How Anxiety Affects the Lives of Individuals with Autism and Treatments that Help

Cigna Autism Awareness Series

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Autism Spectrum

• Defined by the following:
  • Difficulty forming and engaging in reciprocal social interactions
  • Difficulty communicating with others
  • Need for routine and ritual
    – Difficulty tolerating change

• Social and communication delays present prior to the age of 3 years
‘Uncomplicated’ Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

- Social
  - Development of social skills
- Communication
  - Functional language
- Restricted interests/repetitive behaviors
  - Increased flexibility over time
- Absence of significant co-occurring conditions
Co-occurrence of Anxiety in ASD

- Anxiety
  - Phobias
  - Social anxiety disorder
  - Obsessive-compulsive disorder
  - Post traumatic stress disorder
ASK ME ABOUT MY SOCIAL ANXIETY
A Life with Autism

Temple Grandin
An Anxious Experience for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum
Rigidity and Transitions
WARNING

AUTISM MELTDOWN PROBABILITY HIGH
“Explosions”
Why do they happen?
What Factors are Involved?

- Emotion
  - Emotion regulation
- Anxiety
  - Ability to tolerate uncertainty
- Impulse Control
  - Ability to manage frustration
- The person’s experience of the sensory world
Intense World Theory of Autism
Markram and Markram, 2010
Intense World Theory of Autism

- Sensory perception
- Attention
- Memory
- Emotion
- Fear
Relevance of the Intense World Theory

• How is the theory relevant to our understanding of explosions
  – Be aware of sensory experience where the explosions are occurring
  – Understand that this world is being perceived and attended to in different way than yours
  – Look for past memories
  – Realize that emotional dysregulation is occurring
  – Look for fear triggered responses
The Impact of Bullying
Treatment

• Psychological Interventions
  – Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  – Relational Based Interventions
• Speech and Language Therapy
• Occupational Therapy
  – Sensory focused
• Other
  – Yoga, exercise, music therapy
Medication Approaches

• Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors
  – Prozac, Paxil, Luvox, Celexa, Lexapro

• Benzodiazepines
  – Ativan, Klonopin, Xanax

• Serotonin Partial Agonist
  – Buspar

• Atypical Neuroleptics
  – Risperdal, Seroquel, Abilify
Oxytocin

The Social Peptide
Novel Treatment Approaches

- Address the core concerns in autism
  - Feeling connected and engaged with selected friends and family
  - Improve the ability to identify the emotional states and thoughts of those around
  - Have the ability to communicate effectively
  - Be flexible and have the ability to tolerate change
Oxytocin

• Oxytocin promotes social and approach behaviors by reducing the feeling of threat or sense of being unsafe
  – (Di Simplicio et al, 2009)

• Oxytocin increases gaze specifically toward the eye region of human faces
  – (Guastella et al, 2010)

• Data suggest that oxytocin improves the ability to correctly identify the mental state of others from social signals from the eye region
  – (Domes et al, 2007)
Thank you