

# Parent Education & Effective Communication

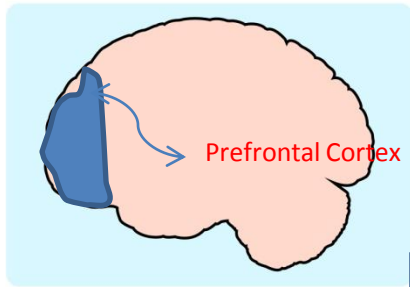
for Highly-Verbal Individuals with  
Autism Spectrum Disorder

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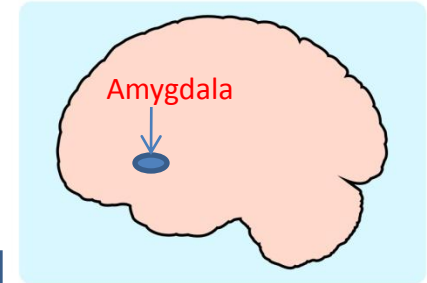
WHO ARE YOU?

## Executive Function

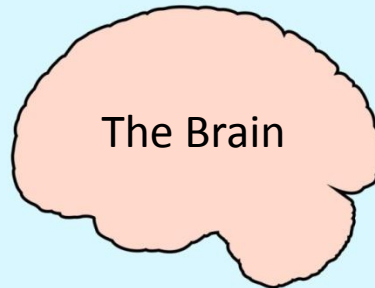


Planning, Prioritizing,  
Remembering the everyday,  
Paying attention

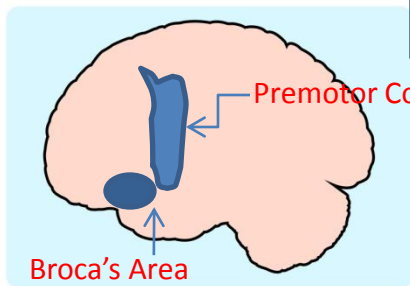
## Emotional Regulation



Fight/Flight / Freeze  
Anxiety /Depression

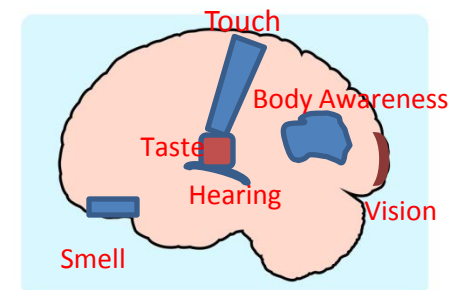


## Mirror Neurons

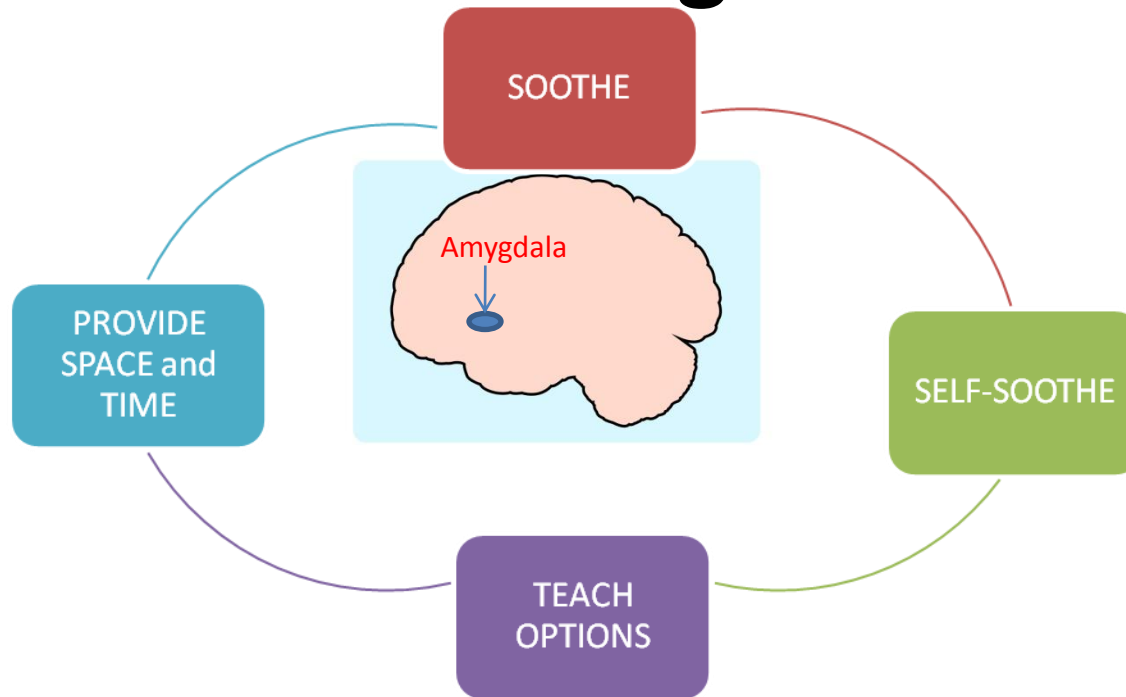


Language  
Facial Expressions  
Body Language

## Sensory Sensitivities



# Emotional Regulation



- Anxiety underlies the fight/flight/freeze response.

# TEACH OPTIONS



## Breathing

- Into the belly
- Lying down



## Music

- Soft
- Familiar



## Distraction

- Sensory Integration break?
- TV? Reading?

# Emotional Regulation - COPING

- Sometimes medication can help – but sometimes can't be tolerated
- Decrease over-stimulation using Sensory Integration techniques
- Explicit instruction on WHY to regulate – on what other's see and think in response and why this is important.

# Emotional Regulation - COPING

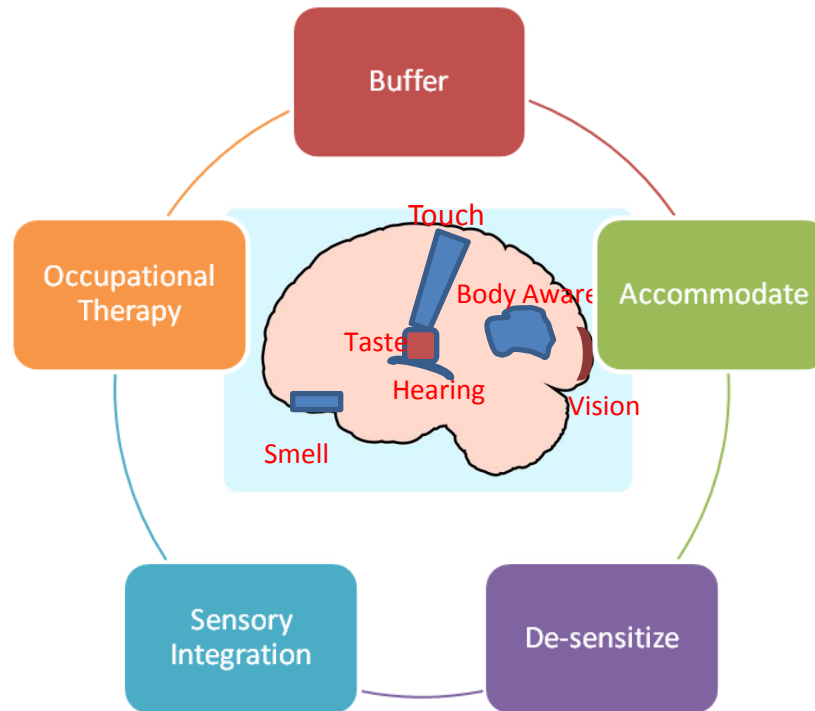
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can help – but with focus on using concrete ways of reinforcing ideas that are suited to that individual
  - Art
  - Music?
  - Explicit phrases seen repetitively

# Emotional Regulation - COPING

- AS APPROPRIATE Slowly de-sensitize to things that are emotionally difficult or of obsessive focus
- FOR EXAMPLE if change in schedule is tough, work on very small changes
  - Prepare child for the possibility of change repetitively over time by talking about it after the fact, and well after a melt-down
    - Explain why changes happen in concrete terms
    - Help them know what to say to themselves (have them repeat something), and what they can do to soothe themselves (hug a stuffy, use a weighted blanket, look at a happy picture of a pet) while they are doing so
  - Tell them (we're leaving at 4:50, not 4:45 today)
    - Explain why
    - Remind them of their coping techniques

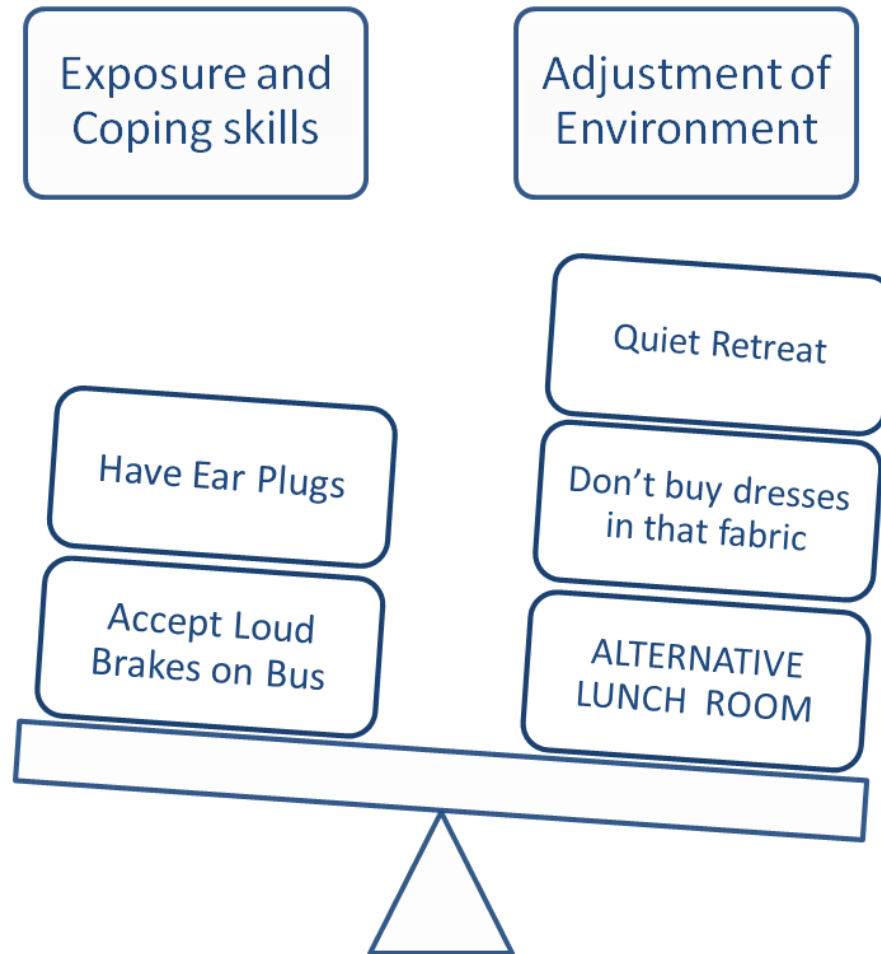


# Sensory Sensitivities



- Possibly due to physical increase in actual perception along with difficulties in executive function (research has shown sensory sensitivity in MICE with autism)
  - It really may hurt more to brush hair
  - The loudness of the lunchroom really is perceived louder than for others.

# Strike a Balance



# Don't Forget

- Sensory Integration possibilities
- Continued graduated exposure
- Occupational Therapy

# Sensory Sensitivity

- Current reviews of research have suggested that Sensory Integration studies have not been sufficiently scientific to demonstrate a positive impact from Sensory Integration treatments.
- However, practice suggests that using these treatments in the moment help reduce emotional reactivity, and improve ability to acclimate to new situations.

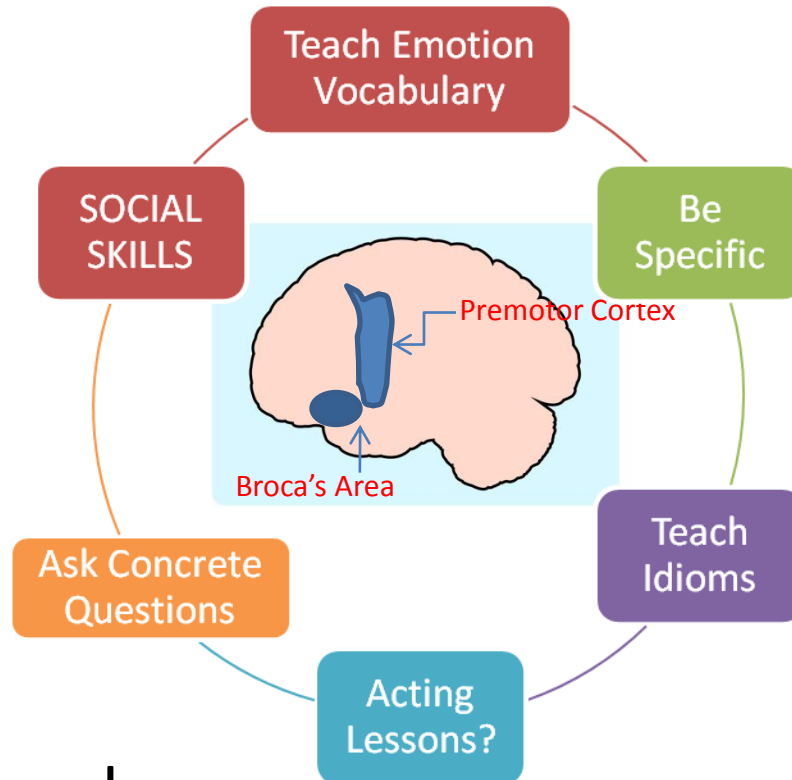
# Sensory Sensitivity - COPING

- Use individually chosen techniques like weighted blankets, jumping on trampoline, bouncing on yoga ball, spinning, swinging to help soothe when your child is over-stimulated.
  - Discuss with an Occupational Therapist
- Help your child develop awareness of how these techniques can help him/her

# Sensory Sensitivity - COPING

- Help your child recognize the situations for which he/she might need to prepare for overstimulation, and consider using sensory integration techniques before hand to reduce overall arousal level.
- Regulate the amount of time spent in a helpful activity to reduce over-use and hyper-focus.

# Communication



- Use visuals where possible

# Defining social skills

SOCIAL SKILLS NEED TO BE TAUGHT.

## 1. Emotions:

- Recognizing emotional states in self & others
- Expressing emotional state
- Using self-control



# In other words...

- If you run into me in the hall, did you do it on purpose?
- How do you feel about running in to me?
- How do I feel about you running in to me?
- What should I do with that feeling?
- What should I say (if anything) to the person who ran into me?

# Social Cognition - COPING

- Tony Atwood's 'Cognitive Affective Training'
- Repetitively use scales to assess current internal state.
- IN THE MOMENT, or via memory,
  - Lead child to consider how their bodies muscles feel
  - Belly
  - Neck
- And connect this feeling to a word or an image for an emotional state
- Then connect this to skill to regulate emotion (self-calming – using whatever techniques are helpful)

# Defining social skills

## 2. Relationship dynamics

- Joining a group / being left out of a group
- Difference between requests and demands
- Disagreeing
- Apologizing
- Fitting in
- Caring and sharing

# In other words...

- If I want to play video games with Alex, how do I ask?
- What if Alex says no?
- What if Alex says yes?
  - How do I feel?
  - What do I do?
- If we're playing video games, how do I blend in with everyone else?
- What if the group asks me to play video games but I don't want to?
- What if I'm the best video game player there?
- What if I'm the worst?

# Defining social skills

## 3. Communication's 'Hidden' components

- Body language
- Vocal tone
- Perspective taking

## 4. Conversation

- Initiating
- Maintaining
- Terminating
- Responsibilities of speaker vs. listener

# In other words...

- How did that girl say 'sure'?
  - Did she mean 'Cool!' (head up, eyes sparkling, tone is high)
  - Or did she mean 'whatever – go away'. (turns away and rolls eyes as saying it, to re-engage with her friend next to her)
  - Or did she mean 'yeah, right, and pigs fly' (tone is disbelieving)
- Let's say I see that girl again, how do I start talking to her? What should I say if she talks back? What stuff should I NOT talk about? How loud should I talk? Where should I look? When should I stop talking? How can I figure out when she is done talking?

# Social Cognition - COPING

- Begin with foundation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
  - For students with average or higher cognitive abilities – ABA as a primary treatment modality is not as effective.
- But CBT is only part of the story

# General social skills programs miss the mark

**Tim Kowalski points out that research has shown:**

- “...outcomes for social skills training are *largely ineffective* due to *minimal generalization* into functional daily use. Practice does NOT make perfect. The group leader must be aware of the inherent difficulties in generalization or functional gains will remain elusive.” (italics are mine)

Bellini, S., Peters, J., Benner, L. and Hopf, H. (2007). A meta-analysis of school-based social skills interventions for children with autism spectrum disorders. *Remedial and Special Education*. 28: 153-162.



# SO – first we need to add...

- Key concepts that allow the professional to interpret how material is received, and the difficulties with putting it into practice in real-life social situations.

# Key Concepts

- Recognize that faces in motion don't make sense
  - Student may have no difficulty with static face
- Difficulties with central coherence – recognizing what details are important vs. those that are not.
- Theory of mind / taking perspective must be taught.

# Key Concepts

- Ability to understand another's perspective is needed to assess intent.
- Anxiety drives many inappropriate behaviors.
  - Individual often does not sense own emotional state.
- Need to use concrete language - be specific.
  - When specifying 'it', 'this' or 'that' don't assume you are understood.

# Key Concepts

- “Hidden Curriculum” (Brenda Smith-Myles, PhD)
- Intervention is needed ‘in the moment’ & repetitively.
- Remember how sensory sensitivities can affect perception.
- Teach metacognition – eg: teach student to use self-talk ‘Stop & Think – Which choice are you making’ – Will it lead to a good or bad result? Use hands to illustrate.

# AND then we need to add...

- Integration with 'Neuro-Typical' peers
  - Liane Holliday's 'Pretending to Be Normal'
  - Susan J. Morenos 'A college education for individuals with autism' – article on [aspergersyndrome.org](http://aspergersyndrome.org)
  - Pamela Wolfberg's 'Integrated Play Group' model
- In all of these the NT peer naturally, or by design, coaches the individual on the spectrum. THIS is the most promising medium for skills to generalize.

# Integrated Play Group Research

- Pamela Wolfberg, PhD – Autism Institute on Peer Socialization and Play ([www.autisminstitute.com](http://www.autisminstitute.com))
  - Integrated Play Groups
  - 1:2 or 2:3 of novice: expert players
  - Novices can have symptoms anywhere from mild to severe.
  - Research demonstrated improved social-communication skills
- Anecdotal evidence points to peer influence improving social abilities into adulthood.

# Consider...

- Integrating 'game-play' groups just for individuals on the spectrum as part of your Social Skills program
  - Playing cards at UAHuntsville

# Useful Tools

- Tony Attwood, PhD - Cognitive Affective Therapy (CAT) program
- Tim Kowalski, CCC – “Social-Pragmatic Success”
- Brenda Smith Myles, PhD – “The Hidden Curriculum”
- Carol Gray – Social Stories
- Maria Garcia Winner – “Socially Curious, Curiously Social” and “Thinking about You, Thinking about Me”
- Elizabeth Laugeson – “The Science of Making Friends”



# Some Useful Cognitive Techniques

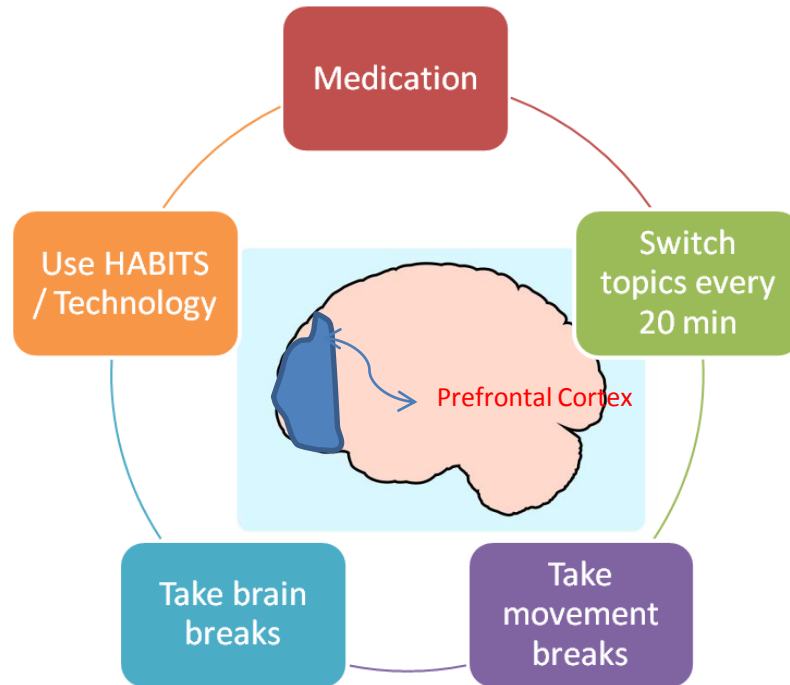
- Acting Lessons
- Role-plays
- Visual cues – social etiquette posters, cards, video modeling
- Videotape the student
- Imaginary Camera
- Disney tween shows for analysis of body language / social communication.
- Social Autopsies – (Lavoie, 2005) – immediate, identify behaviors that were helpful, and those that were not. NOT a punishment.

# Resources

- Kowalski, Timothy. Social-Pragmatic Success for Asperger Syndrome and Other Related Disorders. 2010. Professional Communication Services Inc.
- SLP – Social Pragmatic focus
  - Jennifer Wilson, Speech & Language Center, Huntsville
- Social Skills groups
  - Angela Collier
  - AASCG
  - Vicki Stiles

# Executive Function

What's Important	How Important Is It
Make Myself Do It Even if I don't want to	Realize how much time it takes
Screening out the unimportant	Remembering Consequences



- Timers
- Rewards

# Executive Function - COPING

Start EARLY with instilling school and self-care habits

- Homework when do you do it, how to get it turned in
- Books to be remembered
- Planner contains all items of homework
- Incorporate microwave, washing machine, clothes storage

When talking about making decisions, encourage understanding of problem solving process.

\* We do homework first. Why?

# Executive Function - COPING

- Use visual reminders / diagrams with concrete language to provide methods.
  - Pinterest can provide some good education / organization concepts.
- Use rewards that are significant for that child (special interests are a good motivator) to get habits into place.

# Executive Function - COPING

- Try to put the coping aids (folders, diagrams, bins, etc.) as CLOSE AS POSSIBLE to the place it will be needed.
- Devise the process, and show via hand-over-hand, or via diagram, how to follow it.
  - Don't just tell
  - Don't expect learning by watching your hands do it

# Executive Function - COPING

- Introduce technology to aid executive function as early as possible:
  - Use 12x12 Time Timer to improve sense of passage of time
  - Use phone to create reminders
  - Use phone to encourage reading of email

# Executive Function - COPING

- MOTIVATION –
  - An Executive Function
  - As appropriate allow/encourage special interest to lead to careers
  - “Different ...Not Less” – edited by Temple Grandin
- CONSIDER – Not amplifying the ‘he is so smart’ as a way of giving praise.



# Executive Function - COPING

- Sometimes medication can help – sometimes it can make it worse
  - Oversensitive Amygdala (see Emotional Regulation) can react badly to stimulant medications
  - Dosages should be started smaller than for typically developing peer
  - Best to be working with a child psychiatrist that is familiar with ASDs.