

Helping Students on the Autism Spectrum Prepare for Employment

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Today's Agenda

- ▶ Some background
- ▶ Some of what we've learned
- ▶ Your questions, some strategies and tools
- ▶ More Q and A

Presence on campus is increasing

- ▶ 1 in 68 individuals (CDC) have a diagnosis of ASD
- ▶ More college students with ASD due to improved K-12 services and federally-mandated expectations (e.g., ADA)
- ▶ Small colleges appeal to families who believe individualized attention is critical to success

And at Champlain...

- ▶ Certain types of academic programs often attract a higher percentage of students with ASD (technology, gaming, cybersecurity and other CS-related majors)

Asperger's Syndrome (High Functioning Autism)

- ▶ What do you know about students on the Autism Spectrum?

Asperger's Syndrome (High Functioning Autism)

- Restricted repetitive patterns of behavior, interests and activities, with at least one of the following:
 - encompassing preoccupation with stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest abnormal either in intensity or focus
 - apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
 - stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g. hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
 - persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

Where did Asperger's go?



Social Communication Disorder

- ▶ Difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal
- ▶ Using communication for social purposes
- ▶ Ability to change communication to match context
- ▶ Difficulties following rules for conversation
- ▶ Difficulties understanding what is not explicitly stated

Mild Autism

- ▶ Deficits in social communication and social interactions
 - ▶ Social-emotional reciprocity
 - ▶ nonverbal communicative behaviors
 - ▶ Developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships
- ▶ Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior
 - ▶ Repetitive motor movements
 - ▶ Insistence on sameness
 - ▶ Fixated interests
 - ▶ Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input

Champlain's Challenge

- ▶ How do you turn successful students into successful job applicants and ultimately, prepare them to be successful employees or business owners?

The Good News

- ▶ Many of the strategies you currently employ are “best practices” in working with this population.
- ▶ Often, what’s needed is more a “shift in perspective” than a change in skills.

Contextual Fit (Focus on the person, focus on the environment, or both?)



Resilience

- ▶ Risk factors are predictive for about 20-49% of a high risk population (Rutter, 1987, 2000; Werner, 2001)
- ▶ Resiliency traits predict positive outcomes in 50-80% of a high risk population (Werner, 2001)

Resilience

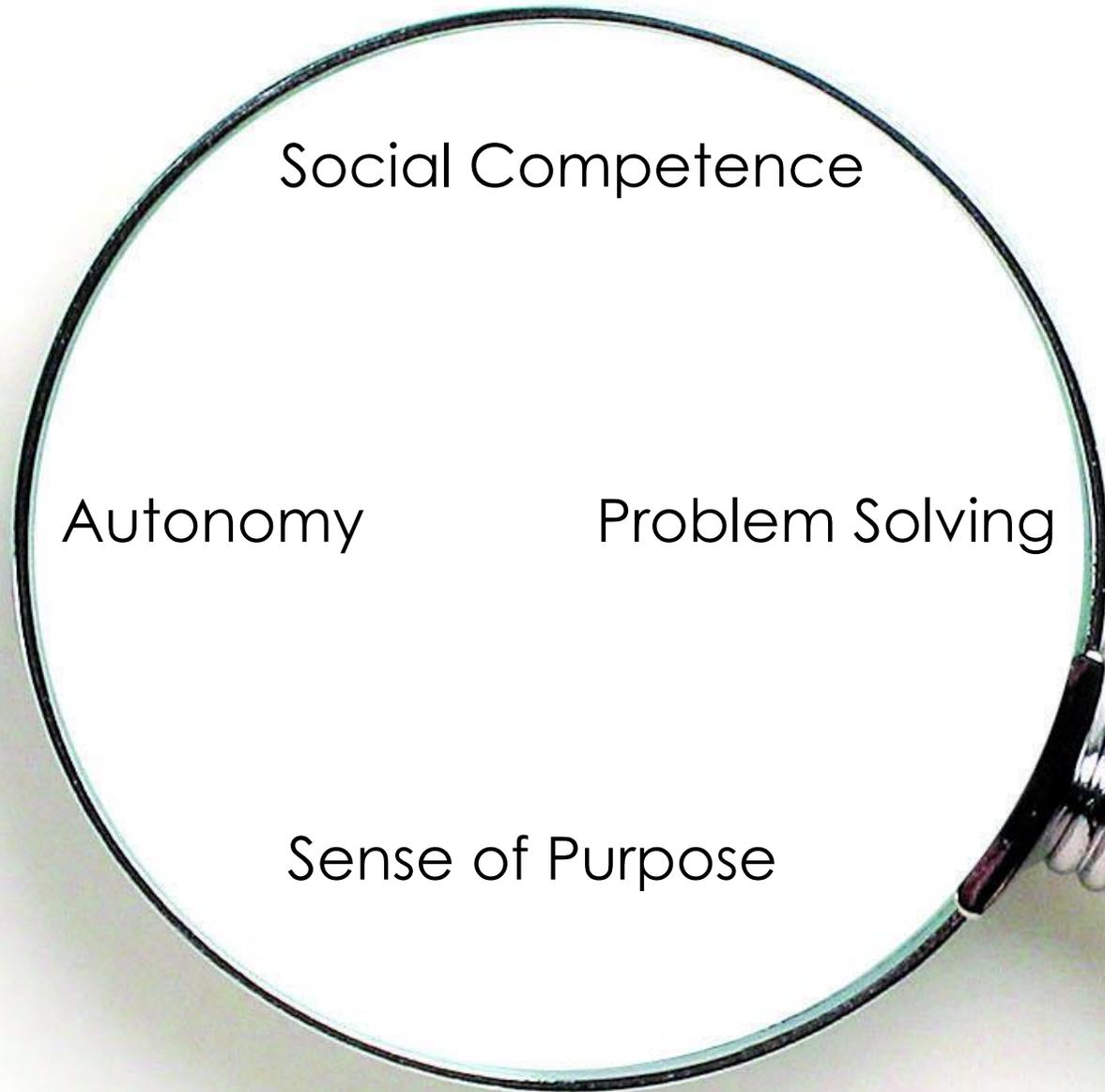
Social Competence - empathy,
compassion, communication

Autonomy - Goal direction, hope, sense of
meaning

Sense of Purpose - humor, internal locus of
control, adaptive distancing

Problem Solving - planning, critical thinking,
resourceful

DISABILITY THROUGH THE RESILIENCE LENS



PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Caring Relationships
- High Expectations
- Opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution

Four Core Approach

Environmental Protective Factors

Necessary to help individuals develop and access resiliency traits / internal assets

Learning (School)
Caring Relationships
High Expectations
Meaningful Participation

Living (Home)
Caring Relationships
High Expectations
Meaningful Participation

Engaging (Peers)
Caring Relationships
High Expectations
Meaningful Participation

Giving (Community)
Caring Relationships
High Expectations
Meaningful Participation

Resiliency Programming & Supports

Intentional Programming to foster development, growth and use of natural resiliency traits

SOCIAL COMPETENCE
Responsiveness
Communication
Empathy
Caring

PROBLEM SOLVING
Planning
Flexibility
Resourcefulness
Critical Thinking / Insight

SENSE OF PURPOSE
Goal Direction
Educational Aspirations
Achievement Motivation
Special Interest
Optimism / Hope
Sense of Meaning

AUTONOMY
Positive Identity
Internal Locus of Control
Self Efficacy
Self Awareness
Mindfulness
Humor

Program Outcomes

Improved:

- Mental Health
- Physical Health
- Academic Gains
- Social Gains



Some of your questions...

- ▶ How do you help a student not monopolize or control the conversation or interview?
- ▶ How do we tell them that flapping or pacing is not expected at an interview?
- ▶ How do we not offend them when they do things such as just stand up and leave because they are done (and the conversation isn't over)?

Social Competence

- ▶ The challenges:
 - ▶ “Theory of mind”
 - ▶ Hygiene
 - ▶ Unusual manner of speaking
 - ▶ Problems with turn-taking
 - ▶ Rigid thinking/rules obsessive
 - ▶ The “hidden curriculum” of social interactions

Social Competence

- ▶ Some strategies:
 - ▶ Role playing
 - ▶ Practice with corrective feedback
 - ▶ Video analysis of interview skills
 - ▶ Peer collaboration
 - ▶ Authentic participation- job shadowing, internships
 - ▶ Don't sugar coat, kind but honest
 - ▶ Reflection after the interview



Some of your questions...

- ▶ How do we help them with their interview preparation?
- ▶ How do you help a graduating senior who hasn't developed the necessary job skills for their first job?
- ▶ How do we help them get that first job, especially those positions that require customer service skills?

Problem-solving

- ▶ The challenges:
 - ▶ *Poor executive function skills*
 - ▶ Organizational and planning abilities
 - ▶ Working memory
 - ▶ Inhibition and impulse control
 - ▶ Self-reflection and self-monitoring
 - ▶ Time management and prioritizing
 - ▶ Understanding complex or abstract concepts
 - ▶ Using new strategies

Problem-solving

- ▶ Some strategies:
 - ▶ Calendars, planners, reminders
 - ▶ Writing things down (working memory issues)
 - ▶ “Chunking” tasks into manageable amounts
 - ▶ Time and patience! Learning takes longer with EF challenges.



Some of your questions...

- ▶ Are there recommended videos that demonstrate success?
- ▶ What if their employment goals are unrealistic?

Sense of Purpose

- ▶ Help students achieve this through:
 - ▶ Goal-setting
 - ▶ Collaborative problem-solving
 - ▶ Skills inventories
 - ▶ Allowing them to fail

The “Social Story”

Williams, Lee B. and LaRoque, Perry (2015). Mansfield
Hall, Burlington, VT

Some of your questions...



- ▶ At what point is it appropriate to refer a student to support services if we sense they are on the Spectrum, but haven't disclosed that?
- ▶ How (if at all) would a student go about broaching the subject of their disability/challenges with an employer?

Personal Autonomy

- ▶ Challenges:
 - ▶ Stigma, secrecy, lack of knowledge about their disability
- ▶ Strategies:
 - ▶ Encourage, role-play, help student with language for that conversation.
 - ▶ Build a strengths/weakness chart with the student.
 - ▶ Build confidence through practice.
 - ▶ Refer to counseling and disabilities colleagues when you are not sure what to do next.

What can you or your student say to employers?

- ▶ There are “scripts” for these conversations (see resource packet)
- ▶ Encourage employers to call you to follow up after an interview.



Are there specific types of jobs/careers that would be a good fit for someone with ASD?

- ▶ YES! But every student (ASD or not) is different. Each requires the individualized assessment you do for all students.
- ▶ Employer/environment is more critical than specific tasks/skills.

And some general reminders:

- ▶ Transitions for this population take longer than for many students.
- ▶ Ambiguity and “gray areas” are more challenging than for many students.
- ▶ This is not a disorder of motivation. Many of these behaviors are hard-wired responses to a different way of seeing the world.

Other Resources

- ▶ Vermont Association of Business Industry and Rehabilitation <http://www.vabir.org>
- ▶ http://weraspies.weebly.com/uploads/6/8/5/9/6859492/interview_social_story.pdf
- ▶ Do2learn.com (subscription website with rich resources for job-hunting and job skills for people with disabilities)
- ▶ Local coaches and therapists (list in Resource Packet)

Other Questions?

A copy of this presentation can be
found at:

Leeburdettewilliams.net