Learning Characteristics of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Social, communication, and behavioral characteristics
- Processing styles
- Issues with attention, learning, and generalization
- Strengths of students with ASD
“Social Reciprocity”

Video Clips from the Autism Speaks Video Glossary

http://www.autismspeaks.org/video/glossary.php
Social Characteristics

- May not respond to name
- May prefer to be alone; socially aloof
- May not show or bring items to others for the purpose of sharing
- Difficulty imitating others’ actions
Socially naïve
Trouble making and keeping friendships
Limited or exaggerated use of non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures
Difficulty understanding social etiquette and rules (personal boundaries)
May appear egocentric
Theory of Mind & ASD

- Theory of mind is the ability to understand that other people have their own thoughts, ideas, opinions.

- It enables a person to figure out behavior or make inferences regarding others’ behavior.

- Students with ASD tend to have difficulty “mind reading” as compared to their peers.

  (Howlin, Baron-Cohen & Hadwin, 1999)
Lacking a Theory of Mind

- Cannot understand why people do what they do
- Difficulty understanding own behavior
- Cannot predict another person’s behavior
- Difficulty reading intentions
- Difficulty understanding another’s point of view

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“Initiating & Sustaining Conversation”

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Communication Characteristics

- Wide range of communication skills
  - Receptive language
  - Expressive language
  - Pragmatic language (the social use of language)
- Difficulty communicating wants, needs, and desires with others
- May use unconventional means to communicate wants and needs
- May engage in one-sided conversations

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 Restricted Interests & Behaviors

- Preoccupation with specific parts of objects (e.g. spinning wheels, etc.)
- May be insistent upon following certain, non-functional routines or rituals
- Preoccupation with one or more topics of interest
- May engage in repetitive movements (e.g., lining up objects, hand flapping, rocking, etc.)
Emotional Characteristics

- Facial expressions may or may not match the situation (e.g. laughing when someone gets hurt)
- Difficulty identifying and understanding emotions of self and others
- Trouble regulating emotions and limited self awareness
Concrete & Literal Thinking

- Students with ASD tend to have a strong rote memory
- Black and white thinkers
- Trouble learning abstract language & concepts
  - Idioms
  - Sarcasm
  - Hidden curriculum
  - Reading comprehension
  - Writing – difficulty with open ended topics, etc.
Attention Problems

- Students with ASD may:
  - Be easily distracted
  - Not pay attention to the right information
  - Be hyper-focused on certain details
  - Have trouble understanding the “big picture” and contextual cues

- They may also have difficulty shifting their attention from one thing to another:
  - Transitions
  - Leaving preferred activities
  - Between thoughts and topics
Discrepancies in Learning

- Students with ASD often display a wide range of skills/deficits in the areas of:
  - Cognitive development
  - Language usage and understanding
  - Academic skills
  - Motor development
  - Adaptive skills
  - Wide range of cognitive abilities (severe to gifted)

- They often do not learn skills in the same developmental sequence as other children do
Students with ASD often have difficulty generalizing between people, materials, and environments. Difficulty generalizing impacts the student’s ability to function independently in the school environment. Must be directly taught skills within all environments.
Common Strengths

- Rote Memory
- Learn best through routine & practice
- Areas of interest
- Visual processing

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The majority of students are Visual Learners
Remember:

IF I CAN SEE IT then I understand
Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Awareness Level Training for Educators

- Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- Learning Characteristics of Children with ASD
- Classroom Supports for Children with ASD
- Introduction to Positive Behavior Support (PBS)