

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

Jackie Mills-Fernald

Director of Access Ministry, Mclean Bible Church

703-770-2942

Jackie.millsferald@mcleanbible.org

<http://www.facebook.com/accessministry>

[www.the inclusivechurch.wordpress.com](http://www.theinclusivechurch.wordpress.com)



Why?

- Luke 14:21-23
- Matthew 18-16



UNDERSTANDING AUTISM AND ASD

- Group of developmental disabilities caused by problem in the brain
- People with ASDs handle information in their brains differently

TYPES OF ASDs

- Autism – significant language challenges, social deficits, and unusual behaviors and interests; may or may not have cognitive
- Asperger's – milder symptoms of autistic disorder; typically do not have problems with language or intellectual disabilities
- Pervasive Development Disorder – not otherwise specified; also called “atypical autism”; meets some of the criteria for autism disorder or Asperger's, but not all

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Limited or no “fantasy” play
- Avoid eye contact and want to be alone
- Trouble relating to others
- Prefer not to be touched
- Difficulty understanding or interpreting others’ feelings
- Repeat actions over and over again
- May not be able to express needs or desires through words
- Repeat words or phrases over “echol?”
- Have challenges when routines/environments change
- Have obsessive interests

DIAGNOSIS

- No blood tests
- Child's behavior and development
- As early as 18 months; typical age for complete diagnosis is 36 months

TREATMENT

- Early intervention greatly improves a child's development
- Specialist
- Developmental ped
- Pediatric neurologist
- Child psychologist or psychiatrist

SUSPECTED CAUSES

- Environmental
- Biological
- Genetic

RATE OF OCCURRENCE

- ASD cuts through all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups
- Four times more likely in boys
- 1 in 91 or 1:115 children now being diagnosed.

CLASSROOM FRIENDLY

- Structure and predictability
 - Well –organized classroom (labeled with pictures)
 - Multi-sensory environment
 - Posted pictures schedule
 - Rules/expectations posted
 - Chillax or quite area
 - Visual timers
 - Be aware of classroom noise level
 - Poster art on walls
 - Fluorescent lighting
 - Bean bags, , floor mats, trampoline

PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS

- Sensory rich
- Guided activities (whenever possible, give choices)
- Allow for movement
- Give visual cues regarding space boundaries
- Make lessons interactive/hands on

PARENT/CHURCH CONNECTION

- Get to know children and families
- Shared goals
- Open communication
- Plan to achieve success
- Commitment

REASONS FOR BEHAVIORS

- All behaviors serve a purpose
- Behavior either gets us something or gets us out of doing something
 - Pain angle
 - Change angle
 - Frustration factor

FUNCTION VS. TOPOGRAPHY

- “Why does the behavior exist?” vs “ What does this behavior look like?”

ABC OF BEHAVIOR FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

- A (Antecedent) – what's happening before the behavior?
- B (Behavior) – what does the behavior look like?
- C (Consequences) – what is happening after the behavior?

COMMUNICATION TIPS

- Less is more
- Match a visual with a verbal
- Allow for “wait time” to receive a response
- Use if-then statements
- Use concrete examples whenever possible
- Call the child’s name before giving instruction
- Give prompts or warnings when something is going to change

BEHAVIOR STRATEGIES

- Develop good rapport
- Ignore as much negative as possible
- Reinforce appropriate behaviors
- Be consistent with plan(s) in home and school

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

- Provide structure and predictability
- Clarify what is expected
- Use positive reinforcers (adults control)
- All adults agree on plan
- Give choices
- Use peer mentors or helpers

BEYOND SUNDAY MORNINGS

- Family support(spiritual, emotional, physical)
- Service opportunities
- Membership
- Baptism