



A Positive Approach for Working with Students on the Autism Spectrum

Presented by:
Lisha Higuchi, M.Ed
Jan Serrantino, Ed.D
University of California-Irvine



Agenda

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders

Challenges for Students on the Spectrum

Understand the connections between students on the spectrum and academic and social success

Social Club at UCI

Identify successful strategies and best practices to support students with ASD on campus



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

- Autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) are a group of neurological disorders that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. People with ASDs handle information in their brain differently than other people.
- ASDs are "spectrum disorders." That means ASDs affect each person in different ways, and can range from very mild to severe. People with ASDs share some similar symptoms, such as problems with social interaction. But there are differences in when the symptoms start, how severe they are, and the exact nature of the symptoms

Challenges for Students with ASD



Asperger's Types

The Logical Type

This subcategory of Asperger's concerns individuals who seem to be very cautious.

- They like to know exactly what to expect, and they prefer to have the rules systematically spelled out for them.
- They often have difficulty getting past the analytical stage when completing tasks and assignments.
- The need for order and logical sequence can lead to frustration and intolerance for things that appear to be irrational.
- The logical type might resist following directions that don't make sense.

Asperger's Types

The Emotional Type

The emotional type is less likely to lean toward analysis and rules.

- This individual is controlled by feelings rather than rational thought.
- Many of their emotions might be difficult to control, and this can lead to anxiety and tension.
- Individuals who fall into the emotional subcategory might experience more frustration, and they may act out more than other types.
- Structure and order help to calm and organize this behavior.

Asperger's Types

The Rule Type

The rule subtype also loves structure and order.

- These individuals need to have everything in its place, including their daily routines.
- If rules are not established, this type will make his or her own rules in order to understand and organize his or her surroundings.

Asperger's Types

The Passive Type

- The passive Asperger individual likes to follow directions and thrives in most classroom environments.
 - Some individuals in this category may be too complacent.
 - Difficulty in self-advocating
 - The goal is to have some balance
- *Adapted from the Autism Support Network*

Common Misconceptions

Myths

No eye contact

Lack of emotion

Not affectionate

No desire for friends or social contact

Asperger's can be cured or outgrown

Facts

Eye contact present.
May be displayed in a less typical manner

Basic emotions present, at times may not be situationally appropriate

Prefer to initiate physical contact

Would like to be included in social functions
Unsure how to initiate social contact

With support, significant improvements in behaviors only

-Adapted from the Hope Network

Disability Related Accommodations

- DSS office will review medical documentation and determine reasonable accommodations
- Functional limitations?
- Possible accommodations: single room, extended time/separate location for exams, note provider, disability management meetings
- Student will send Faculty Notification Letters to professors



Issues that May Come Up

- Roommate Conflict
- Difficulty Speaking to Professors
- Behavioral Problems
- Groupwork
- Executive Functioning/Time Management



Helpful Suggestions

- Be concise and direct
- Avoid sarcasm
- Outline expectations
- Explain policies and procedures
- Monthly check-in meetings
- Promote self-advocacy



When in Doubt, Consult with DSS

- Contact DSS with any questions or concerns
- Registered DSS students should not ask for accommodations that had not been approved by DSS
- Disability Training for Faculty/Staff
- Provide access, cannot guarantee success

The Connection Between Social Success and Academic Success



Students are overwhelmed by:





Students with ASD Have Feelings

Shame, resentment, confusion & frustration from:

- Not fitting in, stress of college life, responsibility
- Low understanding of self-advocacy

These feelings frequently lead to anxiety and often depression

It's easier to stay isolated, engage in video games or TV, and eat alone

How to Support Students

Help students to develop:

- **Interpersonal Social Skills**
- **Social Activities**
- **Organizational Skills**
- **Time Management**
- **Stress Management**
- **Skills to Deal with Conflict**
- **Identify Safe Zones**



Encouraging Socialization on Campus

- Clubs & Organizations
- Campus Recreation
- Intramural Sports
- Counseling Center- Support Groups
- Residence Hall Activities
- Study Groups



Questions?



Small Group Scenarios

- Break into groups of 3-5
- Review scenario
- How can we collaborate to support student?
 - Skills, tasks, academic & social needs
- Group reports

Scenarios

- 1) You have received several calls from campus housing regarding a registered DSC student's inappropriate behavior. The student plays loud music in their dorm late at night and constantly gets into arguments with their roommate. What would you do in this situation?
- 2) A physics professor calls you for advice. There is a student in their class that says they need unlimited time for exams and are exempt from group projects. The student states that they are entitled to these accommodations because they have a disability. How would you advise the professor?
- 3) You received a call from a professor. There is a student in their large lecture class that has had multiple outbursts and is often loud and disruptive during lecture. How would you advise the professor?



Group Reports

- Housing Conflict
- Additional Accommodations
- Student Conduct

What is Social Thinking?

- Social thinking is what we do when we interact with people: we think about them. And how we think about people affects how we behave, which in turn affects how others respond to us, which in turn affects our own emotions. (socialthinking.com)
- How humans attempt to understand how others think, perceive, feel, and react. Developing an understanding of other's actions, thoughts, and feelings is necessary for effective functioning in the social world (Hala, 1997).



Social Club at UCI

- Created in 2007
- Response to need to support students with ASD on campus
- Create a support structure for student that facilitates both academic integration and social interaction
- Group Activities and Social Lessons

Developing a Social Club



Next Steps

Establish
Social
Club
mission
and goals

Explicit
Invitation
to students
on the
spectrum
& referrals

Recruit
peer
mentors

Prepare
students
for what
to expect

Provide a
safe
place for
group
members
to talk
and
express
ideas

Developing Goals

Identify a small goal, take small steps

**Talk to a student
in class**

**Spend an hour in
common room**

**Talk to a
professor in
office hours
instead of by
email**

**Join a
club/organization**

UCI Disability Services Collaboration

- Partnered with ARC – campus recreation facility
- DSC Staff Taught Disability Etiquette Class for ARC Staff
- ARC Staff hosted Social Club Rock Climbing Night
- Social Club members pushed themselves to learn new skill
- ARC Staff applied knowledge of Disability Etiquette class
- Win-Win Situation

General Guidelines

Track goal progress

Plan for possible outcomes including failure

Use direct instruction

Supportive correction- group members can provide support and feedback

Encourage social involvement

Group benefits from seeing others success & failures


Asperger Group Discussion Topics

- Academics
- Social situations
- Career guidance
- Roommate conflict
- Specific group interests such as: art, music, movies, video game
- Activities, games, field trips
- Scenarios



Social Skills Lesson: How to RSVP

- 1) **Check your calendar.** See if you are free on the proposed date and time. If you previously accepted another invitation for that time, you will have to decline the new one.
- 2) **Check your feelings.** Do you want to attend this new event? If not, you may decline. Just say, "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to come."
- 3) **Make up your mind by the date specified on the invitation;** if a "reply by" date was not listed, reply within 24 hours of receiving the invitation.

- 
- 4) **Don't leave your potential hosts in suspense.** If you want to hold your schedule open, the proper response to an invitation is, "Thank you for the invitation, but I'm afraid I will not be able to attend" -- saying, "No thanks."
 - 5) **Methods of replying.** If replying to a formal written invitation, one would reply in writing. You never need to give a reason for not attending. Just let the host know whether you're currently planning to be there or not.
 - 6) **Communicate last-minute changes.** What if the time comes and you can't attend after all? Maybe you're not feeling well or there was some real emergency. Then, as soon as you know, you must get in touch with the host (by telephone is fine) to let them know you can't come, and apologize



Words of Wisdom from Temple Grandin, Ph. D

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=caJAFq_RKcQ#t=638



Creating an Action Plan

Things to think about:

- How many ASD students do you have at your university?
- What size of college/university do you work for – small, medium, large?
- What is your biggest concern in supporting students with Asperger's?
- What other departments would you involve?

Action Plan

Action Steps

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Time Frame

Projects



Best Practices

- How does your institution support students on the Autism Spectrum?
- What's working at your institution?

Resources

Autism Society: www.autism-society.org

<http://www.autismsupportnetwork.com/>

www.succeedsocially.com (social skills lessons)

College Students with Asperger Syndrome: Practical Strategies for Academic and Social Success by Bedrossian & Pennamon, LRP Publications, 2007

Inside Out: What Makes A Person With Social Cognitive Deficits Tick?, Garcia-Winner, www.socialthinking.com

A stylized illustration of a bright yellow sun with a blue outline, partially obscured by blue and white clouds. The background is a gradient of blue with a subtle geometric pattern.

Questions?

Jan Serrantino
Lisha Higuchi

jserrant@uci.edu
higuchil@uci.edu