

IS THIS Autism?

Part 2 in a 4-part Series for Autism Awareness Month

Think of the person(s) you know on the autism spectrum. Do they have:

- speech or language difficulties: no speech? delayed speech? echolalia?
- sensory issues: over-sensitivity to sounds, lights, textures?
- motor difficulties: fine motor? gross motor? motor planning?
- emotional regulation difficulties: anxiety, depression, aggression?
- physical or diet-related difficulties: allergies, limited diet?
- repetitive behaviors: "stimming", hand-flapping?

While "autism treatment" programs may target these areas, all of the above are really co-occurring conditions, existing *along with* the autism.

So then what is Autism?

Again, think of the person(s) you know on the spectrum:

Yes No

- (1) **Can they share experiences with you?** For example, if they are non-verbal, can they share their emotional reactions to a mutual experience by smiling or laughing with you? If they are verbal, can they also share their feelings about what an event meant to them personally? This is called *Experience-sharing* or *Declarative Communication*.
- (2) **Can they borrow your perspective?** For example, can they look to you to help them resolve uncertain situations? Can they be soothed by just a reassuring look on your face? or notice if you are approving or disapproving? This is called *Referencing*.
- (3) **Can they "dance" with you?** For example, can they do their part in coordinating with you when playing "peek-a-boo"? When walking side by side with you? Can they start or stop with you? If verbal, can they converse reciprocally? This is called *Regulating*.
- (4) **Can they reflect on past experiences & anticipate future experiences?** For example, can they use an experience they had yesterday or last week, to avoid a negative result or repeat a positive one? Do they seem to understand consequences? This is called *Autobiographical* or *Episodic Memory*.
- (5) **Can they "go with the flow"?** For example, if plans change, can they easily adapt to new conditions? Can they see things in shades of grey, rather than in black and white? Can they come up with multiple right answers? This is called *Flexible Thinking*.

What Autism researchers have found, is that it is a combination of these five core areas of difficulty which define Autism Spectrum Disorders: (1) Declarative Communication, (2) Referencing, (3) Regulating, (4) Episodic Memory, and (5) Flexible Thinking. For more information, see the back of this sheet or visit our web site at www.RDIconnect.com.

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Often called the "missing link" in Autism treatment, the Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI®) Program is a parent-based treatment program that helps parents learn how to guide their child to desire and succeed in genuine give-and-take relationships, while addressing flexible thinking, rapid attention-shifting, executive functioning and emotional regulation.

The RDI® Program is based on the latest scientific research about autism, the brain and developmental psychology.

We invite you to visit our web site for many free resources, including video clips, research summaries, a weekly newsletter, and much more.

www.RDIconnect.com



relationship development intervention

Remediating Autism through Relationships

THIS IS Autism

Part 2 in a 4-part Series for Autism Awareness Month

Impaired social and emotional functioning presents the greatest obstacle to quality of life for people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). And the devastating impact that these impairments have throughout the lifespan has been well documented.* Even when individuals with ASD do develop some social and emotional skills such as eye contact, emotion recognition, and turn-taking, these skills appear to be contained within a limited domain, characterized by encounters that are managed using scripted, predictable actions bereft of the emotional components of communication. Moreover, these encounters are driven primarily by the desire to use social and communicative behavior for instrumental purposes; that is, as a means to obtain specified goals.

Regardless of language abilities, IQ, academic success, or the presence of other co-occurring symptoms, individuals with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome or Pervasive Developmental Disorder have difficulties in certain core areas:

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relationship development intervention

DECLARATIVE (EXPERIENCE-SHARING) COMMUNICATION:

If they are non-verbal, they may point to get what they want, and if they are verbal, they may ask questions, make demands or talk at length about their special interest, but verbally or non-verbally, they have an inability to share their experiences and feelings with you.

REFERENCING: They may learn to recognize and label various facial expressions, or be taught "eye contact," but they can't "borrow your perspective" to help them resolve situations of uncertainty.

REGULATING: They may learn to follow procedures and scripts, but can't "dance" with you, in back and forth interactions, if you are being spontaneous or unpredictable.

EPISODIC (autobiographical) MEMORY: They may have good rote or procedural memory, but lack the kind of personal memory which allows them to reflect on past experiences or anticipate future ones.

FLEXIBLE THINKING: They may understand rule-based thinking, or use black-and-white thinking, but can't rapidly adapt or alter plans based on changing circumstances, think of multiple right answers, know when something is "good enough" or see "shades of gray."

The RDI® Program addresses all these core areas of difficulties identified by autism researchers* in a step-by-step, developmental way.

* For references, download the Autism Spectrum Quarterly article, "Relationship Development Intervention—Developing a Treatment Program to Address the Unique Social and Emotional Deficits in Autism Spectrum Disorders," by Dr. Steven Gutstein: www.RDIconnect.com/download

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