Social Communication and Autism Spectrum Disorder: Considerations for Assessment and Intervention

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Disclosure

• The presenter has no financial relationship to this program.
Welcome

• Introduce myself
• Learn a little bit about the audience
  • Background/current position
  • Familiarity with components of social communication
Objectives

At the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify social behaviors or skills that may be impacted by ASD
2. Recognize strategies to measure social communication behaviors
3. Discuss how to use information from social skill assessments to determine appropriate intervention strategies
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) Diagnostic Criteria

• Deficits in social communication and social interaction (3)
  • Social approach/interaction
  • Nonverbal communication
  • Relationships

• Presence of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (2)
  • Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, objects, speech
  • Routines
  • Restricted interests
  • Sensory*
Additional DSM-5 Criteria

• Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (might not manifest or be noted until later)

• Symptoms cause significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning

• Disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay (note comorbid diagnosis)
What is Social Communication?

• Definition
  • “The intersection of language and social behaviors observed during peer interactions…the verbal and nonverbal behaviors children display as they approach peers, maintain conversations, and resolve conflicts during peer interactions” (Timler, Olswang, & Coggins, 2005)

• Distinction from language
  • Modality
  • Purposes
    • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JmA2CIUvUY
What does Social Communication Look Like?

• How and why we communicate:
  • Importance of nonverbal behavior
  • Coordinating verbal and nonverbal

• Pragmatics

• Relationship building
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Joint Attention
  • What does it look like?
  • When does it emerge?
  • Initiations and responses
    • 3 point gaze
    • Following pointing or direction of face

• Purpose
  • Social referencing

• [Link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ab4vLMMAbY)
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Joint Attention
  • How can it be different in children with ASD?
  • Implications for learning
  • Implications for social interaction
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Play
  • Developmental progression: increasingly symbolic and social
    • Unoccupied
    • Solitary
    • Onlooker
    • Parallel
    • Associative
    • Cooperative
  • [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0eoXJM9uB4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0eoXJM9uB4)
  • Age range in typically developing children is 2-5 years old
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Difficulties with play often seen in children with autism
  • Limited spontaneous imaginative play
  • Rigidity regarding play routines
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Initiations and responses
  • Can include verbal or motor behavior
  • Usually looking at 3 second intervals
  • Sometimes includes quality of behavior
    • Importance of context
    • Positive or negative/prosocial or agonistic
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Initiations and responses
  • How might these look different for an individual with ASD?
    • Quality
    • Content
  • Caution when using this as a sole measure of social communication
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

- Theory of Mind
  - Attributing mental states to self and others
  - Understanding differentiation between self and others
  - Usually develops between ages 3 and 4
  - Often assessed by presenting scenarios and asking the child about characters’ knowledge or perspective
    - Ex: False Belief Tasks
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41jSdOQQpv0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41jSdOQQpv0)
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Theory of Mind
  • How might this ability be impacted in individuals with ASD?
  • Language as a mediating factor
  • Implications for interactions
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Social Cognition
  • Social information processing
  • Ability to use and interpret cues from social environment
  • Ability to respond appropriately
  • Understanding of social roles
  • Assessment through structured tasks
Potential Social Communication Difficulties for Individuals with ASD

• Social Cognition
  • Ways that this might be challenging for an individual with ASD
  • Implications for learning
  • Implications for social interaction
Assessment of Social Communication

• Importance of social validity
  • Needs to be meaningful for stakeholders
• Assessment for what?
• Gathering information from caregivers
Assessment Strategies

- Questionnaires
  - Utility
  - Benefits and limitations
  - Commonly used measures include:
    - *Social Responsiveness Scale, 2nd Edition (SRS-2)*
    - *Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)*
    - *Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, 2nd Edition (Vineland-II)*
    - *Children's Communication Checklist, 2nd Edition (CCC-2)*
Assessment Strategies

• Tracking behaviors
  • Importance of operational definitions
  • Decisions about where/when to measure
  • Decisions about WHAT to measure
Assessment Strategies

• Direct assessment
  • Theory of mind tasks
  • Published assessments
    • Social Language Development Test (SLDT)
    • Test of Pragmatic Language, 2nd Edition (TOPL-2)
    • Test of Problem Solving, 2nd Edition or 3rd Edition (TOPS)
    • Dynamic Assessment
Assessment Strategies

• Rubrics
  • Importance of operational definitions for behavior and levels
  • Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept/Target</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting Eye Gaze</td>
<td>Child is able to accurately identify what a character is looking at in a video clip when prompted (e.g., “What is he looking at?” in 0-50% of trials)</td>
<td>Child is able to accurately identify what a character is looking at when prompted in 50-100% of trials</td>
<td>Child is able to accurately identify BOTH what a character is looking at and what the character might be thinking in 0-50% of trials</td>
<td>Child is able to accurately identify BOTH what a character is looking at and what the character might be thinking in 50-100% of trials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linking Assessment to Intervention

• Identifying appropriate goals
  • Developmental considerations
  • Meaningful changes
    • Talk to stakeholders!
Linking Assessment to Intervention

• Progress Monitoring
  • Some questionnaires are sensitive to change
  • Behavioral measurement strategies
    • Frequency
    • Duration
    • Latency
  • Use of rubrics
Resources

Resources