The Trauma Experience of Autism: Treatment Implications and Comorbidities

A Presentation by:

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Common Expressions of Autism

- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Sensory Motor Integration Difficulty
- High Pain Threshold
- Oversensitive/undersensitive to sensory input
- Lack of fear to dangerous situations
- Perseveration
- Rules bound orientation
- See the world differently
- When you have met one person with autism....you have met one person with autism
Inability to filter
“Felt like my whole body was on fire” – Aaron Likens
Ability to hear the power lines.
Light that causes migraines
Creating a noise to drown noise out.
Meet Wendy Lampen
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpNZJNQHAHw
Body on Fire, Ants All Over Me, Pressure in My Body
Inability to stop the attack
Communicating through the noise
Processing difficulty
The Pariah effect
There are two main goals of ABA programming for children and youth with Autism:

- Skill acquisition
- Negative Behavior Reduction

Both goals contribute to the desired program outcomes that include:

- Functional behavior
- Appropriate behavior

Independent living/functioning
ABA Strengths and Limits

**Strengths**

- Good at changing behaviors in moderate and Low functioning or very young individuals.
- In home ABA services – changing the environment & family unit.

**Limitations & Doing Better**

- Doesn’t get at the emotional level or deal with anxiety and comorbidities.
- Brain plasticity and mindfulness – an increase in executive control (Teper & Inzlicht, 2013)
Sensory Issues Block progression

Primary Vehicle is learning - develop self efficacy

Social Skills Issues - how do I relate, what do I want?
Sensory needs

Comorbidities and Behavioral Needs

Social Functioning

Adapted with permission from:
Danny Raede & Hayden Mears
– The Asperger Experts

http://www.aspergerexperts.com/
Sensory needs must be met first

- Lowering or raising the baseline stimulation level to manage other needs
- Mindfulness techniques to get back in the present may be incorporated to assist
- Lowering the anxiety baseline to lower expression of comorbidities.
- Behavioral sensory link is highest in children with auditory sensory issues (Dovydaitien & Vaitiekute, 2013)
Identifying sensory needs

Three types of sensory reactivity
- Underreactive (2 types)
  - Passive
  - Seekers
- Overreactive – Aaron Likens, “Living Life Unfiltered”
- Vestibular Problems-gravity issues
- Proprioceptive Problems – Where am I in space?
- What is a sensory diet?
- Meeting the needs
  - Sensory breaks
  - IEP’s
Mindfulness Training

- Can be used to learn to calm before reacting to stress and to become aware of emotional sensation
  - Returning to the moment
    - Releasing the overload
    - Awareness of onset – body awareness
  - Paying attention to the outer world through observation
Sensory Awareness

- Chaining/dissecting the overload
  - revisiting sensory overload moments
- Coping with overload
- Preparing for Overload
- Lowering Stress Levels – Sensory Breaks
Keeping yourself prepared: Lowering the initial threshold through physical preparedness.

- Exercise
- Diet
- Sleep
- Stimulant use
- Bio Cycle awareness
Cortisol and Oxytocin

- Brain chemistry in the autistic individual
- Biochemistry of prenatal mothers (Rosemeyer, 2013)
Cortisol – The anxiety monster

• Cortisol levels in individuals on sensory overload spike
• Spiked cortisol levels are indicated in the onset of psychotic breaks in schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and anxiety disorders (Jones & Fernyhough, 2006)
• Being body aware can trigger mindful exercises and bring a reduction in cortisol levels that could well keep the meltdown from occurring or being as severe.
Oxytocin – The hug drug

- Produced in new mothers and created in the child and mother during holding, breastfeeding and cuddling. It is the calming, “everything’s gonna be all right” drug in the brain.
- Lower in children with Autism (Quattrocki & Friston, 2014)
- Deep pressure and Oxytocin release?
- Oxytocin Nasal Sprays have shown promise in reducing social anxiety (Autism Speaks, 2014) (Anagnostou, et.al., 2014)
- Mindfulness and Oxytocin levels.
The Advantages of Self Regulation

- Medications have a place in healthy regulation
- Reliance on inhalers to be OK with Asthma.
- Increasing self reliance and self understanding through mindful awareness and practice
- Building self regulation can resulting in building a sense of self and the belief in one’s self results in a lowered sense of rejection.
- Resistance to pain and discomfort – physical and emotional – increases with practice.
References

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