

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



Overresponsive

- **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 noisy 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

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

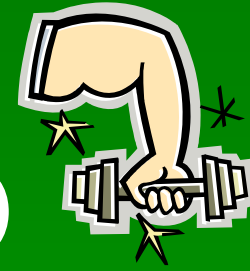
Stereotypical Behavior

Continued

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



“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

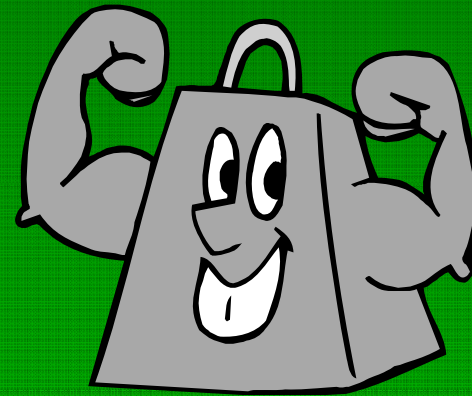
Pushing against an object

the van

a tree

the ground

the wall



Sensory Tool Kit

Ideas for meeting sensory needs to increase participation

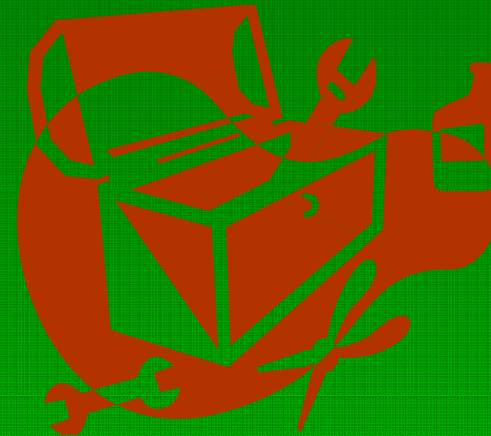
- **Visual : Child is sensitive to light**
 - Sunglasses
 - Baseball cap
- **Auditory : If a child has sensitivity to noise**
 - Ear muffs
 - Ear plugs
 - Hooded Sweatshirt
 - Beanie or stalking cap
- **Proprioceptive : To help a child calm his/her nervous system**
 - Wear a backpack
 - Blankets/towels to wrap children in
 - Set backpack on lap



Sensory Tool Kit

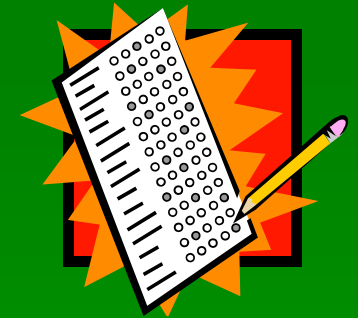
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- **Tactile :**
 - If child is seeking tactile input
 - Thick rubber bands
 - Squishy balls
 - Plastic bracelets
- **Vestibular : If seeking movement**
 - Anything that rocks
 - Balls for children to sit on “while waiting for their turn”
- **Gustatory/oral motor & Olfactory**
 - Crunchy snacks
 - Use straws with drinks
 - Water bottles that require sucking
 - Anything that allows them to chew





Quiz Time!



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?