



UTAH CENTER
FOR EVIDENCE BASED
TREATMENT

Back-to-School Playbook

Evidenced-Based Strategies for
Helping Neurodiverse Kids and
Teens Succeed



Introductions



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- Assessment & Testing Team Member
- Specializes in assessing ADHD and Specific Learning Disability
- Experience working in schools to develop educational plans

Laura Rowley, PhD

- Program Director of Assessment and Testing
- Specializes in assessing ADHD And Autism in children and adults
- Conducts parenting interventions





Why focus on Neurodiversity?

- Individuals with ADHD and/or autism have differences in executive functioning and socioemotional skills that affect school functioning
- Neurodivergent students are at increased vulnerability to environmental stressors
- Neurotypical students also have shown cognitive and emotional effects from COVID-19 pandemic that require support

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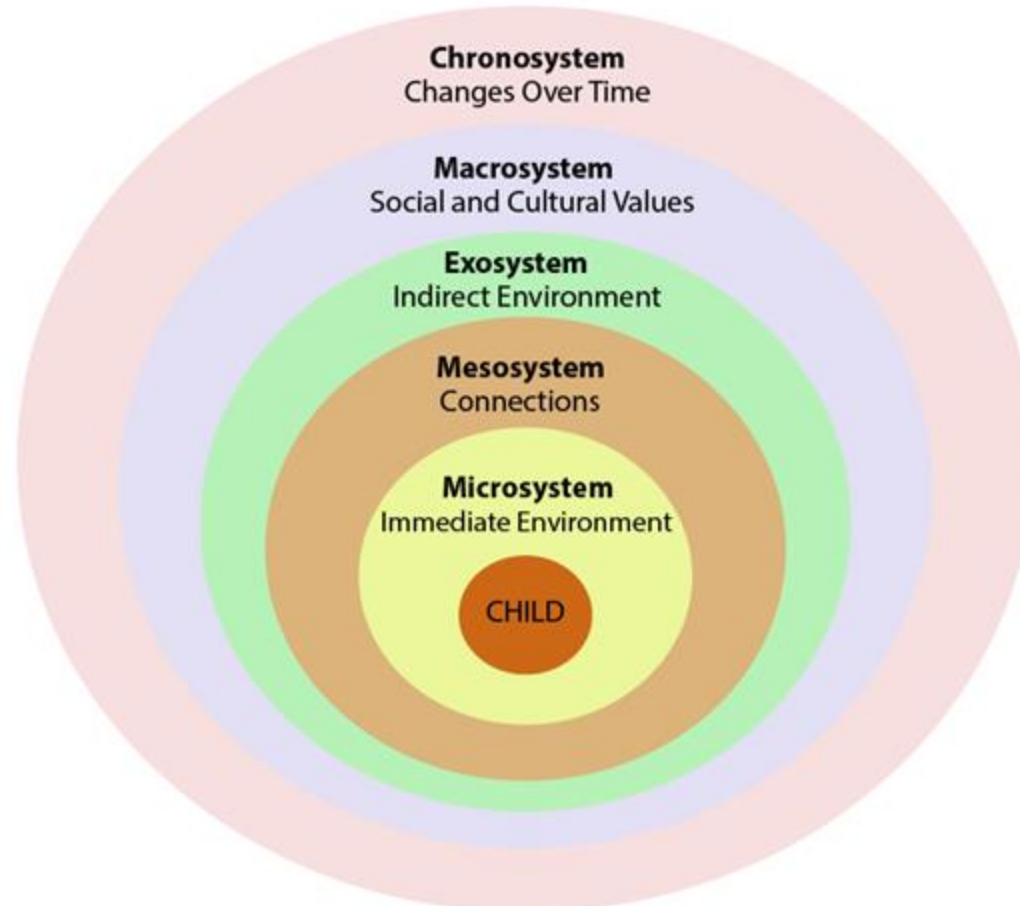


What are you hoping to learn here today?

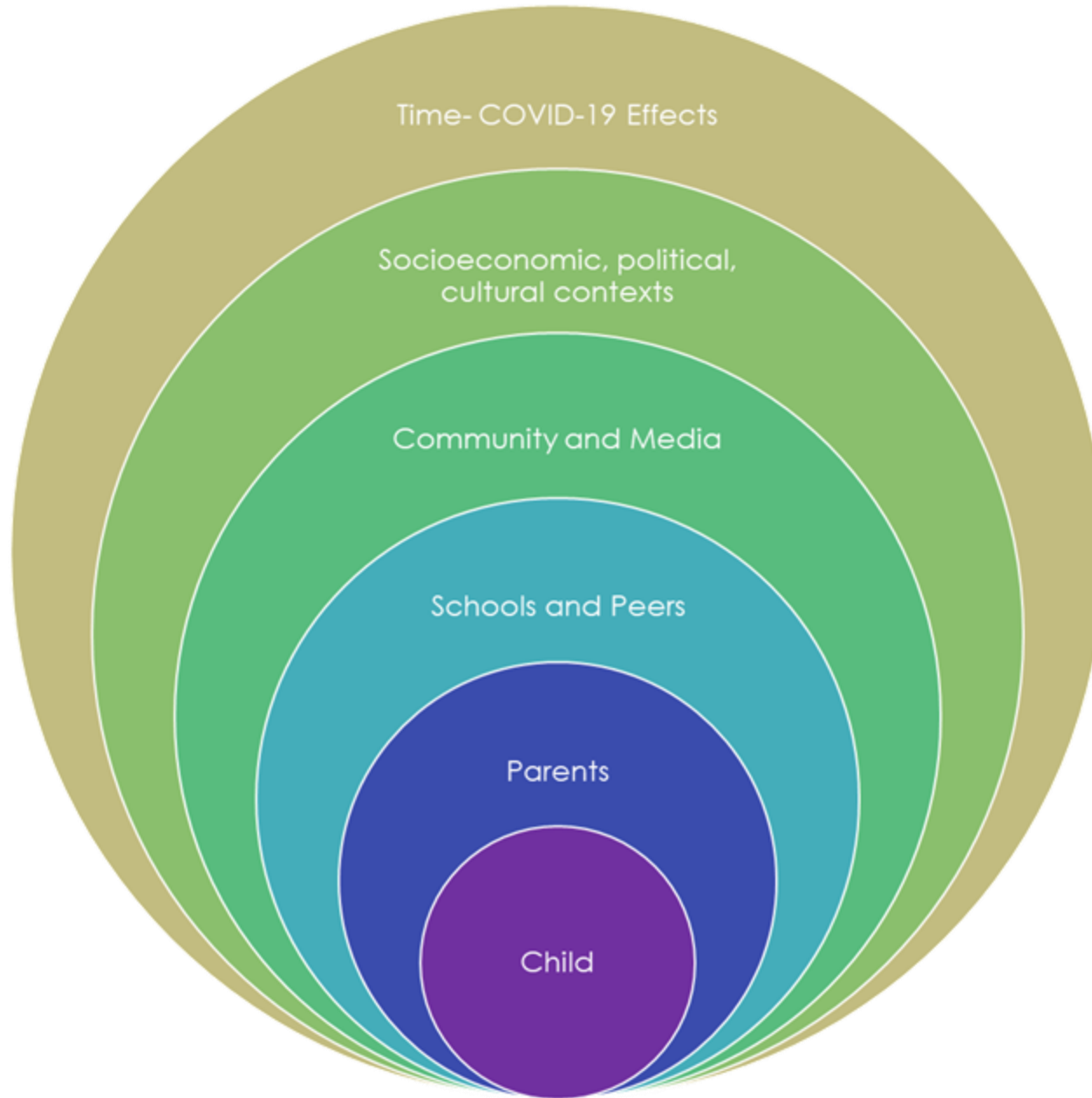
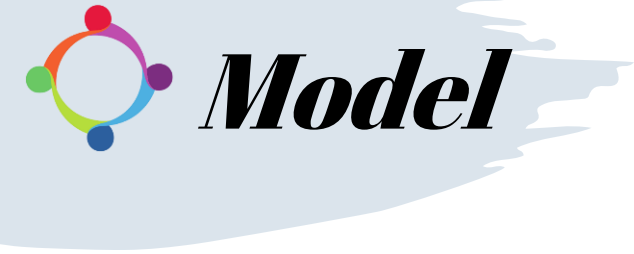


Systems Approach

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



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Definitions- Diagnostic Criteria

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- inattention to details
- difficulties with sustained attention
- problems following through on tasks
- not listening
- avoiding tasks with sustained effort
- fidgeting and restlessness
- interrupting others
- always “on the go”
- excessive talking

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- difficulties with social reciprocity such as back and forth conversation and sharing emotions
- poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication and inconsistent eye contact
- problems maintaining relationships
- repetitive movements
- inflexibility
- fixated interests
- sensory-seeking behaviors

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Ed.



Strength-Based Perspective

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- creativity
- taking in a lot of information at once
- jumping in to new experiences
- sense of humor
- hyperfocus
- energetic
- spontaneous

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- talks passionately about interests
- noticing details
- developing routines and systems
- researching deeply about topics
- noticing and mimicking other people's behavior
- memorizing information
- Logical thinking
- Visual-Spatial skills
- Hyperfocus

Angonoff; Boot et al,
2017 Meilleur et al 2015

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What differences have you noticed for students pre- vs. post-COVID-19?



COVID-19



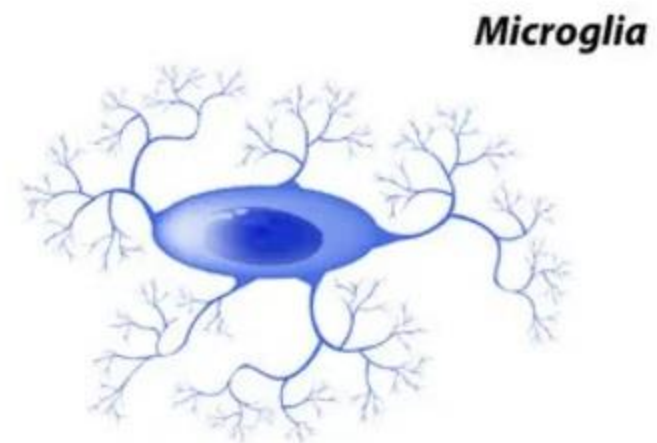
- COVID-19 influence on students can be viewed through two types of long-term effects
 - Biological changes due to contracting the disease
 - Residuals of experiencing environmental stress



COVID-19 Neurological Effects

COVID-19 can affect microglial development in a way that is similar to rubella or the flu (da Silva Chagas et al., 2021)

- Microglia originate from the same origins as white blood cells (Rogers, 2019)
- In child development, microglia play a major role in synaptic pruning (Wake, Moorehouse, & Nabekura, 2011)
- While children have historically been more resistant to respiratory symptoms in COVID-19, v are still unsure how COVID-19 will affect their brains in the long term.





COVID-19 Neurological Effects

- At a base level, COVID-19 could be a risk factor for all people who are in a process of neurological development
 - Even more true for individuals with comorbid medical diagnoses
- Neurodivergent children are more likely to have comorbid medical diagnoses
- Neurodivergent kids are at higher risk for having their brain development affected by the COVID-19 virus—even in the absence of hospitalization, intubation, or serious symptoms.

Muskens, Velders, & Staal, 2017



COVID-19 Psychosocial Effects

In all cases of microglial disruption (whether by COVID-19 or other factors), some common obstacles can arise:

- Disrupted phonological processing
- Disrupted vocabulary development
- Emotional dysregulation and anxiety

Kolb & Gibb, 2011; Shigemori, Sakai,
Tamkumi, Itoh, Suzuki, 2015



COVID-19 Psychosocial Effects

- Neurodivergent kids experienced more COVID-19 related anxiety than neurotypical kids
- Stress related behaviors included meltdowns, behavioral regress, and difficulty returning to school
- School closures also contributed to losses in educational milestones
- Effects are compounded for families that were less-resourced

Engzell, Frey, & Verhagen, 2022;
Sideropoulos et al., 2022



Returning to School After COVID-19

This is likely where teachers and students will intersect for the first time since COVID-19 school closures, and with several challenges

- Reimplementation of routines that were severed at school closure
- Routines may now require behaviors that were not relevant prior to COVID-19 (e.g. social distancing or wearing masks)
- Developmental and educational expectations may have increased now that the children are older and more educated
 - For example, kids who were in 8th grade when COVID started are now entering their junior year of high school.



Returning to School After COVID-19

UNC School of Education School of Education introduced helpful programming for supporting neurodivergent kids in uncertain times:

- Seven Strategies for Emotional Support
- Six Strategies for Returning to School

UNC Frank Porter Graham Child Development
Institute Autism Team, 2021



Seven Strategies for Emotional Support

Understanding

- Support understanding

Expression

- Offer opportunities for expression

Skills

- Prioritize coping and calming skills

Maintain

- Maintain routines

Build

- Build new routines

Connections

- Foster connections

Awareness

- Be aware of changing behaviors



Six Strategies for Returning to School

Schedule

Physical
Structuring of
the
Environment

Provision of a
social narrative
for why they are
doing the task

Video Modeling

Signs or Cards

Reinforcement



*Educational
Planning*

Interdisciplinary Team

Child

Parents

School- teachers,
school counselors,
administrators

Occupational
therapist

Pediatricians

Mental health
Specialists-
therapists,
psychiatrists,
psychologists



Federal Law for Accessibility

Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.)

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Provides support, accommodations, and specialized instruction
- Includes specific goals based on present levels of academic achievement and functional performance
- Services provided in Least Restrictive Environment
- Used in grades K-12

Section 504 Plan

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ensuring an individual cannot be discriminated against due to disability
- Provides support and accommodations
- Used in K-12 and college



IEP Classifications

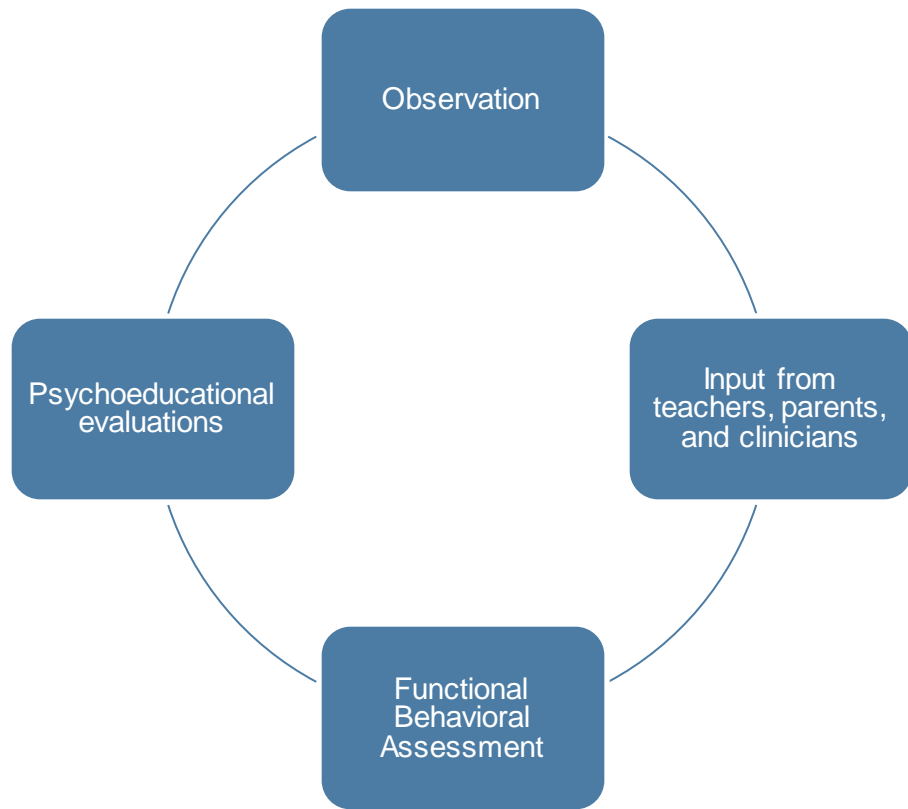
- Autism
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Hearing Impairment
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Visual Impairment (VI)



IEP Classifications

- **Autism**
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Assessment





Functional Behavioral Assessment

- Define the behavior in objective terms
 - Instead of stating “student is defiant” clarify “the student does not complete math worksheets when asked”
- Identify context
 - When is the behavior happening and not happening? What happens right before and right after?
- Determine the function
 - Is the student avoiding something? Eliciting support?
- Identify the need
 - “Student avoids math worksheets because they struggle to show their work”

Gresham et. al, 2019



Psychoeducational Evaluation

- Formal testing with **standardized measures** of cognitive abilities, academic achievement, executive function, etc.
- Standardized report measures from parent and teachers
- **Integration of data** to formulate diagnosis and strengths/weaknesses



Why Evaluation is Important

- Allows us to understand where child's abilities are currently
- Helps to set appropriate expectations for behavior change
- Diagnosis provides directions to start with targeting intervention
- The same outward behavior can have multiple possible causes



Neurodiversity in ASFAB individuals

- Less repetitive behaviors or restrictive interests
- Special interests may be socially acceptable
- Impairment in relationships are qualitative, rather than a complete lack of forming friendships
- Deficits don't often show up until later childhood or adolescence
- Stronger verbal abilities



Hendrix, 2015; Leedham et al., 2020; Nichols, 2009; Wilson et. Al, 2016



This can look like...

- Having friendships in childhood and not keeping up with demands of complex relationships in adolescence
- Not recognizing signs of relational aggression or not being aware of when others are taking advantage
- Appearing immature for their age and fears of growing up
- Watching on the sidelines, copying and practicing, expending a significant effort on appearing “normal”
- Sensory overload leading to intense emotions, being called “dramatic” or “emotional”
- Issues with gender and not connecting with traditional gender roles
- Intense interest in animals, TV shows, celebrities, fashion, fantasy novels



BIPOC individuals

- Prevalence rates occur similarly across racial and ethnic groups
- BIPOC children, esp. black and Hispanic, more likely to be misdiagnosed with conduct disorders
- Even when diagnosed, less likely to receive services



Becerra et al., 2014; Imm, White, & Durkin, 2019; Madell, et al., 2009



Community Stigma and Provider Bias

- Mistrust of systems
 - Not necessarily unwarranted by research on provider bias
 - Medication providers more likely to prescribe stronger drugs like antipsychotics
- Problems aren't seen as requiring formal intervention
- “Frog Pond” Effect- children are identified by comparing to their context

Hibel, et al., 2010



Setting Goals



Childhood Age (6 to 12) Milestones

- **Sitting still** and sustained focus to build reading comprehension
- **Checking work** to complete math calculations
- **Perspective taking** and **inhibiting impulses** to have positive relationships with peers and teachers
- Complete **multi-step instructions** for daily routines and homework
- Observation and repetition to build **organizational skills**

Rogers & Pesantez, 2021



Adolescence (13 to 17) milestones

- Organizational skills and **systems** to navigate complex schedules
- **Prioritizing** goals and **estimate time** accurately to meet deadlines for projects
- **Self-motivation** and self-regulation to support long-term goals over short-term gratification
- **Metacognition**- reflecting on thinking processes and effects of behaviors on others
- **Self-advocate** for accommodations and support for emotional issues

Rogers & Pesantez, 2021



Young adulthood milestones

- **Communicate** needs effectively
- Manage obligations **independently**
- take **responsibility** for daily self-care, including meals, medications, sleep schedules
- Building reminder and scheduling systems
- **Harnessing focus** and attention where they are needed
- Mastering **emotional regulation**

Rogers & Pesantez, 2021



SMART Goals

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Time-
Bound

Doran et al., 1981



Communication Goals

- The student will take four back-and-forth turns in conversation with another individual on four out of five opportunities
- The student will be able to relate five events that took place that day on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will ask for help from teachers and peers on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will be able to describe the meaning of eight non-verbal communication behaviors, such as turning away, frowning, smiling, crossing the arms, and raising the voice, one four out of five opportunities.
- The student will be able to suggest three or more different ways to start a conversation or interaction with another individual on four out of five opportunities.

National Association of Special Education
Teachers



Social Skills Goals

- The student will identify his or her own emotional state on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will be able to describe the reason for three social behaviors, such as using appropriate table manners, saying "excuse me," saying "please," and others, on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will identify when another child is displaying an emotional state, such as happiness, sadness, anger, etc., on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will not interrupt other speakers on four out of five opportunities.

National Association of Special Education
Teachers



Behavior Goals

- The student will follow a three-step direction on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will accept a change in the normal daily routine 70% of the time.
- The student will follow the rules in the classroom 80% of the time.
- The student will behave appropriately outside the classroom (in hallways, the lunchroom, before and after school, etc) 80% of the time.
- The student will identify when he or she needs to take a break and will independently request a break on four out of five opportunities.

National Association of Special Education
Teachers



Occupational Therapy Goals

- The student will identify objects or situations that cause sensory discomfort and communicate that discomfort to an adult 80% of the time.
- The student will be able to write letters, numbers, and symbols with a pen or pencil on four out of five opportunities.
- The student will be able to request a sensory break when needed 80% of the time.
- The student will be able to write legibly 80% of the time.
- The student will be able to follow a set schedule and navigate the school building 80% of the time

National Association of Special Education
Teachers



Accommodation Examples

- Safe space for regulation
- Break card for leaving the classroom
- Modifying length of assignments or workload
- Peer modeling
- Daily visual reinforcement program
- Social stories

National Association of Special Education
Teachers



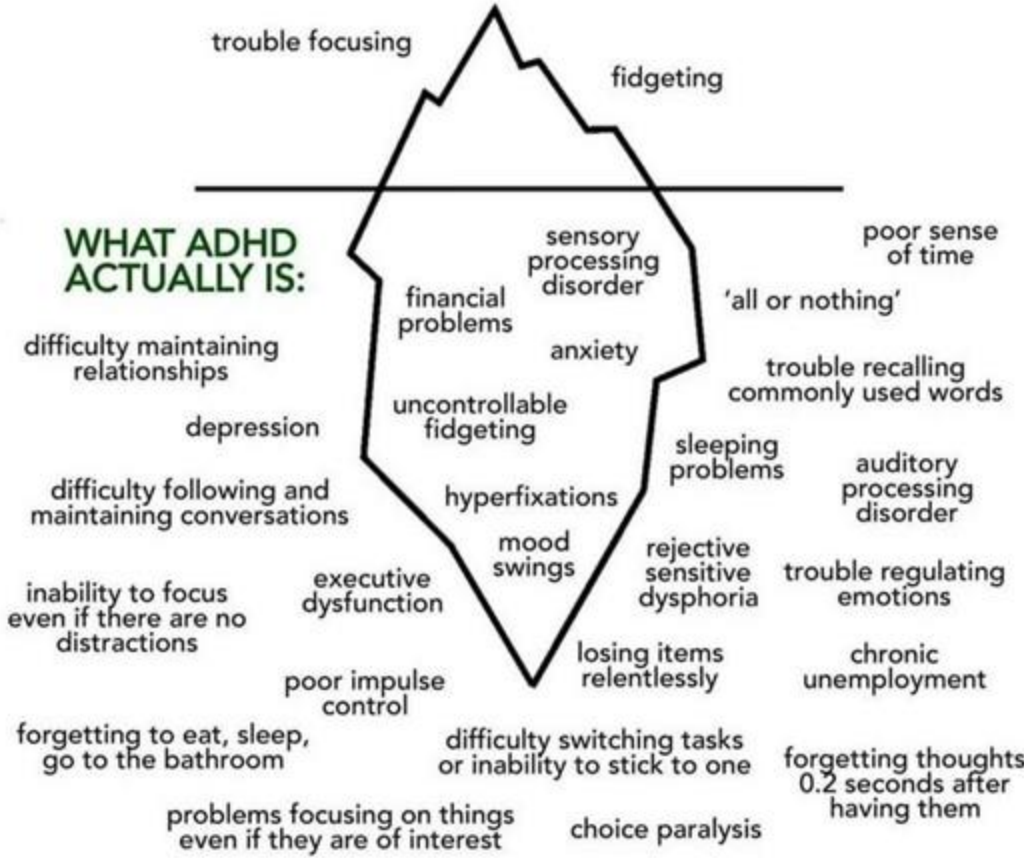
***Socioemotional
Foundations***

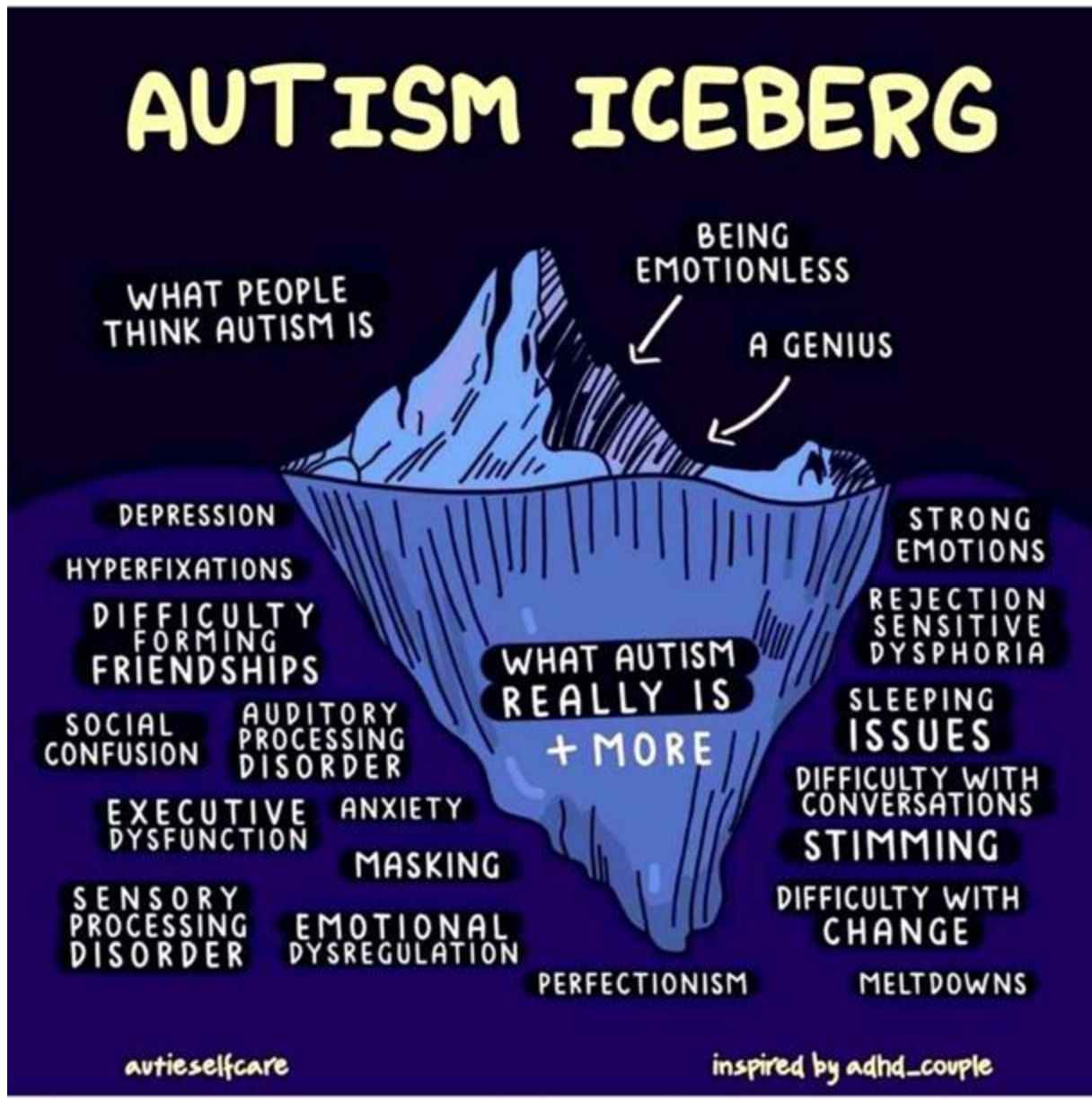


THE ADHD ICEBERG

@FINUCCINIALFREDO

WHAT PEOPLE THINK ADHD IS:







Key Points

Deficits in self-regulation underlie ADHD and autism
Children develop self-regulation in relationships

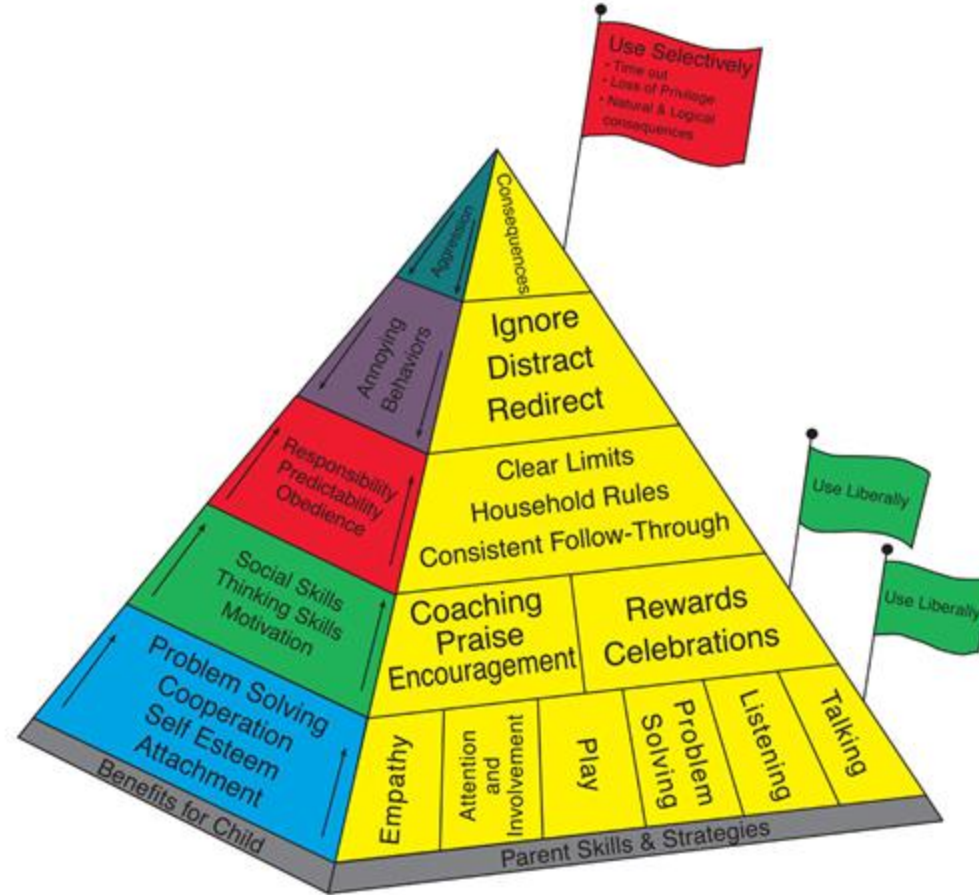
Intervention must be based in relationships



Evidence-Based Intervention

- Most support parent training/behavioral training methods
- Some support for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Positive effects include:
 - reduction of inattentive/hyperactive symptoms
 - decreased irritability
 - decreased emotional lability
 - improved social adjustment
 - decreased antisocial behavior

Vacher et al., 2020



Parenting Pyramid[®]

© The Incredible Years





PRIDE Skills for parents and teachers

Praise behaviors to increase them

Reflect talk to show understanding

Imitate to provide opportunities for child lead

Verbally **describe** to build sustained attention

Show **excitement** to foster positive feelings



Labeled Praise for all ages

Nice work taking turns with your sister

Thank you for using your words to tell me what you need

You're doing well concentrating on your homework

Thank you for doing the dishes right after dinner

You thought through your options very carefully

Thank you for asking before leaving



Selective Attention

Negative attention (like yelling or punishing) is still attention!

Neurodivergent kids like stimulation- getting an emotional reaction from parents is interesting

Ignore minor/irritating behaviors

Reengage right away when behaviors are appropriate or when inappropriate behavior stops



Giving Effective Commands

Be specific- not just “behave” or “listen”
Focus on what to do rather than what not to do
ensure its developmentally appropriate
individual instead of compound
Provide a reason
Neutral tone of voice
praise after compliance



Reinforcement- not a bribe

Neurodivergent kids and teens often need support in building internal motivation for nonpreferred tasks

Reinforcement connects a nonpreferred task to something they want

Over time, success in maintaining behaviors builds their self-efficacy and motivation to continue



Selecting reinforcements

Talk with children and teens- what do they want?

initially reinforcements should be small and frequent

As skills are consistent, increase expectations before reinforcement

Give opportunities for earning larger rewards

Pair ALL reinforcement with labeled praise/positive attention



Validation

Older kids and teens especially need to feel their perspective is understood

Separate emotions from behaviors

Validation does not equal agreement

Rathaus & Miller 2015



Steps of Validation

1. pay attention
2. reflect words back
3. voice what's not being said- nonverbals
4. look for how the person's emotions make sense given their past experiences
5. acknowledge how their emotions fit the situation
6. be genuine



Shifting Common Communication Habits

- Call each other names. > Express anger without hurt.
- Put each other down. > Say, “I am angry that you did...”
- Interrupt each other. > Take turns; keep it short.
- Criticize too much. > Point out the good and bad.
- Get defensive. > Listen, then calmly disagree.
- Lecture. > Tell it straight and short.
- Talk in sarcastic tone. > Talk in normal tone.
- Dredge up the past. > Stick to the present.
- Read others' minds. > Ask others' opinions.
- Command, order. > Request nicely.
- Give the silent treatment. > Say what's bothering you.
- Make light of something. > Take it seriously.

Robin et al., 2002



Families have different parenting styles and parent-child relationship expectations

Many evidence-based parenting interventions can lack cultural sensitivity

Aligning on shared values can
create goals that they buy into
increase trust



Values vs. Goals

In a journey, values are like the compass keeping us in a desired direction and goals are the destinations

The same value can have multiple behaviors that would fit

Examples include:

- Responsibility
- Independence
- Learning

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What are some shared values among parents?



Values between parents and teens

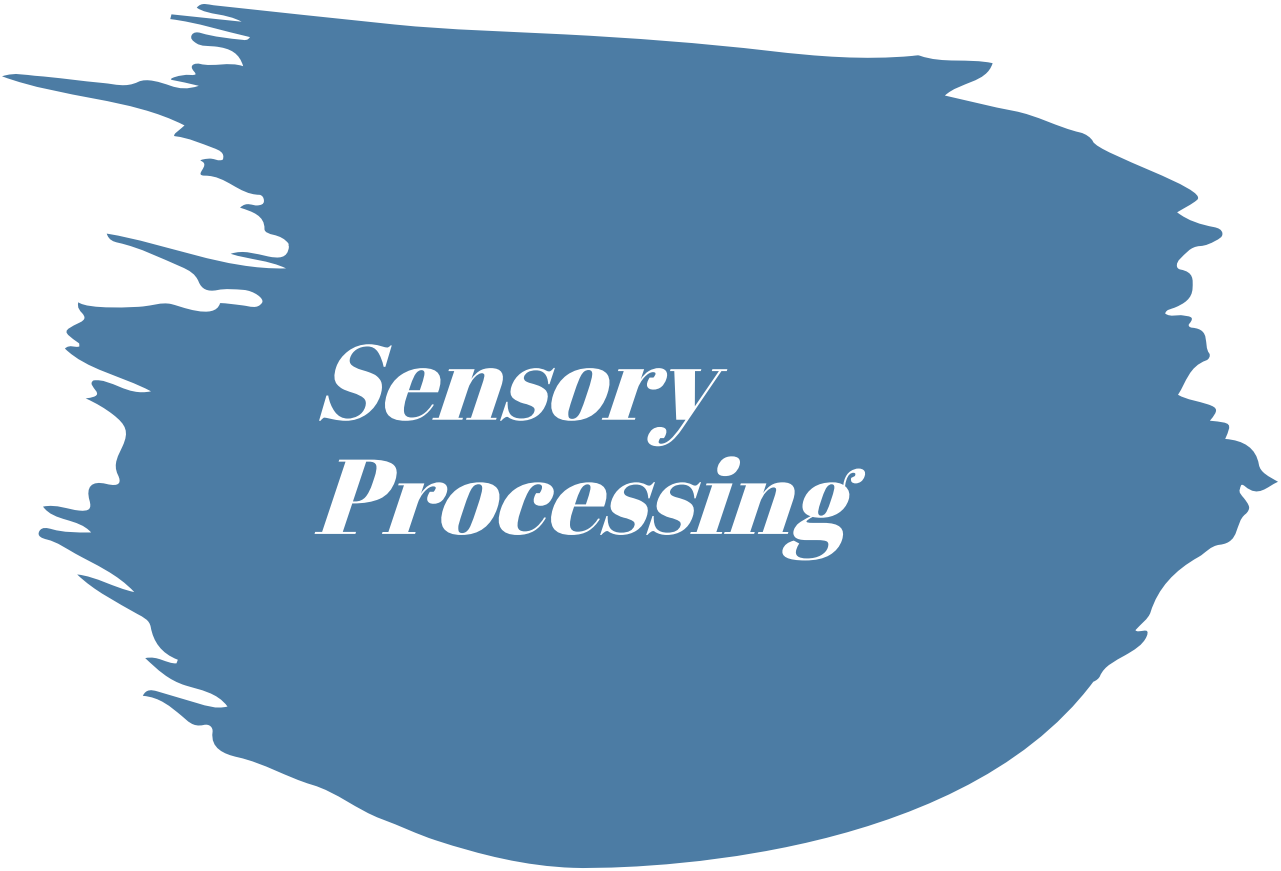
- Parents and teens can often disagree, but may have shared values
- Example- parents want their teen to get good grades but the teen want to focus on their relationships
 - teen focuses on relationships to have a sense of belonging and feels support
 - parents want teen to be able to go to have opportunities for success
 - college would be a good way to have a sense of belonging and increase social relationships AND provides opportunities



Parent-Teacher Collaboration

- Conversation starters
- “I am concerned about...”
- “Do you have any suggestions about...”
- “I’ve noticed [child] responds to...”
- “How do you implement [accommodation] in the classroom?”

ADDitude



*Sensory
Processing*



Understimulation

Neurodiverse individuals need sensory input to stay focused and alert

Misbehavior may reflect a need for more sensory input

- Proprioceptive- pressure
- Vestibular- swinging, rocking
- Tactile- fidget tools
- Auditory- listen to music
- Visual- light and moving objects
- Smell/taste- chewing gum, snacks, scented markers



Overstimulation

- Neurodiverse kids and teens may have strong emotional reactions when sensory input is overwhelming
- may be misinterpreted as defiance, tantrums, panic attacks
- Need to identify triggers- usually not a single thing, but the stacking of multiple simultaneous experiences





Support for Sensory Overwhelm

- Noise cancelling headphones
- testing in a quiet location, separated from others
- comfortable clothing
- snacks that feel safe
- lighting adjustments to decrease strain
- taking a break to calm down and step away



*Cognitive and
Learning*



Classroom Strategies for Redirecting Focus

1. walk around the class while teaching
2. gently touch students' shoulders or tap on their desks
3. use student names in examples
4. give students different jobs/errands to help out
5. start a discussion
6. establish eye contact
7. get entire class to move
8. develop secret signals with students as cue to redirect without reprimanding in front of others
9. Use multiple modalities- verbal, visual, tactile information

Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



Starting work

- Use visual reminders
- use auditory reminders- alarms
- Set dedicated time to break barriers to task initiation- 5 minutes, 10 minutes, or 15 minutes
- Have peer accountability partner
- Talk through a plan

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



Organization

- Provide step-by-step instructions for organization
- Regularly check in with students' systems
- Have a dedicated place for homework completion
- Write deadlines (big assignment deadlines, and deadlines for preliminary steps) on a visual place

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



Time Management

- Help students estimate how long tasks will take- reflect afterwards if estimates were accurate
- Give warnings for task transitions
- Have students access a watch/phone/clock to keep time awareness

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



Processing Speed

- Shorten assignments or tasks
- Give extended time
- Give students time to think before requiring a response-
come back if they don't answer right away
- Give initial prompt and then reminder
- use visual aids

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey,
2022



Writing Papers

- Use verbal dictation- either software or have person type the words
- Give feedback after each step- topic selection, outline, introduction, arguments, and conclusion
- Build in editing time
- Support student in evaluating quality of sources

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



College Planning

- Gradually build independence by increasing tasks teens are responsible for- such as managing medications and schedules
- Support teens in building effective routines of identifying tasks that need to be done and checking in on them at regular intervals
- Communicate with college about accommodations
- Find colleges with programs for students with disabilities
- Continue to check in and ask questions when they start college

Hallowell & Ratey, 2011; Zeigler & Bailey, 2022



Daily Routines



Morning Routine Example

- Using visual schedules can be helpful with teaching your child how to get ready for school in the morning.
- These tasks can be broken down further if needed.
- They can also be adapted for older children by adding teenager-specific tasks (e.g. “put on deodorant”).



http://www.livingwithautism.com/how_to_use_picture_cards_and_schedules/self_care_visual_helpers



Homework Routines

- Set start and finish times (either consistent daily or by day of the week)
 - Follow child's daily rhythms- when do they tend to be most awake and engaged?
- Have a dedicated homework spot
- Start with a list of tasks and prioritize
- Schedule 5 minute breaks for every 20 minutes of work
- Have an activity to look forward to after homework



Bedtime Routine Example

_____ 's Bedtime Routine ★★

 dinner time Time: 6:00 PM	 take a bath Time: 6:30 PM	 brush teeth Time: 6:50 PM	 put on pajamas Time: 7:00 PM	 drink water Time: 7:10 PM
 read story Time: 7:15 PM	 hug & kiss goodnight Time: 7:30 PM	 get into bed Time: 7:45 PM	 sleep Time: 8:00 PM	 Time:

_____ 's Bedtime Routine ★★

Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:

<https://myslumberyard.com/>



Screentime



How Much are Kids on Screens?

CDC 2021 study of daily use:

- Ages 8 - 10: 6 hours
- Ages 11-14: 9 hours
- Ages 15-18: 11.5 hours

Evidence indicates that screen time may be higher in neurodiverse populations

Westby, 2021



How Much is Too Much?

- American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 2 hours as daily limit for screens
- Adverse effects on physical and mental health shown for daily use 3-4 hours or more daily





Limitations of Current Research

- What is screen time?
- Limited comparisons between neurotypical and neurodiverse children
- Research on screen time discounts socioeconomic context
- Methodologies focus primarily on self-report
- Limited longitudinal studies
- Recommendations overlook potential benefits

Kaye et al., 2020



Benefits of Screen Time

- social connection for individuals who struggle in other environments
- digital media can support exploring interests and learning skills
- provides a platform for self-expression
- stress relief



Changing Screen Habits

- increase opportunities for off-screen activities
- practice regular technology breaks family-wide
- have dedicated time for undivided attention
- have conversations about social media safety
- use parental monitoring and block technology



Setting Boundaries with Devices for Teens

- A phone is a privilege, not a right
- Note acceptable and unacceptable use of technology
- Restrict devices at bedtime
- Explain reasons for limits
- Only take away devices when not being used appropriately according to the rules parents set up
- Don't use screen time for an unrelated consequence

Crenshaw, 2022



To Recap



Putting it all together

- COVID-19 has had long-term implications on cognitive and emotional development
- Thorough assessment is needed to understand individual children's strengths and weaknesses
- Self-regulation deficits underlie neurodiverse children's school difficulties
- Parent-child and teacher-child relationships are key to behavior change and maintaining effective habits



Resources

- ADDitude www.additudemag.com/
- Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) chadd.org/
- The Asperger/Autism Network www.aane.org
- Autism Speaks www.autismspeaks.org
- National Association for Special Education Teachers:
www.naset.org



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