

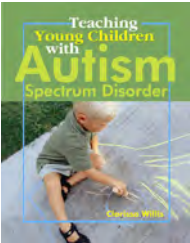
Teaching Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder In the Preschool Classroom-Strategies that Work!

Clarissa Willis
AUTHOR, CONSULTANT, EDUCATOR

• Clarissa@clarissawillis.com
• <https://clarissawillis.com/>

1

Meet Clarissa Willis



2

What is autism?

- Complex biological disorder
- Chronic
- Developmental: Usually occurs before age 3*
- Umbrella definition



A child can be reliably identified as having ASD by 24 months of age; however, the average age of diagnosis of ASD in the United States is approximately 4½ years old.
(CDC, 2021)

3

Terms

- Autism
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Neurodivergent
- Asperger's Syndrome



The National Professional Development Center

on Autism Spectrum Disorder

<https://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/#content>



The IRIS Center. (2014). *Autism spectrum disorder: An overview for educators*. Retrieved from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/asd1/>



AFIRM

Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/>

4

Autism Spectrum Disorder

- Autism is considered to be a spectrum disorder because the characteristics range in severity and type.
- They can be mild, such as in the case of some children with high intelligence or quite severe.



5

Spectrum

- What is a spectrum?
- What does it depend on?
- What makes it a spectrum?



“Working with a child with ASD is not so much finding the ‘treasure’ at the end of the rainbow as it is finding the nuggets along the way.”

6

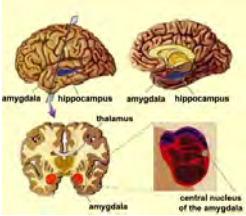
2

Diagnosis

Medical Diagnosis	Educational Determination
- Made by a licensed physician or psychologist - Usually based on the criteria listed in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders</i> (DSM-5) - Diagnosis: autism spectrum disorder	- Made by a multidisciplinary school team - Based on the regulations governing Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA '04) - Required to access educational services - Eligibility determination: autism

7

A research moment

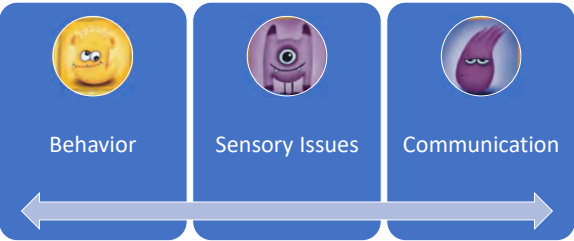


Amara D., Bauman M., and Schumann C. (2023). The amygdala and autism. *Genes, Brain, and Behaviour* 2(5) 295-302

“what does seem rather autism-specific is the finding of deficits or anomalies in the limbic system, largely the temporal and frontal cortices and the amygdala, with the latter known to play a major role in emotional arousal and in attributing significance to environmental events.”

8

The Big Three



Behavior Sensory Issues Communication

9

Behavior

Literal thinking

Hand-flapping or hand-wringing (self-stimulation or self-modulation)

Angry outbursts

Lack of self-regulation skills

Adherence to strict routines

Time to calm down (NOT TIME OUT)

After that day, Sam handed me a piece of paper with his name and phone number. I didn't have a folder for phone numbers. I decided because he gave it to me after we did math, and since it has numbers on it, the math folder was the best place to put it.



10

Points to Keep in Mind

Some children who engage in non-socially motivated challenging behaviors could also be taught functional communicative alternatives.

It is essential to determine the function of the challenging behavior before attempting to teach a child an efficient communicative replacement.

If the teacher chooses to teach a communicative replacement, they must ensure that the communicative replacement serves the same function as the challenging behavior.

11

Nothing is free!

Children must ask or communicate what they want and need

You are not now nor will you ever be a GAME SHOW HOST!



12



What Is Meant by Challenging Behaviors?

“Challenging behaviors (or problem behaviors) result in self-injury, injury to others, cause damage to the physical environment and/or interfere with the acquisition of new skills, and/or socially isolate the learner”

(Doss & Reichle, 1991).

13

Traditional Strategies: *“You Act Therefore I React!”*

- Reinforcing alternative behaviors
- Extinction
- Time out
- Over-correction
- Satiation
- Punishment



14

Antecedent Strategies:



- **Teacher** controls the opportunity not the child or the behavior.
- Less overall disruption and chaos.
- Education: New skills may be acquired in the absence of the frazzle that surrounds challenging behavior.
- Opportunities may be created that interrupt anticipatory chains associated with challenging behavior.

15

Definition of
Setting Event

“Conditions that occur concurrent with problem behaviors or are more distant in time and increase the probability that challenging behavior will occur” –
(Bijou & Baer, 1961; Wahler & Fox, 1981)



16

Setting Events



- Staff changes
- Medication change
- Slept more/fewer hours than usual
- Showed symptoms of illness
- Demand situations increased

- Chaotic environment
- Surprise visits
- Was agressed upon by a peer
- Temperature of environment too hot/cold
- Had to wait a long time for something desired

17

Two Types of Intervention Procedures....

- Those designed to honor the function of the challenging behavior by teaching a communicative replacement.
- Those that are designed to enhance self-regulatory skills and **DO NOT HONOR** the function of a challenging behavior.



18

Social Interaction

- Social interactions with other people, both physical (such as hugging or holding) and verbal (such as having a conversation).
- Children with ASDs do not interact with other people the way most children or they may not be in other people at all.
- Children with ASDs may make eye contact and want to be alone.



19

Continued.....



- They may have trouble understanding other people's feelings or talking about their own feelings.
- A child with an ASD may not like to be held or cuddled and may not form the usual attachments or bonds to other people.

20

Communication

40 to 50% of children with ASD are non-verbal

Effective communication is about sending/receiving messages

Reason or function of communication

Initiation is more likely a result of a strong desire/need

Sign language will not impede verbal communication

The desire to be alone is a strong motivator

“Can I eat lunch with you?” the new kid asked.

I continued to eat ignoring the voice. What was I supposed to say? I forgot what I was supposed to say when someone asked a question.

“Can I eat here?” he said a little louder.



21

Deciding When to Use a Communicative Replacement

• When a teacher chooses to replace the challenging behavior with a communicative alternative, there must be general agreement that the function of the behavior was acceptable but the form used to achieve the outcome is unacceptable.

• For example,



22

About autism by a person with autism....

Autistic children don't deserve to be molded into someone they are not. They deserve to learn and grow, and feel comfortable about themselves. Their worlds can expand to include new experiences, and they can become teachers, opening others to their viewpoints.

23

Tools that can be used to teach/learn about autism:

• Autobiographies: reading and writing (e.g., books, portfolios)

• Having conversations about autism, giving students information, asking students to provide information

• Giving students opportunities to educate classmates about autism

• Asking students with labels to create educational products for teachers/students (videotapes, tip sheets)

24

8

Build From Strengths

- Plan the schedule in reverse
- Avoid using favorite activities as rewards...instead use them as tools for including the student
- Don't yank a student's "cathedral" away!

25

Social Secrets

- You can call the teacher names but only in private.
- When people say "How are you?" in the hallway, they don't really want to know. Just say "Fine."
- If you need a break, you can say, "May I use the bathroom?" You can do this even if you don't need to use the bathroom.

26

Aspects of Communication

Communication	Definition	Example
Form	A way to communicate	Crying, talking, gestures, sign language, pointing to picture cards
Function	A reason to communicate	Hungry, want something, need something or someone, need attention
Content	Something to communicate about	The child needs experiences and opportunities to explore, so that he will have something to communicate about

27

2. Going to the movies

- *Going to the movies* means that when a child repeats a phrase from a movie or television show the teacher tries to identify if the child is using that phrase to communicate a message.
- Once the teacher has figured out what the phrase means to the child, she can make a key for others to follow. For example, Dusty, uses the phrase, "Beam me up Scotty!" when he is frightened because, to him, it means, "I'm scared and don't understand what to do next."

28

Whisper

- Finally, the work of Gail Gillingham has suggested that some children with echolalia respond better when the person who is talking with them whispers.
- The idea is that the listener becomes occupied with trying to hear the speaker and doesn't respond with echolalia.

29

Why Do Children With Autism Have So Much Trouble Communicating?

- Effective communication is more than just sending and receiving messages.
- It requires that one person, either the sender or the receiver of the message, interact with the other person.
- Actually, in order for the interaction to be successful, the other person must reciprocate in some way.

30

A child will communicate when

- he is able to attend to what is being said.
- he is able to understand what is said
- he experiences the responsiveness of others to his attempts at communication.
- he has a reason to communicate.
- He is motivated.
- Look for reasons why he might or might not communicate.
- Learn to recognize that children with autism do not communicate in the same way as their peers.

31

Stages of Communication

1. "It's all about me" – Egocentric Stage
2. "I want it" – Requesting Stage
3. Actions and reactions – Emerging Communication Stage
4. Two-way street – Reciprocal Communication Stage

32

- High Tech techniques/devices with voice output that provide students with a way to speak intelligibly. These approaches give the student the opportunity to use pictures, words, or letters to produce
 - a single message,



"Please, turn on the fan."

33

Sensory Processing Issues

All children with ASD have sensory processing issues

All children with SPD do not have ASD

Sensory Seeker vs Sensory Avoiders

Strategies must include a sensory processing component

Sensory processing issues vary

Think about sensory sensitive ways to change the environment



34

Sensory Integration

• Organization of sensation for use

• Organizing information coming in from the senses: visual, tactile, auditory, vestibular, and proprioceptive to make an adaptive response.



35

Sensory Integration

• Organization of sensation for use

• Organizing information coming in from the senses: visual, tactile, auditory, vestibular and proprioceptive to make an adaptive response.



36

Characteristics of Children with SPD

1. Overly sensitive to touch, movement, sights or sounds:

• Sensory Modulation Dysfunction with Hyperresponsive Behaviors

2. Underreactive to sensory stimulation:

• SMD with Hyporesponsive Behaviors

37

Characteristics of Children with SPD

3. Activity level that is unusually high or low

4. Coordination problems:

• gross motor

• fine motor

38

Characteristics of Children with SPD

5. Delays in speech, language, motor skills, or academic achievement.

6. Poor organization of behavior

7. Poor self-concept

39

Small group (Circle time or circular time!)

- Some children circle the perimeter of the room.
- Some children hide! You want to hide too!
- Children with sensory integration issues are into sensory overload.
- Rather than learn they react by “fleeing” either emotionally or physically from the activity
- Or they “fight” by reacting strongly with negative or inappropriate behaviors.

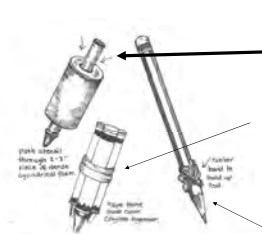
40

Calmers and Organizers

- Surviving Sitting: Successful Circle Time
- Concentration Station Lane
- Wearable Calmers:Dress for Sensory Success!
- Visual Calmers

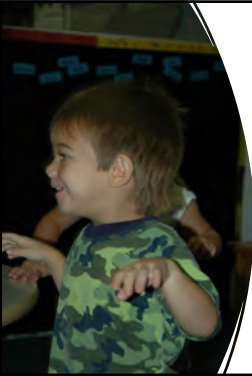
41

Built up tool handles



1. Foam hair rollers like you use to perm hair.
2. Band crayons together
3. Use rubber bands to make an object more useable.

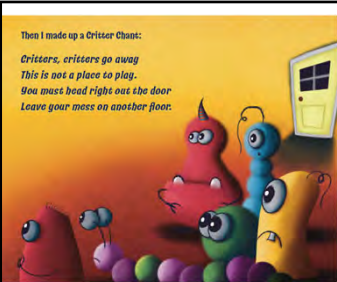
42



Strategy One

Pairing hand-flapping with a preferred activity
Gentle reduction of time spent
Ultimate reduction in hand-flapping

43



Then I made up a Critter Chant:
*Critters, critters go away
This is not a place to play.
You must head right out the door
Leave your mess on another floor.*

Strategy 2-Rhymes

When someone tries to bully you
Don't stand there until it's through
Find a teacher or adult friend,
They can make the teasing end!
Defend yourself with what you say,
Then turn your back and walk away.

44

Strategy 3 Making New Friends

- **Objective:** The child learns how to meet new people.
- **Materials needed:** Cardstock or heavy paper; pencils, markers, or a picture meaning stop; a picture of the child; and clear contact paper or laminating machine.
- **When to use this strategy:** This strategy can be used to encourage the child to make a new friend.

45

What to do? (Strategy)



Step 1: Make a cue card with two cues Have one for the child's name and one to remind him to wait for the other person to respond. Laminiate the cue card, if possible.

Step 2: Explain to the child that the cue card will help him know what to do when he meets someone new.

46



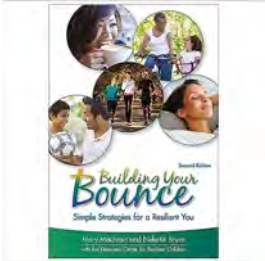
Challenges-

- What not to do-
 - Punish the child
 - Use too many words children don't understand-
 - Negative responses
 - Let yourself get overwhelmed

47

Get Support

- Building your own bounce
- Routines are comforting



48
