Helping Students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder/ Asperger Syndrome to Adapt in Mainstream Secondary Schools

2007.04.30

MS. ANN CHEN

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POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION LTD.
Content and Schedule

9:00 - 12:00 Understanding the adolescents with ASD and their difficulties in Secondary School life

12:00 – 1:00 LUNCH

1:00 - 2:45 Parent interview

3:00 – 4:00 Intervention Strategies

4:00 – 4:50 Case discussion & Questions

4:50 – 5:00 HKSWA round up

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WHO IS WHO?

Autistic

Neurotypical

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WHO IS WHO?

Autistic

Neurotypical

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Characteristics of Secondary School Life

- Mobile and flexible in routine and environment
- Independence in life skills
- Projects management
- A lot of writings: essay, long questions, reports
- A lot of group work

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Characteristics of Secondary School Life

- Stressed on human relationships
- Romance and sex roles
- Learning are more integrated, abstract and required more self-reflection recognizing taking and language expression
- Multiple roles: class members, house members, club members
- Need to make a lot of choices
Profile of AS students

Examples:

![Diagram showing age level and different categories such as exp lang, recp lang, social, domestic, academic, math, fine, gross, with '13 yrs old' indicating age level of 13.]
Developmental Difficulties:

- **Self Development**: usually at pre-school level
- **Social Communication Development**: usually at pre-school level
- **Motor Planning**: pre-school or early primary years
- **Language**: more problems in receptive and pragmatic use of language, verbal language usually ranged from pre-school years to early primary school years
ASD Special characteristics:

- Poor awareness and in-charge of own body and senses
- Different awareness and expression of own emotions
- Difficulties in theory of mind: own and others’ mind
- Limited/ narrowed awareness of Time and Space

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ASD Special characteristics:

- Disconnection between self and human heart, between self and external environment. (external world is a video to me)
- Literality
- Non-social priorities
- Thinking in closed pictures, non-generalized learning
- Failed to predict outcomes
Common Psychological Needs of AS and Normal students

- Physiological needs: safety, enough food and clothes
- Unconditional love, acceptance and respect
- Release of Physical Energy
- Having companions
- Sex education
Psychological Needs of Autistic and Neurotypical teenagers: the difference

Neurotypical
- Self and Group Identity
- Expressing own opinions and in-charge own decisions
- Challenging limits

Autistic
- Security
- freedom
- Having playmates
- Independence in life skills
- Self searching: what do I like, dislike, want, what I am doing..?
- Enjoyment and success in tasks

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Issues in School Life:

- Social difficulties, does not understand relationship
- Cannot hear long instructions
- Can’t recognize people
- Did not understand feedback
- Clumsiness
Issues in School Life:

- Slow working speed
- Difficulties in planning and organization
- Difficulties in expressing self (verbally, emotionally, and logically)
- Irrelevant ideas
Problems in Social Relationship:

- Being bullied or teased
- Too seeking or avoiding in friendship
- Don’t know how to judge the closeness in friendship
- How to make two-way interaction or discussion or daily conversations
Self care difficulties:

- Poor or awkward presentation
- Very messy
- Lost or broke own belongings
- Untidy and dirty
- Pumping into others
- Slow speed
Schoolwork difficulties:

- Fail to note down the homework requirements
- Miss deadlines
- Not understand the requirements
- Messy in handwriting
- Forget to hand-in assignments
- Lost books
- Excluded from project team
- Fail to do project or essay writing
Relationship with Teachers

- High expectation on teachers
- Obedient
- All or none relationship
- Real vs. pretend
- Very Very upset if they noted that the teachers behaved negatively and could not fulfill their expected roles

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Response to stress

- **Physically Escape:**
  - e.g. hiding up, closing eyes, shutting up his ears

- **Psychological Escape:**
  - e.g. Going back to own internal fantasy world, or fixations or behavior pattern e.g. singing

- **Regression:** behaving like a small child

- **Mannerisms**
Compensatory and Adjustment Strategies to Being Different (Attwood, 2007)

- Self blame and depression
- Escape into imagination
- Denial and arrogance
- Imitation of other children and characteristics
Parent interview:

Mrs. So, a mother of a 14 year old, high functioning autism boy

His son is now studying Form 2 in a local private co-ed school using the IB curriculum.
Intervention Strategies:

- Prevention work
- Parent work
- Emotion outburst management
- Incidence investigation
- Teasing and Bullying
- Peer programming
- Social Skills training
- Study Skills training
- Self care skills
- Provision of physical activities
Prevention work:

- Get to know the student comprehensively and deeply
  - get a report on his developmental strengths and weaknesses
  - assess his functions in social-communication, functions

- Provide the student information about the school/activities that he is going to join:
  - teachers, classmates, classrooms location and map, classmates, rules and regulations, schedules and hidden rules.
Parents Work:

- Arrange support network so that parents can ring to other parents/students to seek help for information when in need.
- Don’t push for diagnostic assessment
- Use the term developmental difference/Social and Cognitive and Motor Difficulties
- Check clearly on parents’ view on having the autistic/Asperger diagnosis. What is their present attitude towards their Autistic child?
Meltdowns Management

- Clear the environment, keep everybody safe
- Keep quiet
- Communicate in writing: guide him what next to do, Don’t ask “why”
- Low and slow
- Don’t threaten the child. “If you don’t..., I’ll...”
Incidence Investigation:

- Listen
- Ask concrete and close type questions
- Start with when and where and with whom
- Draw out the scenario/ use comic strip conversations
- Guide the student to describe the actions of different persons one by one: what others did, and then his/her action response.
Incidence Investigation:

- Ask straightly what he/she thought and felt when he/she responded, instead of asking why he/she did it.
- Seek information from the student individually.
- Be patience! Trust the student!
Teasing and Bullying:

- Teach the student where, with whom and how to seek help
- Select a guardian who has high social status to protect the student
- Help the target to “hide” in a group of students.
- Be prompt, fair and straight in handling bullying
- Teach the student how to protect himself, how to be assertive and express himself honestly
- Teach the child how to identify what is teasing/bullying
Support from Counselor/teachers

- Be the best friend or a mentor to the student, or act as a life coach
- Give a lot of time to listen to his frustration
- Provide him a lot of concrete, explicit, action-based feedback
- Focus on self awareness development: start from pre-school levels
- Teach him emotional identifications, release and management
Support from Counselor/ teachers

- Explain to him about the moral rules and human nature. Give him reasons how things happen.
- Help him to solve daily problems
- Develop his interests and talents
- Provide written instructions
Social - Communication training

- Provide structured and skill based training
- Do it individually or in small group of two-four.
- Teach the skills in reading personal space, non-verbal body language, listen and look, what not to say.....etc
- Teach the relationship between intentions, thinking, feelings and actions and teach the vocabularies in reporting
Social - Communication training

- Use thermometer as emotions reader
- Always explain clearly the logic, and practice the skills repeatedly in different scenarios
- Ensure after-school social experiences are voluntary
Structured Sex/Romance
Relationship education

- Teach the physical difference in boys and girls.
- Gives rules
- State clearly which and where are the sensitive parts of the body.
- Teach the related vocabularies
- Teach him identify social cues
Social/Peer Support

- Provide him a mentor, an adult/senior peer/peer that he/she can trust and ask for help
- Help to introduce different social partners: project partners, play partners, sports partners…. Only if needed by the ASD student
- Give some training to the peer helpers so that they know how to help
Learning skills training:

- Writing skills
- Text books presentation
- Relationship between subjects, meaning of doing homework/ classwork
- Read skills for test/exercise papers
- Questions explanation: what are being expected in different format of questions
- Time management and decision making in timed tests
- Organization skills and problem solving skills e.g. use checklist