






## Understanding Autism, Meltdowns & Positive Behaviour Support

Dr Diana Wee | NECIC 2016

## TODAY'S OVERVIEW

- Session Aims:
  - To provide you an **appetizer** introduction to understanding ASD, Positive Behaviour Support, and Stages of Meltdown
  - To (hopefully) **inspire and empower** you to support individuals with Autism with renewed hope and strength
  - Take home **one thing** to apply

You're here today because...  
you care for someone with Autism

**I'm a big fan of people with Autism!**

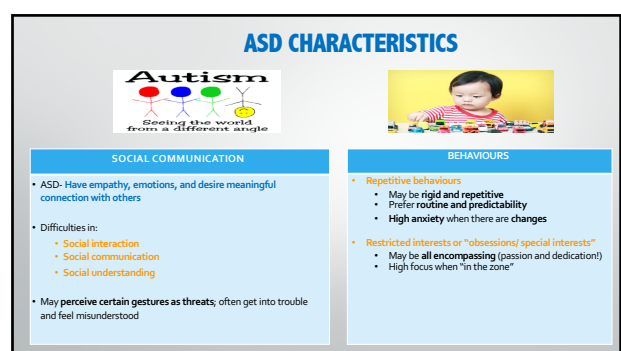
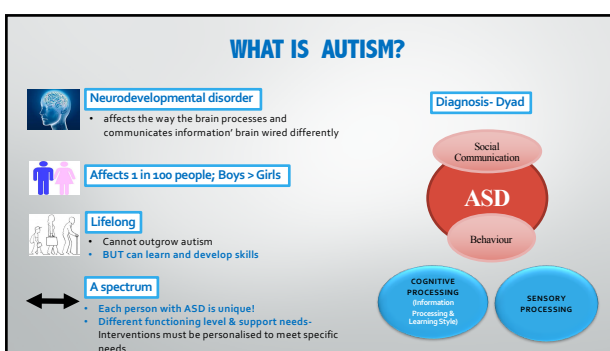
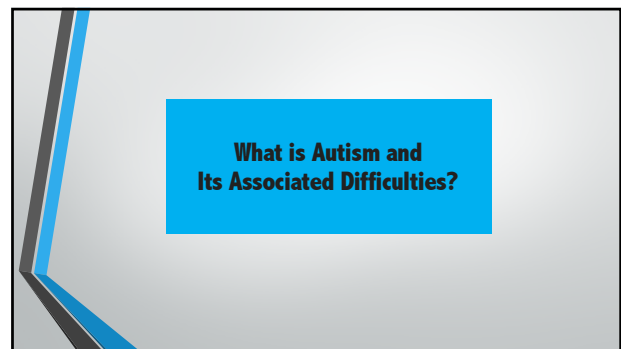
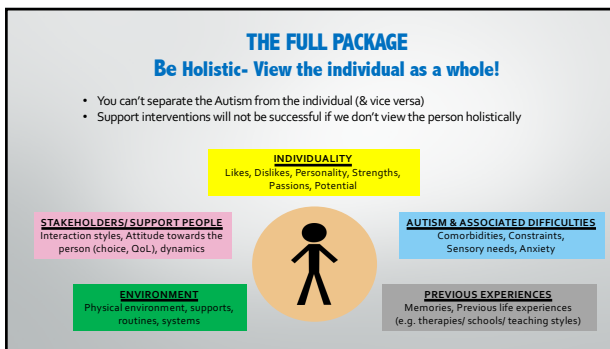
Joys | Challenges | Trial & Error Learning Curves | Disappointments | Victories |  
... Never Give Up Hope

## COMMON QUESTION

Is it my child's issue?

Or is it Autism?

**Doesn't matter. That's NOT the point!**



### Passion / Obsession? Double standards



This non-autistic boy has a hobby.

This autistic boy has an obsession.

### COGNITIVE PROCESSING



#### RECENT NEUROSCIENCE RESEARCH

- Individuals with ASD- brains wired differently
- Possibility of **flawed "pruning process"**
  - i.e. removal of inappropriate/damaged cells
  - appear to have more brain cells than needed & inefficient connections
- Thus they often:
  - Perceive things differently
  - Increased processing time
  - Have **different learning styles**- typically visual learners

### COGNITIVE PROCESSING



#### Theory of Mind (ToM)



- The ability to "put yourself in someone else's shoes"
- Limited ability to understand and predict others' behaviours
- Analogy: Lady walking alone at night
  - Limited ToM → Heightened anxiety!

### COGNITIVE PROCESSING




#### Central Coherence (CC)



- Limited ability to understand context / see the "big picture"
- Difficulties:
  - Identifying **which details** are important & understanding different **contexts**
  - Generalising** skills across environments
- Could also serve as a great strength: Amazing ability to focus on details

## SENSORY PROCESSING



### Sensory Systems

- 1) Sight
- 2) Smell
- 3) Sound
- 4) Taste
- 5) Touch
- 6) Vestibular (Movement)
- 7) Proprioception (Body awareness, deep pressure)

**Sensory integration**  
 One's ability to register and use information through the senses and respond appropriately (Thompson & Raisor, 2013)

## SENSORY PROCESSING

**Over-responsive**

- highly sensitive: a little feels like a lot

**Under-responsive**

- Not sensitive: a lot feels like a little

**Responses to sensory input:**

- Active- Seek out
- Active- Avoid
- Passive- Do nothing

**Every person is different! They are not right/ wrong.**

- We all process differently. What could be organising/ calming for one child, might be very disorganising/ distressing for another. Not a one size fits all approach.

When it impact on our daily lives, we need to address it

## HOW IT FEELS LIKE

My hearing is like having a hearing aid with the volume control stuck on "super loud".

**It feels like a dentist drill inside my ears!**

Autistics must be protected from noises that bother them. A sudden noise, even a relatively faint one will often make my heart race. It's like an excessive startle reaction.


I still dislike places with confusing noise, e.g. shopping malls. It's impossible for an autistic child to concentrate in classroom if he is bombarded with noises that blast through his brain like jet engine. **We always get into trouble, for something that we can't control.**



*Dr Temple Grandin  
 PhD in Animal Science designing animal livestock and author of The Autistic Brain*

**"I am different, not less."**

## HIGH ANXIETY




**Internal alarm keeps firing!**

- Fearful and worried about things constantly
- E.g. changes, perceived threats, what is expected of me, will I do wrong, will I be left alone?, do my parents love me?, are my siblings better?

Sometimes could be false alarms



## UNDERSTANDING MELTDOWNS VS TANTRUMS



Fight, flight, freeze!!

- Response when confronted with stress (can be real/ perceived stress)
  - Lack of resources to cope with the stressor → Limited or loss of control/ don't know how to self-regulate effectively
  - Some days could cope better than others (depending on "how full is the cup")
- Not 'manipulative'- Children & adults do not like/ want to be in this outburst state
  - At this stage: Very rigid in thinking & limited awareness of own safety/ others
  - Often confusing, scary and exhausting

## Reflection



- What accommodations and supports are provided?
- What is necessary for one's **Quality of Life (QoL)**?
  - Being valued- Respect and dignity
  - Safety, trust
  - Freedom and choice- right to participate and withdraw
  - Inclusion
  - Meaningful relationships and activities

## Square peg forced into a round hole?



"Autistics are the ultimate square pegs, and the problem with pounding a square peg into a round hole is not that the hammering is hard work... It's that you're destroying the peg".  
Paul Collins (author)

Environmental changes are key!

You can choose to be:



or



## Understanding Positive Behaviour Support & Stages of Meltdown

### WHAT IS POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT (PBS)

What happens when an individual doesn't know how to...?

We teach & coach   We teach & coach   We teach & coach   We punish!   We punish!

How do we set a person up for success to learn a desired skill?

### WHAT IS POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT (PBS)

PBS is an applied science that uses **educational and systems change methods (environmental redesign)** to:

- 1 • Increase Quality of Life (QoL)
- 2 • Decrease behaviours of concern

Strong Values Based:

Person-Centred   Strengths-based  
Meaningful outcomes   Dignity, social inclusion  
Empowerment & collaboration among stakeholders  
Environmental changes

E. Carr et al., 2002; Horner et al., 1990; Anderson & Freeman, 2000.

### WHAT IS (PBS)?

- Emerged around the 1980s in support of non-aversive behaviour management as an alternative to the use of more extreme aversive events. Those methods were not useful in improving behaviours
- Aim of PBS is not to "fix" the individual or merely to reduce specific behaviours of concern, but a recognition that "problems behaviours" are often due to the absence of appropriate support.
- Improvement of a behaviour of concern is primarily achieved by:
  - (1) creating responsive environments
  - (2) building new skills
- rather than simply "stopping" a "problem behaviour".
- Usually requires collaboration & more than one type of intervention

### PBS PROCESS

1) IDENTIFY  
a) BEHAVIOUR  
b) TRIGGERS  
c) FUNCTION

2) PLAN SUPPORTS/INTERVENTION

PREVENTATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES  
Modify the environment to set individual up for more success  
- Reduce triggers  
- Increase support

REPLACEMENT SKILL  
Teach a new skill that meets the same need/function

## UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS

Behaviour are learned and reinforced. Behaviours can be elicited by *slow & fast triggers*

**OVERLOAD !!**

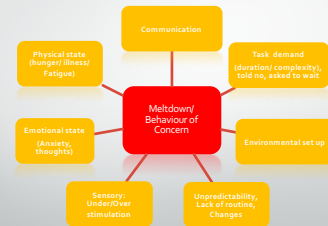


How full is the cup?



## UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS

All aspects must be considered



## UNDERSTANDING FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOURS

- Each behaviour communicates something and has an underlying function (O'Neill, et al, 1997).

- Sometimes can serve more than one function (Milttenberger, 2008).

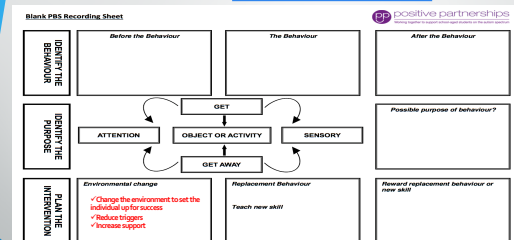
Main functions of behaviours:

• To get	T	Tangibles/ Activities
• To get away	S	Social Attention/ Interaction
	S	Sensory need

Scenario & Impact	Behaviour	Function?
Loud noise in a supermarket	→ Close my ears and scream	
Removal of preferred activity or item. That was keeping me calm	→ Self calm repetitive behaviour	
Outing to Legoland with grandparents was cancelled.	→ Physical outburst/ smash doors	
New or unfamiliar activity. I don't know what to do	→ Scream and refusal	

## PBS TOOL

Source: Positive Partnerships <http://www.positivepartnerships.com.au>



### DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

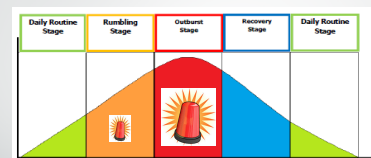


ALAN

- 10 year old boy with Autism
- Attends mainstream school
- Loves to watch TV and play Minecraft (computer game)
- Able to speak verbally, however his expressive communication decreases when he is anxious/ upset
- He often screams and damages property (e.g. hit wall, bang doors) when he feels upset.
- Sensory profile:
  - Enjoys movement & proprioceptive/ deep pressure feedback

### UNDERSTANDING STAGES OF MELTDOWN

Adapted from Brenda Smith Myles (Stages of Rage) & Leah Kuypers (Zones of Regulation)



Low anxiety  
↑ learning & processing

High anxiety  
↓ learning & processing

\*Red zone- Outburst can be due to frustration, overload, or anxiety (not anger alone)




Description	Priorities & strategies
<b>GREEN ZONE: Daily Routine</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Day-to-day stage</li> <li>• Doing typical routine</li> <li>• Low anxiety; feeling relaxed/ happy</li> <li>• Ability to process information: Best</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue daily routine</li> <li>• Teach/ coach independent skills and self-regulation</li> <li>• Access sensory strategies throughout the day to "recharge"</li> </ul>
<b>YELLOW ZONE: Rumbling</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning to feel anxious/ frustrated due to fast or slow triggers</li> <li>• Moderate anxiety/ anger; building up to Outburst stage</li> <li>• Ability to process information: Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevent escalation to Outburst stage</li> <li>• Use distraction or redirection</li> </ul>

Adapted from Brenda Smith Myles (Stages of Rage) & Leah Kuypers (Zones of Regulation)

Description	Priorities & strategies
<b>RED ZONE: Outburst</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peak/ full-blown meltdown</li> <li>• High anxiety/ anger with challenging behaviours</li> <li>• Very rigid in thinking and behaviours</li> <li>• Ability to process information: Very low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Keep calm</li> <li>• Give space</li> <li>• Speak less</li> <li>• Facilitate to move towards Recovery</li> </ul>
<b>BLUE ZONE: Recovery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhausted from Outburst episode</li> <li>• Still in a vulnerable state</li> <li>• Usually need rest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest and recovery</li> <li>• Reduce demands</li> <li>• Transit back to Daily Routine stage</li> </ul>
<b>GREEN ZONE: Daily Routine</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redirect back to routine</li> <li>• Feeling relaxed again</li> <li>• May or may not remember previous Outburst</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue daily routine</li> <li>• Don't debrief about previous episode just yet as it may re-trigger meltdown</li> </ul>

Adapted from Brenda Smith Myles (Stages of Rage) & Leah Kuypers (Zones of Regulation)



## AUTISM SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

### General helpful strategies

- Believe in the individual!**
  - Get to know the person and take interest in his/her passions
  - Flow with his/her strengths & passions
- Provide structure & predictability**
  - Environmental set up, routines, daily activities
  - Provide visual support!
- Support sensory needs**
  - Reduce sensory overload
  - Allow access to self-calming/ sensory strategies throughout the day. "Recharge" consistently
- Prepare for changes/ new activities/ cancellations**
  - Explain what to expect, what will happen, who will be there, what can be done instead
- Be aware of Stages of Meltdown & respond appropriately**
  - Identify early signs!






## What is **ONE THING** that you want to apply today?



## Great Resources

- Positive Partnerships**  
[www.positivepartnerships.com.au](http://www.positivepartnerships.com.au)
- Autism Internet Modules**  
<http://www.autisminternetmodules.org>
- Autism Association of WA**  
<https://www.autism.org.au>
- AAWA- Autism Apps**  
<http://autismapps.org.au>
- ASPECT- PBS**  
<https://www.aspect.org.au/pbs>
- Brenda Smith Myles- Geneva Centre for Autism**  
<https://www.autism.net/resources.html>
- Leah Kuypers- Zones of Regulation**  
<http://leahkuypers.com/index.html>

