

Next Steps Workshop into Adolescence for Parents and Professionals

Nature of the Intervention

This is a workshop designed for parents and professionals who support children approaching adolescence with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Our goal is to orient these groups to essential information and resources they should consider as their children approach adolescence. As children approach and enter the teen years, they must deal with physical growth spurts, mindboggling hormone releases, and ever-changing and challenging social relationships. Many children begin to care about being “cool,” and classmates may no longer be as tolerant. For pre-adolescent children with ASD, these already complicated physical and social changes are compounded by the typical ASD-difficulties of reading social cues and understanding the behaviors of others. Consequently, children with ASD approaching adolescence have greater transition needs than most typically developing pre-teens. Additionally, parents of pre-adolescent children also need support. By the end of elementary school, parents begin to look toward the future. They begin to think about what their children will be when they “grow-up” and worry if their children will ever “catch-up” academically and socially. Other concerns arise from the facts we know – pre-adolescence is a time children can develop seizures, have greater trouble sleeping, and are faced with greater academic demands at school. Overall, the transition into adolescence is a difficult one and a time when many families realize ASD is a life-long disability that will require a lifetime plan.

We cover questions such as what behavior is attributable to ASD, and what is typical adolescence, what are evidence-based interventions for ASD, and what supports are available for families, including education, behavioral health and physical health systems.

Given the nature of the topic, we cater the presentation towards parents and professionals who work with children from their later elementary years to middle high school. Past attendees include parents, grandparents, friends of the family, case managers, teachers, social workers, therapists, etc. it is particularly useful in helping the professionals learn the depth and breadth of how an ASD diagnosis impacts the whole family and community, and not simply the individual child.

In regards to intervention, this workshop is not training on how to perform certain interventions. We provide an overview of evidence-based interventions such as various Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) packages, describe language and communication techniques, suggest executive function supports including the use of technology, and discuss sensory issues so many struggle with. We stress that the selection of an intervention is reliant upon a multitude of factors such as the child’s learning style and

attitude, the accessibility and cost of the intervention, the amount of time the family has to commit to an intervention, etc.

Training Details

This workshop occurs two times per year, once in the fall and once in the spring addressing needs of the child, family, and community. In the first part of the day, the audience receives academic information:

1. What is adolescence, including cognitive, social, and behavioral developmental changes,
2. How might adolescence look in ASD, including co-occurring disorders,
3. Supports and services to the child and family, including technology, behavioral techniques, and possible medication management
4. Bullying, sexuality, and other safety concerns,
5. Family Panel – (parent, sibling, grandparent and an individual with ASD) offers an intimate, open and frank discussion of how the diagnosis and growth into adolescence effects and affects the family. (The audience contains only 50 -60 attendees and a family panel of about 6 members)

The workshop runs from 8:30am to 3:30pm. The training is located either in the B or D room with a second room to accommodate the “break-out” session. Just before lunch, we separate into two groups defined by whether the individual with ASD is on an independent track vs. the individual who will need support throughout his lifespan.

The sessions are held at 3535 Market Street, 16th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

Materials for the workshop include:

1. a projector,
2. computer,
3. resource CDs distributed to all attendees,
4. assorted food and beverages,
5. handouts of the PowerPoint presentation so that attendees may easily take notes throughout the day,
6. Agenda and contact information for the presenters. The workshop can accommodate between 40 and 60 attendees.

The main contributors for this workshop all work at the Center for Autism Research and the Regional Autism Center at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (An ATN site). There is some variability in who is available to present at the workshops, but generally the staff includes:

Moderator/Facilitator:

Gail Stein, LSW ACSW

Psychologist to discuss what ASD is and how it is diagnosed

Terisa Gabrielsen, PhD

BCBA/Educator to describe positive behavioral interventions and ABA

Megan Carolan-Tomkinson, M.Ed., BCBA

Speech/Language Pathologist to describe communication difficulties and various treatments

Paula L. Barson, MA, CCC/SLP

Occupational Therapist to discuss sensory difficulties and how OTs can help support children with ASD

Kristen Girardi Cunningham, MS, OTR/L

Evidence-base for the interventions

We receive almost 100% parental and/or professional satisfaction from those who attend our workshops. We include information about evidence based practices including how to access the National Standard's Project and information from The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders. We only present materials that are evidence-based, however we do not wish to cut off any discussion for any complementary and alternative or other non-evidence based therapies that may come up and caution families to discuss any treatments with their physicians.

Provisions for cultural adaptation

We do our best to either limit or clearly define terminology throughout the workshop. In the past, we have made accommodations for attendees who were deaf and needed sign language interpreters.

Contact information

The workshop coordinator is Gail Stein, who can be reached at 267-426-4910 or steing1@email.chop.edu.

The fees charge do not cover the costs of the program, yet we do make accommodations to the \$25.00 all day fee for those families who cannot afford to attend otherwise.