MELTDOWNS IN INDIVIDUALS WITH HIGH-FUNCTIONING AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

www.texasautism.com; www.ocali.org

All slides are not in the handouts

THE AUTISM PARADOX

M. LEARNING CONCEPTS, INC. (2003-2006)

It’s easy to recite an entire book, but difficult to make up a story.
It’s easy to line up toys, but difficult to stay in line.

It makes perfect sense to climb on the sofa, but little sense to sit on it.

Memorizing the presidents in order: 10 minutes. Packing a school bag: 10 hours.
Family pictures on the wall are boring; but, that speck of dust next to them, now that’s fascinating.

Talking about weather patterns: piece of cake. Talking about my day … impossible.

Ability to focus on spinning objects: timeless. Ability to focus on homework: 3 seconds.
Being called by name, can’t hear it. Some owl hooting in the distance – clear as a bell.

How to operate the remote control – zero instruction. How to button up pants – intensive instruction.

Navigating social rules – poorly skilled. Navigating from the back seat – highly skilled.
THE AUTISM PARADOX

IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO TIE THE BEHAVIORS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH HFA AND AS TO SOCIAL SKILLS AND SELF-REGULATION

TRADITIONAL TEMPER TANTRUMS” vs “MELTDOWNS
TEMPER TANTRUMS

- The child will look to see if behavior is getting a reaction
- The child can alter behavior to ensure that she does not get hurt
- The “temper tantrummer” will use a situation to his benefit
- The child has a goal and when the goal is met, the behavior returns to typical
- The child is in control

THE MELTDOWN

- The child has no involvement in the social situation
- The child is not concerned for his own safety
- The child does not look to or care if others react to his behavior during the meltdown
- Meltdowns appear to be under their own power and have a cycle
- Are not manipulation – they are the only behavior the child has to react to the situation
PHYSICAL AGGRESSION


MELTDOWN BEHAVIOR IS THE ABSENCE OF A GOOD PROGRAM!!!
BEHAVIOR BASICS

- Behavior always occurs for a reason
- Children and youth with ASD have difficulties detecting how they feel and do not know how to calm themselves down
- The ability to verbalize what they are to do and doing it are two different skills
- Behaviors are generally not on purpose

The Rage Cycle

- Rumbling
- Rage
- Recovery
THE MYTH OF CODDLING

IF OUR STUDENT DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO (A) RECOGNIZE HIS EMOTIONS, (B) MATCH EMOTIONS TO EVENTS, (C) SELF-CALM, ETC ....

WHOSE ISSUE IS IT?
IF OUR STUDENT DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO (A) RECOGNIZE HIS EMOTIONS, (B) MATCH EMOTIONS TO EVENTS, (C) SELF-CALM, ETC ….

WHOSE ISSUE IS IT?

THE STUDENT’S OR OURS?

Prevention is one of the best interventions!
THIS IS IMPORTANT!

The minute the rage cycle hits, all opportunities for learning are gone (perhaps for the rest of the day)!

Rumbling Stage

- Most important stage
- Building up to rage
- Some thinking ability still intact
- Individual children have their own patterns of “rage behavior”

Note: The role of verbalizations in escalation.
Rage Stage

- This is the lightening stage when the neurotransmitters are not working correctly.
- The child or youth may shout, swear, kick, or hit.
- He or she is clearly out of control.

RUMBLING INTERVENTIONS
1. Antiseptic bumbling
2. Proximity control
3. Signal interference
4. Support from medline
5. Redirect
6. Home base
7. Acknowledge student difficulties
8. Just walk and don’t talk
9. Self-calming

RUMBLING ADULT CURVE
1. Remain calm
2. Use a quiet voice
3. Take deep breaths
4. Prevent power struggle
5. Re-evaluate student goals
6. Be flexible – the child cannot
Recovery Stage

- The child or youth may sleep for awhile.
- He/she may apologize or be contrite.
- Withdrawal may occur; a fantasy world may be the target.
- The student may deny meltdown.
- Some do not remember what happened during the Rage Stage.

Recovery Behaviors

- Sleeping
- May deny rage behaviors
- Withdraw into fantasy
- Apologizing
- Fragile

Recovery Interventions

1. Allow to sleep, if necessary
2. Support use of relaxation techniques
3. Direct refer to the rage behavior
4. Determine a child's individual needs. Use the appropriate option:
   - Redirect to successful activity
   - Provide space
   - Help them to express their emotions
5. Check to see if child is ready to learn
6. Don't make excessive demands
7. Support with structure
8. Consider the child to be “fragile”
9. Plan non-instructional interventions
10. Keep rules consistent
11. Be responsive to rage, meltdowns, and shut downs

Myles, 2013
STUDENT CRISIS PLAN SHEET
Page 3
Rage Stage
Recovery Stage

SELF-REGULATION

- The ability to
  - Detect how you are feeling
  - Match emotions to events
  - Change level of behavior and emotion to match environment and cultural expectations

AND IS SELF-REGULATION IMPORTANT?
THE SECRET OF SCHOOL SUCCESS

"... one of several findings in the growing body of research on "self-regulation" -- people’s ability to stop, think, make a plan and control their impulses. ... it turns out that "these are really the same skills you need to do well in school" and potentially in life."  
Professor Megan McClelland  
Oregon State University

INHERENT IN ASD ARE SELF-REGULATION CHALLENGES!

WHY DO INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM BECOME STRESSED?
THEORY OF MIND

- Mindreading
- Mindblindness
- Understanding the perspective, thoughts, feelings of others
- Predicting what others will do
- Understanding what will happen next

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE NAIL
CENTRAL COHERENCE

- Seeing the forest and the trees
- Understanding the big ideas and the details
- Understanding what is important and important in any situation

When learning this information, what is important?

If you have good central coherence, you will memorize the names that match to the parts.

If you do not, you memorize the words in order.

Or memorize the colors.

Sondra
EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

Executive Function

- Organizing, prioritizing, activating
- Focusing, sustaining, and shifting attention
- Regulating alertness, sustaining effort, processing speed
- Managing frustration, modulating emotions
- Utilizing working memory and accessing/recalling
- Monitoring and self-regulation action

Adapted from Thomas E. Brown

PSEUDO-LOGIC
PSEUDO-LOGIC

• Is extremely logical, but the logic is very unique based on that student’s perspective
• Is often misunderstood
• Assumes he is right
• Does not ask questions
• Assumes his logic is the same as others
• May be perceived as argumentative

PSEUDO-LOGIC

• There are some topics you don’t discuss -- even if they are factual.
  • Spencer and his final exams

USING CONTEXT AND INTEGRATING INFORMATION

Kozier, Buny, McNerny, & students, 2007
LITERAL APPROACH TO LIFE

- People say exactly what they mean
- People mean exactly what they say
- There is no need to look for other meanings

Write the following words in alphabetical order (in the order they come in the alphabet):

1. cat
2. cow
3. dog
4. elephant
5. fox
6. pig
Dear Abie,

The other day I set off for work, leaving my husband in the house watching the TV. I hadn’t gone more than a mile when my engine conked out and the car shuddered to a halt. I walked back home, only to find my husband making love to our neighbor.
Dr Abe,

Th othr da I set off for wrk, lving my hsbn in the hse waing the TV. I hdn’t gone more than a mile when my engn cnked out and the car shuderd to a halt. I wlked back home, only to find my hsbn mkng love to our nebor.

TIPS TO ENHANCE INTERACTIONS WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD
WWW.OCALI.ORG

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<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>&quot;Give Me Some Space&quot;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensory sensitivities can cause individuals to become extremely anxious. Touch sensitivities or needs can become very overwhelming. IDEAS:</td>
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<td>• Provide a personal area where the person can feel safe and ready himself for interaction.</td>
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<td>• Attempt to stay back (more than an arm’s length away). Move slowly into a person’s personal space.</td>
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<td>• Ask someone for permission to touch, do not assume it is OK.</td>
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<td>• Let the person choose where they want to sit, stand or pace.</td>
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### Tip #2

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<tr>
<th>&quot;Turn Down the Noise and Lights&quot;</th>
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<td>Sensory sensitivities can extend to how people hear the sounds in their environment and how lights or colors affect them. It can sometimes be so overwhelming that a person cannot move or so painful that he may do everything he can to escape. IDEAS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Try to eliminate multiple sounds within an environment</td>
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<td>• Allow the use of headphones at work or in the community</td>
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<td>• Change lighting by turning off lights or only use lamps. Sometimes reducing even just one stressor can help reduce anxiety and stress</td>
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### Tip #3

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<th>&quot;Listen or Look for the Message Behind the Behavior&quot;</th>
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<td>“Behavior is Communication” It is true! When you see someone acting differently or in a way that is confusing, try to understand that they may be communicating messages such as fear, anxiety, pain, confusion, happiness, anger, hunger or many other messages. IDEAS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consider the possible “hidden message” in the behavior before you respond</td>
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<td>• Respond with a comforting word, a choice or possibly change what you are doing (see Tip 6)</td>
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### Tip #4

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<th>&quot;Say What You Mean: Communicate Your Message Clearly&quot;</th>
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<td>Making a situation predictable can go a long way to help someone feel calm and to allow someone to successfully participate. Some people need specific and detailed information of what will happen, when it may happen, or why it will happen. IDEAS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Communicate clearly and concisely. Evaluate your communication system to ensure your message is accurate and understood.</td>
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<td>• Be concrete and &quot;to the point&quot;.</td>
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<td>• Use words or phrases that have meaning to the individual. For example, someone may not have been exposed to words like “dressing change”, “vent signs”, “contempt of court” or “personal items”. Think about clear descriptive language and check for understanding before moving on.</td>
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<td>TIP</td>
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<th>TIP</th>
<th>&quot;Change Your Approach&quot;</th>
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<td>Look inward. Look at yourself. How can you change your actions or reactions? How can you change your voice or words? IDEAS:</td>
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<td>• Can you whisper or slow your words</td>
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<td>• Would singing be helpful?</td>
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<td>• Perhaps stop talking for a period of time</td>
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<td>• Stop moving and have still hands</td>
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<td>• Breathe slowly. Demonstrate calmness. Smile. Wait.</td>
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<td>Change what you do and observe how this can change what others do.</td>
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<th>TIP</th>
<th>&quot;Don’t Ask Me Why!&quot;</th>
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<td>Why, WHY, WHY? What if a person does not know why? Or what if they cannot communicate the &quot;why&quot;? Continually asking questions, especially the “why” question, can cause a person great anxiety. IDEAS:</td>
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<td>• Provide information about the situation instead of asking for information (remember to use pictures and written words to help).</td>
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<td>• Give background information, ask questions that offer a choice instead of being open-ended. This pulls someone gently into the interaction rather than putting him in the position of needing to completely develop and un Fla articulate an answer.</td>
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<td>• Example: Instead of, “Why are you here?” one might ask, “Are you here because you have pain or are you sick? If the response is “yes” or “pain”, the follow up can be, “Point to where you hurt” or “Tell me where you hurt” or “Show me where you hurt”</td>
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**TIP #6**

*Give Me Choices*

Choice offers control, having control can reduce anxiety and stress. IDEAS:

- Examples of choices that can be offered include: what a person can do, in what order they do things, who can participate, when to take a break, what to eat, or what to wear. These are just a few examples of ways to add choice in any activity.
- Once you start making the "choice option" a part of your typical interaction, it is surprising how easily and naturally it happens.

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**TIP #6**

*Be Patient*

Patience communicates respect and caring for a person. You are telling someone they are worth your time and attention. Give people time to be ready and time to respond. IDEAS:

- Make a statement or ask a question and wait.
- Count in your head and wait 5-10 seconds.
- Accept when someone attempts to follow your directions or offers any response. An attempt is not a refusal. Treat it as a success.
- A refusal means the person may not be ready.
- Avoid rushing and give time. Successfully sharing a quiet calm moment with someone is a place to begin.

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HAVE FUN
HAVE FUN

- Enjoy the different ways in which our students see the world
- Celebrate their successes
- Motivate

HOW DO YOU KEEP THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE DAILY ROUTINE SO THAT HE CAN LEARN THESE STRATEGIES?
The ability to learn decreases as stress increases.