

Training for Barbara C. Harris Camp

“Towards an Inclusive  
Camp Experience”



**The Rev. Rebecca Black**  
**Ministry with Autism Spectrum Families**

# AUTISM

*by the numbers*

**1970: 1 in 10,000**

**1975: 1 in 5,000**

**1985: 1 in 2,500**

**1995: 1 in 500**

**2001: 1 in 250**

**2004: 1 in 166**

**2007: 1 in 150**

**2009: 1 in 110**

**2012: 1 in 88**

**2013: 1 in 50**

**2014: ?**

# Autism “Characteristics”

## SENSORY

- Hypersensitive to
  - Sound
  - Light/dark
  - Changes in routine
  - Textures
  - Touch
  - Body in space
- Preference for
  - Low noise
  - Steady lighting
  - Stable routine
  - Enclosed space



# Autism “Characteristics”

## SOCIAL



- May
  - Circle & Touch
  - “Stim”(Rock, Flap hands)
  - Respond non-verbally
- May Not
  - Converse
  - Make eye contact
  - Respond to verbal inquiry or instruction
  - Notice what others are doing

# Autism “Characteristics”

## SOCIAL



- May
  - Talk Unceasingly
  - Have poor hygiene
  - Prefer adults to peers
  - Still be in parallel play
- May Not
  - Understand body language
  - Join in groups
  - Try to block out noise



# Spectrum of Abilities

1

- Attention to detail

2

- Honesty with no bias

3

- “Deep” Learners

Mannerisms

Rule-  
Oriented

Lack of  
Social Skills

Immature  
Interests

Sensory  
Issues

# “Odd” Mannerisms

*My child hates noise but he is the loudest and noisiest of us all*

## 1. Talking too loud – can’t modulate voice

Suggestions:

- Avoid games, icebreaker, or situations that require a quiet voice
- Build on strengths – make the teen your “announcer”



## 2. Talking too much on favorite topic

*She's like a little professor – she loves to teach us*

Suggestions:

- Institute a “Back on Topic” tool
- Build on strengths – allow them a little time to teach about their favorite topic

## 3. Repeating (and repeating...)

*He'll make sure you know what he knows*

Suggestions:

- Acknowledge verbally that you have heard
- Ask questions to redirect



**Thanks !**

**STOP**

**Let's get back  
on-topic**

## 4. No eye contact – are they listening?

Suggestions:

- Assume attention is being paid & don't insist on eye contact
- Build on strengths – make the child your “recorder”

## 5. Won't interact, share opinions or thoughts

Suggestions:

\* Allow thoughts & ideas to be expressed in a way other than verbal, for example, a drawing or making a film

# Rule-Oriented

## Knowing the Rules = Security

### Suggestions:

- Use an Agenda and stick to it
- Enforce time or use a time clock or visual aid to keep oriented to time
- Keep group apprised of changes ahead of time – preferably in writing
- Be literal about how much flex might be in any rule – even if it seems “obvious.”
- As much as possible, stick to your word!
- Explain metaphors

# Lack of Social Skills

## 1. Clothing & tendency toward none

### Suggestions:

- Devote some group time to discussing the dynamic that perception can lead to judgment
- Build on strengths – assign an observation activity to the whole group. How can this child teach others about being non-judgmental?
- Check if clothing is uncomfortable – remove tags, untwist, loosen

## 2. Hygiene or lack of

Suggestions:

- \* Devote some group time to social expectations:
  - What is rude and what is not?
  - Why do others expect you to be clean?
- \* Build on Strengths – remember how rule-oriented these teens are? Reward good hygiene but do not punish , just remind

### 3. Honesty and Non-Judgment

One of the AS Teens greatest strengths can be their ignorance of social judgment and norms. They tend to be honest and non-judgmental of others. They will not usually share the prejudices or stereotypes of their peers.

### 4. Group Work

- Role Play how to enter in to a group
- Be prepared with a solitary activity if this is too much

# Immaturity

## 1. Liking things for “younger” kids

Suggestions:

- Devote some group time to discussing why we hang on to things we used to like & why its ok.
- Build on strengths – make it a point of pride that all preferences are honored
- Point out that resisting peer pressure can be beneficial
- Learn about them – I learned to play Pokemon TCG and LOVE it



## 2. Difficulty with Competition

Suggestions:

- Avoid direct competition, choose to award abilities
- Build on strengths – extreme fairness makes good referees
- Expect emotional reaction to any competitive setting
- Never shame or blame – losing or winning gracefully is a social skill that takes a long time to develop

## 3. Emotional Immaturity

### Suggestions:

- Patience & Understanding – sometimes having some explicit teaching about how we handle negative events, upsetting news, or simply not getting our own way can be beneficial to the whole group.
- Use opportunities to model mature behavior
- Redirect and praise
- People on the Spectrum are often very sensitive to how others perceive them; be positive

# Sensory

## 1. Most Common Cause of Meltdowns

- Extreme discomfort can be caused by sensations NT people take for granted
- Child may not be able to verbalize the discomfort
- Loud noises, lots of voices, high level of noise, being touched, being anxious about how to handle an upcoming change or expectation = all can cause meltdowns

## 2. Senses are at different levels

- Many people on the Spectrum have a poor sense of smell but an overly developed tactile sense, and sensitivity to noise and light.
- Use tactile aids for calming
- Avoid changing light levels, crowds and echoing noises
- Allow a “safe place” – a spot where teen feels comfortable to retreat to under stress
- Build on strengths – make a game of “micro-observation” or asking the child to recall a situation

### 3. Discomfort and anxiety

- AS children are rarely motivated by laziness; if they are refusing to try it is most likely because the task or situation is very UNCOMFORTABLE. What may seem fine to a an NT can cause great distress to people on the Spectrum.
- People on the Spectrum DO NOT LIKE change
- Build on strengths – allow everyone in the group to share their sensory preferences.

# BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT-general

- AVOID YELLING – even in an emergency, try to condition yourself not to shout. AS Teens will not respond to your words, but only to your urgency and will take it as if you are yelling AT them.
- Examine your expectations– did you make all expectations EXPLICIT?
- Have a quiet safe space available and make sure everyone knows it is acceptable to go there.
- Build on strengths – praise the child for instances of self-control
- Always ask about touch; many do not like any touch

# BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT-meltdown

- Remove all sensory input, do not speak to the child, remove others, and make no loud noises. The child may strike out, punch or bite. Decreasing sensory input will help the child regain control
- Speak quietly but do not press for answers
- Intervene if others are critical; AS children tend to be very sensitive
- Provide as much quiet and privacy as possible.
- Reassure the child after the meltdown that you understand and will try to help them stay in control.
- Not the time for humor or jollyng

# BCHC Compares favorably

In a typical Asperger's kids' camp, students are trained in independent living skills and group dynamics. Some popular courses and approaches include Adaptive Physical Education, Art Therapy, Group Therapy, Movement and Dance, and Literacy Development. All of the activities at such camps are designed to stimulate a child's awareness, interest in the environment and in social relationships.

- The instructors are aware of each camper's needs and goals. Counselors give children the assistance they may need in:
- making friends
- learning new skills
- getting along in a group scenario.
- Routine support and guidance formally and informally through sessions hands on supervision.

Additional support and consultation maybe offered by an occupational therapist and speech therapist.



# Resources

[www.ASpecialGrace.com](http://www.ASpecialGrace.com)

Look for BCHC button for these and more materials