

Social Communication Challenges in School-Aged Children with ASD: What do they look like and how can we help?



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A black and white photograph showing several hands of different skin tones stacked on top of each other, symbolizing unity and support.

Social Communication Challenges in School-Aged Children with ASD: Objectives

- Define social communication
- Identify social communication difficulties in children with ASD
- Understand underlying deficits that contribute to social communication difficulties
- Discuss strategies to support children with social communication difficulties.





What is Social Communication?

Social communication refers to the use of language to communicate and interact with others. It consists of **what** we say and **how** we say it and its appropriateness to the given situation.





What are the components of Social Communication?

- Social Context- social roles, peer group, familiar adult, unfamiliar adult, conflict situation, cooperative play, group activity
- Social Cognition-Theory of Mind (ToM), executive functioning.
 - ToM understand that other people have their own beliefs, attitudes, emotions, thoughts, and points of view
 - Presupposition-assumption of mutually shared knowledge
- Language Pragmatics-Verbal and Nonverbal
- Receptive and Expressive Language





What is Autism Spectrum Disorder? DSMV Criteria

- A. Persistent deficits in **social communication** and social interactions
- B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
- C. Symptoms present in early developmental period
- D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- E. Symptoms not better explained by ID or global developmental delay.



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Diagnostic Criteria of ASD- A: Deficits in social communication and social interactions

1. Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity (ToM) ranging from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
2. Deficits in nonverbal behaviors- poorly modulated eye contact, body language, space boundaries, use & understanding of gestures and facial expressions, intonation.

❖ **Two thirds of communication is nonverbal!**





Diagnostic Criteria of ASD- A: Deficits in social communication and social interactions

3. Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.





Diagnostic Criteria of ASD- B: Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior or interests

1. Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, repetitive use of objects (lining up toys, flipping/banging objects, carrying objects in hands, grouping objects by color, idiosyncratic speech, echolalia)
2. Insistence on sameness-inflexible, adherence to routines, ritualized behaviors or speech, difficulty with transitions, changes, rigid thinking, rule followers.
3. Restricted and fixated interests- preoccupation with unusual objects or topics.



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Co-occurring Conditions: Contribute to Social communication deficits

- **Language Delay/Disorder**
 - Inability to communicate at same level as peers
 - Difficulty understanding/comprehending information, peer language, higher level language
- **ADHD**
 - Invading personal boundaries
 - Missing social nonverbal cues
 - Missing information
 - Impulsive and/or emotional reactions-blaming, overreacting



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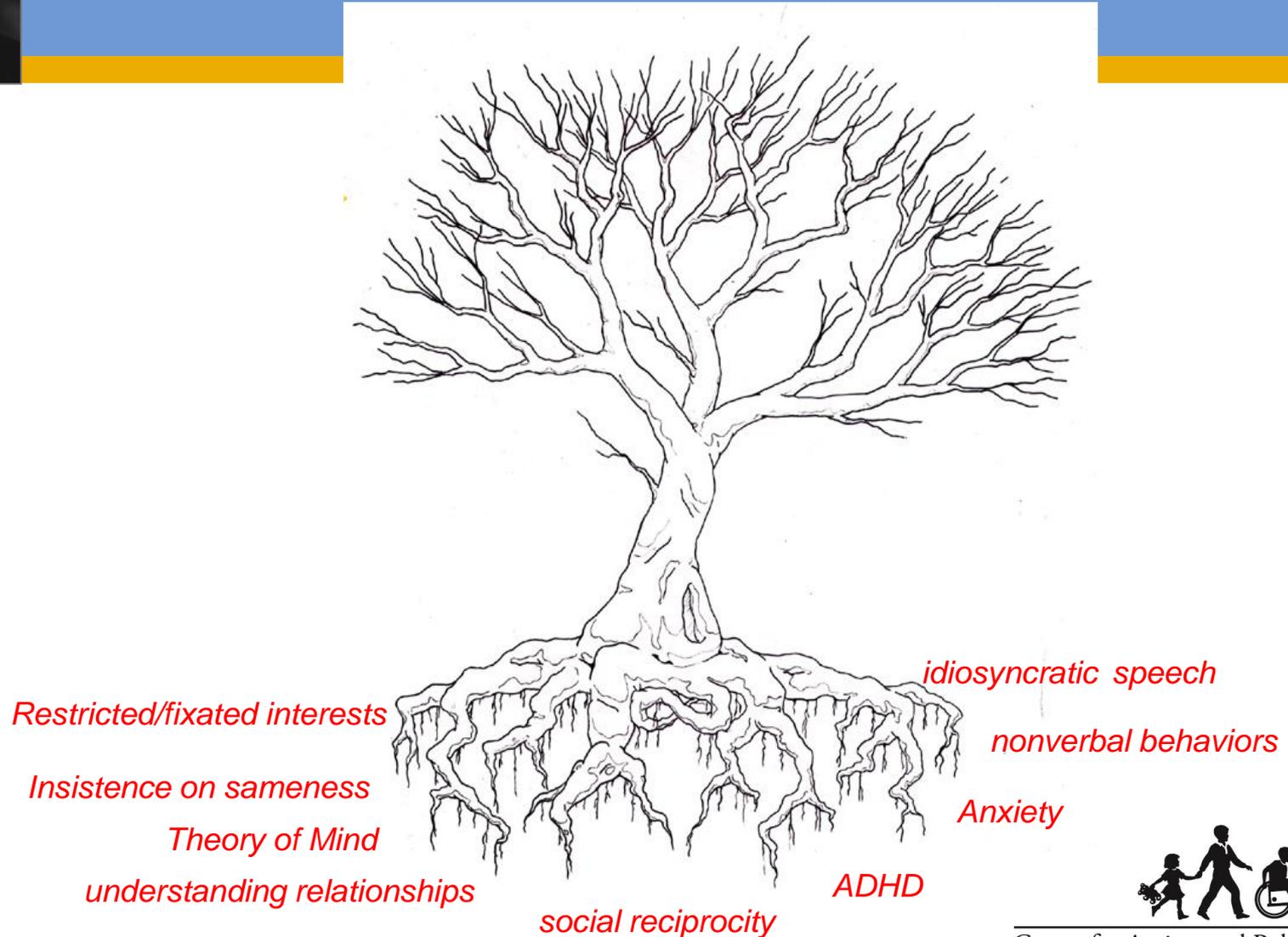
Co-occurring Conditions: Contribute to Social communication deficits

- Executive Functioning
 - Slow processing- not able to keep up with language input
 - Memory deficits-not able to keep information in short term memory to reason, problem solve, negotiate, handle conflict
 - Difficulty organizing information- trouble formulating and expressing ideas.
 - Word/phrase repetitions, reformulating sentences, pausing, use of fillers
- Intellectual Disability- Cognitive deficits
- Anxiety
- Mood disorders





Social Communication



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Social Communication Challenges:

- Difficulty expressing intent appropriately-Make inappropriate comments, may appear rude or disrespectful
- Overly candid- may share information or ask questions that are overly personal
- May give redundant, irrelevant, or overly detailed information (e.g., dates, times, make of cars)
- Overly talkative and do not allow others opportunity to talk. May give “monologues”, interrupt others, perseverate on their topic of interest





Social Communication Challenges

- Difficult to engage in back and forth conversation. Not maintaining conversation, responding to what others say (verbally, nonverbally), shifting topics
- Language may seem strange or odd
 - Use of overly formal or informal language
 - Scripted language, echolalia, neologisms
 - Unusual intonation patterns
 - Difficulty regulating volume
- Difficulty with nonverbal language/behaviors
 - Space boundaries
 - Use of gestures
 - Facial expressions



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Social Communication Challenges:

- Provide insufficient information-Difficulty understanding what others know and what information to share with others.
 - Insufficient background information
 - Unreferenced pronouns
 - Vague vocabulary (e.g., thing) or acronyms
- Difficulty linking information together-explain cause-effect relationships, how events are related
- Difficulty clarifying information





Social Communication Challenges

- Difficulty accepting others ideas and thinking flexibly
 - Misinterpreting others
 - Trouble handling conflicts
 - Difficulty sharing, playing cooperatively
 - Do not understand “friendly” teasing
 - Argue or challenge others when not following the rules
 - May become angry when others don’t want to do what he wants
- Difficulty understanding nonliteral and figurative language (e.g., humor, sarcasm, idioms, inferencing, making predictions)





Evaluate the ABC's of the Situation

1: Antecedent



2: Behavior

3: Consequence





Evaluate the ABC's of the Situation

- Antecedents:
 - Events or circumstances that occur *before* a behavior
- Behaviors:
 - What communication behaviors occurred?
 - Why?
- Consequences:
 - Events that occur *after* a behavior
 - What did the child get?
 - How did others react?

Is there a pattern?





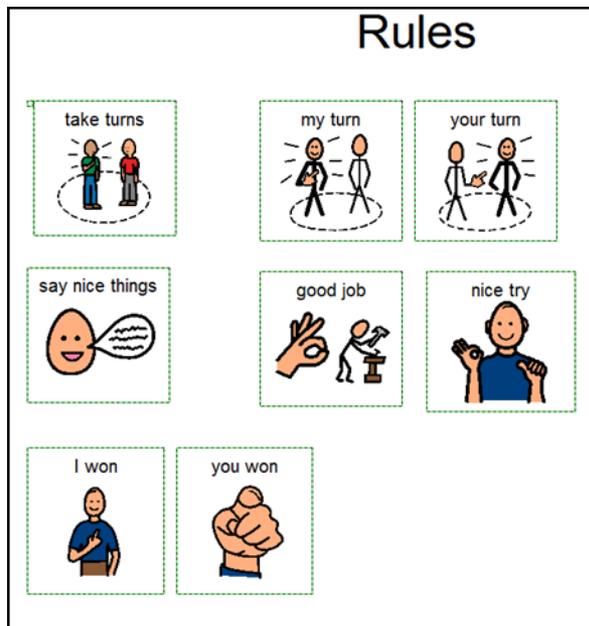
How to Support social Communication in Children with ASD

What occurred before the behavior?

- How can this be modified to prevent or shape the behavior?
 - Tell them what to expect
 - Explain the situation-might be a social story
 - Let them know what you expect of them-be specific. Use visuals
 - Let them know of any changes
 - Let them have a choice
 - Practice in social skills group and in class



How to Support social Communication in Children with ASD





How to Support social Communication in Children with ASD

Practice skills in the classroom-can help all the students

- Ask theory of mind questions-
 - What was the man thinking/feeling?
 - Why did the father go to the hospital?
 - What might happen if the boy does not do his homework?
- Explain idioms, jokes, sarcasm in books/text, classroom situations
- Help organize responses to questions-graphic organizers, sentence starters



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How to Support Social Communication in Children with ASD

- Practice in social skills group or in class
- Encourage recognition and control of emotions
- Know any social programs the student is using for social skill intervention
- Aide or adult assistant attend speech-language sessions or social skills groups to help the student generalize learned skills.



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How to Support Social Communication in Children with ASD

- Facilitate and model appropriate social communication in real time
- Recess and lunch are good opportunities to help facilitate and practice social communication skills with peers
- Guided conversations-you may need to give the child the language to use
- Give a replacement communication behavior
- Help the student interpret others feelings, intents, motivations (real life and in stories)





How to Support Social Communication in Children with ASD

- Organize what they say and have them retell-stories, personal experiences/past events
 - repeat what you say
 - use graphic organizers,
 - sequencing cards
 - use visual supports
 - Fade support over time





Social Communication



Supports

Restricted/fixated interests

Insistence on sameness

Theory of Mind

understanding relationships

idiosyncratic speech

Anxiety

nonverbal behaviors

ADHD

social reciprocity



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