



**CARD**<sup>TM</sup>  
CENTER FOR AUTISM  
& RELATED DISORDERS

# Programming for Advanced Learners with ASD

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# Objectives

- ▶ Identify the fundamental deficits of a high-functioning individual diagnosed with ASD
- ▶ Be able to identify basic social language deficits
- ▶ Understand the importance of perspective taking in social interaction
- ▶ Be able to give 3–4 common examples of Executive Functioning skills missing in ASD individuals

# Common High Functioning ASD Profile

- ▶ Very concrete thinking ~ everything is black and white in meaning
- ▶ Talks “like a professor” whether people understand or not
- ▶ Does not read body language or facial expressions
- ▶ May seem detached or overly emotional in responses
- ▶ There are no exception to rules

# Communication Deficits

- ▶ Basic language skills are intact but limited understanding of social (pragmatic) language
- ▶ Literal understanding of speech
- ▶ Figures of speech, or any nuances in tone of voice to change the meaning of what a person says is abstract and often not understood
- ▶ May have trouble communicating thoughts with enough detail in language for another person to understand.

# Social Skills Deficits

It's very hard to be social if you don't have the language skills to be social

- ▶ Learning to observe another person and imitate is often missing. It is a core skill so that the person can one-day learn by doing.
- ▶ Can memorize some basic social rules but difficulty implementing them because social situations change constantly.
- ▶ Not being able to track a conversation using eye contact or facial expressions
- ▶ Letting other people know you are listening without talking

# Examples of Social Communication Deficits by Age

- ▶ A peer asks the child “What’s up?” and the child responds by looking up and saying “The sky.”
- ▶ Walks up to friends & strangers and starts talking about a preferred topic with no introduction of topic
- ▶ A person gets hit by a ball in the face. Our individual walks up to the person and asks if they are okay. The person says “Yes” but is crying & obviously hurt. The ASD individual starts talking about what a great day he has had, etc.
- ▶ A person says “Nice job” when they see someone drop or break something of value. The ASD individual congratulates the person on doing a nice job.

School Age Child

Teen / Adult

# Pragmatic Language Skill Targets

- ▶ Learning to use language that is appropriate to their relationship with the person he / she is talking to
- ▶ Learning to modify the volume of speech according to the surroundings
- ▶ Learning to modify his/her speech according to the facial expression or body language of the person they are speaking to
- ▶ Gaining someone's attention appropriately

# Cognition Definition

- ▶ Cognition: Basically, our internal mental state of how a person thinks
- ▶ Social Cognition is being able to understand another person's thoughts & perspective.
  - Being able to understand that others may think differently, know different information, like different things, etc.

Learning that there are things such as

- Desires, Emotions, Thoughts, Knowledge, Deceit

# Cognitive Development

- ▶ Starts at 9 mos of age, when a baby pushes a toy off of their high chair and they notice that people will jump to pick up their toy
- ▶ By 3, preschoolers are aware of their own senses
- ▶ At 4–5 yrs, they start to recognize that other people think differently, know different things. They start to develop “*perspective taking abilities*”
- ▶ By 5–6 yrs, they can take someone's perspective in common activity
- ▶ Between 7–9, they develop an understanding of deceit in jokes/teasing, but also in lies & white lies

# Examples of Cognitive Development

- ▶ At the beginning of Kindergarten, most or all of the kids are playing Hide 'n Seek but are still giggling out loud, body parts can be seen sticking out behind places they are hiding. By the end of Kindergarten, more than half can hide behind objects and try to stifle their giggles
- ▶ Joking and Lies – both are evidence of deceit. Being able to identify what people know, allows one to manipulate information for their own benefit

# Cognitive or “Perspective Taking” Deficits

If you can't take another person's perspective, it is difficult to be friends with another person.

Examples:

- ▶ They won't understand that you like different things than they like
- ▶ They will have highly preferred conversation repetitively as they don't understand you get bored hearing the same things repeatedly
- ▶ Not being able to identify when someone is lying to you is dangerous.

# Cognition Skill Targets

- ▶ Understanding Desires and Thoughts
- ▶ Being able to discern the different Emotions that people show or have following a situation
- ▶ Demonstrating a connection between a person's senses and how that influences what someone knows or does not know
- ▶ Developing perspective taking skills of how others may feel the same or diff as the individual

# Cognition Skill Targets

- ▶ Being able to identify the different types of deceit that exist
- ▶ Being able to identify when others are lying to the individual
- ▶ Learning to identify the Intentions of others
- ▶ Learning to understand Sarcasm

# Executive Function Definition

- ▶ Executive functions are processes we learn in order to set and meet goals.
- ▶ These skills are the “managers” of information in our thoughts
- ▶ Helps us to pay attention, use our working memory, be flexible, plan & organize, and problem solve appropriately

# Executive Function Deficits

- ▶ **Attention:** There are many different types of attention
  - Difficulty sustaining attention long enough to hear safety instructions or not being able to do even a little bit of multi-tasking
- ▶ **Memory:** ASD kids have good rote memory but have trouble with other kinds of memory such as “working memory.”
  - Working Memory is known as “online” memory.
  - Can’t carry a conversation because the individual doesn’t know how to relate the Batman movie he saw last night to a conversation a peer is having about going to the movies tonight.
- ▶ **Problem Solving**
  - Requires a person to think flexibly in order to come up with alternate solutions when encountering a problem.

# Executive Function Deficits

- ▶ **Saliency:** Learning how to identify what is important in every medium of information exchange e.g. pictures, conversations, etc.
  - Understanding that people are more important than objects
- ▶ **Organization:** Learning to understand how to organize all of their belongings.
  - Constantly losing objects, or not being able to brush their teeth because they didn't put their toothbrush away in the place where it goes.
- ▶ **Planning:** Learning to organize and sequence a series of steps
  - Not being able to figure out when they should take their medications each day in light of all of their other activity

# Executive Function Targets

- ▶ Learning to identify what to look at when observing a scene. Figuring out what is important in observation or in conversation
- ▶ Learning to plan morning or evening routines such when and how to take a shower, wash hair, etc
- ▶ Organizing their own belongings in their bedroom or helping to put away dishes done by family members
- ▶ Learning flexibility so that he /she can make requests in different ways. Learning to understand that most things aren't black/white but are on a continuum.
- ▶ Making plans with friends

# Questions?