

Behavioral Strategies to Improve Job Placement Success for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

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What is Autism?

Neurodevelopmental disorder

Affecting areas of:

- **Communication** (verbal and non-verbal)
- **Social Interaction**
- **Behavior**

Autism Spectrum

Low Functioning ----- Generally non-verbal or cannot use language effectively, sensory and behavior issues

High Functioning ----- Generally can be in a typical classroom. May use some behavior supports

Asperger's Syndrome ----- Above average intelligence and struggles with social interaction.

PDD-NOS ----- Exhibit many symptoms, but does not qualify for Autistic Disorder or Asperger's diagnosis



Common Characteristics

- Self Stimulatory Behavior or Stimming— Repetitive activities or movement
 - Flapping
 - tensing body
 - sounds
 - repetitive behavior
 - ritualistic behavior

Characteristics continued

- Rigidity-- Resistance to change
 - Many have Obsessive Compulsive tendencies as a component of autism.



Characteristics continued

- Sensory issues- Unusual responses to sensory experience such as:
 - Auditory
 - Visual
 - Tactile
 - Proprioceptive (pressure, joints and muscles)
 - Vestibular (motion, inner ear)
- Fine and Gross Motor Impairments- Generally the related to motor planning issues
- Apraxia- Motor planning problems that interfere with speech production

Characteristics related to language

- **Echolalia:** Repetition of verbalizations
 - immediate echolalia
 - delayed echolalia
 - Affects 75% of people with autism who are verbal (Prizant 1983)
- **Scripting:** Refers to echolalia involving repeating lines from T.V., movie, or electronic toy.
- **Challenges with abstract language:** May have difficulty understand and using jargon, abstract language, idioms



Characteristics

- **Social Skills Deficits-** Individuals with autism often need to be explicitly taught social norms (i.e. greetings, eye contact, non-verbal cues)
 - May prefer to be alone, aloof in manner
 - Not motivated intrinsically by pleasing others.
 - Trouble empathizing
 - Difficulty identifying emotions in people
 - Difficulty mixing with others in social settings

- **Behavior issues**
- **Usually to achieve:**
 1. Escape
 2. Attention
 3. Tangible item
 4. Sensory stimulation



Challenges in the Workplace

- **Sensory**
 - Noise or specific sounds
 - Smells in the workplace
 - Lighting—fluorescent lighting can be especially distracting
 - Visual clutter
 - Lack of personal space



Sensory Strategies

- Allow employee to arrive early (10 minutes)
- Allow/encourage employee to wear ear plugs or listen to soothing music
- Use calming, relaxation techniques like deep breathing to cope with challenging situations
- Experiment with different types of lighting, or cover lighting with loose “tents” or drapes
- Explore ways to allow the worker to move or pace as needed in the workplace

Challenges in the Workplace

- **Communication/Social**
 - Expressive speech may be impaired
 - Speech comprehension may be very concrete; abstract language can be challenging
 - Conversation skills may be lacking
 - Conversation turn taking
 - Appropriate responsive
 - Staying on topic
 - Not spending too much time on one topic (perseverating)
- **Auditory comprehension may be lacking**
 - Many adults are visual learners/thinkers



Communication/Social Strategies

- Provide modeling and prompt strategies
- Use concrete language
- Rehearse appropriate conversation skills
- Provide visual instruction
 - Lists
 - Schedules
 - Examples
 - Videos of others performing the tasks
 - Provide consistent structure
 - Use written communication (email, computer, etc.)



Challenges in the Workplace

- Executive Function
 - Getting started
 - Maintaining attention to the task
 - Knowing what to do when the task is complete
 - Transitioning from one step to the next
 - May be messy or disorganized
 - May “shut down” if overwhelmed

Executive Function Strategies

- Develop lists
 - Items needed
 - Steps to complete task
 - Schedules
- Maintain routines
- Provide clear, environmental structure
 - Let the environment provide cues as to what to do next
 - Clear place for finished work
 - Next task is visually present
 - Clear beginning to the task



Challenges in the Workplace

- Repetitive Behaviors
 - Could revolve around specific interests
 - May include self stimulatory behaviors
 - Can interfere with workplace or job completion
 - May intensify when adjusting to new settings

Repetitive Behavior Strategies

- Provide predictability and structure
- Incorporate repetitive behavior into the routine
- Provide alternative outlets to fill the need of the repetitive behavior
- Teach socially appropriate replacement behaviors



Behavioral Strategies to Address Challenges

- Let's define ABA
 - Applied
 - Using what you have learned
 - Behavior
 - Action you can see, do, measure
 - Analysis
 - Study of why the behavior occurs

Token Economy

- Reinforcement is delayed
- Tokens are received to gain access to reinforcement
- Tokens can be checks, tickets, points, money
- Schedule can be thinned



Prompts and Supports

- **Visual**
 - Written
 - Pictorial
 - Video
- **Verbal**
- **Environmental**
 - Structure
 - Reduced distractions



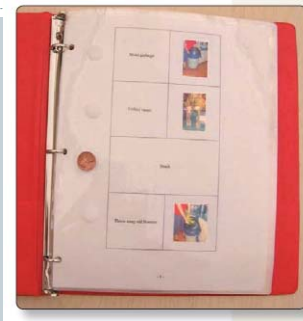
Visual Prompt Example



This is an example of a text schedule depicting each step of clearing the aisles at a retail store.

-Alpine Employment Manual

Sample word-pictorial schedule for creating a flower arrangement



-Alpine Employment Manual

Skill Assessment

- **Task Analysis**
 - Assess the task and identify steps involved
 - Assess each step
 - Where are supports needed?
 - What steps need to be taught discretely?

Reinforcement Assessment

- **Interview**
 - Client/Consumer
 - Family/caregivers
- **Sample**
 - Provide choices and work through process of elimination to determine strong, mild reinforcement
- **Observation**
 - Self reinforcement?
 - Preferred activities

Behavior Assessment

- **ABC**
 - Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence Log
 - Allows you to determine patterns that can be addressed to change behavior
- **MAS**
 - Motivation Assessment Scale
 - Assesses motivators for behavior
 - <http://www.monacoassociates.com/mas/aboutmas.php>

Useful Resources

- **OCALI Transition Guide**
 - http://www.ocali.org/_archive/pdf_trans_guide/Trans_Guide_5.pdf
- **Alpine Employment Manual**
 - http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org/userdocs/alpine_employment_manual.pdf
- **Milestones Autism Organization**
 - http://milestones.org/adult_services.htm