Tips for working with participants with Autism

Practical Excerpts from
“Why does he/she act that way?
Unlocking the Secrets of our Participants with Autism”
Turnbull 2007
What is Autism?

- “Autism is a Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Pervasive Developmental Disorders are characterized by severe and pervasive impairments in several areas of development: reciprocal social interactions skills, communication skills, or the presence of stereotyped behavior, interests, and activities” (DSM-IV-TR, p.69)

- Autism is a “spectrum”, children who fall within this label range in abilities as well as in presentation of stereotypical behaviors (Rogers, 2005)

- Children with Autism are often unable to organize and process sensory information (Huebner & Dunn, 2001)
Underresponsive (poor registration and discrimination of sensory stimuli)

- Seeking intense input to help register information
  - Stomping when walking
  - Pushing against objects and people
  - Crashing, bumping into things
  - Run, spin, swing, jump

Overresponsive (to sensory stimuli defensiveness or oversensitive)

- Respond defensively to sensory stimuli and feel the need to control their environment
  - Hesitant to climb, jump, ride or swing
  - Dislike touch, may cry if bumped, many not get messy with food or when playing
  - Cautious about interactions except with those who are familiar
Clues: Behaviors that indicate over or under responsiveness

- **Overresponsive**
  - Dislikes change in temp
  - Dislikes being barefoot
  - Pulls away from light touch
  - Dislikes messy foods
  - Dislikes having hands messy
  - Tendency to walk on their toes
  - Fearful of movement
  - Avoids having feet off the ground
  - Dislikes sudden movements
  - Covers ears in noisy rooms
  - Hums/create noise to block out loud noises
  - Cries in nosy environments
  - Avoids bright lights
  - Wears sunglasses inside and outside

- **Underresponsive**
  - Delayed response to heat
  - Prefers barefoot
  - Explores excessively w/hands, very touchy, no boundaries
  - Seeks intense movement
  - Seeks loud noises
  - Hums to create noises to seek input
  - Distracted by busy environments
## Stereotypical Characteristics of Autism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Example Behavior</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited Interests</td>
<td>My always talk about or Play with one thing</td>
<td>Introduce new activity (ease them into a new experience) Use the child's interest to motivate them to participate in an activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive Motor Behaviors</td>
<td>Hand flapping, head banging, rocking, biting, hitting, jumping, throwing, Self talk, putting objects in Mouth</td>
<td>If the behavior is not harming themselves or others may be ignored If situation does not allow for behavior give them &quot;heavy work” before entering situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule bound Behavior</td>
<td>May insist that macaroni be served on the orange plate always</td>
<td>Know that the deviation may result in a break down Include the behavior into the task (bring orange plate)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Stereotypical Behavior Continued

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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Example Behavior</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fascination with Common Objects</td>
<td>Interest in a piece of string, wheel of a car, blades of a fan</td>
<td>If does not present harm may not need to be addressed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Include into theme of outdoor activity to increase motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty with Transitions</td>
<td>Transitioning too quickly/unpredictably between activities my result in melt-down</td>
<td>Prepare a child to transition before hand</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use visual cues to prepare them for the next activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusual response to sensory</td>
<td>Hypersensitivity to sensations such as light, touch, sounds, tastes and smells</td>
<td>Attempt to control adverse environment or provide adaptive devices such as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>May not be able to focus in busy environment, may be excessively bothered by a</td>
<td>ear muffs, sunglasses, hat etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>smell or taste</td>
<td>When touching someone with hypersensitivity providing deep touch is better</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>than light touch avoid touching hands</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“Heavy Work” (Proprioceptive activities)

“The proprioceptive sense provides information through our joints, muscles and ligaments about where our body parts are and what they are doing” (Kranowitz, 2003, p.3)

“Heavy Work” is a term used to describe the types of activities which we receive proprioceptive input, these types of activities provide “heavy work” for our muscles and joints (Personal notes, Alert Program, 2006)

Heavy Work helps a child achieve an “optimal State of arousal”

Calms the over aroused system
Stimulates the under aroused system
Examples of “Heavy Work”

- Pushing a wheelbarrow
- Hanging from the monkey bars
- Digging in the dirt
- Crawling on hands and knees
- Climbing a ladder or rope
- Carry something heavy (backpack)
- Being covered in sand
- Being wrapped in a tight blanket
- Linking arms and pulling until the circle cannot get any bigger
- Pedaling a bicycle
- Pushing against an object
  - the van
  - a tree
  - the ground
  - the wall
Sensory Tool Kit

Ideas for meeting sensory needs to increase participation

- **Visual**: Child is sensitive to light
  - Sunglasses
  - Baseball cap

- **Auditory**: If a child has sensitivity to noise
  - Ear muffs
  - Ear plugs
  - Hooded Sweatshirt
  - Beanie or stalking cap

- **Proprioceptive**: To help a child calm his/her nervous system
  - Wear a backpack
  - Blankets/towels to wrap children in
  - Set backpack on lap
Sensory Tool Kit

Continued

- **Tactile:**
  - If child is seeking tactile input
    - Thick rubber bands
    - Squishy balls
    - Plastic bracelets

- **Vestibular:** If seeking movement
  - Anything that rocks
  - Balls for children to sit on “while waiting for their turn”

- **Gustatory/oral motor & Olfactory**
  - Crunchy snacks
  - Use straws with drinks
  - Water bottles that require sucking
  - Anything that allows them to chew
What is Autism?

What are two indicators that a participant is: Overresponsive? Underresponsive?

List two stereotypical behaviors of participants with autism? What are appropriate interventions for each?

What is “Heavy Work”? Why is it effective?

True or False “Heavy Work is only effective for underresponsive participants

List two examples of Heavy Work activities that you could use during Spring Programs?