Understanding Autism
Professional Development Curriculum:
Characteristics and Practices for Challenging Behavior
Introduction to Autism
Who knows someone, personally or professionally, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?
What is ASD?

- ASD is a developmental disorder that impacts the way individuals communicate and interpret their environment, often resulting in challenges with social interactions and processing information.
Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across contexts

Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements,
- Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behavior
- Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
- Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests

Symptoms must be present in early childhood

Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning
Objectives

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

- Describe typical characteristics of learners with ASD
- Become familiar with how ASD can impact individuals in a school setting
- Understand that ASD manifests itself differently in individual learners
- Recognize and maximize the strengths of students with ASD
- Describe how to support students with ASD when they exhibit challenging behavior
ASD is a **spectrum** disorder. No two people with autism are exactly alike.
Try This…

- Think about either a person you know with ASD or what you’ve heard about people with ASD.
- Write down 3 ways that their ASD is apparent to you or 3 things that you know about ASD in general:
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 
- Share these within small group.
- Notice differences/similarities.

Please refer to exercise #1 on the corresponding handout.
Some General Characteristics

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Challenges with Social Skills

- Reciprocity and Negotiating
- Joint Attention
  - Shared focus of two people on an object
- Pragmatics
  - The social use of language
- Leisure Skills
- Solitude
Challenges with Communication

- Receptive/expressive language
- Language: rhythm, pitch, inflection and volume
- Body language, facial affect, interpretation of non-verbal behavior of others
- Concrete and literal thinking
Other Challenges with Communication

- Difficulty understanding language with multiple meanings
- Humor
- Sarcasm
- Synonyms
- Idioms
- Metaphors
The Hidden Curriculum

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Think About Your School...

In groups of 3-4 discuss:

- What “social rules” exist in your school that may be hidden from students with ASD (e.g. juniors and seniors don’t eat at the tables in cafeteria)?
- What help is available for students to learn these rules?
- How could you and others help your students to learn these rules?

Please refer to exercise #2 on the corresponding handout.
Challenges with Behavior

- Self-stimulation
  - E.g. Rubbing fingers, pulling hair, rocking
- Perseverative topics of conversation
- Limited/obsessive range of interests
- Non-functional routines or rituals
  - E.g. Having to have books in specific order
- Anxiety/depression
- Tantrums/meltdowns
Repetitive Behaviors and Restricted Interests

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Strengths

- Using a student’s strengths to provide intervention will maximize learning. Building and developing such strengths will increase personal independence and improve outcomes (Janzen, 2003).
Capitalizing on Strengths

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Tips for Teachers

What you can do…
• Organize work expectations
• Provide step-by-step instructions
• Give visuals to make information clear
• Be as concrete as you can
• Be consistent and predictable with your classroom structure
• Give only as much information as a student can process at one time
• Learn each student’s strengths
• Know, understand, and implement accommodations

What you can help students learn to do…
• Interact with their peers
• Organize and plan their work
• Ask for help

For more support strategies, please review:
Understanding Autism Professional Development Curriculum: Strategies for Classroom Success and Effective Use of Teacher Supports.
More Supports

- For other evidence-based practices for students with autism, visit:
  [http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/evidence-based-practices](http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/evidence-based-practices)

- For case studies describing the use of these practices with secondary school students with autism, visit:
  [http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources](http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources)
Based on What I’ve Learned...

What do I/my team need to:

• Stop doing
• Continue doing
• Start doing
Practices for Challenging Behavior
In this part of the session we will:

- Discuss the three stages of challenging behavior
- Identify strategies that will help you address behaviors at each stage
- Identify supports available at your school
Challenging Behaviors

What are they?
- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Social maladaptive behavior
- Property destruction
- Withdrawal
- Oppositional behavior
- Stereotyped behavior
What Can Cause Challenging Behavior?

- Can result from stress and anxiety
- When needs for the following cannot be met:
  - For information
  - For sameness
  - For a tangible item
  - Due to expectations (of self, others, environment) not met
  - To lower stimulation in the environment
- Appears differently in every student
- Remember: Limited communication skills can impact student’s ability to express needs
3 Stages of Challenging Behaviors

STAGE 1
RUMBLING

STAGE 2
MELTDOWN

STAGE 3
RECOVERY
Stage 1 - Rumbling

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 1 – Rumbling –
What Can You Do?

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 1 – Rumbling – What Can You Do?

Out of the ordinary minor behaviors
Tell-tale signs that the student is stressed

- Identify student triggers
- Modify the classroom environment
- Provide choice, feedback, and praise
- Provide strong reinforcement
- Allow for an “antiseptic bounce” – separate student from stressful environment
- Provide a “home base” or “cool zone”
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behaviors

- What are his or her rumbling signs?
- What have you/are you doing when he or she starts rumbling?
- What might you do differently to help manage future situations?
- Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #3 on the corresponding handout.
Stage 2 – Meltdown

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 2 – Meltdown – What Can You Do?

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 2 – Meltdown – What Can You Do?

Student loses control
Externalized and/or internalized behavior

- Demonstrate empathy
- Maintain safety
- Provide space
- Implement emergency plan
- Provide assurances
- Remove others as needed
- Maintain calm
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behaviors

- What is the current plan for managing his/her meltdowns?
- What, if anything, would you like to change about the plan?
- Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #4 on the corresponding handout.
Stage 3 – Recovery

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 3 – Recovery – What Can You Do?

Not yet ready to learn
Needs help easing back in

- Direct student to a highly motivating task
- Reintegrate student into a normal routine
- Provide strong reinforcement
- Communicate support
- Build on successes
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behavior

- What is the current plan for helping this student recover from a meltdown?
- What, if anything, would you like to change about the plan?
- Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #5 on the corresponding handout.
After the Meltdown...

- Figure out the root cause
- Talk with others about how to deal with the student’s behavior in the future
- Develop a partnership with parents/guardian
- Teach the student:
  - To recognize his own triggers
  - To ask for help
  - How to properly communicate immediate needs
  - To initiate calming routines or ask for someone to assist
Most Importantly...

**KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS!**

**HAVE A PLAN!**
At My School…

- When I have concerns about a student’s behavior I get support from…
- Our process for addressing the challenging behavior of students with ASD includes these steps:
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.

Please refer to the handout, “At My School” that corresponds with this exercise.
In Summary

- Students with ASD may experience challenges with:
  - Communication
  - Social Interactions
  - Behavior

*Focus on strengths!*

- The 3 stages of challenging behavior:
  - Rumbling
  - Meltdown
  - Recovery

*Have a plan! Know the signs!*
Resources

- Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD - http://cresa.fpg.unc.edu/
- National Professional Development Center on ASD - http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/
Credits

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