CHOOSING EVIDENCE-BASED TREATMENTS

Currently, there are a wide variety of treatment options targeted at improving the symptoms that accompany autism spectrum disorders, such as difficulties with social interaction, communication, and challenging behaviors. Due to the fact that autism is such a complex disorder, it can be hard to determine which of these various treatments is most likely to work for an individual child (NAC, 2011). Though it is essential for professionals to stay updated on the advances in research on autism, it is also important for parents to be informed when choosing to enroll a child in a treatment program. The best way to identify a treatment that will be effective is to examine the evidence supporting the treatment. Evidence-based practice has been defined as “the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences” (APA, 2005). Incorporating empirical support and therapist expertise with the values and characteristics of each individual is the best way to ensure that a treatment will be successful.

How can one be sure that a particular treatment is evidence-based? In 2011, as part of its National Standards Project, the National Autism Center released a parent’s guide outlining the characteristics of evidence-based practice and listing specific treatments that are currently considered evidence-based. When choosing a treatment program, parents or professionals are first urged to consider the scientific literature investigating that particular treatment. The literature should provide evidence to suggest that the treatment will produce benefits and that it is not related to ineffectiveness or harm. Parents should also seek advice from professionals with expertise in autism spectrum disorders. Next, it is important that the selected treatment is in line with the values and preferences of the family and the child. Lastly, it is necessary that both the family and the treatment providers have the capacity to implement the treatment correctly and with fidelity. Be cautious of any treatment that seems too good to be true, has a high cost associated with it, or promises a “quick fix.”

It is also important to view research with a discerning eye; not all studies are created equal! Parents are experts of their children, but may not be trained experts of research literature. If a treatment claims to be “evidence-based” and has research supporting it, how do you determine if the source itself is credible? You need to first consider where the research was published. Is the research published in a peer-reviewed journal, such as the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders or the Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology? You can call CARD or ask a librarian or health care provider if a journal is peer-reviewed. Has more than one study been completed on the treatment? Multiple studies showing positive outcomes without conflicting findings would indicate the evidence supports the treatment. Does the person supporting the funding of the research have an interest in the results? The funder’s interest could influence the results and should be disclosed. Finally, can you trust the information from television, magazines, and the internet? If a report is not taken directly from a peer-reviewed journal, be sure to examine who provided the information, whether the source was credible, and whether the information is consistent with other research. Again remember, “a single study is never enough to make a case” (CDC, Deciding Whether a Source is Reliable). The consideration of each of these factors will best ensure that families and professionals are selecting treatments that are evidence-based, and therefore, most likely to be effective for a child with autism.


U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control. Deciding whether a source is reliable. Available at: www.cdc.gov/diabetes/consumers/research/understanding_deciding.html

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SAVE THE DATE
CARD’S 8th Annual Statewide Conference
APRIL 11, 2014
SYRACUSE, NY
Keynote Speaker:
PHILLIP KENDALL, Ph.D.
ANXIETY AND ASD
Watch our website for updates
CARD Continues to Offer NYSED Required Course on Autism

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, almost 2,000 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 then 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 titled “Responding to the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders”, please visit the website at www.albany.edu/autism or call us at 1-866-442-2574.

Distance Learning Opportunities Expanded

In addition to offering the required 3-hour course in autism required by the NYS Department of Education for special education teachers and administrators, CARD Albany has expanded its distance learning initiatives over the past year.

In October 2012, CARD Albany offered a 5-part series for classroom paraprofessionals and their supervising teachers to better serve the needs of students with ASD. The series was well-received and live sessions were archived and can be accessed via the internet.

CARD Albany also developed and delivered two additional topics and offered them as live trainings throughout its regional territory this spring. A session on using functional communication training to reduce challenging behaviors and a session on successful transitions from high school to either work or post-secondary school were offered live to participants in the North Country, Central New York, and the Mid-Hudson Valley. Live sessions were archived and can be accessed at any time.

For more information regarding these sessions please visit the website at: http://www.albany.edu/autism/33452.php or call us at 1-866-442-2574.

New York State Regional Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Regional Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders are a partnership of six university-affiliated programs across New York State with an overarching goal of identifying, disseminating, and assisting in the implementation of evidence-based practices to build capacity to improve services and outcomes for children and youth with autism spectrum disorders.

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

Utilizing a regional model approach, which has been demonstrated to be a successful paradigm around the nation for providing services, resources are now available to families and professionals in areas of NYS that may not have had access to cost-effective services in the past. Each of the six centers provides high quality autism spectrum resources to individuals and families affected by autism, and to school personnel and community providers.

For more information about the regional centers or to contact the regional center in your area, please visit our website at: http://www.albany.edu/autism/nysrcasd.php or contact the CARD headquarters in Albany at 1-866-442-2574.
As the new school year approaches, the transition of returning to school can be especially challenging for children with autism (and their families!). Planning and preparing ahead of time can make this time of change and uncertainty easier for everyone. All of the following ideas can be adapted for verbal or non-verbal children.

Begin to reintroduce the concept of school. Mark the calendar with a visual cue (highlight, label, or picture) of when school begins, and direct your child’s attention to it regularly. This will allow them time to process the idea that they will be going back to school soon and on a specific date. Books, movies, and/or a social story about returning to school may also be helpful.

Work with a school professional to arrange a visit to the school before it opens. This will give your child the opportunity to scope out a new classroom, meet new staff members, and/or practice locker combinations. You may also find it helpful to request a schedule of the times that things will happen in school.

Slowly adjust bedtimes and morning routines to resemble the school schedule to help you avoid a September shock. The rehearsal of the morning routine should save you stress when the first day arrives. Planning lunch and snack time similar to that of the school day can help your child to physically acclimate as well.

Picture schedules may help ease routines and transitions the first few days, even if they are not normally used. Use this starting the night before the first day of school so that your child knows what to expect the next day.

Finally, remember to stay positive! Living with autism can be overwhelming and it is often easy to think about past problems and worry about “another” school year. Back to school is an adjustment for everyone in the house, including caregivers. If you look for strengths in your child, you will see potential... and you might even notice progress that you hadn’t noticed before.

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**Tips for Reducing Back to School Anxiety**

**CARD’s 7th Annual Statewide Autism Conference**

**Practical and Effective Ways to Support Students with Autism Spectrum**

The 7th Annual Statewide Autism Conference was held on Friday, April 19, 2013 at the Hyatt Regency Buffalo in Buffalo, NY. Brenda Smith Myles, Ph.D. delivered the keynote presentation “Embedding Evidence-Based Practice throughout the Day for Learners with Autism”. Dr. Myles is a consultant with the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) and the Ziggurat Group. She has written more than 150 articles and books on ASD and has received many awards and acknowledgements including being cited as the second most productive applied researcher on ASD in the world in the latest survey conducted by the University of Texas.

During the afternoon breakout sessions, participants had the opportunity to select from a wide variety of topics including: Living Well on the Spectrum: A Positive Psychology Approach presented by Valerie L. Gaus, Ph.D.; Building Skills vs. Doing Skills: Considerations for Fostering Independence in Individuals with ASD in addition to Effective School-Based Strategies for Dealing with Challenging Behaviors Demonstrated by Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders with David Meichenbaum, Ph.D.; Teaching Adolescents with Autism: Practical Strategies Across School Settings and Little Help from My Friends: Why Typical Peer Relationships Matter and What We Can Do to Increase Them by Walter G. Kaweski, MA; Replacing Challenging Behavior and Improving Quality of Life through Functional Communication Training and Encouraging and Shaping Prosocial Behavior in Students with ASD which were both presented by Melissa Rinaldi, Ph.D., who is the research coordinator at CARD; and The Power Card Strategy: Using Special Interest to Teach Social and Behavioral Expectations presented by Elisa Gagnon, MS.Ed.

There were more than 400 parents, professionals, and community members at this year’s Statewide Conference. In addition to the keynote presentation and the breakout sessions, participants had the opportunity to review current books and publications related to autism spectrum disorders.

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**Tip from “Simple Strategies That Work” by Brenda Smith Myles, Diane Adreon and Dena Gitlitz**

Strategies To Help Children with ASD Attend and Follow Directions: Based on the strengths and challenges of the individual child, use their name prior to giving a direction or asking a question; tap gently on the child’s desk or table prior to giving them a direction; provide the child with questions in advance; combine verbal instructions with pictures, gestures, demonstrations, and written instructions; and/or have the child demonstrate that they understand the direction or statement - do not rely on yes/no responses to indicate comprehension.
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<td>Professional Development and Parent Seminar: Best Western University Inn, Canton, NY</td>
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<td>Part 1: Helping Students with ASD Overcome Challenging Behavior and Improve their Quality of Life</td>
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<td>Part 2: Encouraging and Shaping Desired Pro-Social Behavior in Students with ASD</td>
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