

Autism 200 Lecture Series

Making Connections
Social Communication

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Communication

- Takes place 24/7
- Needs to involve parent/school collaboration
- Dynamic
- Difficult to make change in 1 hour/week

CONTEXT!

Objectives

- Define social communication
- Identify several delay/differences in ASD
- Provide strategies to use at home and school

Diagnostic Statistical Manual-Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)

- **Communication (1 or more of the following):**
 - Delay in or total lack of development of spoken language
 - Marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain conversation
 - Stereotyped and repetitive use of language
 - Lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level

DSM-IV Criteria for Autism (cont.)

- **Social Interaction (2 or more of the following):**
 - Marked impairment in nonverbal behaviors
 - Failure to develop peer relationships at developmental level
 - Lack of spontaneous sharing of enjoyment, interests or achievements
 - Lack of social or emotional reciprocity

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Social Reciprocity

- The ability to both socially respond, socially initiate and manage interactions in a give and take manner. Often, children with ASD can either respond or initiate social interactions but have difficulty with sustaining reciprocity during conversations or social interactions.

Social Response

- “Taking in” information from others, processing, and responding appropriately to the context
- Good responders will look better during adult-led interactions but have difficulty when interactions are not facilitated
- “Passive” children can sometimes be better responder than initiators

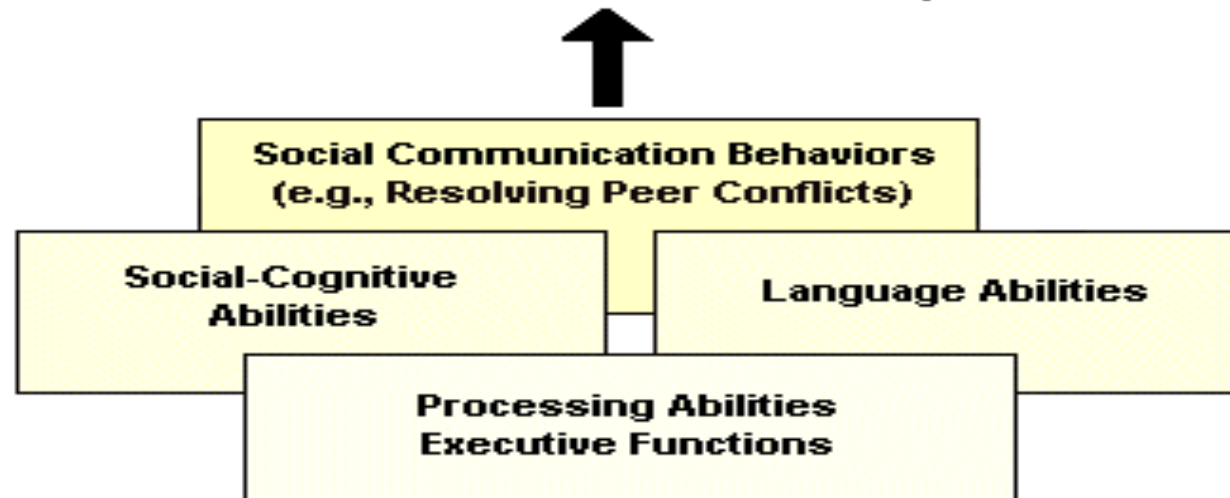
Social Initiation

- Beginning social interactions and communication
- Some children are better at initiating (usually to serve own needs)
- Will often have difficulty with social response (processing what others' are saying to him and responding appropriately)

Social Communication

- UW Speech and Hearing Department:
<http://depts.washington.edu/soccomm/model.html>

Social Communication Competence



Executive Functions

- Enable a child to access and utilize available social knowledge and world experience
- Organizing and making sense of incoming information (verbal and nonverbal)
- Formulating a contingent response
- Perspective Taking

Processing Abilities

- Auditory Processing
- Visual Processing
- Other sensory processing and integration
- Attention
- Shared Joint Attention

Social Cognition

- The social “rules”
- Knowing what to do or say given a situation
- Knowing how to modify what you say based on the CONTEXT

Language

- Language (Understanding and Expression)
 - Grammar (syntax)
 - Vocabulary (semantics)

Nonverbal Communication

- Gestures
- Eye Contact
- Facial Expression
- Emotion/Affect



Social Communication: Putting it all together

- Using language & nonverbal communication to communicate ***socially within CONTEXT***
- Involves coordination of:
 - Words
 - Gestures
 - Facial Expression
 - Eye Contact
 - Affect



Encouraging Communication

- Recognize how your behavior influences changes in development
- Two Examples
- Changing own behavior to help your child
 - Facilitate more sophisticated communication
 - Language
 - Eye Contact
 - Follow routines
 - Consistency/Predictability
 - Simplifying language

Pre-Intentional Communicators

- Caregivers need to interpret behavior to determine needs and desires
- Child gets what they want without making requests
- Non-directed vocalizations
- Crying, screaming, tantrums
- Often associated with frustration

Intentional Communicators

- Use of others' bodies to communicate (leading or placement of others' hands on objects)
- Giving to obtain help
- Directed vocalizations
- Gesture use – pointing, arms up, showing objects to share
- Beginning to use words (symbolic communication)

Pre-Verbal Communication

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- Communication that does not involve words
 - Gestures
 - Eye Contact
 - Vocalizations

Foundation of Social Communication

- Engagement
- Joint Attention
- Imitation

Engagement!

- Motivation to be social?
- Social Initiation
- Social Response
- Attention (eye contact)
- Use of eye contact and facial expressions (affect) during interactions (e.g. social smiling)

Increasing Engagement

- Use preferred activities to create social opportunities (bubbles, balloons, peek-a-boo!)
- Take control of preferred objects; control access
- Create predictable and enjoyable social routines
- Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation

Joint Attention

- Response (pointing, head turns, eye gaze)
- Initiation (pointing, eye contact, maybe verbalization, eye gaze shifting)
- Shared joint attention to objects, activities, books, etc is main vehicle for learning

Joint Attention

- Placing objects of interest out of reach and shifting the child's attention to them by pointing and/or looking (response to joint attention)
- Facilitating pointing and eye gaze when making requests (initiation)
- Initiating joint attention – necessary skill for making comments

Imitation

- Imitation – social act and important for reciprocity
- Should be an **Initial Goal**
- Imitation includes:
 - Motor (gross and fine)
 - Play actions
 - Verbal
 - Gestures
 - Facial Expressions

Imitation

- Contingent imitation – imitate what child says or does, facilitate imitation
- Can begin with gross motor imitation and try to facilitate verbal
- Physical prompting can be used for motor imitation
- Singing favorite songs or playing social games that involve imitation
 - Wheels on the bus; Head, Shoulders...
 - Ring around the Rosie, Simon Says

Meaning

- Attaching meaning to words (language) – words as symbols
- Vocabulary: Objects → Figurative Language
- Gestures
- Pretend Play
- Changes depending on the context

Encouraging Communication

- Modeling and Imitation
- Increasing vocabulary
- Providing opportunities to practice
 - Verbal
 - Nonverbal
- Opportunities in books, movies, across contexts
- Need for generalization

Why do we communicate? Communicative Intentions

- Gaining Attention
 - Making requests
 - Making comments
 - Greeting/Saying good-bye
 - Protesting
 - Responding to others
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- AND...coordination of words, gestures, eye contact and affect for communication intentions

Requests

- Using others' bodies
- Giving objects to ask for help
- Reaching
- Pointing
- Verbal
- Coordination of eye contact with requests

Increasing Requests

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- Modifying the Environment
 - Set up opportunities to communicate by placing preferred objects on a shelf or in a box
 - Create a visual choice board
 - Sabotage
 - Be a communication coach!

Protests

- Pushing/turning away
- Taking hands off of objects
- Shaking head
- Verbally saying “no”
- Connection with emotional regulation

Increasing Protests

- Model and replace less sophisticated communication
- Provide opportunities to practice
- Write social stories that provide structure for protests
- “Practice” by role playing

Commenting

- Communication for purely social purposes
- Commenting vs. labeling
- Showing
- Pointing
- Verbally commenting
- Initiating joint attention – coordination of eye contact with communication

Nonverbal Communication

- Use and Interpretation involving:
 - Eye Contact
 - Facial Expressions
 - Gestures

Eye Contact

- How we gain information about others
- How we “read” other people
- How we interpret others’ actions
- The coordination of eye contact with other communicative abilities is how we become SOCIAL
- Social Referencing – “Checking In” (gaining permission)
- Paired with facial expressions during nonverbal communication

Eye Contact

- Indirect cues – pausing during social routines
- Become interesting to your child – acting silly or doing something unusual to pique interest
- Take language out of communication – play nonverbal games
- Avoid “look at me” (unless a last resort)

Facial Expressions

- How we communicate emotion
- Often emotional extremes (happy and frustrated)
- Better at expression than receptive understanding (paired with perspective taking and understanding of emotions)
- Reading social cues

Facial Expressions

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- Digital Cameras – Take pictures of familiar people making different facial expressions and practice

Gestures

- Pointing!
- Conventional gestures: waving, nodding, shaking head, “where”, etc.
- Descriptive gestures: “big”, “fast”

Gestures

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- Lots of Modeling
 - Play a game where you communicate only via gestures
 - Imaginative Play
 - Red Light/Green Light
 - Take language out of communication

Precursors to Conversations

- Asking/Answering Questions
- Answering questions that involve “thinking”
- Relating personal events
- Asking “relevant” questions
- Turn-taking

Narratives

- Relating personal events in simple terms
- Talking about the past (outside of “here and now”)
- Relating daily events (“what happened at school today?”)
- Difficulty with organization, sequencing, and recall
- Difficulty retelling stories from books

Narratives

- Relating events
 - Sequencing cards/”How” questions
 - Books (telling and re-telling stories)
 - Practice talking about an event and then direct them to tell someone else)
 - Create your own books with digital pictures (especially events like birthdays, holidays, vacations)
 - Ask specific questions rather than open-ended questions

Conversational Skills

- Reciprocal Verbal Exchange of:
 - Information
 - Personal stories/narratives
 - Social sharing
- Requires attention to others, perspective taking, social knowledge, social response, social initiation, more!

Conversational Skills

- Includes:
 - Asking/Answering questions
 - Ability to relate events and attend to others
 - Lots of nonverbal behaviors: eye contact, facial expressions, gestures (nodding to acknowledge; confused looks)
 - Need to adjust to context!

Perspective Taking

- The ability to imagine what someone is else is thinking or feeling
- “Do you know what I know”
- Or...denying what you know to be true
- Important ability in social interactions – how we modify what we do or say given the context of the situation

Perspective Taking

- Books – what are characters thinking/feeling
- Movies
- Drama – role playing
- Games that involve strategy – knowing what others' know
 - Clue Jr.
 - Mancala, chess, Tic Tac Toe, Connect 4

Reading Social Cues

- **Involves:**
 - Attention to others
 - Eye contact
 - Recognizing facial expressions and how they link to emotions
 - Social Knowledge
 - Appropriate social response
 - Depends on **CONTEXT!**

Higher Level Conversational Skills

- Conversational development doesn't stop with turn-taking and topic maintenance
- Complex system involving
 - Executive Functioning
 - World knowledge and social rules
 - Social Reciprocity
 - Nonverbal Interpretation
 - CONTEXT!

Parent Involvement

- Targeting social communication requires a TEAM approach
 - Consistency
 - Generalization
- Educating and communicating with parents regarding targets and strategies will increase progress toward goals
- Training in schools – Have communication expert in school provide in-services regarding how to facilitate communication in context

Assessments should consist of:

- Combination of:
 - Structured testing
 - Observation
 - Parent report
 - Teacher report

Cautions related to standardized testing

- Often over-estimate language abilities (PLS-4)
- Provide visuals and require short answers
- Miss out on social communication (context!)
- Avoid tests that are highly specific (e.g. PPVT) unless examining that specific area
- Be wary of “pragmatic” standardized tests (TOPL)
- Be sure to combine standardized tools with less formal assessment and observation

Social Communication

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- Children with ASD who have language that is “within normal limits” usually have deficits in social communication development

Thank you!

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