Stress, anger and learnt behaviour in ASC

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Anxiety and Stress in Families
- ASC population prevalence anxiety disorders 20–40%
- Non AS population 3–13%

Contributors to family stress
- Diffability (autism spectrum)
- Lack of support (family, friends, education, community)
- Parental conflict (couple and family conflict)
- Personality styles (not always conducive to need for structure etc)
- Anxious/nervous, controlling, over protective.

Differing design for different jobs
- Neuro-typical design fits with the need to divide attention and accommodate multiple interests in the chaotic world we all live in.
- AS design fits with focused attention, single interest (great in vocations needing focus, i.e. car industry; leggo; sport, engineering; animals; drawing etc.) Not great for relating socially.

Single attention & cognition in ASC
- Main flow of attention is single minded
- Literality (even with abstract interests)
- Thinking in closed pictures (or concepts)
- Lack of generalisability
- Timing and sequencing difficulties
- Forward thinking tends to occur but only when connected with interest

What to expect from this presentation
- A summary of why stress, anger & anxiety are so high in ASC. Information to help understand support needed & the building of delayed ‘Object Permanence’ (OP) to reduce stress etc.
- A look at the impact of sensory issues on stress, anxiety & anger.
- Putting it all together.

A look at the impact of sensory issues on stress, anxiety & anger.

FOR MORE INFO...
- Murray, 1992 etc (Durham Papers) Wenn’s books: Build Your Own Life: Understanding and working with the spectrum of autism. The passionate mind: How people with autism learn...
NT divided attention and cognition
- Attention in many places simultaneously
- Non-literality (reads non-literal signs)
- Thinking in open pictures (or concepts)
- Generalisability
- Understanding timing and sequencing (appropriate social timing)
- Can forward think outside of one’s interest: accommodation of ‘Other’ more available.

NT attention: Inwards focused but looking out
- presentation of self takes precedence:
  - Mental health and autonomy connected.
  - What do others think of me?
  - How do I look?
  - Do they approve?
  - How do others see me?

NT & AS source of conflict
- Presentation of self
  - Considers impact of self upon other
  - Need to look good
  - Need to accommodate the interests of other’s (whilst taking care of self)
  - Has access to global map showing intention, context and scale of everyday concepts
  - Autonomy based upon ‘OTHER’ s approval & acceptance.
  - AS Diff–ability: threat to being accepted

AS: presentation of interest
- Not interested in presentation of self (unless ‘others’ is the interest)
- No accommodation of ‘Other’
- No spare attention
  - This leads to difficulties appreciating the concepts that rule the world of NT’s
  - Increases distress for all
  - Each is left in an alien world that doesn’t understand the other.
  - Autonomy questioned, anxiety & anger

Factors influencing stress
- Genetic factors (family history of anxiety or other mood fluctuations)
- Disposition: temperament, personality (shy, anxious)
- Relationship factors – parenting styles & modeling of caution/anxious behaviours
- Cognitive factors – information processing styles and negative self-talk
- Self–reinforcement via thinking process
crucial variables for AS Individuals
- Not being accepted or understood by others
- Not having appropriate sensory surroundings
- Not having the needed structure & routine
- Having surprises thrust upon us re: change
- Not being part of the decision making process

These lead to:
- Non-cooperation from individual during activity
- Challenging behaviours (behaviour support needs)
- Strained relationships
- Withdrawal
- Poor self-esteem

crucial variables for Parents
- Professional ignorance
  - Non-understanding of AS
  - Non-understanding of family needs
- Little recognition of resources needed by families
- Low public understanding of AS
- Poor mental health due to lack of support & autonomy

Internal & external pressure leading to parental distress
- Lots of pressure to parent well
  - I have to do a good job with this child/adult
  - This person’s behaviour is my responsibility
- When one is focused upon outward appearances (what others think of your parenting) having a person with AS is doubly demanding

Communication in ASC: What if ASC meant: Being taken up with the ‘now’? So, forward thinking, appreciating object permanence, sensory modulation & processing were all delayed? Stress, anxiety & anger might ensue.
All my attention will be taken up with what stresses me. Need reasons for stress to be addressed.

Abject Permanence video: Piaget’s Stages of development
Bad behaviour?

- not coping? not bad behaviour, but stress support needs = previously termed: challenging behaviour.

- Identify triggers to behaviour:
  - Object permanence not established.
  - Sensory Issues, – Noise – Close proximity to others etc.
  - Processing issues – Inability to understand words, information etc.

Object permanence (Schema generalised permanence) is an individual’s ability to understand that objects/people/events still exist even when they can’t be seen.

Object permanence is the result of knowing that an object still exists, even if it is hidden. It requires the ability to form a mental representation (i.e. a schema) of the object (e.g. McLeod, S. A. (2010). Sensorimotor Stage. Retrieved from: http://www.simplypsychology.org/sensorimotor.html.

Anger, sadness & other behaviours are an ‘expression’ of an individual’s current emotion. This may not always be ‘intentional behaviour’ but rather, a ‘biological response’ to the neurochemical change in the brain due to a change in the environment.

(e.g. Adult tells individual they are going outside into the garden; Adult leaves to go outside; individual appears to be OK. adult returns after a short time in the garden to find individual upset/angry and saying ‘where were you I couldn’t see you; I thought you had left me’).
Tom aged 23yrs goes to stay with his grand-parents. Tom has autism. He is playing hide-and-seek with them. But, as soon as there were no visible signs they were around, Tom begins to shout and rock. He is utterly convinced his grandparents are gone.

The grandparents watched Tom repeat this experience over and over again. It was very upsetting for them and awful for Tom. However, this is not about IQ, but about Tom’s learning style and cognitive adaptation to change.

Cognitive abilities develop naturally, but sometimes, not fully. There is so much variation. Some areas of the brain are more, or less developed, than others causing strengths and weakness in visual learning, auditory learning, or kinaesthetic learning.

In regards to strategies, the picture system, visual schedule, etc. may be useful in providing accommodation for transition between activities. However, it might not change the individual’s understanding as to why the change is happening.

In AS to change an individual’s understanding is to intentionally change the brain. Create new connections through using attention/interest to capture attention and assist an individual to understand (this means building concepts in a fuller way using story in a format that works for them via Disney characters; Lego models; video games; comic strip stories e.g. super heroes; dinosaurs; role play and so on).

Sensory issues?

› Sensory issues are without doubt a problem in autism
› Becoming quickly over loaded, confused and reactive may be a result.
› What role does ‘attention’ contribute towards sensory problems in AS?

Sensory issues are without doubt a problem in autism. Becoming quickly over loaded, confused and reactive may be a result. What role does ‘attention’ contribute towards sensory problems in AS?
Central Coherence in AS individuals

- Has been said to be lacking or poorly formed
- It’s not the ability that’s lacking it’s the difficulty ‘picking up on’ the signs. This leads to an incomplete picture
- Would we say that because an individual is visually impaired they cannot ‘get the picture’? No, we would enable them via different means.

Search for coherence

- In AS, need to order, orchestrate, achieve coherence very high:
- This will necessitate using up attention in large amounts
- Very extreme, very tiring.

Attention in typical individuals

**If attention is in many directions:**

- need for ‘executive functioning’ high, but low need to attend closely
- ‘executive functioning’ comes relatively easily
- global map
- multiple connections

In Autism?

- Can only attend to one thing at any one time (unless within attention tunnel)
- Interests dictate
- Driven to organise and plan (but with poor EF; CC & access)
- Thinking ahead may only occur in connection to interests

What Are We Seeing?

Areas concerned with language in the brain:

- On the left, autism, on the right, typical.

Uni-sensory & Multi-sensory connections allow for different concepts/experience memories and will lead to different behavioural outcomes.
If circumstances an individual finds themselves in present as overwhelming (all attack at once) and their brain works with processing things one at a time; the very mechanism for building understanding is immobilised. They succumb to the belief that they are not valuable, important, capable, loved etc. and negative behaviour follows.
Therefore: important to use AS interest
- Use interest/motivation as a vehicle that drives learning.
- Use appropriate/allowed interests
- Find mediums that can do this
- Technology (Proloquo2GO)
- Video games (Second Life)
- Social eyes
- PowerPoint, cameras, TV, computer
- Animated social stories.

Discussion
- I don’t want anyone to change who I am but, just like you, I do want to be heard, understood and accommodated.
- Dismissing who I am or trying to see me as part of a tragic disaster, is not the way to go. As people with AS we have so much to give back to our communities.

Are NTs better able to cope with choice and change?
- Maybe NTs are designed to cope better with change, difference and diversity, but, only if they can accommodate and not fear it.

Seeing AS as a natural part of neuro-diversity and accommodating us (and our learning styles) can only be a positive step forward.

RESOURCES
- [www.wennlawson.com](http://www.wennlawson.com)
- [www.JKP.com](http://www.JKP.com)
- [GOOGLE](http://www.autismspectrum.org.au/content/summary-findings-we-belong-too)

RESOURCES
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/autism_spectrum_disorder_attention.html
Ross Green [www.livesinthebalance.org](http://www.livesinthebalance.org)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoXBFOZmI80
[www.wennlawson.com](http://www.wennlawson.com)
http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-331005412/teaching-object-permanence-an-action-research-study