Autism in The News

NEW CRITERIA FOR DIAGNOSIS OF AUTISM WITH THE RELEASE OF THE DSM-5

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has proposed new diagnostic criteria for autism with the release of the fifth version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). The DSM-5 is expected to be released in May, 2013. The publication of the DSM-5 reflects a 14-year revision process and the diagnostic criteria for autism stems from a multi-disciplinary work group comprised of leaders in the field of autism research and treatment.

Under the proposed changes, there would be one category referred to as “autism spectrum disorders” that would encompass Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder and PDD-NOS. These four disorders would be considered a continuum from mild to severe. The goal, according to the leader of the neurodevelopmental disorders work group, Susan Swedo, MD, was not to exclude anyone who currently has an accurate diagnosis but to “make the framework more useful for both sexes, all ages, all developmental levels and all degrees of severity where there is impairment; make sure that the criteria describes [those with] ASD (sensitivity) and doesn’t describe many people who don’t have ASD (specificity); and allow separate ways of describing behaviors and noting etiology and associated condition.”

To read more about the proposed changes check the APA’s website:
http://www.dsm5.org/ Pages/Default.aspx

Funding Restored to Regional Centers

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities is pleased to announce that funding has been restored to the NEW YORK STATE REGIONAL CENTERS FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS. NYSRCASD is a partnership of six university-affiliated programs across New York State with the overarching goal of identifying, disseminating, and assisting in the implementation of evidence-based practices to build capacity to improve services and outcomes for children with autism spectrum disorders.

Using a regional model approach, high quality programs and resources specific to ASD are now available to families and professionals in areas of New York State that have not recently had access to cost effective services.

The University at Albany, SUNY currently serves as headquarters for the statewide network, with partners at the University of Rochester; University at Buffalo, SUNY/Summitt Educational Resources, Inc.; New York Medical College/Westchester Institute for Human Development; Queens College-CUNY and College at Old Westbury, SUNY.

For more information on RCASD programs:
www.albany.edu/autism/nysrcasd.php

http://www.dsm5.org/Pages/Default.aspx

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The 11th Annual Autism Conference was held on October 19, 2012 at the Holiday Inn in Albany, NY. Catherine Lord, PhD, delivered the keynote address “Understanding the DSM-5 Criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorders: Implications for Schools and Families.” Dr. Lord is the director of The Center for Autism and the Developing Brain at New York Presbyterian Hospital and serves as a member of the committee overseeing the DSM-5 autism revisions. Her presentation was very well received by the audience of almost 600 school personnel, community professionals and family members.

During the afternoon breakout sessions, participants had the opportunity to select from a variety of topics including: Building Skills vs. Doing Skills: Considerations for Fostering Independence in Individuals with ASD presented by David Meichenbaum, PhD.; How to Use Special Interests to Decrease Anxiety and Improve Behavior in the Classroom with Elisa Gagnon, MS Ed.; Replacing Challenging Behavior and Improving Quality of Life Through Functional Communication Training which was presented by Melissa Rinaldi, PhD who is the research coordinator at CARD; Teaching Adolescents with Autism: Practical Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom by Walter Kaweski, MA; Effective School-Based Strategies for Dealing with Challenging Behaviors Demonstrated by Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders by David Meichenbaum, PhD.; A Spectrum of Apps for Students on the Autism Spectrum by Heather Bridgman, MS ATP and Nick Weiland, CCC-SLP; Autism and Learning Style in the Classroom by Diana Friedlander, EdD and Teaching Writing to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Intellectual Disabilities by Robert Pennington, PhD.

Participants also had the opportunity to review books and publications related to ASD.

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities continues to be an approved provider of the 3-hour autism training course which is required for all persons applying for a teaching certificate or a license as a special education teacher in New York State.

Since May, 2010 approximately 1,400 professionals from around the country have been able to access this web-based training from the convenience of their home or work computer 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Online registration can be found on the CARD Albany website. Once payment and registration are processed, registrants are sent the webinar link and a password to access the training. Registrants are able to log in and take the training from their personal computer.

For more information about the training or to register for the online course, “Responding to the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders”, which has a $75 registration fee, please visit the website at www.albany.edu/autism or call us at 1-866-442-2574.
Holiday Tips and Strategies to Support Individuals with ASD

The holidays are often busy for all of us, but the changes in routine, overwhelming social situations, and intense environmental stimuli that accompany this season can be particularly stressful for individuals with autism. However, with the use of a few helpful strategies, families can reduce anxiety for their loved ones on the spectrum and facilitate a more enjoyable experience for everyone. The following tips were adapted from resources provided by the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, the Autism Society of America, and Autism Spectrum Therapies.

Preparation is crucial for many individuals. Although minimizing disruptions to established routines should be the goal, creating a plan for when inevitable changes occur is also important. Marking a calendar with the dates of holiday events, or using a social story that explains what will happen at a given event can help many children with these changes in routine. However, if your loved one with autism has a tendency to become anxious when anticipating an event in the future, you may want to adjust how many days in advance you prepare him or her. For more complicated days with many activities, visual supports can help reduce stress.

When it comes to social situations, practicing and/or role-playing scenarios such as opening gifts, taking turns, waiting for others, and knowing what to say and do when receiving a gift you don't like can help avoid embarrassing moments with family and friends. You might also choose to practice certain religious rituals.

Teaching an individual how to leave a situation or how to access support when an event becomes overwhelming is an important skill that can be used through adulthood. For example, have a space set aside for the individual as his or her safe/quiet space that you teach them to go to when feeling anxious. You may want to establish a signal or cue for them to show when they are becoming overwhelmed, and then prompt them to use their space. Individuals with more significant needs may require practice using this space several times before an event or may require you to recognize their anxious behavior and lead them to the calming environment. It can also be helpful to have the individual's favorite foods or items available if you are traveling, as these familiar things can be calming and reassuring.

Most importantly, know your loved one with autism. Being aware of how much noise and sensory input they can tolerate, understanding their level of anxiety and the amount of preparation it may take, and knowing what things will make the season more enjoyable for them will make whatever strategies you use more effective. Have a happy holiday season!
Calendar of Statewide Events

01/31/13  Make and Take: “Learning Better Ways to Cope”, Radisson Hotel Utica Center, Utica, NY
02/05/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn, Mount Kisco
02/07/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel, Poughkeepsie, NY
02/26/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn, Ronkonkoma, NY
02/27/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn Westbury, Carle Place, NY
02/28/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn, Oneonta, NY
03/12/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Binghamton Riverwalk Hotel, Binghamton, NY
03/19/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Best Western University Inn, Canton, NY
03/21/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn, Oneonta, NY
03/28/13  Professional Development and Parent Seminar: “Thinking Differently”, Holiday Inn, Plattsburgh, NY
04/19/13  7th Annual Statewide Autism Conference, Buffalo, NY

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