



The Autism Spectrum: Underlying Characteristics and Implications

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The Autism Spectrum *DSM-IV*

1. Autistic Disorder
2. Asperger Disorder
3. Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not
Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)
4. Rett Syndrome
5. Childhood Disintegrative Disorder



Underlying Characteristics


What you can see



What Lies Beneath...

Underlying Characteristics

1. Social Differences
2. Restricted Patterns of Behavior and Interest
3. Communication
4. Sensory Difference
5. Cognitive Differences/Executive Function
6. Motor Difference
7. Emotional Vulnerability
8. Biological/Medical



SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS and SOCIALIZATION



Characteristics of Social Challenges *A Qualitative Issue*

- ***Social Competence*** is Challenged
 - Interacting
 - With Others
 - Engaging
 - In the “Dance” of socialization
 - Understanding
 - Social implications of a situation or interaction
 - Problem-Solving
 - Social Challenges



Results in.....

- Difficulties with interactions that require “Theory of Mind”
 - *The ability to take another person’s perspective*
- Difficulties with “Hidden Curriculum”
 - *“What everyone knows and no one is taught”*



Characteristics of Social Challenges

- Implications:
 - Personal Space
 - Work space issues (too small, too large, not “controlled”)
 - May be perceived as “rude”
 - Waiting for co-workers, breaks, next task
 - Taking turns or abiding by the social rules of “fairness”



Eligibility Issue

- Without taking a close look at the social implications, high-functioning individual with ASD may appear extremely competent
- Functional limitations in this area can be devastating, but may not be evident in a brief encounter

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Emotional Vulnerability

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Examples of Characteristics

- Easily stressed or anxious
 - Low frustration tolerance
 - Worries frequently
- May be frequently sad/depressed
 - May express suicidal tendencies
- Fearful - Avoids new situations



Implications

- Rages over “minor” issues
 - Melt-downs
 - Self-injury
- Difficulty accepting mistakes in self or others
- Difficulty with emotional expression
 - Identifying Emotions in self or others
 - Expressing Emotions
 - Understanding or explaining emotions



Communication



Communication

- Communication skills will be an area of challenge, regardless of the functioning level or how verbal the individual



Examples of Communication Characterisitcs

- Delayed expressive and/or receptive language
 - Uneven skills
- Echolalia (Repeating sounds, words, phrases)
- Self-Talk
- Concrete Interpretation of words/
conversations/ directions
- Difficulty expressing feelings and emotions
 - Verbally or non-verbally
- Delays in processing language
 - 5, 10, 15 seconds (or more)



Characteristics

- Difficulty with reading body language
 - Facial Expressions
 - Tone of voice
 - Gestures
- Difficulty with words that have multiple meanings
 - Sarcasm
 - Idioms
 - Vague Requests or directions
 - Discrete language for “delicate issues”



Eligibility Issue

- Much like Socialization issues
- Some folks with High Functioning ASD can appear to be very communicative, however can be misled or misunderstood due to concrete understanding



Restricted, Repetitive Patterns of Behavior, Interests or Activities



Restricted, Repetitive Patterns

- ***Restricted, Repetitive Patterns***
 - Abnormal in intensity or focus
 - Inflexibility to routines
 - Stereotypic motor routines
 - Preoccupations with parts of objects
- May be:
 - UNUSUAL
 - Such as string, telephone books, or shoes
 - TYPICAL but extreme in nature
 - Cars, music, or video games



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IMPLICATIONS

- Needs or insists on the same routines
- ***Must*** complete activity
- Difficulty with transition
- Motor movements
 - Hand-flapping, pacing, finger flicking
- Verbal/Vocal Repetition
 - Sounds, Words, Phrases, or Questions

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Eligibility Issue

- If assessment only looks at the individual in their familiar situations, the difficulties with changes in routine may not be evident



Sensory Processing Differences



Because of Sensory Processing
differences.....

Individuals with ASD can
experience:

- ***Hypo***-sensitive

and/or

- ***Hyper***-sensitive

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Examples of Sensory Characteristics

- Difficulties with sounds
- Over or under-reacts to pain
- Prefers or avoids certain foods (tastes or textures)
- Avoids/seekes bright lighting
- Sensitive or oblivious to temperature extremes
- Seeks out or avoids smells
- Seeks out or avoids touch/tactile input
- Seeks out *or* avoids movement activities

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Motor Differences



Example of Characteristics

- Balance Difficulties
- Accident prone
 - Knocks into walls, bumps into co-workers, seems to break items easily
- Poor, slow, handwriting or fine motor
 - Avoids handwriting tasks
- Awkward gait
 - Uncoordinated, poor at sports
- Unusual body postures or facial expressions
 - Stiff, facial; grimace (may appear unhappy/upset)



Implications

- Tolerance to work or living environments may be limited. Need for the “right fit” is critical
- Tolerance to co-workers in personal space may be perceived as rudeness
- Increased anxiety and stress thus decrease in ability to modulate and accommodate the sensory input



Cognitive Differences and Executive Function Issues



“Cognitive” challenges may be related to difficulties with Executive Function rather than the capacity to learn



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Executive Function is.....



- The ability to:
 - Attend
 - Focus, Filter, and Mentally Plan
 - Inhibit actions and thoughts
 - Organize thoughts and materials
- Allows multi-tasking
- Allows problem-solving

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IMPLICATIONS

- Difficulties with EF can:
 - Mask cognitive strengths
 - Impact the working memory
 - Prevent or limit the individual's ability to learn or work ***without modifications or adaptations***

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IMPLICATIONS

- Difficulty with:
 - Attending, shifting attention, or re-engaging attention to work
 - Organizational skills (mental or physical)
 - Abstract reasoning or generalization
 - Strong memory for details
 - Reading comprehension
 - May have strong word recognition (hyperlexia)

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Medical or Biological Issues



Medical/Biological

- Co-occurring issues that affect health (including mental health), are common.



Examples

- Sleep Disturbances and Fatigue
- Gut Issues
 - Constipation and Diarrhea
 - Reflux
- Allergies
 - Food
 - Environmental



More

- Mental Health Issues
 - Mood Disorders
 - Depression
 - Mania
 - Bipolar
 - Anxiety
 - OCD
 - Tics
- Be aware, these issues may manifest somewhat different in the individual with ASD



Take Home Points

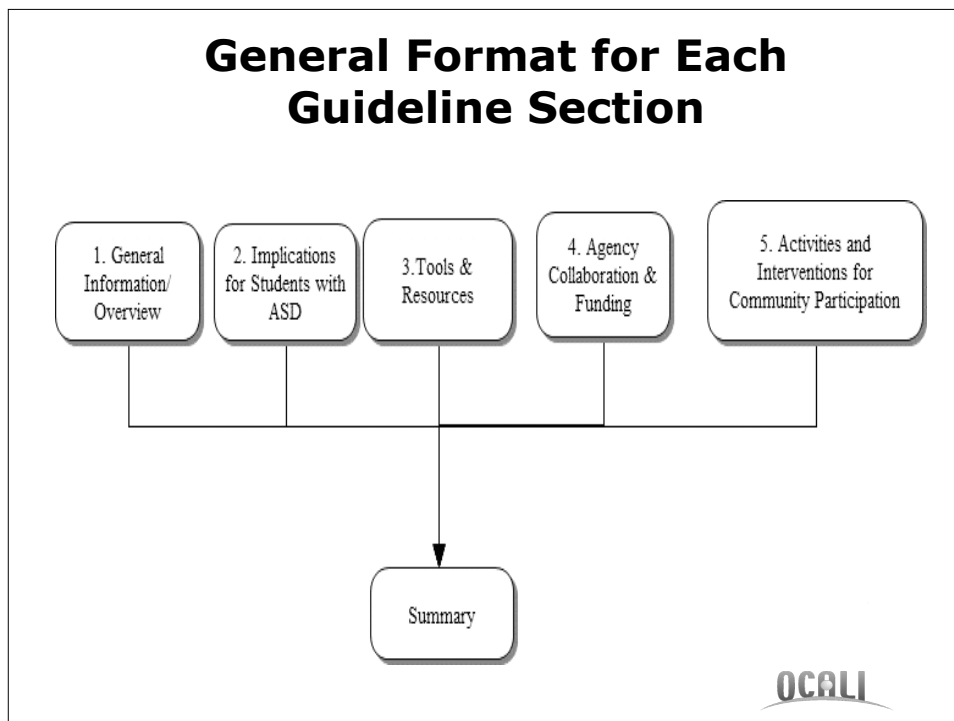
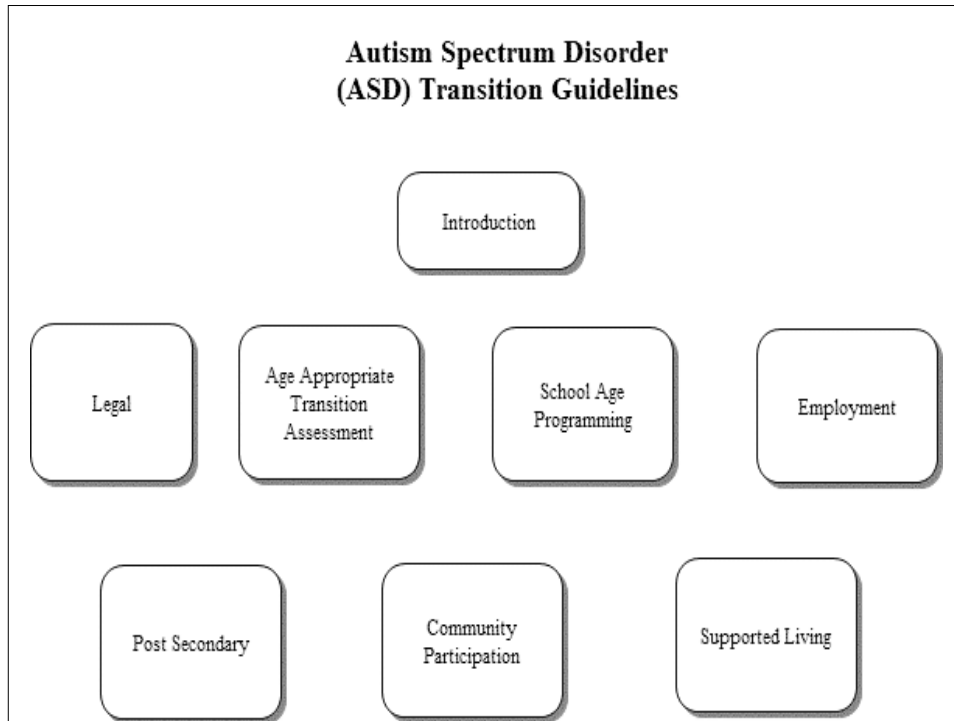
- Individuals with ASD have challenges in the areas of Communication, Socialization, and Rigid Patterns of behaviors/interest
- Challenges may mask Strengths
- Strengths may mask Challenges
 - May make it difficult to meet eligibility requirements if only looking at a surface level
- Routine, Predictability, Structure can not be underestimated
- Addressing sensory issues is essential



OCALI Transition to Adulthood Guidelines for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders



Beyond High School:
Preparing the Individual with Autism for
Successful Adult Living



Availability

- Online with active links
 - www.ocali.org
 - Click on “Transition” found on home page
- Hardcopy if needed
- Web casts to support content



Transition Component of the IEP



Beyond High School: Preparing the Individual with Autism for Successful Adult Living

Draft Transition Version 7-18-08.pdf (page 1 of 4)

Draft Version Only – Not for Distribution Draft Transition Component Page – Ohio IEP Draft Version Only – Not for Distribution
July 2008

Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Grade Level: _____ Student ID #: _____ Male Female
 Child/Student Address: _____ Parent/Guardian: _____
 Parent Address: _____ Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____
 Effective Dates: from _____ to _____ Meeting Date: _____ Initial IEP Periodic Review
 District of Residence: _____ District of Service: _____

Step 1: Discuss future planning. (Family and student needs, preferences, and interests for a vision of immediate and postsecondary life plans.)

E.g., what do you want to do as an adult (education/training, employment, independent living)? Between now and then, what do you need to do to get there? For younger children, this can be an age appropriate statement. Future planning becomes more specific as the student nears graduation.

Step 2: Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

2.1: Address all identified needs from the Evaluation Team Report (ETR) and other sources. Each need must correspond to a goal and objective or benchmark in the IEP. Include transition needs for all children age 14 or older.
 2.2: Discuss student's current academic achievement and functional performance (baseline data).
 2.3: Describe how the student's disability affects the student's involvement in the general education curriculum, or for a preschool student, developmentally appropriate activities.
 2.4: Summarize the data from Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments (by age 14 or younger) related to employment, education, training, and where appropriate, independent living.

Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments used for developing the high school courses of study and transition services: "an ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, strengths, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, education, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data provide the evidence for transition services that are needed in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the IEP." **Begin this process as early as possible, but no later than age 14.**

Transition Planning Steps for Age 14 and older (or earlier for exceptional needs as appropriate). (These steps may be omitted for non-transition IEPs)

Step T-1.1: Age 14 Statement – immediate post-school plans (updated annually); Related to the future planning statement – what do you intend to do upon leaving high school? (I.e., a general statement in the areas of education/training, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living.)
Step T-1.2: Based upon age-appropriate transition assessments and immediate post-school plans listed above, in **Step T-4** list the **transition services** needed to assist the student in the attainment of those plans and to support the **proposed courses of study** identified in **Step T-2**.

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Step T-2: Proposed Course work for Secondary School (for IEPs that take effect by age 14 or earlier and updated annually) based upon the Future Planning statement on page 1. Discuss and document the **proposed** courses of study that address the immediate post-school goals of the student.

Document proposed course work in the spaces below:

Options: 1) Attach the proposed high school course work to the IEP; OR 2) fill in the **Proposed Courses of Study** grid to individualize or add other needed courses; OR 3) Describe the proposed high school course work on the lines below.

What course requirements are needed for graduation (CORE or other requirements)?

What is the student's current status with regard to these requirements?

Annually (or more often if needed) update the **proposed** course work needed for the student to pursue the post-school expectations and graduate by the target graduation data. (These may change as interests and needs change, or courses become unavailable, or the student enrolls in another district.)
 Anticipated graduation (or exit) date: _____
 The courses of study for this student were discussed with the student and parent: Yes No


Proposed Courses of Study (High School Course Work)

Year 1 – Age 14/15	Year 2 – Age 15/16	Year 3 – Age 16/17	Year 4 – Age 17/18	Extended – Age 18-21

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Step T-3: Measurable Postsecondary Goals (address by Age 16 or earlier)	
Describe appropriate measurable postsecondary goal(s) as identified by the student, parent and IEP team. Goals are based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to employment, education and/or training, and where needed, independent living skills. Postsecondary goals should be related to the student's vision statement and future plans from page one of this document. Appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals in employment, and education or training are required. Appropriate measurable goals in independent living depend upon the needs identified in the Present Levels (step 2). 300.320(b)(1,2) Fed. Reg. Final Rule 8/14/06	Supporting IEP Goal(s) #
<p>Goal 1: Postsecondary Employment (e.g., competitive, supported, self-employment, military, etc. See guidance document for more examples and explanations.):</p> <p style="text-align: right;">AND/OR</p>	
<p>Goal 2.1: Postsecondary Education (e.g., community college, four-year university, technical/vocational/trade school, etc.):</p> <p style="text-align: right;">AND/OR</p> <p>Goal 2.2: Postsecondary Training (e.g., vocational or career field, vocational training program, independent living skills training, apprenticeship, DJT, job corps, etc.):</p> <p style="text-align: right;">AND</p>	
<p>Goal 3: If Applicable, Independent Living (e.g., daily living skills, health/safety, self-advocacy/future planning, transportation/mobility, social relationships, recreation/leisure, financial/income needs, etc.):</p>	
Refer to the examples at www.nsttac.org (Indicator 13, Training Materials) for appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals.	

Examples and Non-Examples of Post-Secondary Goals



 **Education/Training**

Example:

- Upon completion of high school, John will enroll in courses at Ocean County Community College*.
 - This goal meets NSTTAC Indicator 13 (I-13) standards for item #1 for the following reasons:
 - Participation in postsecondary education is the focus of this goal.
- Enrollment at a community college can be observed, as in John enrolls in courses or he does not.
- The expectation, or behavior, is explicit, since John enrolls at the community college or he does not.
- Enrollment at a community college occurs after graduation, and it is stated that this goal will occur after graduation.

 **Education/Training**

Nonexample:

- Alex thinks he'll major in math in college
 - This goal does not meet I-13 standards for Item #1 for the following reason:
 - The goal is written as a process, rather than an outcome that can be demonstrated.



Employment

Example:

- After graduating from high school, John will work in a part-time job in an position related to landscaping.
 - This goal meets I-13 standards for Item #1 for the following reasons:
 - Obtaining employment is the focus of the statement.
- Working part-time is an explicit outcome that can be observed.
- The phrase “after high school” indicates the goal is post-secondary.



Employment

Nonexample:

- John will attend a job fair.
 - This goal statement does not meet I-13 standards for item #1 for the following reasons:
 - While “attending a job fair” is measurable, this statement suggests an activity toward a postsecondary goal.
- This activity could occur while John is still in high school.





Employment

Nonexample:

- Allison hopes to work with young children someday.
 - This goal does not meet I-13 requirements for Item #1 for the following reasons:
 - “Hopes” is not a measurable outcome.
- “Work with young children” does not necessarily indicate an employment goal.



Independent Living

Example:

- After graduation Rolanda will live at home and participate to the maximum extent possible in her daily routines (e.g. feeding, dressing, bathing, activating small appliances/media devices, choice making, etc.) and environment through the use of technology.
- After graduation Rolanda will participate in community-integrated recreational/leisure activities related to music, movies, and art at movie theaters, concerts at the local community college, art and craft museums downtown, and the entertainment store at the mall.





Independent Living

Example (cont.):

- After graduation Rolanda will effectively utilize an augmentative communication device at home and in the community that allows familiar and non-familiar individuals to communicate with her regarding needs, wants, and desires.
 - The above goals meet I-13 standards for Item #1 for the following reasons:
 - Each goal is focused on Rolanda’s independent living (residential, self-care, community participation, communication skills).
- Each goal is stated in a manner that can be observed (i.e., “will live”, “participate”, “effectively utilize”).
- There are criteria for performing the postsecondary goals that make them explicit and observable.
- The goals are stated as outcomes for Rolanda after high school, not activities or processes toward outcomes.



Independent Living

Nonexample:

- Rolanda should continue to use her facial expressions as a reliable mode to communicate her preferences as well as practice increasing her communication skills via eye gaze at concrete objects.
 - This goal does not meet I-13 standards for Item #1 on for the following reasons:
 - While “using facial expressions” is measurable, it is not a postsecondary outcome, because Rolanda has already developed this skill.
- “Practice increasing” is an activity toward an outcome of effective communication skills.



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Step T-4: Transition Services: Strategies and Activities Needed to Assist the Student in Reaching Postsecondary Goals. [Fed. Reg. 300.43 and 300.320(b)]			
List the transition services activities needed to support the goals in the student's future planning and postsecondary goals listed in Step T-3.			
Transition Services Areas*	Transition Needs and Activities	Agency(ies) and/or Persons Responsible	Timelines for Delivery of Services
Instruction (related to postsecondary goals): Services not needed because –			
Community Experiences: Services not needed because –			
Employment: Services not needed because –			
Related (or other) Services: Services not needed because –			
Development of Post School Adult Living Objectives: Services not needed because –			
Daily Living: (Where appropriate)			
Linkages to Other Agencies/Services ** (Where appropriate)			
Functional Vocational Assessment: (Where appropriate)	<i>(Functional Vocational Evaluation is defined in the transition guidance document)</i>		
* See IEP Guidance Document for definitions of these transition service areas.			
** If a participating agency other than the public agency fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, the public agency must reconvene the IEP team as soon as possible to identify alternate strategies and amend the IEP as necessary. Document date of reconvened IEP meeting and results.			
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