What You Might Expect from Students on the Autism Spectrum

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Learning Outcomes

- Participants will be able to identify characteristics of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Participants will understand the challenges facing college students on the Autism Spectrum.
- Participants will be able to describe strategies for working with students with Autism Disorder.
Pervasive Developmental Disorders

- Autistic Disorder
- Asperger’s Syndrome *
- Rett’s Disorder
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder NOS

* Our primary focus today
Characteristics of ASD

Deficits in social communication and social interaction

- Social–emotional reciprocity (ex. abnormal social approach, reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect)
- Non-verbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction (ex. abnormalities in eye contact/body language, difficulty understanding/use of gestures)
- Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships (ex. difficulty adjusting behavior in social contexts, difficulty making friends)

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013)
Characteristics of ASD

- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
  - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (ex. idiosyncratic phrases)
  - Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal/non-verbal behavior (ex. extreme distress at small changes, rigid thinking patterns)
  - Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (ex. attachment to unusual objects, perseverative interest)
  - Reactivity (hyper/hypo) to sensory input or unusual interests in sensory aspects of the environment (ex. Adverse response to specific sounds/textures)
Video

Sheldon Cooper Asperger Syndrome

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiQtKWkIt5o
Causes of ASD

- No single cause
- Most people agree there is a genetic predisposition
- Brain scans have shown different activity in the brains of individuals with ASD
- Many believe that some individuals have a genetic predisposition and environmental toxins trigger the symptoms

*Information from *Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Chantal Sicile-Kira*
Myths about ASDs

- All have a special, extraordinary talent (Rain Man)
- All are extremely gifted
- All are developmentally delayed
- Everyone with ASD symptoms has an ASD
- People with ASDs have no emotions
- People with ASDs don’t get attached to others
Terms

- Aspies
- Auties
- Neurotypicals
- “On the spectrum”
- HFA
- Neurodiversity
College Students with ASDs

- Difficulty “fitting in” with other college students (many students on the Autism Spectrum know they are different, but have a desire to be “normal”)
- Social immaturity (interest in relationships is often appropriate for their physical developmental level, but their social development level lags behind)
- Lack of structure (students may not know what to do with much more free time than in high school)
Difficulty with classes that are not within their interests (often have preoccupations and they may not see the relevance of “core curriculum” classes)

Difficulty dealing with and lack of problem solving skills

Difficulty getting a job after college (poor interviewing skills, limited knowledge of how to look for a job, lack of references)
Interacting with Students with ASD

- Use clear, specific language. Avoid slang or regional (or university) terms
- Give specific directions
- Find out the students strengths and limitations and advise accordingly
- Get to know the student so he/she will feel comfortable coming to you with problems
- Help connect students to academic advisor or other professional who can be a resource
TAMU College Station Disability Training Network Handout:
“College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder”
http://dtn.tamu.edu/pdf/qu-0803.pdf

Organization for Autism Research (OAR):
http://www.researchautism.org/educators/index.asp

Video “Understanding Asperger Syndrome, A Professor’s Guide” (OAR)
http://www.researchautism.org/resources/AspergerDVDseries.asp

Guidelines for College Success (OAR)
http://www.researchautism.org/resources/GuidelinesforCollegeSuccess.asp

Media Resources from College Autism Spectrum.com
http://www.collegeautismspectrum.com/mediacenter.html

Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
https://www.ahead.org/search/node/autism%20spectrum

Local:
Corpus Christi Autism Spectrum Resource Center
http://www.asrc-cc.org/

Coastal Bend Autism Advocacy
http://www.coastalbendautismadvocacy.org/
Questions?