



LEARNER OBJECTIVES

WEBINAR – Putting the Cart before the Horse: Autism Treatment

Participants will be able to:

- Identify necessary direction of treatment
- Identify forms of sensory issues and how they may effect behavioral needs
- Identify the ways the brain of individuals with autism is primed for experiencing trauma
- Identify the benefits of using mindfulness in treatment
- Use two mindfulness exercises to help individuals with emotional regulation and anxiety

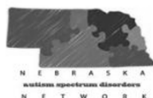
Tri-State Webinar series

Putting the Cart Before the Horse: Autism Treatment

Presented by:
Robert Cox, MA, PLPC, NCC



COLORADO
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Tri-State Autism Spectrum Disorder Webinar Series



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Presenter Information

- Robert Cox, MA, PLPC, NCC



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Learner Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Identify sensory issues involved with Autism
- Identify necessary direction of treatment
- Be able to identify helpful sensory exercises
- Implement mindfulness training at various functioning levels
- Determine when behavioral supports are necessary

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Presentation Summary

Autism is a trauma. The sensory environment is a constant traumatic force on a brain that is ill prepared to sort out the incoming stimulation or is so overloaded that it is non-responsive to it. Coping with this trauma (and later in high functioning individuals with the social trauma) is key in the treatment of autism.

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A Little About Autism and the Brain

- You are born with about 100 billion neurons
- By age 2 there are trillions of connections between them (far more than you need).
- Pruning is the process of reducing those connections so that the pathways that fire together, wire together.
- Pruning is not efficient in the autistic brain resulting in confusing neural pathways
- The amygdala is far more dense and larger in autistic than in neuro-typical brains

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Neuro-Typical Brain Pruning

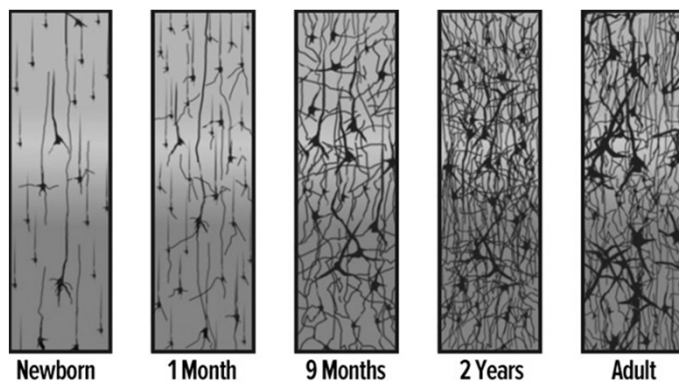
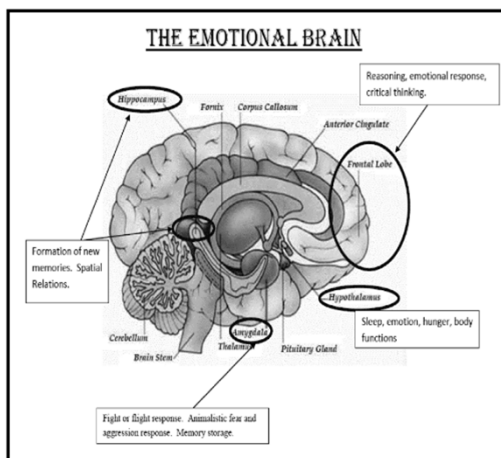


Image from the urban child institute

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Autism and the Emotional Brain



Thalamus

Scans sensory world

Amygdala Response

Heightened because the amygdala is larger And denser.

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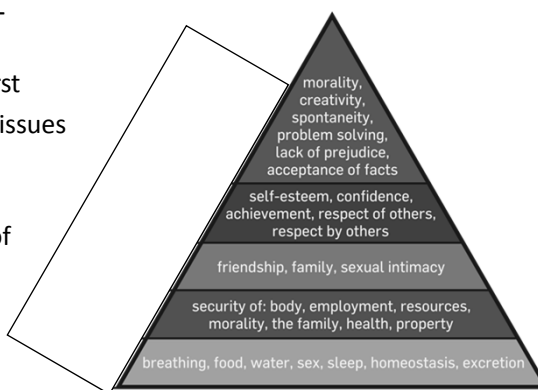
Polling Questions

- How is the brain in the autistic individual "Primed" for a trauma response?
 - A. There is a heightening of sensory reactivity
 - B. The brain is more densely wired
 - C. The amygdala is larger and more dense
 - D. All of the above

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Direction of Treatment

- Maslow's fundamental rule – Safety first
- We must treat the trauma first
- This means treating sensory issues
- Teaching mindfulness as an emotional regulation tool
- Implementing the teaching of social and behavioral skills



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Polling Questions

- Why is direction of treatment important?

Please indicate your answer:

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Assessment of Sensory Needs

- Vestibular needs
 - Balance (inner ear) issues
- Proprioceptive Need
 - Where I stop and the world starts, depth perception
- Tactile Issues
 - Clothing textures,
- Auditory Issues
 - These are the worst
- Food issues
 - Transitioning to different foods

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The Sensory Diet

- Implement more regularly for younger ages with longer periods of sensory activity versus activities of learning.
- Implementation will greatly reduce the behaviors and often reduce or nullify the need for more expensive behavioral interventions.
- Breaks should be regular and scheduled.
- Implement exercises in as simple and integrative a fashion as necessary (bands for chairs, squeeze balls, things I can do at my desk)
- Assist in recognition of need as it arises (identify antecedents)

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What Mindfulness Does

- Lowers toxic chemicals like cortisol released in anxiety moments and known to be higher in individuals with sensory issues.
- Increases Oxytocin, the social relatedness chemical responsible for things like bonding and empathic attunement known to be low in individuals with autism
- Increases the pruning in the brain and generates new neural pathways.
- Trains the brain to respond differently to triggers that would have generated anxiety before.
- Allows space for processing tasks and filtering of sensory input

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Teaching Mindfulness to Children

- Use very concrete methods
- Begin with what already fascinates
- Focusing on one thing first then generalize
- Copy Cat Breathing Exercises

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Higher Functioning Mindfulness

- Techniques become more abstract as cognitive levels increase and metacognition becomes possible.
- Discussion of how mindfulness works on the brain may increase buy in.
- Setting routine and self motivating practice
- Identifying triggers and stressors through body awareness

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Uses For Mindfulness in Autism

- Emotional Regulation
- Increase in executive functioning
- Decrease in stress chemicals and increase in good chemicals
- Control of symptoms of comorbid expressions like ADHD, anxiety, OCD, etc.

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Polling Questions

- Which of the following is a result of regular mindfulness, practice (choose all that apply)?

- A. Reduces Anxiety
- B. Cures Autism
- C. Rewires neural pathways
- D. Increases Trigger Awareness
- E. Increases IQ

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Behavioral Concerns

- Need for behavioral intervention should be greatly reduced by this point.
- ABA methods are very effective with younger and low to moderate intellectual functioning individuals
- Cognitive therapies have proven just as effective for higher functioning individuals as they are for neurotypical individuals.
- Motivational interviewing is very effective in the treatment of adolescents and young adults and can be used to gain “buy in” during treatment.

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Polling Questions

Mindfulness can help to train the individual in emotional control by rewiring the neural responses to anxiety and sensory issues?

- A. True
- B. False

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Issues in Social Development

- The delay of development by bullying/social trauma
- Erickson's "Identity Vs. Role Confusion" is often unresolved
- Creates delays in the "Intimacy Vs. Isolation" Stage
- Bullying results in a social trauma and giving up. It becomes easier to isolate and vulnerability is unacceptable.

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Developing the Self

- Groups are extremely powerful in teaching relational skills
- Creating a core sense of self through identity development
- Teaching the individual to overcome the past trauma
- Bonding through group support
- Teaching Perspective Taking
- Being the observer

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Conclusion

- Trauma is involved through the sensory assault of the environment on the individual and from the social pariah aspect of social development during adolescence and young adulthood.
- Until we treat the trauma the individual will not feel safe enough to want to engage in new skills training.
- Asking ourselves what is keeping the individual in an anxiety state is the most beneficial thing we can do in beginning treatment.

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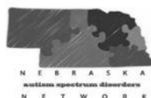
Thank You!

Feel free to contact me about speaking engagements
or consultation Services.

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