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Autism, impulsivity, and Self-Monitoring

One of the main characteristics of autism is the existence of patterns of behaviors, interests, and activities that appear to a neurotypical person as abnormal and sometimes frightening. Depending on the severity, these characteristics can cause major difficulties for both the individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and those who work with them (Szakacs, 2009). Impulsivity can be defined as erratic and poorly controlled behavior (Zirpoli, 2008). This behavior can be verbal, physical or any combination of the two. Further, these verbal and physical behaviors of some ASD children can interfere with time spent learning and sometimes make a child completely tune out of the world around them. It also inhibits the ability for them to develop correctly because they do not work on correct movements but ones that are not accepted. They also lack self –monitoring from a young age and as such cannot learn what is socially right and wrong. Additionally, attempts to overcome some of these behaviors may further develop into other communication and social disorders that are just as inappropriate as the behavior being addressed. Therefore extreme care must be taken in developing interventions to control problem behavior in ASD individuals. Since it is at younger ages that are being dealt with, it is vital to make sure you figure out what the source of the problem is so that it can be handled before it is too late.

It’s important to remember that individuals with autism have no control over their interests anymore than a regular student. These interests and behaviors are one of the main characteristics of autism, so ASD kids are not choosing to behave in this manner; rather it is a symptom of the disorder. This is important because they will be misunderstood right off the bat so a teacher must make sure they do whatever they can to put the student in the best place to succeed. An important question that must be asked is why a particular individual with autism is behaving the way they are. The importance of answering this question helps in our ability to decide what strategies are available to address a person’s specific disorder. We must try to get to the core of the behavior in order to come up with a replacement behavior that is more appropriate. When the appropriate behavior is achieved then is will be easier to help the student develop in the places he needs to most. No two students exhibit the same characteristic for the same reasons, which means that no two students will be exactly alike and it must always be treated that way. This is why IEPs are so important because as a child gets tested and teachers collect data they go through every little thing to make sure they know exactly what they are dealing with. This gets passed on with the child so that every teacher will know exactly what to do for the betterment of the student’s development.

Possible reasons for the behavior that individuals on the spectrum exhibit are that they are trying to relieve anxiety and stress by using activities and interests as a coping mechanism (Szakacs 2009). Students who do not have ASD have ways of calming themselves like chewing gum, twisting a strand of hair, or tapping a crossed leg. Therefore, regular students are aware of the socially acceptable ways to calm down, so even though they may rather use inappropriate ways to calm down like rocking back and forth or spinning, they will not do these activities in front of others. Students with ASD, on the other hand, are not aware of the behavior’s inappropriateness; they are simply more focused on calming themselves down, relieving some anxiety, or entertaining themselves (Leekam, Prior, & Uljarevic, 2011). The more severe the ASD the higher need of movement and input to wake up their bodies and minds (Szakacs, 2009).

Social skills are another thing that goes into the development of a child. As they interact with other students and adults they learn what correct behavior is and what is not. A typical student will be able to catch onto these things or be able to learn from a teacher. However students with autism will not pay attention to these cues especially at a younger age. Another possibility is that individuals with ASD get tired of working and resort to behaviors and interests that allow them to escape from whatever demands are being placed on them. Simply put, the reason for any behavior is to either get something, or get away from something (Soemali, 2102). Since these students have not been able to develop the parts of the brain where personal awareness and self-monitoring are they do not get the hints when they are doing something that is not socially correct. This is why you see kids yelling and using body movements that are not acceptable in society. It is because of these things that students with ASD have to always be working on these skills even after high school. Individuals who display impulsive behavior have not yet learned how to self monitor (Zirpoli, 2008), and self monitoring is an important skill that individuals with ASD must learn in order to be more functional in society.

It is important for those of us, or anyone for that matter, that lives and works with individuals with ASD to understand the possible reasons for their interests and behaviors. We must be able to examine a situation and decide what the source of the target behavior is in order to come up with ideas to extinguish it at best, or control it at the least (Szakacs, 2009). That is why there has been a lot of research and help to make sure that the right interventions and steps are taken for each individual student who needs it. Generally speaking there are two major areas of interventions that are used for emotional and behavioral disorders namely, biological and non biological. Within the biological interventions the two types are the use of medication and diet control (Bauer & Shea, 2012). Regardless of which type of intervention is chosen, it is important to note that a deep understanding of the student is necessary in order to design an intervention that will have the highest probability of success. In order to generate an understanding of the student, a number of areas must be made familiar to the teacher and other supporters of the student. The team must be familiar with the student’s strengths and interests and have a good hypothesis about which setting events, triggers, and consequences are contributing to the problem behavior and why it is occurring (Otten & Tuttle, 2010).

There are numerous alternatives to choose from. For example, impulsivity may be decreased by teaching students appropriate waiting behaviors, and a reinforcement plan for appropriate responding behavior (Zirpoli, 2008). This strategy may be appropriate because giving smaller and shorter tasks at one time can be effective in controlling impulsivity when doing seatwork. It makes sure that every child, no matter what the attention span is, is giving their best in the time that they can give their best. This strategy also gives the student more opportunities to slow down and check work as well as giving the teacher more opportunities to praise the student and give positive reinforcement. Another strategy is Antecedent-based interventions (ABI). This is an evidence based practice that is used to address interfering and on task behaviors. ABI are a collection of strategies in which environmental modifications are used to change the conditions in the setting that prompt a learner with ASD to engage in an interfering behavior (Neitzel 2012).

Another evidence based practice is called Response interruption/redirection (RIR). This practice is particularly effective for individuals with ASD whose behaviors occur in the absence of other people, in a number of different settings, and during a variety of tasks. These behaviors are not maintained by either attention or escape (Neitzel 2012). Its basic duty is to work behind the scenes when the kid is not in public. It can then be more obvious to the student what is wrong with their behavior and how the correct way it. More specifically detailed, the RIR technique contains two main components. First is response interruption and second is redirection (Fellner, Laroche, & & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1984). During the first component of the intervention, staff stops the learner from engaging in the incorrect behavior. This can be done by either physically or verbally blocking the subjects attempt to engage in the repetitive behavior. During the redirection phase the subject is refocused on more appropriate, alternative behavior. Generally speaking there are four steps to this technique, namely: Identifying the interfering behavior, Collecting baseline data, Implementing RIR, and Monitoring learner progress. While there are a number of smaller steps contained within each of these main steps, essentially the goal is to identify the target behavior, determine how often and where it is occurring, start the intervention and then monitor effectiveness.

 Impulsivity is a common behavior for individuals with ASD. This behavior can be almost anything and is individual for each person. This is why there is such emphasis on catching it early in a child’s development because it can cause major problems later in their life. It is important to remember that a person with ASD does not realize that the behavior they are exhibiting is inappropriate and it is the job of the professionals in their life to do everything possible to redirect or put out inappropriate behavior by teaching students with ASD to self monitor. It helps develop the social skills that they will need to succeed as they grow older. All students will have a different need and problem that needs t be solved which is why there are so many techniques out there that can be used to great effectiveness. Teachers and other professionals go through great lengths to decide what will be the best for each child and they have great amounts of data to follow so they are not wrong in their choice. Kids with ASD are missing little things that regular students develop naturally over time and as such must have it trained and taught so they understand what it is. The goal is to have the students self monitor his behavior and learning. This is why schools today put great emphasis on mistakes because kids learn from them and know not to do them again. However as stated above and in the articles, some students need help developing it so they too can have success in those areas they did not have it in before.

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