Effective Communication & Strategies for Working with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

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• Attendees will identify characteristics that may impact equine-assisted therapy.

• Attendees will match and select possible intervention strategies to support communication and behavior with the equine-assisted activities and therapies program participants.

• Attendees will be able to outline potential interventions and accommodations for their programs that set clear expectations and promote success for the participants.
About Me

• SLP for 26 years
• Specialty areas: Pediatrics, ASD, Challenging behaviors, Complex Communication Needs
• Assistant Professor/Clinical Supervisor
• Advocate
• Wife
• Mom of 4
• Grandma of 2 😊
My guy~

- Diagnosed with Epilepsy at 2 mos.
- Diagnosed with ASD at 4 years
- Therapy started at 14 mos.
- Multiple therapies
- Involvement in Horse therapy for 11 years
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Social Communication
- 3 areas
  - Social Emotional Reciprocity
  - Non-verbal behavior
  - Deficits in developing and maintaining relationships, appropriate to developmental level

Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behaviors
- 4 listed~ need 2 of the 4
  - Stereotyped or repetitive speech, motor movements, or use of objects
  - Excessive adherence to routines, ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior, or excessive resistance to change
  - Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus
  - Hyper-or hypo-reactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of environment
Characteristics That can impact Therapy:

- **Sensory**
  - Need to prepare and make necessary provisions for helmets, animals, smells indoor vs. outdoor, etc.

- **Repetitive Behaviors**
  - What may that child need to do to move forward with therapy... how many times can I do it, when can I do it, etc.

- **Rigidity**
  - Changes may cause anxiety, so how can we decrease anxiety: visuals, pre-teaching, social stories, clear beginning and ending, duration maps, etc.?
Characteristics That can impact Therapy:

- Communication deficits
  - How can we make sure our communication is at the appropriate level for success: visuals, voice output, sign language, short/simple directives, positive language, etc.

- Social Skills Deficits
  - Helping to build appropriate social interactions for the environment and between therapists, volunteers and other riders.
Communication Characteristics

- non-verbal to highly verbal (little Professor)
- Prosody and intonation patterns can differ
- Lack of/Use of gestural communication
- One-sided communication (not reciprocal)
- Unusual phrase/vocabulary use
- Echolalia (present in approx. 75% of individuals diagnosed with ASD)
- Gestalt Language
- Scripting
- Hand Leading
Communication Characteristics

• Processing differences~
  • Need to finish processing the whole thought

• Literal language vs. figurative

• Attention to speech

• Literate vs. nonliterate
Characteristics of Communication

Partner

1. Concrete Directives
2. Positive Directives
   - What do you want to happen?
3. Increased Processing Time
4. Short Directives
5. Multi-modalities
6. Incorporate Universal Design within the environment (helps everyone at every level be successful within the environment)
About You?

• What is your attitude?
• What attitude are you projecting?
• How do you give directives?
• How are you presenting materials?
• What ways are you offering for receptive and expressive language?
• How are you transitioning?
• What feedback are you giving?
Clear Expectations & Boundaries

• Thinking about what we know about individuals we serve with various disorders; how can we clarify our expectations and create clear boundaries?
• We must try to think like the individuals we are serving
• We need to empathize with the “need” areas
Ask these Questions from the rider’s POV

- Where am I supposed to be?
- What materials/toys can I use?
- What & when can I do something?
- Who am I doing “X” with?
- How long do I have to?
- How do I stay calm/cope?
- When am I done/how do I go to the next thing?
Where am I Supposed to Be?

• Before I get on the horse.
• When I am on the horse.
  • Myself
  • Me & My horse
• When I am getting off the horse.
• After I am finished riding or while I am waiting.
Possible Interventions:

• Visual Supports
• Social Stories
  • *can be real pictures and text
  • *can be a video
• Instructions
• Video Modeling
• Consistency!
My mom will watch me ride my horse. I will get to play games and ride with friends while I am on Molly! I need to talk to my friends when I am riding Molly. When I am done, I get to make a treat for Molly. It will be so much fun!

I can tell my horse lots of things to do. I tap her with my hand and use words to talk to her. These are the things I can tell my horse.
My Riding Choices

- I want to
  - clean horseshoes
  - brush
  - pat the horse
  - help with saddle
  - put on helmet
  - ride

Ride inside
- barn

Ride outside
- trail

I feel
- great
- bored
- tired
- cold
What Materials?

- Vocabulary: Make it clear to riders and volunteers & be consistent
- Organized storage
- Follow the use and clean-up procedures
Possible Interventions:

- Label with Pictures/Words
- Picture Communication when needed
- Use modeling during therapy & video
- Social Stories
- Organized and consistent storage
What & When Can I do Something?

• Making it clear when and what is to happen links closely to each rider’s preferences.

• How is the rider interpreting the expectation?
  • Excited, scared, drawn towards something else, special interest, etc.
Possible Interventions:

• Visual schedule
• Choices when able
• First Then
• Duration Map
• Timer
My Riding Choices

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Who am I doing “X” with?

• Which horse?
• Who is leading?
• Who will be my side walkers if I have them?
• Who do I listen to?
  • Will someone prompt or cue me?
Possible Interventions:

- Pictures /Labels for People
- Pictures/Labels for Horses
- Layer the Information
- Nametags/lanyards
- Have Staff Trained in the following:
  - Useful techniques
  - Procedures
  - Rules
  - Consistent Vocabulary
How long?

• How long can I do something I like?
  • “I want trot please?”

• How long do I have to do something I don’t like?
  • Be concrete & honor your words!
  • Avoid “in a sec/minute/little bit.”

• How long is my lesson?

• How long do I have to wait?
Possible Interventions:

- Timer
- Duration Map
- Schedule
- First-Then
How Do I stay Calm/Cope?

- Plan for creating calming space
- Plan how you are going to help handle changes & the unexpected
Possible Interventions:

- 5-point Scale
- Zones of Regulation
- Break Cards
- Breathing technique with visuals *pre-taught
- Calming routine with visuals *pre-taught
When am I Done?

• When is the individual done?

• If challenging behaviors are present, what happens?

• What do I do when I am done?

• What are my responsibilities?
  • Consistent expectations for transitions/cleaning up/ finishing in each space
**Sensory is Important!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listen</th>
<th>Listen to the Individual, parents/caregivers, and your observations regarding the sensory needs of your riders.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consult</td>
<td>Consult an OT that knows about sensory interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have</td>
<td>Have sensory supports available at your site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional Thoughts:

• Be aware of each rider’s individual strengths/needs

• Maximize sensory strength
  • Ex: If a child cannot see, utilize touch, auditory, etc.

• Familiarize yourself with each rider’s disability

• Use “Special Interest” as a motivator

• Use “person-first” language unless the individual’s preference is “Autistic.”
  • Ex: S/He has autism vs. ‘autistic.’
Challenges & Brainstorming:
References & Resources:


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References & Resources:

- http://teacch.com/about-us/what-is-teacch
- http://www.timetimer.com/
- http://www.speakingofspeech.com/
References & Resources:

• Pinterest
• Google Images
• Boardmaker: [https://goboardmaker.com/pages/boardmaker-online](https://goboardmaker.com/pages/boardmaker-online)