

ASD Assessment: What the Words Mean and Why It Is Important for Accurate Classification

SHAV 2024

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My Goal is For You to Leave This Presentation...

1. Certain about the key terms related to Autism.
2. Confident in the requirements of IDEA relative to suspicion of an Autism classification.
3. Passionate about gathering appropriate data to support a classification including educational impact.
4. Confident in considerations for differentiation.
5. Eager to share what you've learned!



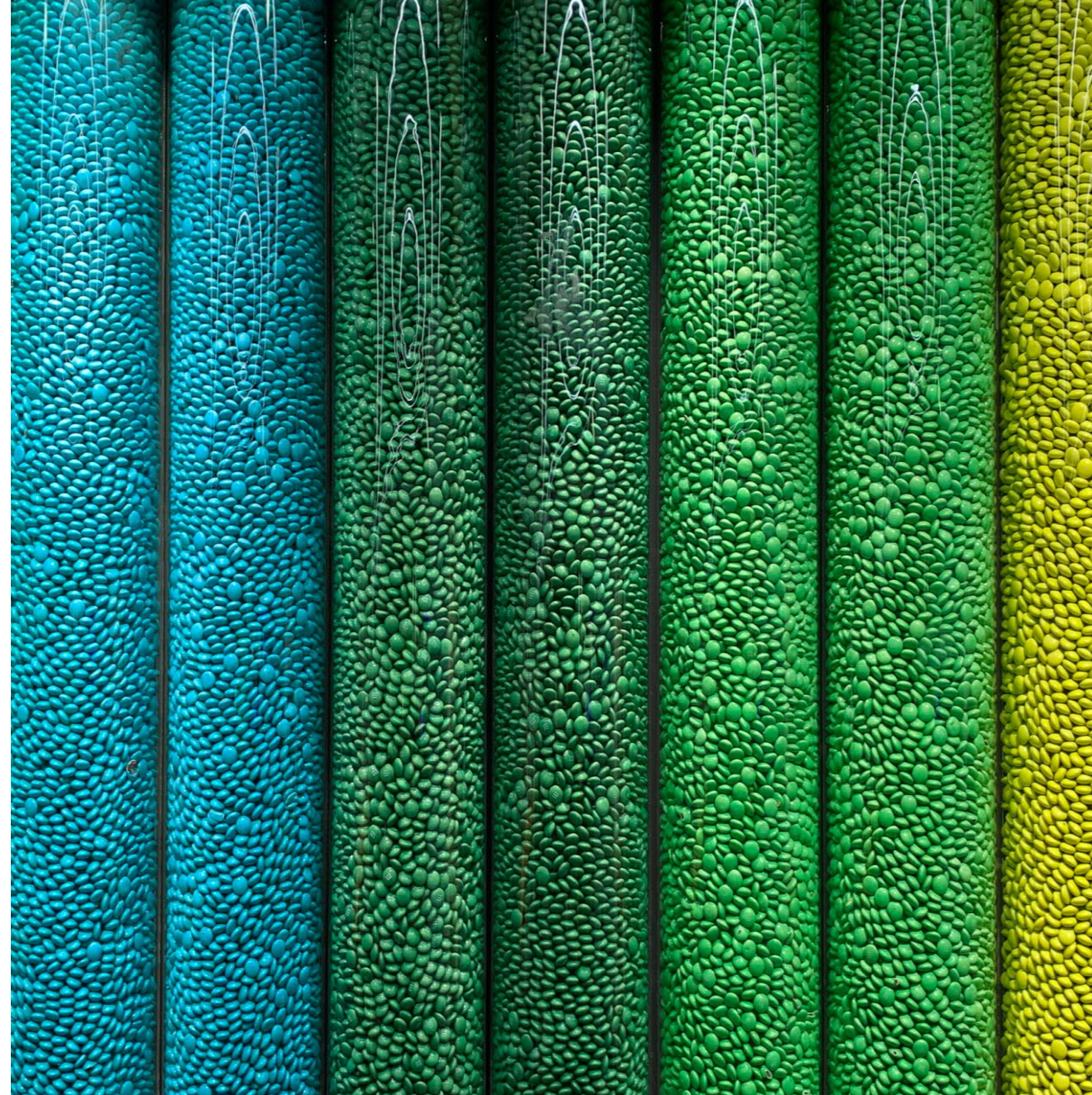
Disclosures

Financial:

Presenter is receiving an honorarium for presenting.

Nonfinancial:

- Presenter is a member of ASHA's School Based Advisory Council (SIAB)
- State Education Agency Communication Disabilities Council Board (SEACDC)
- Employed by the South Carolina State Department of Education



Increasing Rates of Autism Diagnoses and Classifications



Rates of Autism in the United States (CDC)

1 in 150

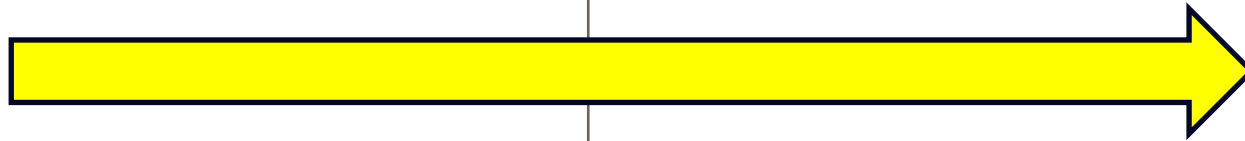
1 in 44

1 in 36

**Year Reported
2007**

**Year Reported
2021**

**Year Reported
2023**



***320% increase from
2007**



IDEA Classification of Autism 2021-2023 (Sample of States)



- South Carolina – 11% increase
- Georgia – 15% increase
- California – 13% increase
- Texas – 13% increase
- Washington – 8% increase
- New York – 11% increase
- Ohio – 10% increase
- Pennsylvania – 10% increase



Bias and a Decrease in Intellectual Disability Classifications

- Researchers analyzed a study of ASD among 8-year-olds residing in the New York-New Jersey Metropolitan Area from 2000-2016 and found diagnosis of children with *ASD without* intellectual disability increased 500% and only 1-in-3 children with *ASD had* intellectual disabilities (AAP, 2023).
- Children residing in affluent areas were 80% more likely to be identified with *ASD without* intellectual disabilities compared to children in underserved areas (Shenouda et al., 2023).
- Black students were significantly more likely to be identified with an intellectual disability rather than autism as a primary educational disability label (Kim et al., 2021).



Key Aspects of Virginia Criteria for SLPs

Impairments in Social Interaction

- Nonverbal skills
- Failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to the developmental level (greeting and sharing information appropriate to the context)
- A lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, and achievements with others (lack of showing, bringing, pointing)
- Lack of social emotional reciprocity (abnormal social approach and failure of normal back and forth conversation)

Impairments in Communication:

- Delay in or lack of spoken language (not accompanied by attempts through alternative methods)
- Impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain conversation with others
- Stereotyped and repetitive use of language
- Difficulties with inference, communicating for social purposes, matching communication to the context, following conversational rules, lack of pretend play or social imitative play appropriate to the developmental level



IDEA Definition of Autism (34 CFR 300.8(c)(1)(i))

- (i) Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that **adversely affects a child's educational performance**. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory
 - 1. Verbal
 - 2. Nonverbal
 - 3. Social interaction
 - (DSM) social emotional reciprocity
 - (DSM) Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
 - 4. Adverse affects educational performance
 - 5. Repetitive activities
 - 6. Stereotyped movements
 - 7. Resistance to change
 - 8. Unusual responses to sensory experiences



Social communication

Social interaction

Social reasoning

Social skill

Social-Emotional reciprocity

Emotional regulation

Pragmatics

Play

Theory of Mind

Central coherence

Empathy

Nonverbal communication

Stereotyped or repetitive movements

Highly restricted fixated interests

Insistence on sameness

Hypo or hyper sensory response



Neurodiversity

- **Neurodiversity** is a term predicated on the idea that autism (and other developmental or learning conditions) are differences to be embraced rather than diseases to be cured. The neurodiversity movement primarily centers around autism but encompasses other conditions as well.
- There is no behavioral ideal to which all people should or do conform... human variations as well as diverse perspectives are both inevitable and valuable (DeThorne & Searsmith, 2021).
- There is no “cure” for autism. Therefore, therapy/instruction should not be provided with an intent to “cure it” or to be “less autistic”.



Would These Align with a Neurodiverse View?

- Conversational goals related to questions the autistic person has no interest in
- Topic maintenance related to the conversational partner's choice of topic for "x" number of turns
- Cooperation without complaint in a group decision when the student is not in agreement. (Instead, teach conflict resolution strategies.)
- Interactive play based solely on the interests of peers
- Initiating of play when solo free time is preferred or even needed



Key Terms



Pragmatics and Social Communication

- **Pragmatics** is an area of social communication that focuses on goal-consistent language use in social contexts (Nelson, 2010). It is the set of rules or expectancies that individuals follow within different **contexts and cultures** when using language in conversation and other social settings.
- **Social communication** (sometimes also referred to as communicative competence) refers to the ability to have a broader level of understanding such that the student can understand **why certain skills are important and how to demonstrate them across broader contexts**.
 - Subway or Chipotle vs. TGIFriday's or Applebee's



Social-Emotional Reciprocity

- **Social-emotional reciprocity** relates to the **active role** communicative partners engage in with a common, unspoken goal of successful interaction with a variety of people in a variety of situations. This also includes being aware of the emotional and interpersonal cues of others (Leach & LaRocque, (2011).
- Includes...
 - back and forth conversation,
 - sharing of interests, emotions, or affect, and
 - initiation or response to social interactions.
- **Social interactions aren't predictable which can cause anxiety.**



Social Skills

- **Social skills** refers to the ability to complete a social task with a pre-determined result. Teaching a social skill means that the student may have learned a skill that, when **observed in isolation**, may appear to be functional and meaningful. However, the student may not be able to understand why the skill is important outside of the pre-determined or isolated context. Examples...
 - Sharing ideas (when, with who, how)
 - Waiting patiently (where, how)
 - Winning/Losing appropriately (with who, how)
 - Appropriate tone and volume of voice (when, where)
 - Resolving conflict (is there only one way to resolve conflict?)
 - Rules for politeness (Whose rules? Which rules for politeness?)



Important Clarification

Pragmatics

One of the areas of language focused on the use of language.

Social Skills

Completing a social task with a pre-determined result.

Social Communication

Social knowledge that includes understanding why certain contexts have certain expectations.

Social-Emotional Reciprocity

The active “back and forth” and joint attention between communicative partners including verbal and nonverbal communication.



Social Reasoning

- **Social reasoning** refers to the ability to make inferences about other's intentions, disposition, and actions and/or presuppose or make assumptions about someone's beliefs (Levesque, 2014). Examples...
 - Why do you think...?
 - What would happen if...?
 - What do you think will happen next?
 - Writing for an audience (presupposing what they already know)



Social Interaction

- **Social interaction** includes (but is not limited to)...
 - Greetings
 - Exchanging information
 - Persuasion
 - Argument
 - Cooperation/Collaboration
 - Narrative/Sharing stories
 - Adjusting communication to the context: Which context(s)? Is context only *setting* specific?



Emotional Regulation

- **Emotional regulation** is the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state, to cope with everyday stress, and to be most available for learning and interacting as well as the ability to move back and forth across negative, positive, and neutral emotional states.
 - Recognize the emotion based on your body
 - Understand the context
 - Label the emotion
 - Express the emotion in an appropriate way
 - Regulate back to neutral
- ***Executive Function** (cognitive flexibility, working memory, **inhibitory control**).



Emotional Regulation (continued)

Difficulty staying well regulated emotionally and physiologically should be core, defining features of autism, often the focus is on the resulting behaviors instead of the underlying causes (Prizant, 2015).

- “My primary emotion is, and always has been, fear” –Temple Grandin
- **The opposite of anxiety isn't calm, its trust.**
 - Trusting their body (sensory processing), trusting the world around them (predictability), trusting other people (Theory of Mind)
- We ALL feel dysregulated from time to time, but the difference is...
 - a lower threshold
 - fewer innate coping strategies
 - contributions of sensory-processing differences
 - lack of awareness for how others may react to dysregulated behaviors

Empathy

- **Empathy.**

- Empathy means feeling **with** people.
- The absence of empathy makes hurting another person intentionally possible.
- Empathy requires recognition of emotion based on nonverbal cues and responding appropriately to that emotion, but empathy can be impacted by external factors.
- Autistic people are capable of great depths of empathy. What they struggle with is recognizing the emotion in others and knowing appropriate responses.



Theory of Mind

- **Theory of Mind (ToM)** The ability to attribute mental states (beliefs, intent, desires, pretending, knowledge, etc.) to oneself and others and to understand that others have beliefs, desires and intentions that are different from your own (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Deficits in ToM result in...
 - Poor ability to consider that there are interests outside of their own
 - Lack of understanding that different people, situations, and locations may have different expectations
 - Poor hygiene (especially in older elementary, middle and high school)
 - Poor recognition of facial expressions and understanding of emotions
 - Unaware that their behavior affects how others think and feel
 - Inability to identify "future self"



Theory of Mind (continued)

– Precursors to ToM (Birth through age 3)

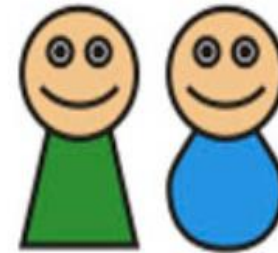
- pretend **play**
- verbal and nonverbal language
- joint attention
- early narratives
- early cognitive skills (means-end, object permanence)
- initiating
- imitation
- metacognition - thinking about your OWN thinking (verbs of cognition, perception, and intention)



Theory of Mind (continued)

- First Order of ToM – age range of 4-5 years
 - Able to tell a lie.
- Second Order of ToM – age range of 6-8 years
 - Understands that different contexts have different expectations.
- Third Order – age range of 8 to 10 years
 - Understands figurative language and sarcasm.

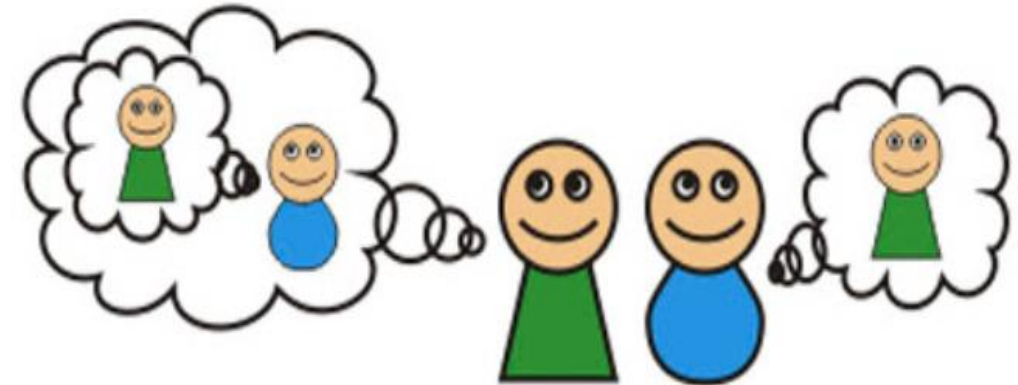
first-order



second-order



third-order



Nonverbal Communication

Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and **nonverbal communication**; to abnormalities in **eye contact** and **body language** or deficits in understanding and use of **gestures**; to a total lack of **facial expressions** and nonverbal communication.

- Nonverbal communication refers to the understanding and communication of messages and information without using words or in conjunction with words.



Nonverbal Communication

Facial expressions

Tone of Voice

Gestures

Prosody

Eye contact

Movement

Body language

Posture



Nonverbal Communication and Eye Contact

Eye contact may vary due to...

- Cultural norms
- Dislike of the person
- Unknown or undiagnosed hearing difficulties
- Anxiety or shyness
- Inattention or distractedness
- Difficulty focusing on spoken language and the nonverbal information from the eyes at the same time
- Intense sensory experience



Nonverbal Communication and Gestures

- Gestures are actions produced with the intent to communicate and are typically expressed using the fingers, hands, and arms, but can also include facial features (e.g., lip smacking for “eating”) and body motions (e.g., bouncing for “horsie”).
 - **Deictic gestures** establish reference by calling attention to or indicating an object or event (Bates, 1976) and can only be interpreted by their context (e.g., pointing to a dog that is running).
 - **Representational gestures**, on the other hand, establish reference and indicate a particular semantic content (Iverson and Thal, 1998) (e.g., using pinky and thumb to represent a phone).



Nonverbal Communication, Gestures, and Eye Gaze

- There is increasing evidence that **gesture development can be a key distinguishing feature to help differentiate** children with typical development from those with various types of disabilities including ASD (Mundy, Kasari, Sigman, & Ruskin, 1995; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2005).
- **Lack of appropriate gestures between twelve and twenty-four months** was one characteristic that **distinguished autistic children and children with typical development** (Adrien et al., 1993).
- **Eye gaze** (*see also line of regard) **and gestures** have been found to be **persisting core deficits** in children with autism (Colgan et al., 2006; Mundy, Sigman, & Kasari, 1994; Sheinkopf, Mundy, Oller, & Steffens, 2000).



Assessment of Nonverbal Communication

- Limitations of assessments of nonverbal language
 - Includes only a few items
 - Not linked to the developmental expectations
 - Asked as a “yes” or “no” (e.g., “Does your child use gestures?” Which ones? Which kinds? In what contexts?)
- There are variations in parenting style and in individual children, caution should be taken in interpretation and utilization of these milestones, especially for those from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.



Play

- Formal psychometric tests yield an only **estimate** of some specific skills, but they do not assess all the cognitive, representational, and thinking skills necessary for the **use of language for communicative purposes** (Westby, 1980).
- **Social and joint attention, imitation, and play** have been shown to **be especially significant variables in relationship to language outcomes** (Watson & Flippin, 2008).
- Children who participated in **joint attention or symbolic play interventions** showed better expressive language skills than children who only participated in applied behavior analysis (ABA) services after a one-year period (Kasari, Paparella, & Freeman, 2008).



Stereotyped or Repetitive Motor Movements, Use of Objects, or Speech

- **Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements**, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypies, lining up toys, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases).
 - Twirling hair, drumming fingers, shaking leg, rocking
 - Watching fingers in front of eyes, watching through corners of eyes, posturing
 - “That’s All Folks” at the end of a task vs. “That’s All Folks” regardless of context

What is the FUNCTIONAL impact?

What is the CONTEXT?



Highly Restricted, Fixated Interests that are Abnormal in Intensity or Focus

- **Highly restricted, fixated interests** that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g., strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests).
 - Minecraft, Dinosaurs
 - Manhole covers, Car emblems

What is the FUNCTIONAL impact?

What is the CONTEXT?



Insistence on Sameness, Inflexible Adherence to Routines, or Ritualized Patterns of Verbal or Nonverbal Behavior

- **Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior**
 - extreme distress at *small* changes
 - *significant* difficulties with transition
 - rigid thinking patterns/concrete thinkers
 - restricted food intake

What is the FUNCTIONAL impact?

What is the CONTEXT?



Hyper or Hypo Activity to Sensory Input or Unusual Interest in Sensory Aspects of the Environment

- **Hyper-or hypo-activity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment** (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).

What is the FUNCTIONAL impact?

What is the CONTEXT?



Ask “Why?”

- **Circular reasoning:**
 - Why does Michael flap his hands? Because he has autism. Why is he diagnosed with autism? Because he flaps his hands.
 - This approach defines a child as the sum of their deficits and treats the person as a problem to be “cured” as opposed to a person to be understood.
- Instead, ask **what is leading up to or causing these behaviors?**
 - Is it a regulation strategy? (deep breaths vs. flapping)
 - Is it a coping strategy? (making the environment predictable)
 - When is the dysregulation behavior occurring? (unstructured times, transitions, noisy environments)



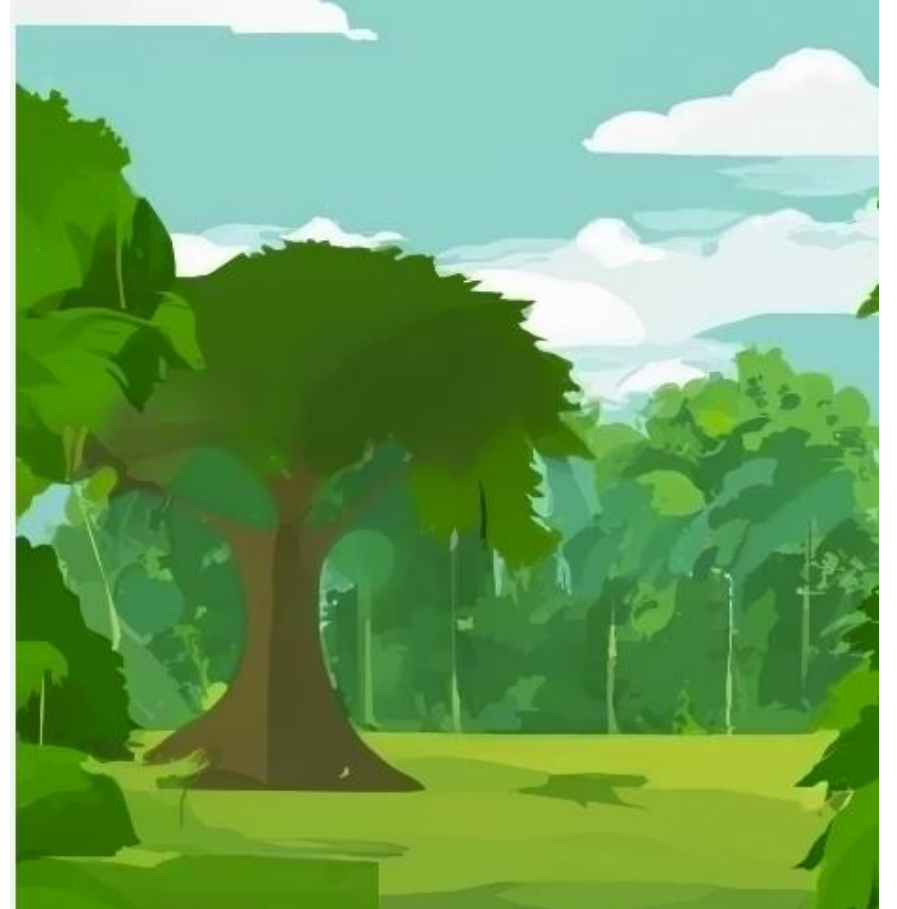
Adverse Educational Impact



Central Coherence

“Can’t see the forest for the trees”

- **Central Coherence** refers to the ability to recognize the invisible relationships between all the parts (ex. “these both ___”), a focus on the details, but not the big picture, the ability to get the point, and to understand the gist or main idea. In conversation, it would manifest as the ability to get the point or understand the gist.



Narrative Skills

- **Narration** plays a role in social competence and can take the form of **telling and retelling stories, providing descriptions of an event, providing an account of not only of what happens to people, but also what those involved in the action know, think, or feel about what happens.**
- **Narrative** discourse (or storytelling) is a ubiquitous form of communication, used to **derive meaning from experiences** and construct **shared understanding** of events (Bruner, 1986, 1990).

**When you go home, will you download facts
or tell a story about this conference?**



Narrative Skills (continued)

- **Both play and fiction have a specific structure** (setting, characters, conflict, resolution, etc.). In addition, understanding the temporal and cause/effect relationships in play builds the foundation for understanding these relationships in stories.
- **Narratives bridge the gap between oral and written language** (Hedberg & Westby, 1993; Roth, F.P., 2000; Roth et al., 1996; Snow & Dickinson, 1991; Spencer & Peterson, 2018; Gilliam & Johnston, 1992; Westby, 1985).
- Narrative skills at **age 3** make direct contributions to **reading comprehension assessed at 8–9** years of age (NICHD, 2005) and narrative skills **at 5** years of age make independent contributions to children's **reading comprehension at 10 years of age and reading achievement at 14 years of age** (Babayigit, & Shapiro, 2020).



Skills Related to Theory of Mind

- Inference
 - “Why do you think...”
- Prediction
 - “What do you think will happen next?”
 - “What would happen if...”
- Cause and effect
 - “What lead up to the American Revolution and what was the result of the American Revolution?”
- Identifying the problem, finding a solution
 - “Why was this challenging? What could you do differently next time”



Verbal Skills

- Development of interpersonal, collaborative, and **personal safety skills** along developmental continuum.
 - Who is a friend? What is trust? How do you earn it?
- Labeling of emotion.
 - Mad, happy, sad vs. frustrated, disappointed, worried.
- **Figurative language** is when words say one thing but mean another.
 - Hold your horses, fly off the handle, at wit's end, no holds barred.



What if There is No Documentation to Support Adverse Educational Impact for Initial or Ongoing Eligibility?

- The presence of a disability alone does not make a child eligible for an IEP.
- A child with a disability which *does not* adversely affect educational performance is usually eligible for the protections of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- On November 17, 2015, in *Q.W. v. Bd of Ed of Fayette County, Kentucky* the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a District Court decision which concluded that a child with autism lost his eligibility for an IEP because the autism no longer adversely affected his educational performance.
- Social and behavioral deficits are considered only insofar as they interfere with a student's education.

**If there is no adverse educational impact,
what is the specially designed instruction addressing?**



Differential Considerations



Definition of Autism (34 CFR 300.8(c)(1)(ii))

- (ii) Autism does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has **an emotional disturbance**.
- While there is often overlap, it is helpful to consider which difficulty may be having the most impact.



ASD	Area	ED*
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities with functional impact across settings and contexts	Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests	No restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impacts across settings and contexts
Insistence on perseveration of sameness is a coping strategy used to control and make sense of surroundings, reduce anxiety, and increase predictability	Insistence on sameness	Insistence on sameness or routines may be obsessive, directly impact function, but are critically different in that these routines rarely serve to make the person feel better
Difficulty with eye contact as it may be overstimulating	Eye contact	Eye contact may be the result of dislike of a person or extreme shyness/anxiety
Social-emotional reciprocity is better with those who share the same interests (more likely to share interests, initiate and respond to social interactions relative to topics of interest)	Social emotional reciprocity and interactions	Social-emotional reciprocity may be inconsistent and likely vary or depend on their frame of mind at that moment
May have co-occurring diagnoses such as anxiety (due to Theory of Mind deficits), ADHD	Anxiety/Depression	Depending on underlying emotional disability depressive characteristics are seen more often than anxiety related symptoms
Capable of great depths of empathy but struggles to recognizing emotions in others and knowing appropriate response	Empathy	Depending on underlying emotional disability difficulties with empathy may be observed
Benefits from instruction to recognize and label emotions as well as regulation strategies	Emotional regulation	Benefits from instruction to recognize and label emotions as well as regulation strategies
May struggle to build and maintain interpersonal relationships with those who are not similar to them	Building and maintaining relationships	May struggle to build and maintain interpersonal relationships due to unpredictability, emotional dysregulation, withdrawal, inappropriate behaviors or feelings under typical circumstances, pervasive unhappiness

ASD vs. ED (continued)

May struggle to build and maintain interpersonal relationships with those who are not similar to them	Building and maintaining relationships	May struggle to build and maintain interpersonal relationships due to unpredictability, emotional dysregulation, withdrawal, inappropriate behaviors or feelings under typical circumstances, pervasive unhappiness
Often present are feeding and/eating issues including severely restricted diets (ARFID) *Problems with eating and feeding in children with ASD have been reported to occur in 50-90% of all cases (NIH, 2021)	Diagnostic considerations	Psychiatric impairments and emotional behavioral disturbances (i.e., Reactive Attachment Disorder, Bipolar, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Selective Mutism, PTSD, etc.)
Conduct or behavior is not with an intent to harm others though self-injurious behaviors may be present	Aggressive behaviors	Aggression, intent to harm others, self-injurious behavior, withdrawn, immature
Defiant behaviors more likely related to understanding of task	Defiant behaviors	Defiant behaviors more likely related to opposition to task, dislike of task, difficulty with task, or frame of mind when asked
Language difficulties are likely specific to pragmatics, figurative language, discourse/narrative skills	Language development	Language difficulties are possible across any of the areas of language
Difficulty with reading is more likely in the area of comprehension	Reading	Difficulty with reading may occur in both decoding and comprehension and may occur as a result of missed instructional opportunities or underlying learning disability

ASD	Area	ADHD
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impact across settings and contexts	Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests	No restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impacts across settings and contexts
Difficulty with eye contact as it may be overstimulating	Eye contact	Eye contact may be related to inconsistent or fleeting due to visual distractions or limited span of attention
Difficulty with emotional regulation due to poor labeling and recognition of emotion	Emotional regulation	Difficulty with emotional regulation may be due to impulsivity/inhibitory control, difficulties considering known consequences before acting
Social-emotional reciprocity is better with those who share the same interests (more likely to share interests, initiate and respond to social interactions relative to topics of interest)	Social emotional reciprocity and interactions	Knows and can state social expectations but often forgets "in the moment"
Difficulty with social relationships likely due to misunderstanding social cues, difficulty with Theory of Mind/perspective taking, person-to-environment fit	Building and maintaining relationships	Difficulty with social relationships due to not paying attention to social/nonverbal cues, contextual expectations, and communicative partners as well as challenges with planning, follow through and impulsivity
Difficulty with work completion may be due to challenges with initiating, planning, asking for help	Task completion	May rush through work, become distracted and not complete work, or hyperfocus on certain details
Language difficulties may be due to impairments in pragmatics, semantics (specifically figurative language), and discourse/narrative skills	Language development	May not have any areas of weak language development
Reading comprehension difficulties may be due to a focus on details as opposed to overall understanding, perspective taking, and inference	Reading	Difficulties may be due to not monitoring comprehension while reading, skipping words or lines of text, not constructing meaning while reading

ASD	Area	ID
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impact across settings and contexts	Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests	Atypical behavior, movements or sensitivities may be related to underlying diagnoses (e.g., dystonia, ataxia, seizures, etc.) or side effects of medications
Difficulty with eye contact as it may be overstimulating	Eye contact	No difficulty with eye contact unless related to underlying disabilities (e.g., vision impairment)
Language difficulties may be due to impairments in pragmatics, semantics (specifically) figurative language, and discourse/narrative skills	Language development	Impaired language as well as marked deficits in cognition
Adaptive skills are modifiable and improve with instruction	Adaptive skills	Adaptive skills are the result of difficulties with language and cognition and are not easily modifiable or have limited improvement with instruction
Difficulty with emotional regulation due to poor labeling and recognition of emotion	Emotional regulation	Difficulty with emotional regulation due to poor labeling and recognition of emotion
Social communication difficulties include joint attention, impaired use and understanding of nonverbal language including gestures	Social-emotional reciprocity and interaction	Good capacity for joint attention, showing and directing attention, as well as appropriate eye gaze for communicative purposes and engagement with conversational partners
Difficulty with social relationships likely due to misunderstanding social cues, difficulty with Theory of Mind/perspective taking, person-to-environment fit	Building and maintaining relationships	Building and maintaining relationships aligns with cognitive and language development
Likely to wander or escape due to limited understanding of environment, expectations, and/or hidden dangers	Safety concerns	Comorbid medical concerns increase safety concerns (e.g., hearing, vision, fine motor, gross motor, heart, gastrointestinal concerns, etc.)
Reading comprehension difficulties may be due to focus on details as opposed to overall understanding, perspective taking, and inference	Reading	Difficulty with reading in the areas of both decoding and comprehension

ASD	Area	SLI (Language Impairment)
Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impact across settings and contexts	Restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests	No restricted, repetitive, stereotyped, and atypical patterns of behavior, activities, and/or interests including hypo or hyper sensitivities that have functional impacts across settings and contexts
Difficulty with eye contact as it may be overstimulating	Eye contact	No difficulty with eye contact
Social-emotional reciprocity is better with those who share the same interests (more likely to share interests, initiate and respond to social interactions relative to topics of interest)	Social emotional reciprocity and interactions	Able to communicate for a range of purposes and with a variety of people
May find it easier to interact with adults than peers	Building and maintaining relationships	Any social difficulties are consistent across both peers and adults
Play skills likely impacted or play may be limited to individual interests only	Play skills	Play may be delayed, but in alignment with language development
Difficulty staying well-regulated emotionally and physically	Emotional regulation	Developmentally appropriate emotional and self-regulation skills
Poor understanding and integration of nonverbal language and gestures	Nonverbal language and gestures	Gestures and nonverbal skills may not be impacted
Narrative difficulties may be due to difficulty with Theory of Mind and perspective taking (assuming listeners knowledge)	Discourse/Narrative	Narrative difficulties may be due to missing components of story grammar and/or poor organization
May have a broad vocabulary and include many Tier 3 words that are specific to restricted area of interest	Vocabulary	Vocabulary is limited across all three tiers of vocabulary
Language difficulties may be due to impairments in pragmatics, semantics (specifically) figurative language, and discourse/narrative skills.	Language development	Morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonological awareness are likely impaired
Difficulty with reading is more likely in the area of comprehension	Reading	Difficulty with reading in the areas of both decoding and comprehension

10 Key Considerations

- 1 . Does the student appear to break social rules and/or expectations they...
do not like,
do not agree with,
or that they do not know?
2. Once the student learns a social rule or expectation, do they continue to break it? **If so, why?**
3. Is there performance inconsistency (meaning are social interactions better in certain settings, or at certain times, or with certain people)? **If so, why?**



10 Key Considerations (continued)

4. Does the student struggle with considering consequences before acting? **If so, why?**
5. Is the student missing social cues? **If so, why?**
6. Has the student had opportunities to be exposed to or learn social rules/expectations or had adverse childhood experiences that would impact social development?



10 Key Considerations (continued)

7. Is there a lack of empathy for other people and/or a deliberate intent to hurt or harm others?
8. Is the student manipulative or purposefully deceitful?
9. Are sensory related behaviors impeding the student's ability to function?
10. What is the evidence of adverse educational impact?



Re-Defining “Pragmatics”

Pragmatics:

- Nonverbal (gestures, eye gaze/line of regard)
- Verbal (communicating across a variety of types of social interaction and purposes, social reciprocity, self advocacy/communicating needs)
- Theory of Mind (relates to perspective taking, inference and prediction, cause and effect)

Discourse/Narrative:

- Narratives
- Play
- Central Coherence

Semantics:

- Labeling Emotion
- Figurative Language

How might these skills adversely impact a student’s ability to access and progress with the general education standards?



The SLP Report Should Include Information from All Five Domains

Area of Social Communication	Example Data
Social Interaction	Understanding and application of accepted rules for politeness as well as classroom/school rules, social reasoning/problem solving, conflict resolution, initiation and response to social interactions
Social Cognition	Perspective taking/Theory of Mind, joint attention, inference and prediction skills, labeling and recognition of emotion in self and others, metacognition
Verbal Communication	Notes regarding prosody and vocabulary (specifically understanding of figurative language), discourse/narrative skills, as well as quality, quantity, relevance and manner of communication, conversational turn taking, ability to express wants and needs/ask for help
Nonverbal Communication	Body language, gestures, facial expression, eye contact
Adverse educational impact	Difficulties asking for help, difficulty with reading comprehension, difficulties with emotional regulation, difficulty with play (for Pre-K), observation in multiple school environments, understanding main idea, summarizing, writing for an audience

Resources

- ASHA [Components of Social Communication](#)
- ASHA [Social Communication Benchmarks](#)
- [Differential Consideration for Autism](#)
- [Social Communication Data Tool](#)
- [Stages of Play, Stages of Narrative Development, Westby Play Scale, Gestural Development, Central Coherence prompts](#)



Question and Answer

Thank you for your time, attention, attendance,
and for what you do for children every day!



**If you'd like more information,
please do not hesitate to reach out!**

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A list of references is available as a separate Word document.

