Strategies for Working with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

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2019 PATH Intl Region 6 Conference
Learning Objective

- Attendees will come away with communication strategies and general treatment strategies they can implement into their equine-assisted activities and therapies program that set clear expectations and empower participants.
About Me~

• SLP for 22 years
• Specialty areas: Pediatrics, ASD, Challenging behaviors, Complex Communication Needs
• Assistant Professor/Clinical Supervisor
• Advocate
• Wife
• Mom of 4
• Grandma of 1 😊
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

• Social Communication
  • 3 areas
    • Social Emotional Reciprocity
    • Non-verbal behavior
    • Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships, appropriate to developmental level

• Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviors
  • 4 listed~ need 2 of the 4
    • Stereotyped or repetitive speech, motor movements, or use of objects
    • Excessive adherence to routines, ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior, or excessive resistance to change
    • Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
    • Hyper-or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
Characteristics That can impact Therapy:

- **Sensory**
  - Need to prepare and make necessary provisions for: helmet, animals, smells indoor vs outdoor, etc.

- **Repetitive Behaviors**
  - What may that child need to do to move forward with therapy... how many times can I do it, when can I do it, etc.

- **Rigidity**
  - Changes may cause anxiety so how can we decrease anxiety: visuals, pre-teaching, social stories, clear beginning and ending, duration maps, etc.
Characteristics That can impact Therapy:

- **Communication deficits**
  - How can we make sure our communication is at the appropriate level for success: visuals, voice output, sign language, short/simple directives, positive language, etc.

- **Social Skills Deficits**
  - Helping to build appropriate social interactions for the environment and between therapists, volunteers and other riders.
Communication Characteristics

- non-verbal to highly verbal (little Professor)
- Prosody and intonation patterns can differ
- Lack of/Use of gestural communication
- One-sided communication (not reciprocal)
- Unusual phrase/vocabulary use
- Echolalia (present in approx. 75% of individuals diagnosed with ASD)
- Scripting
- Hand Leading
Communication Characteristics

• Processing differences
  – Need to finish processing the whole thought
• Literal language vs. figurative
• Attention to speech
• Literate vs. nonliterate
Communication Characteristics of Communication Partner

- Short Directives
- Increased Processing time
- Concrete Directives
- Positive Directives ~ what do you want to happen?
- Multi-modalities
- Incorporate Universal Design within the environment (*helps everyone at every level be successful within the environment)
About You?

• What is your attitude?
• What attitude are you projecting?
• How do you give directives?
• How are you presenting materials?
• What ways are you offering for receptive and expressive language?
• How are you transitioning?
• What feedback are you giving?
Clear Expectations & Boundaries

• So taking what we know about individuals we are serving with a variety of disorders, how can we clarify our expectations and create clear boundaries?

• We have to try think like the individuals we are serving

• We need to empathize with the need areas
Ask these Questions from the rider’s POV

– Where am I supposed to be?
– What materials/toys can I use?
– What & when can I do something?
– Who am I doing “X” with?
– How long do I have to?
– How do I stay calm/cope?
– When am I done/how do I go to the next thing?
Where I am Supposed to Be?

• Before I get on the horse.
• When I am on the horse.
  – Myself
  – Me & My horse
• When I am getting off the horse.
• After I am finished riding or while I am waiting.
Possible Interventions:
Visual Supports
Social Stories
*can be real pictures and text
*can be video
Instructions
Video Modeling
Consistency!

Mason's Horse Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helmet On</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Helmet" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belt on</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Belt" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk to Horse</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Walk" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet Horse</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pet" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush Horse</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Brush" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride Horse</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ride" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feed Horse Treat</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Feed" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk to Mom</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Walk" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helmet Off</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Helmet" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My mom will watch me ride my horse. I will get to play games and ride with friends while I am on Molly! I need to talk to my friends when I am riding Molly. When I am done, I get to make a treat for Molly. It will be so much fun!

I can tell my horse lots of things to do. I tap her with my hand and use words to talk to her. These are the things I can tell my horse.

- walk on
- whoa
- 1-2-3 trot

- circle
- weave
- back
What Materials?

- Vocabulary: Make it clear to riders and volunteers & be consistent
- Organized storage and follow use and clean up procedures
Possible Interventions:
Label with Pictures/Words
Picture Communication when needed
Use modeling during therapy & video
Social Stories
Organized and consistent storage
What & When Can I do Something?

• Making it clear when and what is to happen links closely to preferences of each rider.

• How is the rider interpreting the expectation?
  – Excited, scared, drawn towards something else, special interest, etc.
Possible Interventions:
Visual schedule
Choices when able
First Then
Duration Map
Timer
My Riding Choices

I want to
- clean horseshoes
- brush
- pat the horse
- help with saddle
- put on helmet
- ride

Ride inside
- barn

Ride outside
- trail

I feel
- great
- bored
- tired
- cold

Who am I doing “X” with?

• Which horse?
• Who is leading?
• Who will be my side walkers if I have them?
• Who do I listen to?
  – Will someone prompt me?
Possible Interventions:
Pictures /Labels for People
Pictures/Labels for Horses
Layer the Information
Nametags/lanyards
Have Staff Trained in:
• Useful techniques
• Procedures
• Rules
• Consistent Vocabulary
How long?

• How long can I do something I like?
  – “I want trot please?”
• How long do I have to do something I don’t like?
  – Be concrete & honor your words!
  – Avoid “in a sec/minute/little bit”
• How long is my lesson?
• How long do I have to wait?
Possible Interventions:
Timer
Duration Map
Schedule
First-Then
How Do I stay Calm/Cope?

• Plan ahead for creating calming space
• Plan how you are going to help handle changes & the unexpected
Possible Interventions:

- 5 point Scale
- Zones of Regulation
- Break Cards
- Breathing technique with visuals pretaught
- Calming routine with visuals pretaught
When am I Done?

• When is the individual done?
• If challenging behaviors are present what happens?
• What do I do when I am done?
• What are my responsibilities?
  – Consistent expectatins for transitions/cleaning up/ finishing in each space
Sensory is Important!

• Listen to the Individual, parents/caregivers, and your observations regarding the sensory needs of your riders.

• Consult an OT that knows about sensory interventions.

• Have sensory supports available at your site.
Additional Thoughts:

• Be aware of each rider’s individual strengths/needs

• Maximize sensory strength
  • Ex: If child is unable to see, utilize touch, auditory, etc.

• Familiarize self with each rider’s disability

• Use “Special Interest” as a motivator

• Use “person first” language
  – Ex: S/He has autism vs. ‘autistic’
Challenges & Brainstorming:
References & Resources:

References & Resources:

- http://teacch.com/about-us/what-is-teacch
- http://www.timetimer.com/
- Social Stories: http://kidscandream.webs.com/page12
- http://www.speakingofspeech.com/
References & Resources:

• Pinterest
• Google Images
• Boardmaker: https://goboardmaker.com/pages/boardmaker-online