Decreasing Barriers to Education and Employment for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Lynn Kern Koegel, PHD
Robert L. Koegel, PHD
Kristen Ashbaugh, PHD

Autism on the Rise
- Autism is a continuum/spectrum disorder
- Increase in prevalence and incidence (1 in 68)
- Males affected more than females 4:1
- Etiology/epidemiology unknown

Higher Education
Adolescents and Adults with ASD
- Loneliness
- Shorter Duration of Friendships
- Lack of Social Skills and Social Understanding
- Inflexibility
- Independent Living
- Time Management
- Comorbid disorders
**Why is support for employment important?**

- Individuals with autism tend to work fewer hours and earned lower wages per week than nearly all other groups (Cimera & Cowan, 2009).
- Currently, few support systems exist to assist individuals with ASD in finding employment.
- Employment leads to increases in cognition; unemployment leads to decreases.
- Employment leads to improvements in Mental Health and Socialization.

**Pre-Employment Targets and Interventions**

**Communication Skills**

- **Conversation Skills**
  - Question-asking
  - Greetings/Goodbyes
  - Appropriate detail
  - Topics of mutual interest
  - Empathy
- **Nonverbal communication**
  - Eye contact
  - Posture
  - Facial expression
Techniques for improving communication

- Video based interventions
- Visual framework
- Self management
- Clinician modeling

Video Feedback Intervention

- Video Feedback: view and evaluate previous performance
  (Mechling, 2005; Maione & Mirenda, 2006; Rayner, Denholm, & Sigafoos, 2009)
  - Good Examples
  - "Needs Improvement" Examples
- Combination of one or more of these models with other interventions, i.e. self-management

Visual framework for appropriate detail

- Possible strength in visual perception
  (Grandin, 1995; Boucher & Lewis, 1989; Quill, 1995)
- Visual method of thinking
- Visual components combined with other interventions, i.e. self-management
Sample visual framework:

Appropriate detail

Positive Reframing

- Intervention
  - Video Feedback
  - Self-Management

Example: "I had a terrible weekend, I didn't do anything."
Reframed: "I didn't do much over the weekend, but got to relax."

Example: "I hate it when my brother leaves after the holidays and I can't see him anymore."
Reframed: "I love seeing my brother and look forward to the holidays when we get to spend time together."
Independent Living Skills:
Daily Living Checklist

- Weekly checklist - Self management
  - Professional Skills
  - Independent Living Skills
  - Social Behavior

- Individualized for each client

- Flexible and adaptable for ability levels and target behaviors

Sample weekly checklist

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<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
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Notes:
- X = task is completed.
Structured Social Planning to Increase Socialization with Peers

1. Social Planning
   a. Motivational interests are identified
   b. Clinician creates a menu of at least three social activities based on participant’s interests
   c. Client selects activity
   d. Clinician assists in planning of the activity

2. Organizational skills
   a. Use of daily planner to document time, place, and activity for the week

3. Social Support
   a. Clients given the option to have a similar age peer attend the activity with them for additional support
   b. Peer mentor will model and provide feedback on client’s socialization during activity
Structured Social Activities
Improved Socialization with Peers
Employment
Improved GPA
Dating
Mental Health
Confidence Decreased Anxiety & Depression

Fig. 1. Visual framework used in intervention procedures
Collateral benefits of employment

- Quality of life
- Contribution to society
- Independence
- Co-morbid disorders
- Long-term cost of services
- Parental stress
Summary

- Multi-Component interventions for improving Socialization and success at work or college
- Interventions such as Self-Management, Video-Modeling, and Feedback are effective
- Positive Collateral Gains when targeting social

Thank you!

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Lynn@Stanford.edu