

University of New Mexico

UNM Digital Repository

Client Educational Handouts

Occupational Therapy

Spring 4-17-2023

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Morgan E. Fambro

University of New Mexico, MFambro@salud.unm.edu

Kendahl Schlosser

University of New Mexico, KSchlosser@salud.unm.edu

Carmen H. Ausserer

chausserer@salud.unm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ceh>



Part of the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fambro, Morgan E.; Kendahl Schlosser; and Carmen H. Ausserer. "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)." (2023). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ceh/6>

This Handout is brought to you for free and open access by the Occupational Therapy at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Client Educational Handouts by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

What is Autism?

ASD is a developmental disorder often caused by genetic predisposition combined with environmental factors. ASD can be present in many different forms and severity levels. On the mild end of the spectrum people are often able to enter into mainstream education and integrate into the workplace with the use of therapeutic learned skills to improve their social skills. On the more severe end of the spectrum, autistic people may never learn functional social skills or ways to communicate. These barriers can be challenging for the autistic person and their family. It is a disorder that is lifelong. Treatments can make a positive impact (Styles, 2020). It is important to note that ASD can lead to anxiety and depression, often due to social interaction difficulties and feeling misunderstood and/or not accepted by others (Sauer et al., 2021).

1 in every 60 individuals will fall under the autistic spectrum (Styles, 2020).

The prevalence of ASD is 2%, with a 4:1 male-to-female ratio. (Lundy-Ekman, 2023).

Common symptoms:

- Speech delays
- Social interaction difficulties
- Learning impairments
- Repetitive behaviors: this can look like saying repetitive words/phrases
- Autistic people can also tend to fixate on a specific interest or stick to a specific routine
- Reduced eye contact
- Differences in body language
- Lack of facial expressions
- Not engaging in imaginative play
- Repeating gestures or sounds
- Closely focused interests
- Indifference to temperature extremes

Some individuals may experience all, some, or even none of these symptoms.

(Autism Research Institute, 2020)

Participation in day to day activities and personal behaviors can vary depending on the severeness of the individual's ASD.

- Relationships - Feelings of isolation, disconnectedness, unable to relate to others.
- Roles - Expectations of being a parent, sibling, child, student, employee/employer and nuanced social roles
- Routines - Established patterns benefit one greatly and reinforce predictability and information processing

What is impacted day to day in an autistic person's life?

What can Occupational Therapy do to help?

Occupational Therapy can help autistic people with:

- Creating functional routines and habits
- Sensory processing and strategies to cope with sensory overload
- Development of fine motor skills
- Support with activities of daily living like self-care & school participation

Interventions:

1. Ayres Sensory Integration - This child-centered intervention offers personalized activities that emphasize playfulness, connection, and choice. Sensory integration addresses a child's alertness to their environment, sensory reactions and perception, and postural control (Watling, 2018).
2. Video Modeling - With this technique, an autistic person can learn a new skill or behavior by watching a demonstration on screen. While formats can vary, individualized videos that use concrete language are most effective at teaching new skills (Marcotte et al., 2019; Le et al., 2021).
3. Visual Supports - Visual supports can use real objects, images, or written words to enhance participation and promote skill development. They can be hi-tech (e.g., iPad communication system) or low-tech (e.g., using hand-drawn pictures or calendars) and can help with sequencing tasks, structuring routines, and assisting with communication (AOTA, 2022; Grant & Warren, 2018; Kuhaneck et al., 2020).

Assessments:

Since ASD is such a broad and diverse condition, assessments are also quite disparate.

1. Functional Behavioral Assessment - An observation-based assessment which identifies challenging behaviors and what causes them. After watching the individual in various settings, relevant interventions are developed to modify maladaptive behaviors (Autism Research Institute, 2020).
2. Sensory Integration and Praxis Test - Comprised of 17 subtests, this assessment identifies areas of one's development and participation in daily life that have been impacted by sensory processing difficulties (Smith, 2021).

REFERENCES:

1. American Occupational Therapy Association. (2022). Autism spectrum disorders across the life course and occupational therapy services. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(Suppl. 3), 7613410210. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2022.76S3002>
2. Autism Research Institute. (2020, August 19). *Screening & Assessment*. Retrieved March 8, 2023, from <https://www.autism.org/screening-assessment/>.
3. Grant, E. & Warren, J. (2018). Implementing Client-Centered Life Skills Groups for Individuals With ASD. In R. Watling & S. L. Spitzer (Eds.), *Autism across the lifespan: A comprehensive occupational therapy Approach* (4th edition). (pp. 195-213). The American Occupational Therapy Association Press.
4. Kuhaneck, H., Spitzer, S. L., & Bodison, S. C. (2020). A Systematic Review of Interventions to Improve The Occupation of Play in Children With Autism. *OTJR: occupation, participation and health*, 40(2), 83-98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1539449219880531>
5. Le, T., Rodrigues, B., & Hess, L. G. (2021). Video Modeling Use in Work Occupations for People With Autism: A Systematic Review. *The American journal of occupational therapy : official publication of the American Occupational Therapy Association*, 75(3), 7503180030. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2021.041912>
6. Lundy-Ekman, L. (2023). 8. In *Neuroscience: Fundamentals for Rehabilitation* (pp. 128-129). Elsevier.
7. Marcotte, J., Grandisson, M., Piquemal, C., Boucher, A., Rheault, M. È., & Milot, È. (2020). Supporting Independence at Home of People with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Literature Review. *Canadian journal of occupational therapy. Revue canadienne d'ergotherapie*, 87(2), 100-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008417419890179>
8. Sauer, A. K., Stanton, J. E., Hans, S., & Grabrucker, A. M. (2021). Autism spectrum disorders: ETIOLOGY AND PATHOLOGY. *Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.36255/exonpublications.autismspectrumdisorders.2021.etiology>
9. Smith, K. (2021, January 29). *About the sensory integration and praxis test (SIPT)*. ASI Wise & Sensory Project [Ayres Sensory Integration Education across Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England]. Retrieved March 8, 2023, from <https://sensoryproject.org/2018/03/16/about-the-sensory-integration-and-praxis-test-sip>
10. Styles, M. M. (2020). Risk factors, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of autism. *Frontiers in Bioscience-Landmark*, 25(9), 1682-1717. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2741/4873>
11. Watling, R. (2018). Tailoring Evaluations for Diverse Individuals With ASD. In R. Watling & S. L. Spitzer (Eds.), *Autism across the lifespan: A comprehensive occupational therapy Approach* (4th edition). (pp. 105-125). The American Occupational Therapy Association Press.