Understanding and Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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TRANSFORMING TEACHING INSPIRING LEARNING

PCHD/NIE/NTU

Learning Objectives

Prior knowledge: preferably know what are the characteristics of ASD

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

❑ Understand how characteristics of ASD become 'challenging' behaviours in school

❑ Understand the basic principles of supporting them (and even other students with Special Educational Needs) in your class

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

- Autism / Autistic Disorder / High-functioning Autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- PDD-NOS

Characteristics of ASD

- **Difficulties in social interaction/communication**

    - Has difficulty engaging in <u>typical</u> social interaction with peers <u>appropriately</u>
        - ➢May prefer to be alone and appear to be 'disengaged'
        - ➢Makes it hard to work with other students in small groups or to participate in discussion
        - ➢May engage in 'task-avoidance' behaviours
        - ➢May be perceived as 'selfish' or 'self-centered' due to not understanding the principle of reciprocity (give-and-take – hidden curriculum*)
        - ➢Makes it hard for them to ask for help

Characteristics of ASD

- **Difficulties in social interaction/communication**

  - Has difficulty showing concern to others <u>appropriately</u>
    - ➢ Makes it hard for other students to like them; others may perceive them as uncaring

  - Has difficulty understanding <u>implicit</u> instructions/directions or social situations ('hidden curriculum')
    - ➢ May not respond as expected (i.e., in a <u>socially acceptable</u> manner)
    - ➢ Others may perceive them as 'dumb', 'weird' or 'not auto'

Characteristics of ASD

- **Difficulties in social interaction/communication**

  - Has difficulty using non-verbal communication cues appropriately when interacting with others
    - Makes it difficult to convey feelings
    - Can be interpreted as lack of engagement or boredom

  - Has difficulty understanding others' non-verbal communication cues appropriately
    - May not be able to tell if teaching staff or other students are becoming frustrated with their behaviours

Characteristics of ASD

- **Difficulties in social interaction/communication**

  - Has difficulty interacting with people of the same age or group (e.g., a student makes friends with his teachers but not his classmates)
    - May appear disrespectful or unfriendly

  - Has difficulty understanding social norms as expected
    - May stand too close or too far in interaction
    - Can be interpreted as rude or disinterested
    - Say the wrong things at the wrong time (concept of 'white lie' - HC)
    - Understanding figurative language (interprets literally) & sarcasm
      - misunderstandings…

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

    - Repetitive and persistent behavior that seems 'non-functional' (e.g., keeps counting coins, watching bottle cap move, or watching the same video clip again and again)
        - ➢May appear 'odd' or be distracting to others in class

    - Keeps on using peculiar terms or speaking in an very odd way (e.g., overly formal, speaking in a peculiar accent)
        - ➢May appear 'odd' or rude

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

    - Insistence on following specific, useless(?) routines and rituals (e.g. must eat the same food prepared the same way in the same way; must always go to school on the same time along the same route doing the same things)

        ➢Appears to be rigid and not accommodating

        ➢Difficulty with change in assignments or seating arrangements

        ➢Affect time management

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

    - Not coping well with relief teachers, change of lessons
        ➢ Affect mood which in turn affect learning/peer relationships

    - Rule 'policeman'
        ➢ Affect peer relationships!!!

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

  - Certain obsessive interests/fixations
    - ➢Can make it difficult to transit between topics

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

  - over/under-sensitivity to sensory stimuli such as sounds, touch, smell
    - ➢ sights, sounds or smells in the environment may be extremely distracting/disturbing

  - over-sensitivity to clothing material
    - ➢ Affects ability to concentrate

Characteristics of ASD

- **Odd/usual and repetitive behaviours**

  - over/under-sensitivity to temperature differences and pain
    - ➢ Affect ability to concentrate
    - ➢ Not aware of possible injury

Fundamentals of ASD

- It's important to note that all individuals can exhibit unusual behaviours occasionally, or they can seem shy around others sometimes - without having a ASD. What sets the individuals with ASD apart is the <u>consistency</u> of their unusual behaviours.

- Symptoms of the disorder should be present in all settings - not just at home or at school - and over considerable periods of time.

*disclaimer: but may not apply to all, especially high IQ/girls... (camouflaging effect)

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Disability or differences?

- Can difficulties be viewed as possible strengths in their academic learning?

Examples might include:

- an intense ability to hyper focus on academic content of interest which allows for a deeper understanding/knowledge of subject material;

- the ability to be precise where accuracy is critical; the willingness to challenge and question ('thinking outside the box')

Disability or differences?

- A good memory for certain information that contributes to rich discussion and research.

- Are rarely distracted by or mixed-up in 'social politics'

- Often able to learn and follow specific rules when told explicitly what is expected

- Often have unique perspectives and sense of humor

What can I do if I think my student has an ASD?

- Talk to your other colleagues who also interact with that child to verify your concerns

- Talk to your other more experienced colleagues/senior staff to confirm your concerns

- Talk to the child's parents to see whether they share your concerns

What can I do if I think my student has an ASD?

- Ask the child's parents to see a GP/pediatrician to discuss their concerns, to rule out any medical reasons, and to get a referral

- Referral for Comprehensive Diagnosis
  - MOE
  - Autism Clinic @ Child Guidance Clinic
  - Autism Resource Centre (Singapore)
  - Government hospitals (KKH & NUH)
  - Private hospitals and clinics

Crash course/Quick guide to helping students with ASD (and other students with Special Educational Needs)

Although individuals with ASD share some common features, <u>no two individuals are the same</u>. The common characteristics help us to understand general needs associated with ASD, but there is a need to combine this information with knowledge of the specific interests, abilities, and personality of <u>each</u> child/individual.

BASIC BASIC BASIC principle for ASD

- Know the specific interests, abilities, needs, and personality of my student with ASD

  - Triggers
  - Coping mechanisms

BASIC principle #01 for ASD

»Don't take their (mis)behaviour personally…

BASIC principle #02 for ASD

» How can I make the environment CLEAR for my student(s)?

» How can I make the environment PREDICTABLE for my student(s)?

General strategies for you to consider

- Visual support/management

  ✚

  - Structure/routine

    ✚

    - Behavior management

Visual support/management

Essentially how an individual receives and understands information and instructions…

via VISUAL CUES…

Visual support/management

Who

What

Where

When

Why

How

Visual support/management

Who – photo, name tag

What – photo, picture cards, mind/concept mapping

Where – landmarks on map, photos

When – timer clock, organizer/schedule

Why – **<u>social story</u>**

How – instruction list (in pictures?)

* General – font size, color highlight, **<u>bold and underline</u>** etc..

Visual support/management

Social Story (Gray, 1998)

- Visual step-by-step way of explaining
    - What is going to happen
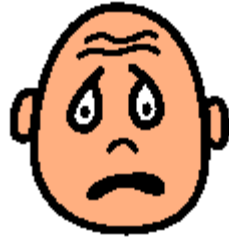   - How should I behave/respond
    - Why…

Establishing Structure/Routine

Creates organization and predictability of the

- Environment

- Day/Routine

- Activity

- People

* Basically the wh questions

worried

I don't understand!
what is happening?
What is going on?

Vs   vs
I don't want to…   I can't do it…

Behaviour management

Create a behaviour management system

1. Set Up Rules

2. Devise Consequences For When Rules Are Broken

3. Catch Them Being Good

4. Be Consistent