, or dropping them?
- 9. Does your child ever bring objects over to you (parent) to show you something?
- 10. Does your child look you in the eye for more than a second or two?
- 11. Does your child ever seem oversensitive to noise? (e.g., plugging ears)
- 12. Does your child smile in response to your face or your smile?

CHAT

- 13. Does your child imitate you? (e.g., you make a face-will your child imitate it?)
- 14. Does your child respond to his/her name when you call?
- 15. If you point at a toy across the room, does your child look at it?
- 16. Does your child walk?
- 17. Does your child look at things you are looking at? 18. Does your child make unusual finger movements near his/her face?
- 19. Does your child try to attract your attention to his/her own activity?

CHAT

- 20. Have you ever wondered if your child is deaf?
- 21. Does your child understand what people say?
- 22. Does your child sometimes stare at nothing or wander with no purpose?
- 23. Does your child look at your face to check your reaction when faced with something unfamiliar?

Joint Attention I (Striano and Rochat)

Dyadic

Gazing

Smiling

Re-engagement vocalizing

Re-engagement activity

Joint Attention

- Children who have a greater ability to engage in Joint attention developed more sophisticated use of language (Sigman and Kisari, 1995; Rumble 2008).
- Presence of symptoms of Autism including lack of Joint Attention predicts imitation deficits (Rogers,et.al., 2003).

Part II Developmental Milestones and Autism: Joint Attention

- Protoimperative Pointing Nine Months a child can point to get something that he wants .
- Triadic Exchange A child can look at a person, point at an object, look at a person..
- Protodeclarative Pointing-pointing to share.
- The lack of the pointing gesture is the foundation of the non-verbal language deficits and in turn impedes the building of vocabulary and higher language skills as well as social-relatedness.

Increasing Joint Attention (Yoder & Stone, 2006)

- Modeling Joint attention for children and formally and systematically encouraging joint attention in the child increases instances of independent initiation of joint attention.
- Children who were able to point in an imperative manner were better able to improve their joint attention.
- Low intensity treatment led to significant gains.

Developmental Milestones and Autism: Imitation (Rogers, 2003)

- Three Categories of imitation.
 - Actions on objects
 - Manual and postural
 - Oral and facial movements.
- Body and facial imitation predicts speech development
- Object imitation predicts play skills
- Imitation is impaired by 60%

Functional Behavioral Assessment

- Base your interventions on what you observe about the individual's behavior.
- What are the positive and penalizing social behaviors (Abele, 2007).
- When, where and how often do the behaviors occur?
- Do they occur with certain people and not with others?
- When Possible use multiple observers.

Teaching Social Skills: Where to Start.

- What do you know?
 - Age
 - Developmental age
 - Intellectual functioning.
 - Language functioning.
 - Social skills present.
 - Social skills absent.
 - Sensory and motor planning issues.

Where to start part II

- Observation: Take the time to watch the child even if you know the child well.
- Watch the child through the lens of social skills.
- Observe and record what's going wrong and what's going right.

Observations

- Child: Male
- Age: 7 years old.
- Diagnosis: Aspergers.
- Cognitive Function: Strong Verbal Language Skills, Below Average Performance Skills, Below Average Processing, Poor Short-term Memory

Observation results:

What can he do?

- He can sit at a table and participate in an activity for about 5 minutes with adult support.
- He asks for a child partner during therapeutic check-ins.
- He can make basic needs known.
- He can play with toys but in a repetitive non functional way.
- He can verbalize his needs. He can initiate a conversation.

Observation Results Continued

What can't the child do that we want him to learn:

- He'll join peers in play but won't request that they join him in his play activities.
- He can't sustain a conversation beyond the initiation stage without support.
- He does not initiate eye contact and cannot maintain beyond a few seconds.

Three Essential Concepts

#1: Theory of Mind

- Theory of Mind
 - **Perspective taking**
 - **Making predictions, guesses about what others are thinking.**

#2: Central Cohesion

Central Cohesion

- Getting the Gist of things
- Part to Whole Thinking
- Preoccupied with the
parts of objects

Collecting thoughts into a meaningful
whole.

3: Executive Functioning

- **Flexibility**
- **Organization**
- **Planning**
- **Inhibition (self-monitoring)**
- **Self Correction**
- **Working memory**
- **Metacognition**

Visual Supports

- Research indicates that visual supports can augment or replace other forms of communication, Charlop-Christy, M.H., Loc, Le., and Freeman K. A. (2000); Hagiwara, Taku (1998) .
- There is no indication that one format is better than another.
- Individualized treatment planning and implementation is necessary.

Visual Supports II

- Comic Strip conversation (Gray, 1999).
- Comic Book Creator.
- Video and photographic stories.
- Movies and television shows as teaching tools.

Acting for children on the spectrum

- Silent Films (pantomime and non-verbal communication).
- Pantomiming emotions and social situations.
- Charades.

Duo Therapy

- Children with Autism need opportunities to practice social skills and friendship skills with adult support.
- Duo Therapy provides 1:1 practice in compromising, flexibility, et.al.
- Peer support and mutual aid.

Group Therapy

- Small groups ideally no larger than four.
- Practice conversation skills.
- Topic maintenance
- Turning taking
- Perspective taking.

Cognitive Interventions

- Social Decision Making,
- Social Stories,
- Cognitive Scripts

Social Decision Making/Social Autopsy (Myles, 1999).

- Student chooses an event with either positive or negative outcome.
- Student and therapist breakdown the event into manageable pieces to determine what happened and why.
- Student and therapist create strategies and alternative responses to similar situations.

The Hidden Curriculum (Myles, 2002).

- In every social setting there are a set of rules that every typical person understands without having it explained to them.
- Neurotypical people internalize rules fairly quickly.
- They learn by observation and imitation.
- They can reflect on mistakes and self-correct
- They can take advice from peers and adults.

The Hidden Curriculum

- Autistic Children have trouble imitating.
- They observe details but have difficulty putting those details into an information set.
- They don't appear to internalize rules.
- They tend to apply rules rigidly and don't have the flexibility around the rules that typical people develop.

Cognitive Scripts

- Creating simple scripts that allow children and adults to navigate specific situations.
 - Scripts that cover asking for help at a store.
 - What to say when you want to play with someone.
 - What to say when you bump into someone when you do something else by mistake.

Cognitive Scripts

- Research indicates that Cognitive scripts increase:
 - Conversational Speech (Charlop and Milstein, 1989;
 - Alternatives to stress and aggression(Sasso, Melloy & Kavale, 1990).
 - Sympathetic Comments (Loveland & Tunali, 1991).

Social Stories™ (Gray, 2004)

- Explains social information.
- Connects specific actions to general social rules (part to whole).
- Uses positive language to explain positive actions.
- Answer who, what, where, why and how questions.
- Add pictures to enhance the message.

Floortime (Greenberg, 1998)

- Children develop skills through interactions with those who are close to them.
- Follow the child's lead.
- Use preferred activities and toys.
- Introduce unexpected or unpredictable elements to predictable play situations.
- Interactive play with peers is essential.

Floor Time (Greenberg, 1998)

- Encourages attention and intimacy.
- Two way communication.
- Encouraging expression and use of feelings and Ideas.
- Logical Thought.

Skills based Interventions

- Skill-based Interventions and Treatments(ABA, PECS, Discrete Trials.)

Medical/Biological Interventions

- Physiological, Biological, Neurological Interventions(Sensory Integration, Medications, vitamins)

Games that Focus on Theory of Mind, Central Cohesion, Executive Functioning

- Apples to Apples
- Conga
- In A Pickle
- Cadoo
- Poker