Children with Autism
Syllabus

Introduction & Overview

Expert – Dr. Robert Nickel, developmental pediatrician, authority on autism
Panel of foster, adopt, and kinship care providers

This course provides information on the characteristic behaviors of children with autism spectrum disorders; describes general recommendations for treatment; explores common medical problems experienced by children with ASDs; and lists behavioral strategies that parents can use with children with autism.

What is Autism?

Children with autism have impairments in:

- Communication
- Social skills
- Play
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Asperger syndrome

How do Kids Get Autism?

The role of genetics and environmental influence. Other theories.

- Causes of Autism (reproducible handout)
- Resources for Parents (reproducible handout)

Garrett: Autism and Developmental Delay

In-depth look at the case of a 3-year-old foster boy who is developmentally delayed and autistic.

- Picture schedules to encourage communication
- Floor time to model communication
- Treatments and Interventions (reproducible handout)
Diego: Applied Behavior Analysis

Brief discussion of Applied Behavior Analysis through the case study of Diego.

- Systematic modeling of behaviors
- Redirection and positive reinforcement
- Applied Behavior Analysis: ABA (reproducible handout)

Antonio: Functional Behavior Assessment

The Functional Behavior Assessment as a tool for understanding the motivation behind behaviors.

- Functional Assessment (reproducible handout)
- What is the root cause of the behavior
- School staff will use the assessment to understand the best response to a behavior
- Parents can use FA at home

Lamar: Asperger Syndrome

Examination of the symptoms of Asperger.

Maya: Social Stories & Sensory Diets

Explanation of Social Stories, which help ASD children practice positive social behaviors.

- Written for a child
- Useful for parents and teachers
- Help teach appropriate behaviors

Sensory Diets is the phrase used for making changes at home to accommodate a child’s intolerance of certain sounds or textures

Medication and Children with Autism

Medication issues touched on in this section:

- Don’t treat the core issues
- May lessen symptoms
- Results vary by individual
- All medications have side effects
- Much research happening on medication and Autism
- Medication (reproducible handout)
Gastrointestinal Disorders; Seizure Disorders; Sleep Disorders; Dietary Issues; Complimentary and Alternative Therapies

Brief sections, many with reproducible handouts, on medical conditions common to children with ASDs

Next Steps

Resources and supports.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD
- Felt to be common in children with autism
- Pain from stomach acid irritating the esophagus
- An acid blocker may be prescribed

Seizure disorder
- Occur in about 1 or 2 in 10 children with autism
- Start in young children or during adolescence
- Can be any seizure type
- grand mal seizures
  - both arms and legs jerk rhythmically
- brief seizures
  - the child just drops abruptly

Sleep disorders
- Melatonin at bedtime
- “Sleep hygiene”:
  - going to bed at the same time
  - having the same bedtime routine
  - going to sleep in own bed and bedroom
  - no TV, computer or active play
  - reading, preparing for bed, and relaxing

Nutritional deficits
- A restricted diet is a common problem in children with autism
- Medical condition like GERD
  - anticipate the pain from the reflux
• Sensory issues
  ○ aversion to how food feels
• Compulsive behaviors
  ○ rigidness
• If it interferes with good nutritional health
  ○ discuss with your child’s doctor
  ○ a small dose of an SSRI may be helpful

Complementary and alternative therapies
• Complimentary
  ○ used in addition to the traditional treatments
• Alternative
  ○ used in place of the traditional treatments
• Also called “biomedical” and “dietary” treatments
• A word of caution
  ○ no definitive research information
• Special diets
  ○ may make a child more at risk for nutritional deficits
• Discuss with your child’s physician and caseworker before you begin
• If choose to try an alternative therapy
  ○ try one thing at a time
  ○ determine if it works or not

If you think your child might have autism
• Learn more about the characteristic behaviors of children with autism
• Talk to your primary care physician
  ○ get a referral for evaluation
  ○ Ask for a referral to Early Intervention
• Seek out parent advocacy groups
  ○ the Autism Society of America
  ○ other parents in your community
• Take care of yourselves
  ○ Join a support group
  ○ seek respite services if you need them