Understanding Autism
Professional Development Curriculum:
Characteristics and Practices for Challenging Behavior
Introduction to Autism
Who knows someone, personally or professionally, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?
What is ASD?

- ASD is a developmental disorder that impacts the way individuals communicate and interpret their environment, often resulting in challenges with social interactions and processing information.
DSM-5 ASD Criteria

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across contexts
- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
  - Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements,
  - Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns or verbal nonverbal behavior
  - Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
  - Hyper- or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interests
- Symptoms must be present in early childhood
- Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning
Objectives

By the end of the session, you will be able to:

- Describe typical characteristics of learners with ASD
- Become familiar with how ASD can impact individuals in a school setting
- Understand that ASD manifests itself differently in individual learners
- Recognize and maximize the strengths of students with ASD
- Describe how to support students with ASD when they exhibit challenging behavior
ASD is a spectrum disorder. No two people with autism are exactly alike.
Try This…

- Think about either a person you know with ASD or what you’ve heard about people with ASD
- Write down 3 ways that their ASD is apparent to you or 3 things that you know about ASD in general:
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 
- Share these within small group
- Notice differences/similarities

Please refer to exercise #1 on the corresponding handout.
Some General Characteristics

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Challenges with Social Skills

- Reciprocity and Negotiating
- Joint Attention
  - Shared focus of two people on an object
- Pragmatics
  - The social use of language
- Leisure Skills
- Solitude
Challenges with Communication

- Receptive/expressive language
- Language: rhythm, pitch, inflection and volume
- Body language, facial affect, interpretation of non-verbal behavior of others
- Concrete and literal thinking
Other Challenges with Communication

- Difficulty understanding language with multiple meanings
- Humor
- Sarcasm
- Synonyms
- Idioms
- Metaphors
The Hidden Curriculum

[Image of students sitting at a table]

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Think About Your School...

In groups of 3-4 discuss:

- What “social rules” exist in your school that may be hidden from students with ASD (e.g. juniors and seniors don’t eat at the tables in cafeteria)?
- What help is available for students to learn these rules?
- How could you and others help your students to learn these rules?

Please refer to exercise #2 on the corresponding handout.
Challenges with Behavior

- Self-stimulation
  - E.g. Rubbing fingers, pulling hair, rocking
- Perseverative topics of conversation
- Limited/obsessive range of interests
- Non-functional routines or rituals
  - E.g. Having to have books in specific order
- Anxiety/depression
- Tantrums/meltdowns
Repetitive Behaviors and Restricted Interests

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Strengths

- Using a student’s strengths to provide intervention will maximize learning. Building and developing such strengths will increase personal independence and improve outcomes (Janzen, 2003).
Capitalizing on Strengths

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment One: Characteristics
Tips for Teachers

What you can do…

• Organize work expectations
• Provide step-by-step instructions
• Give visuals to make information clear
• Be as concrete as you can
• Be consistent and predictable with your classroom structure
• Give only as much information as a student can process at one time
• Learn each student’s strengths
• Know, understand, and implement accommodations

What you can help students learn to do…

• Interact with their peers
• Organize and plan their work
• Ask for help

For more support strategies, please review:
Understanding Autism Professional Development Curriculum: Strategies for Classroom Success and Effective Use of Teacher Supports.
More Supports

- For other evidence-based practices for students with autism, visit:
  [http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/evidence-based-practices](http://autismmpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/evidence-based-practices)

- For case studies describing the use of these practices with secondary school students with autism, visit:
  [http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources](http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/resources)
Based on What I’ve Learned...

What do I/my team need to:

• Stop doing
• Continue doing
• Start doing
Practices for Challenging Behavior
In this part of the session we will:

- Discuss the three stages of challenging behavior
- Identify strategies that will help you address behaviors at each stage
- Identify supports available at your school
Challenging Behaviors

What are they?

- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Social maladaptive behavior
- Property destruction
- Withdrawal
- Oppositional behavior
- Stereotyped behavior
What Can Cause Challenging Behavior?

- Can result from stress and anxiety
- When needs for the following can not be met:
  - For information
  - For sameness
  - For a tangible item
  - Due to expectations (of self, others, environment) not met
  - To lower stimulation in the environment
- Appears differently in every student
- Remember: Limited communication skills can impact student’s ability to express needs
3 Stages of Challenging Behaviors

- **Stage 1**: Rumbling
- **Stage 2**: Meltdown
- **Stage 3**: Recovery
Stage 1 - Rumbling

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 1 – Rumbling – What Can You Do?

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 1 – Rumbling – What Can You Do?

Out of the ordinary minor behaviors
Tell-tale signs that the student is stressed

- Identify student triggers
- Modify the classroom environment
- Provide choice, feedback, and praise
- Provide strong reinforcement
- Allow for an “antiseptic bounce” – separate student from stressful environment
- Provide a “home base” or “cool zone”
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behaviors

‣ What are his or her rumbling signs?
‣ What have you/are you doing when he or she starts rumbling?
‣ What might you do differently to help manage future situations?
‣ Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #3 on the corresponding handout.
Stage 2 – Meltdown

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 2 – Meltdown – What Can You Do?

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 2 – Meltdown – What Can You Do?

Student loses control
Externalized and/or internalized behavior

- Demonstrate empathy
- Provide space
- Provide assurances
- Maintain calm
- Maintain safety
- Implement emergency plan
- Remove others as needed
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behaviors

- What is the current plan for managing his/her meltdowns?
- What, if anything, would you like to change about the plan?
- Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #4 on the corresponding handout.
Stage 3 – Recovery

CLICK HERE to View Video Clip – Segment Three: Practices for Challenging Behavior
Stage 3 – Recovery – What Can You Do?

Not yet ready to learn
Needs help easing back in

- Direct student to a highly motivating task
- Reintegrate student into a normal routine
- Provide strong reinforcement
- Communicate support
- Build on successes
Reflect on a Student with Challenging Behavior

‣ What is the current plan for helping this student recover from a meltdown?
‣ What, if anything, would you like to change about the plan?
‣ Share with a colleague

Please refer to exercise #5 on the corresponding handout.
After the Meltdown…

- Figure out the root cause
- Talk with others about how to deal with the student’s behavior in the future
- Develop a partnership with parents/guardian
- Teach the student:
  - To recognize his own triggers
  - To ask for help
  - How to properly communicate immediate needs
  - To initiate calming routines or ask for someone to assist
Most Importantly…

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS!

HAVE A PLAN!
At My School…

- When I have concerns about a student’s behavior, I get support from…
- Our process for addressing the challenging behavior of students with ASD includes these steps:
  1.
  2.
  3.
  4.

Please refer to the handout, “At My School” that corresponds with this exercise.
In Summary

- Students with ASD may experience challenges with:
  - Communication
  - Social Interactions
  - Behavior

*Focus on strengths!*

- The 3 stages of challenging behavior:
  - Rumbling
  - Meltdown
  - Recovery

*Have a plan! Know the signs!*
Resources

- Center on Secondary Education for Students with ASD - [http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/](http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/)


- National Professional Development Center on ASD - [http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/](http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/)

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