



Interacting with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum

Emotional Regulation,
Executive Functioning, and
Theory of Mind in Individuals with ASD



ASERT
bringing autism resources together.

PA *autism.org*

What is Autism?

- Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD) is a complex developmental disorder that can cause difficulty with how a person thinks, feels, communicates, and relates to others.
- A person with ASD may also engage in repetitive patterns of behavior and motor mannerisms, have restricted ranges of interest and/or inflexibility in adhering to routines or rituals.



Emotional Regulation

- Emotional Regulation (ER) is the process used to modify emotional reactions.
- ER is a common issue for those with behavioral health diagnoses.
- Common behavioral health diagnoses in ASD include Depression, Anxiety, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.



How Do ER Problems Look in ASD?

- Issues recognizing emotions in one's self.
- Goes from "0 to 100"; Unaware of emotional escalation until it's too late.
- Unable to let go of an intense feeling.
- Meltdowns (can argue, make derogatory comments, be verbally aggressive, disrespectful, etc.)



What Can You Do?

- Does the person know when a meltdown is coming? Ask how you can help.
- Identify and minimize triggers.
- Have a meltdown plan in place for that person.
- Give them space and time.
- Reduce environment stimuli.
- Calming strategies (mindfulness, relaxation).
- Develop a system to help cue them to start using a coping strategy.



What is Executive Functioning?

- Executive Functioning (EF) is a group of high-level processes that help us regulate, control, and manage thoughts and actions.
- EF is not a symptom of ASD, but many people with ASD have it.
- Sometimes EF creates a gap between skill and performance.



How Do EF Problems Look in ASD?

- Difficulty with: being on time, prioritizing tasks, talking about a subject even when asked to stop, shifting to a task that needs to be completed immediately, shifting away from a preferred task, and following multi-step directions.



What Can You Do?

- Breakdown multi-step goals (Chunking).
- Help find and use functional alternatives.
Examples include: Making to-do lists, using a planner or digital app for scheduling, and setting own deadlines.



What is Theory of Mind?

- Theory of Mind is the ability to understand other's beliefs, desires, and intentions.
- Knowing that others have different thoughts than you and being able to predict them.
- The ability to show empathy at appropriate times and accurately take the perspective of others into account.



How Does Theory of Mind Look in ASD?

- People with ASD have delays in developing Theory of Mind and often continue to struggle.
- Examples include: Only seeing one option to solve a problem, becoming upset when someone doesn't know the answer to a question, unintentionally making a comment that could be interpreted as rude, and an inability to understand sarcasm.



What Can You Do?

- Ask perspective-taking questions, like "How do you think that person feels in this situation?" or "How would you feel in this situation?"
- Use examples as teaching moments, like "What you said could be interpreted in this way."
- Use movies and TV as examples to identify the emotions and motives of others.



ASERT Statewide Resource Center

With a database of information, our resource specialists are able to provide up-to-date and accurate information and resources. ASERT is here to help individuals with autism, families, professionals, and community members learn more about services and resources available, and assist them in navigating the service system in Pennsylvania.

Our website also offers information about local, regional and statewide events, professional trainings, community resources, services, current research and other information relevant to the autism community.



Statewide Resource Center
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