EVERYTHING AUTISTICS/ASPIES REALLY NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SOCIAL SKILLS

By: Jason Bunn-Parsons, CPSS & Arron Foster, MA LAC CRC CRSS

BASIC AUTISM SCIENCE
(ACCURACY OF WHICH HAS BEEN REFINED BY DR. BRYAN WOODRUFF, NEUROLOGIST, MAYO CLINIC)

1) Jason’s Definition of Autism: Autism is an atypical neurological connectivity paradox resulting in heightened activity in some areas of the brain and decreased activity in others, compared to non-autistic individuals.

Some of the issues that Autistics face because of their atypical neurological connectivity include:

❖ Sensory Processing Issues
❖ Hyper Sensitivity to Stress and Emotions
❖ Stimming
❖ Seizures
❖ Delayed and/or Impaired Language Development
❖ Delayed and/or Impaired Social Development
❖ ADD/ADHD
❖ Tourette’s Syndrome
❖ Impaired Executive Functioning
❖ Impaired motor skills
❖ Hyper Sensitivity to Medications

a) Atypical: most individuals have similar range of development, as well as means of completing certain routine tasks, problem solving, socializing, etc. The individuals who are outside that range are “Atypical.”

b) Neurological Connectivity: The simple explanation of this is that Autism/Asperger’s is, at its neurological roots, a neuro-connectivity issues. Our neuro-connections are atypical.

c) Paradox: The paradoxes of Autism can result in Autistics being extremely gifted in some areas, and extremely inept in others. The struggles Autistics/Aspies deal with are often aggravated by people who do not accept that Autism is a paradox; but instead focus solely on one aspect of Autism while refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the paradoxical opposite.

2) Brain Plasticity: The brain of every life form on Earth is constantly changing, enabling it to adapt in both positive and negative ways. This provides us with a scientific basis to believe that some areas which Autistics/Aspies struggle with may self-correct and/or be modifiable.

3) Developmental Disabilities Do Not Affect All Areas of the Brain in A Universal Manner: So the part of your, or you child’s, brain that enables speech development is underdeveloped. What does this have to do with the part of their brain that enables them to understand what others are saying about them? Nothing! What does the part of the brain that enables bowel control have to do with the parts that allow them to memorize what they hear? Nothing! What does the parts of the brain that enables us to do complex mathematical problems have to do with the parts involved in social interaction? Nothing! Just because your, or your child’s, brain may be affected in one area, that is not an indication of the level of functionality of other parts of our brain. Some areas may even be affected in a way that is to our advantage in certain situations.

4) Natural Countermeasures: It is well known fact that someone who loses their sight will develop an increased sense of hearing. This concept is not just limited to the blind; but is a well-known factor in so many other physical disabilities that the healthy part(s) of a body will compensate for unhealthy or injured parts. Not only do I believe that this gives us a basis to consider the possibility that this same principle may at play for those with developmental disabilities, but I
believe that I can provide specific examples of it being a factor in the day-to-day lives of Autistics/Aspies.

**UNIVERSALITY OF SOCIAL SKILL BUILDING**

1) Social skills are learned behaviors and are universality to all human experience

2) Understanding the need for social structure that is both effective & flexible
   a) Effective social structure enables individuals with inherently incompatible goals to cooperate, and possibly collaborate, with each other in order to get their needs, wants, and desires met.
   b) A consequence of no effective social structure is conflict.
   c) A consequence of inflexible social structure is that individuals with atypical personalities, &/or disabilities, will not be able to fit in.

3) Everyone, including Autistics/Aspies, needs to properly analyze conflicts they are involved in order so they can determine the extent in which both parties are at fault.
   a) Even if you *believe* that the other party committed the first offence(s), and/or the greater offence(s), doesn’t excuse any offence(s) that you committed in response.
      Note: Just as you may *believe* the other party is the bigger problem, they may *believe* the same about you.
   b) Whoever is at fault, in part or in whole, needs to…
      i. …except full responsibility for their choices. Even if the other party’s poor choices provoked you into reacting the way you did, you’re still responsible for your choices.
      ii. …learn how to respond to the same situations in the future that will result in a more positive outcome.
      iii. …refuse to take responsibility for someone else poor choices.
   c) No one should ever except the blame for anything that they were not at fault for.

**IMPACT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE ON SOCIAL SKILL BUILDING**

1) Jason will have address in opening statements in morning

2) Arrow will address during presentation as it influences peer work

3) The social/relational rights of every human being, regardless of neuro-configuration, provided we’re not undermining the rights of other:
   a. We have the right to form our own unique personalities, as long as we aren’t crashing the format that a venue needs in order to fulfill its objectives.
   b. We have the right of self-determination, but it would be wise to give due consideration to the suggestions of well-meaning others whom we’ve found to be wise in their ways.
   c. We have the right to object when we…
      i. …like how we’re being treated.
      ii. …believe someone assessment of us is wrong, but it would be wise to give due consideration to the possibility that well-meaning others might see things in us that we’re blind to.
4) Other principles
   a) Sometimes, you have to give up your rights to do what’s right, such as stating your grievances with someone else in the most constructive way possible, instead of the inflammatory way that 1\textsuperscript{st} crosses your mind when the offence occurs.
   b) Being superior in quantity of relationships doesn’t automatically mean superiority of quality.
   c) Focusing on intent can prevent well-meaning mistakes from become major offences.

**Proper Understanding of Theory of Mind and Non-Verbal Cues**

1) Proper Use of Theory of Mind:
   a) Providing a basic understanding of how certain things we do or say are most likely to impact others.
   b) Understanding the basic needs of those who don’t possess the capacity to express them their selves.

2) Proper Usage of Non-Verbal Cues: Recognition that…
   a) …there may be issues the individual cannot express because they lack the...
      i. …ability to understand the ability to understand what they are experiencing.
      ii. …an effective means of self-expression.
   b) …there may be issues the individual will not express because they may be…
      i. …too painful for them to confront.
      ii. …unwilling to admit their failures and/or vulnerabilities.
   c) …the course of a conversation may need to be adjusted for various reasons.

3) Improper Usage of Theory of Mind & Non-Verbal Ques.
   a) Impersonation of a mind reading telepath.
   b) An alternative to direct dialog about the issues.
   c) A tool/weapon to manipulate others into doing whatever the manipulator wants.
   d) A façade to convince those around you that you’re in better shape then you really are.