



Understanding Medical Autism
Diagnosis and Setting Up Success
for Autistic Students

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Introductions

- Psychologists within OHSU's Multidisciplinary Autism Diagnostic Clinic
- No conflicts of interest



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Goals for Presentation

- Understand the process of making a medical diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder
- Develop an understanding of common differential and co-occurring diagnoses
- Learn additional techniques to support children with autism in the classroom



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We'd like to learn about you!





Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity Awareness

Neurodivergence is not a diagnosis, but a way of describing the unique strengths and challenges that may occur in individuals whose brains work differently than the average, or "neurotypical", person. This includes individuals with ADHD, learning disabilities, Autism, and other similar conditions.



Neurodiversity-Affirming Language

- Neurodivergent (describes individuals)
- Neurodiverse (describes the makeup of a group)
- Community preference for identity-first language (“autistic” vs. “person with autism”)
- Focus on current skills and level of support needed (“low support needs” rather than “high-functioning”)

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What is Autism?

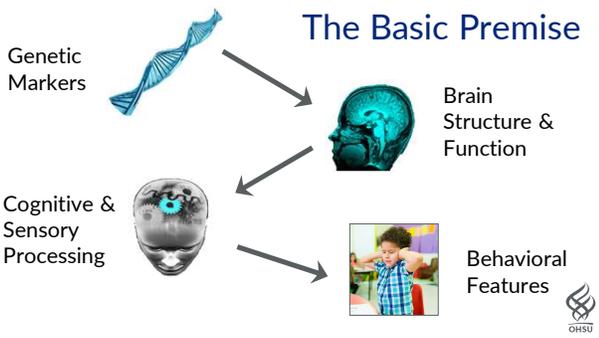
- Neurodevelopmental condition/syndrome
- Present at birth
- Multiple etiologies
- Behaviorally defined
- 1 in 36 children as of 2020

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Maenner, 2023



The Basic Premise



How is Autism diagnosed in medical settings?

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DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL
MANUAL OF
MENTAL DISORDERS
FIFTH EDITION
TEXT REVISION
DSM-5-TR™
AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION



Common Assessment Measures

- Clinical/Developmental Interview
- Review of school, medical, other records
- Autism-Specific Behavioral tools and questionnaires (ADOS-2; SCQ; CARS-2)
- Cognitive (WISC-5; WASI-II; Stanford Binet)
- Developmental (Mullen; Bayley, DAS-II, DP-4)
- Adaptive (ABAS-3; Vineland-3)
- Behavioral (BASC-3; CBCL)
- Speech & Language testing

Can never rely solely on one tool. Must integrate all data with direct observations and reported history

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Social Communication and Interaction

- Difficulties with back-and-forth social interactions, and social response
- Lack of nonverbal communication and/or lack of understanding of nonverbal communication
- Difficulties developing and maintaining relationships

Challenges must be present in all three areas

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Social Communication and Interaction

Non-Verbal Cues

Restricted, Repetitive patterns of behaviors, interests, or activities (RRBs)

- Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech
- Strong adherence to rules or rituals
- Preoccupation with a particular activity or object
- Hypo- or hyper- reactivity to sensory interests or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment

At least two of four need to be present

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RRBs: Repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech



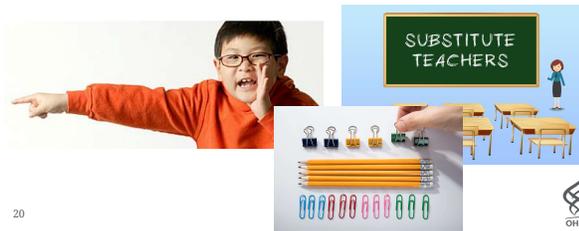
RRBs: Repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech



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RRBs: Preference for routines, rules, or sameness



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RRBs: Strong and/or niche interests



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RRBs: Strong and/or niche interests



22



RRBs: sensory differences

Averse/Sensitive

Sensory Seeking



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Additional but necessary criteria

- Present in the early developmental period
- Clinically significant impairment
- Not better explained by intellectual disability or global developmental delay (though they can co-occur).

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Many ASD criteria are not exclusive to Autism alone

- Difficulties with peer relationships
- Social perspective taking
- Sensory difficulties
- Excessive interest in video games/electronics
- Difficulty with transitions or need for structure

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We have to assess the impact of

- Prenatal exposure or premature birth
- Trauma/neglect
- Housing, food, transportation insecurity
- CPS involvement
- Broader family stressors

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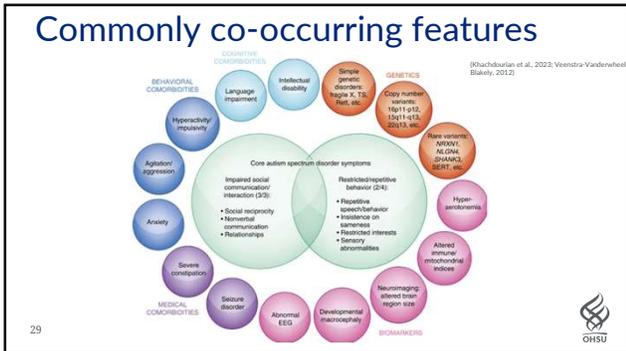
Common Differential Diagnosis

- ADHD
- Anxiety
- Trauma-related Disorders
- Intellectual Disability
- Language Disorder

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Barlattani et al, 2023



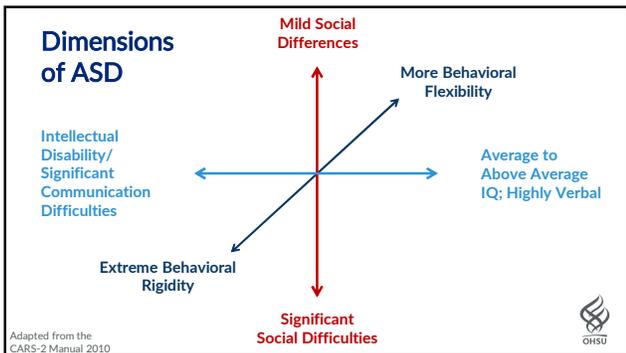


- ### Common co-occurring behavioral health-related conditions
1. ADHD
 2. Developmental & Learning Disorders
 3. Sleep Disorders
 4. Anxiety Disorders
- 30

“If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.”

—Dr. Stephen Shore

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Prevalence Rates

- 1 in 36 children in US; 4-to-1 male to female

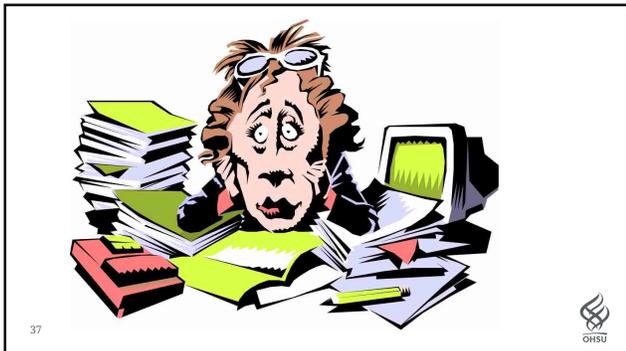
Group	IQ ≤ 70	IQ 71-85	IQ > 85
Total	38%	24%	39%
Sex			
Male	37%	24%	39%
Female	42%	22%	37%
Race			
White	32%	21%	48%
Black	51%	25%	24%

Note: other racial/ethnic analyses were Non-significant

(Callison, 2023; Manner, 2023)

OHSU







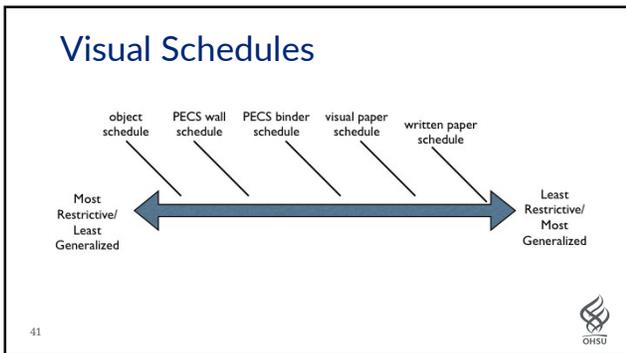
General Principles

- Visual Schedules & Supports
- Transition Warnings
- Social Skills Supports
- Modified Instruction
- Concrete Teaching Tools

38 Pallicky, et al. 2023 

These strategies will vary depending on the child's language, developmental, attentional, and cognitive needs, but the principles can be generalized









Visual Prompts/Communication

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Transition Warnings

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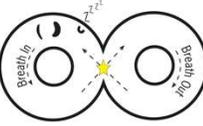
Social Skills Supports

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Emotional Supports

The ZONES of Regulation®

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
			



Trace the Lacy 8 with your finger starting at the star and taking a deep breath in.
As you cross over to the other side of the Lacy 8, slowly let your breath out.
Continue tracing around the Lacy 8 until you have a calm body and mind.



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Modified Instruction

- Multimedia Discussions
- Visual Indicators of Classroom Structure
- Work Systems
- Integrate Strengths and Interests

48 Flannery & Miron, Carlson, 2020 

Inclusion Classrooms

- Motivational Supports
 - Choice Interventions; Task Interspersal; Active Student Responding
- Consequences for Academic Behavior
 - Preference and reinforce assessments; self-management
- Learning History with Instructor
 - Pairing; Prompting & Fading
- Learning History with Setting
 - Visual activity schedules; Priming

49 Merrill, Delgado, & Casey, 2020 

Giving Concrete Instructions

“Put your papers in the recycling”



Much better!



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Concrete Teaching Tools

- Increase the use of manipulatives
- Use as concrete language as possible

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Abstract
↑
produce
fruit
apple
Braeburn
apple
The Braeburn
apple is good for
breakfast
↓
Concrete

IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS
IT DOESN'T RAIN CATS & DOGS, IT'S RAINING WATER

Teacher Resources

- [Universal Design for Learning](#)
- Autism Society of Oregon

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Thank You

Questions?
Thoughts?
Discussions?

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