What Interventions and Supports Does My Child with Autism Need and How can I Determine if They are Effective:

Making Decisions That Make a Difference

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Pre-Diagnosis

• “What’s going on with my child? How can I help?”

• “I don’t want there to be anything ‘wrong’.”

Is it Autism?

• How is the topic introduced to the family?
• What reactions may be elicited?
• What support/s will need to be provided to the family during the evaluation stage?
After the diagnosis...

Behavioral Therapies
Medical Treatments
Biomedical Treatments
Sensory Dietary
Alphabet of agencies

Reality is....

• Sleep deprivation
• Family discord
• Medical bills
• Friends don’t speak the same language
• Extended family may not be supportive
• Genetic blame game
• Overwhelming amount of paperwork
Who am I?

I has frozen
HALF frozen
Nobody’s home

Who We Think We “Should” Be

SUPER MAN

Why wouldn’t ALL parents do ANYTHING?!

- EVERY treatment
- EVERY therapy
- NEVER miss a day
- WHOLE LIFE is autism
- Just where is that going to get us?
We...

...love our children
...are trying
...will make mistakes
...CANNOT CURE
AUTISM
...need understanding,
compassion and
HELP!

Obstacle Removal

“I finally came to the realization that you fix things that are broken and my children were not “broken.” They had obstacles that I could try and help them overcome.”

Eric Blackwell

What We Found

A village to help us in raising our children...

Research
Medical Information
Community Resources
(Alphabet Agencies)
Support
Book and Conference Information
How to Choose the Right Village

• Similar circumstances
• Similar philosophies
• Relevant resources

There is a SPECTRUM of support communities just like there is an Autism Spectrum!

The “right “ village will FEEL right.

How to Know if Intervention is Working

• Immediate measure: Is my child doing well (eat, sleep, meltdowns)?
• Long-term measure: assessments, formal and information (feedback from others)
• Consider the implications for the whole family: Is it working for ALL of us?

For Example:
Social Stories made a big difference!
Finding Balance

• Every family is unique
• Not everything has to be about autism
• You’re required to have fun and laugh sometimes
• Relationships are the most important thing

Daily Activities

Band
Inexpensive Good Times

- Walks (even teens if you reward them)
- Craft projects
- Library
- Reading or books on CD
- Add on stories
- Cooking
- Creative messes

The ball of string

Let Them Express Their Passion

- The mess...is to be expected, which teaches another life skill
- Generalize skills to other practical uses
- Creating memories
- Positive feelings about home being where they are understood

Home repairs
Classroom repairs
Buried treasure
Obstacle Removal

Removing obstacles takes teamwork. Each member of the team plays a critical role. We bring our strengths and weaknesses to the situation and through working together we hopefully help lift not only the person on the Spectrum but also the whole team.

Obstacle Removal

• Sometimes an obstacle cannot be totally removed. It may be a person involved. It may be a physical or environmental issue.

• At that point we need to look for ways to remove the obstacle as a factor in success.

Skills not Gadgets
Behavior Tells Us a Story…

• I can’t express my needs verbally
• I feel anxious
• I am coping the best I can
• This relaxes me (stress reliever)

• I’m not aware of how others perceive me
• I don’t understand!
• You don’t understand me: I give up!

It’s Not about Managing Our Kids’ Behavior

Instead of asking yourself ‘What’s it going to take to motivate this kid to behave differently?’ ask ‘Why is this so hard for this child? What’s getting in his way? How can I help?’

Dr. Ross Greene, The Explosive Child

Prudent Flexibility

• What is the goal?
• Is a current meltdown worth the cost of the long-term goal?
• Risk assessment
• Pick your battles
Know When to SHUT UP (and Wait)

Know When to SHUT UP (and Wait)

Transitions

Why are transitions so difficult for our kids?
It’s basic Physics...

An object in motion tends to stay in motion
An object at rest tends to stay at rest

Meltdown Prevention
Self-Management Tools

- Priming
- Predicting
- Count-down
- Wrap-up
- Reward

Priming: This is what we expect will happen

- Explanation
- Schedule
- Visual Aide
- Reward
- What is going to happen?
- What typically happens?
- Be brief yet thorough

Priming: Explanation

- Get the child’s attention
  But, do not force eye contact
- Tell the child what is going to happen
- Be brief yet thorough
- Get verbal confirmation
- Show no panic or fear!
**Priming: Schedule**

- Use a timeline and stick to it
- No last minute changes
- Consider this step as a trust-builder
- Write it down or create a visual

**Priming: Visual Aids**

- Oh great! One more thing I have to do!
  - Ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure
  - Developing a routine
  - You can use basics again and again
  - Once a routine is established, you may find you no longer need detailed visuals
  - Even adults use visual reminders: calendar, datebook, palm pilot, grocery list

**Rewards: Why And How They Work**

- Children respond to extrinsic motivation
- They respond to positive reinforcement, especially when using a special interest
- It creates a more self-motivated atmosphere
- It creates a cooperative environment
**Priming: Reward**
- Tell or negotiate
- **Reasonable** compliance
- “Going with the program”

**Predicting: Think Ahead**
- Examine all variables
- What has happened in the past
- With the child, think of possible alternatives ... just in case

**Countdown**
- Time needed varies by activity and location
- Be prepared
- Do not use seconds
- Don’t say “just a minute” unless you mean 60 seconds
Rewards

- Balance difficult or distasteful activities with rewards:
  - No meltdowns = ??
  - Penny rewards
  - Stop at Video Store
  - Stop for ice cream

Rewards: Why and How They Work

- It teaches valuable lessons that may help your child to realize the benefits of other types of compensation
- It creates a habit that often leads to increasingly greater motivation

Rewards-Daily

- Computer or electronic games
  - *LIMIT TIME*
- Candy
- Collectable cards
- Activity with an adult
- Key is consistency...
- And, finding new rewards as the child gets older
Wrap-Up

• Present the facts
  – Not a time for scolding or making judgments
  – A play-by-play listing of what occurred
• Make sure the child is calm before you wrap-up

Pathway to Professional Development

The Underlying Characteristics Checklist (UCC)

• Social
• Restricted Patterns of Behavior, Interests and Activities
• Communication
• Sensory Differences
• Motor Differences
• Cognitive Differences
• Emotional Vulnerability
• Medical/Biological
Underlying Characteristics Checklist (UCC)

Celebrate Strengths/Interests

• “All he ever wants to talk about are bugs. He knows every kind of bug imaginable.”
• “Why does he insist on stopping me in the middle of class to share the batting averages of the players on the minor league hometown baseball team?”
• “She can quote every line from Dora the Explorer. It’s amazing!”

Intervention Ziggurat

Skills to Teach
Task Demands
Structure and Visual/Tactile Supports
Reinforcement
Sensory Differences and Biological Needs

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Collaboration on Program Development

- Prioritizing areas on which to focus through assessment
- Identifying and celebrating strengths, special interests
- Developing easy-to-use interventions
- Supporting implementation of interventions
- Evaluating
- Celebrating successes

Prioritizing Areas

- What is the short and long term vision for the child?
  - All voices should be heard!
- More doesn’t always mean better!

Developing Interventions

- Stay away from the cookie cutter approach!
Keys to Implementation

- Interventions link to specific underlying needs
- Everyone is on board
- Consistency across people and environments
- Open, honest communication
- A shoulder to lean on for support

Allie

- Priorities:
  - Develop communication and language skills to increase social relationships with peers
  - Increase independence with self-help skills
  - Interact with siblings
  - Increase food selections

Allie’s Strengths and Special Interests

- Strengths
  - Follows routine well
  - Likes to follow task to completion
  - Follows 3 step work systems and schedules

- Special Interests
  - Dora the Explorer
  - Music
  - Fuzzy things
  - Motor activities
Examples of Supports

First-Then

Examples of Supports

1. There is only one swing on the playground. It is important to take turns with the other children who want to swing.
2. If you are playing on the swings, you can play on the other playground equipment, like the slide, every go-round of the swing ride.
3. It is important that everyone has fun swinging on the swing.
Examples of Supports

WAIT  MY TURN

HELP
Examples of Supports

School Support Ideas for Michael

[Chart showing various support ideas]

Home Support Ideas for Michael

- 30 minutes of time to practice reading
- 15 minutes a day on the computer
- 15 minutes of quiet games

Visual Strategies

- Many ways to use this as a tool
- Allows processing time
- Allows for review
- It’s the schedule telling him, not you

Do2learn.com
Importance of Home-School-Community Communication

- Provides means to share information regarding changes in student’s underlying characteristics/interventions
- Provides consistency of programming across environments and people
- Allows student success to be celebrated by ALL

Parents

We need to:
- Watch our tone
  - Being angry doesn’t give us the right to be MEAN
- Pick our battles
- Look for opportunities to praise what they are doing right
- Remember relationships build with time and trust

“we’re afraid of parents!”

Communication Barriers

- Time
- Appreciation
- Trust
- Confidentiality
- Honesty
- Feedback
- Positives vs. Negatives
Caution....Keep in Mind...

• Tone of voice
• Facial expressions
• “Old baggage”
• Finger pointing
• “Meeting before the meeting”
• “Internal alarm clock”

Home-School-Community Communication

• Communication notebook
• Communication checklist
• Email listserv
• Blogs
• Wikis
• Quickie Phone calls
• Quickie Face-to-face check-in’s

School to Home Meltdowns

• Work to identify the problem
• Always take underlying characteristics into consideration
  – too busy of a day
  – what happened on the way home?
  – what does the child need to transition?
Parents’ Unreasonable Requests or Staff Roadblocks?

Money

Time

Administration

Knowledge

Data

Parents’ Unreasonable Requests or Staff Roadblocks?

Students

Paperwork

Multiple Staff

Interventions

Create a NEW vision

• Reality check
  – Think about the future
  – Talk to adults with same DX or their parents
  – But KEEP IN MIND: things are better now & constantly improving
It’s a Long Road
Our Kids Grow Up

Remember...
In the long run it is the family who is surrounded by an accepting, supportive community that will have a better outcome...and the community itself benefits too!

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Please visit our website for resources on ASD, AT and low incidence disabilities:
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Some of Our Favorites