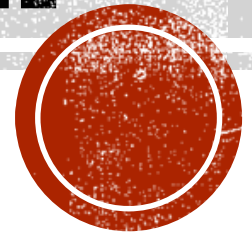


AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) TRANSITION FROM CHILD TO ADULT

Wilson Renfroe, Psy.D.



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ASD

- Fastest growing developmental disability ever
- Current stats show that ASD occurs in 1/59 births, and that's a lot of people
- The numbers seem to only be increasing rather than decreasing
- Despite a theories and assumptions, there is no known cause of ASD, thus, no known remedy
- Depending on the severity of the symptoms, the ASD condition can wreak significant havoc on a family system
- Many children and families do not have adequate treatment options
- NO one ASD person is exactly like another one!!!



DIAGNOSTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD

Deficits with Language Skills

- Some are non-verbal initially, and some will remain that way though their lifetime
- Language is often delayed, the first sign noticed by parents, generally
- Deficits in both expressive and receptive language skills
- Lack of ability to express oneself can lead to behavioral issues
- When language is present, it is often odd and not used appropriately
- Echolalia, grunting, growling, screaming, etc.



DIAGNOSTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD

Deficits in Interpersonal Relationship Skills

- Children often tend to be aloof and detached, even from infancy
- Lack of typical eye contact in infancy and beyond
- A tendency to focus, or obsess, on things rather than people
- Difficulty in understanding how to act in a back-and-forth relationship with people/other children
- Sometimes a tendency toward aggression as a means to “communicate”
- A tendency to be one’s own world, which can improve or worsen over time
- Within that “own world,” there can be a tendency to take on or act out certain “roles” from within the mind



DIAGNOSTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD

Deficits with Sensory Stimuli

- All of us are subject to information and input from the five senses
- Generally, that input is not troubling to most of us
- It can be extremely troubling to ASD individuals
- NO ASD person is exactly like another one!!! (A reminder)
- Understanding and making allowances for these sensory issues can save people a great deal of grief, on both sides of the diagnosis!
- These sensitivities are so unique that they are hard to categorize, but they are also so important to recognize
- Don't assume they get better with age. They might, or might not.



**ESSENTIALLY, ASD PEOPLE ARE
ODD, STRANGE INDIVIDUALS, AS
COMPARED TO WHAT IS
“TYPICAL”**

**NO ASD PERSON IS EXACTLY
LIKE ANOTHER ONE!!!**



CHANGES IN ASD OVER TIME

Language Skills generally get better

- The quality of language at age 5 is often a good predictor of the depth of language development overall
- Receptive and expressive skills may improve disproportionately
- Even in late adolescence and adulthood, language tends to be unusual, scripted and inwardly focused



CHANGES IN ASD OVER TIME

Sensory Issues can get better, or worse

- For the most part, ASD individuals tend to get more flexible with age, thus improving the ability to handle environmental stimuli
- Sensory issues can become more focused and overarching with some
- Other mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety may increase the severity of the sensory input



CHANGES IN ASD OVER TIME

Interpersonal Relationships can go both ways also

- As flexibility increases, along with maturity and training, ASD individuals learn better ways to deal with other people
- They are often able to set aside their own internal agendas to share time with others in a more meaningful way
- Still other ASD people can become fixated in a world (video games) that does not welcome outsiders (except online), and become more isolated.



CHANGES IN ASD OVER TIME

Overt Behavioral problems generally improve

- With the increase in language skills and understanding interpersonal relationships better, behavioral issues can improve greatly
- The ASD person must be taught, repetitively, how to manage emotions without acting out behaviors, using language and more appropriate coping skills



OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE ASD TRANSITION

Depression

- The ASD young adult can have depression feelings that may have otherwise been absent
- Age and genetics play a role here, but also general improvement and understanding of one's condition can be a pivotal factor
- Suicidal ideation is not uncommon and psychiatric care is needed





OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE ASD TRANSITION

Anxiety

- Every ASD person, young and older, experiences anxiety to some degree
- A lot is produced from the confusion from sensory issues early on
- Parenting and relationships with other authority figures can exacerbate these feelings



OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE ASD TRANSITION

Psychotic Symptoms

- Some ASD individuals will experience hallucinations and delusions and require psychiatric treatment
- These symptoms don't always develop until late adolescence or early adulthood



OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE ASD TRANSITION

OCD and Bipolar Disorder

- ASD people may not have true OCD, but have a lot of obsessive thinking and actions, and are often misdiagnosed as OCD
- ASD individuals are often wrongly diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder due to their excessive reactions to things and people





OTHER MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE ASD TRANSITION

ADHD

- Some of the most hyperactive children I have ever seen have been the ASD ones!
- The hyperactivity can have a sensory basis at times
- Impulsivity is very prominent with some
- Medication can often help these symptoms
- Fortunately, some of these symptoms improve with age!



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Basic, Bedrock Issue

- A teen/young adult cannot transition away from their home or family without accomplishing these skills
- ***The key is to start this process as early as possible, even in toddlerhood!
- For most parents, the goal is to prepare the child to live as independently as possible. That means that there has to be a certain mindset, or mindset change.
- Parents WILL need help in getting this accomplished!!!
- Families must move from protecting their child from the world to properly projecting them into the world
- A lot of these skills can be taught, but it takes a great deal of patience and time to do so
- Transition never really ends!



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Communication

- This is beyond just being able to use language, but to use it in a productive, purposeful manner. It's getting things done!
- Communicating with people in the “outside” world
- Use of various technologies



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Handling money

- This is beyond just being able to use language, but to use it in a productive, purposeful manner. It's getting things done!
- Communicating with people in the “outside” world
- Use of various technologies



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Transportation

- Some ASD individuals can, and will, drive, and do so adequately
- Some ASD individuals don't need to ever drive, even some that do!
- The ASD person may live in an area that provides public transportation. A lot do not.
- This can be a huge, limiting issue for the young adult and his/her family, in many ways



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Cleaning, in many forms!

- Cleaning things and one's body can be challenging for ASD people
- From the physical perspective, ASD individuals don't often see the need for bodily cleanliness, nor how it affects others. This is especially problematic with transitioning males!
- This can be expanded to cleaning of a home



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Food Preparation

- ASD people often have ongoing issues with food from a sensory standpoint
- But preparing it for consumption is yet another challenge
- This can be dangerous if the use of the stove or oven is involved
- Requires a great deal of training and help



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Job Skills and Employability

- This is also a tricky area and requires the use of professionals who can evaluate job skills and readiness
- Don't be fooled in thinking that because an ASD person has an interest in something, then they would be good at working in that field. Doesn't always correlate.
- This area will likely take some time and the ASD individual may not be “launched” into the workforce at age 18 like some of his/her peers.
- On the job training with job coaches, for a lengthy period of time, is a must



INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS — THE KEY TO ASD TRANSITION

Adult Relationships

- This is also a very tricky area. ASD people have hormonal needs just like everyone else. The issue of sexuality can be problematic and the issues with this vary greatly from one ASD person to another
- But general, adult relationships can be challenging as well. This will depend on the ASD person's communication skills and ability to flex with the interests and idiosyncrasies of others
- Like most everything else, supervision and repetitive education is key



QUESTIONS

