

ABSTRACT

Individuals with neurodiversities such as autism spectrum disorders, learning disorders, and ADHD often require assistance in building their social communication skills. This session shares successful methods used to increase social inclusivity in lower-functioning neurodiverse populations. Clear and decisive modifications to social communication programming are identified. Adaptations to person-centered planning and collaborative caregiver strategies are described in an inclusive framework.

SUMMARY

Neurodiversity, as an emergent area of scholarship, views neurological differences as the result of natural variations in the human genome (Saleh & Bruyere, 2017; and Judge, 2017). The continuum of neurodiversity encompasses a wide range of neurological differences, including

such variations as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), learning disabilities (LD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). When recurrent departures from accepted social communication skills are coupled with neurodiversities, individuals are often described as lacking the social knowledge to competently participate in society (Freedman, 2010).

In circumstances where social communication behaviors are deficient, people need programs designed to assist in the development and practice of specific social communication skills. In a review of existing social communication programs, one sees that specific levels of cognitive performance are expected. This session shares successful approaches in learning social communication skills in lower-functioning neurodiverse populations that result in increased social inclusivity.

A social communication program designed to enhance social inclusivity for young adults with ASD, LD, and ADHD is examined (Waller, Sanford, Caswell, & Bainbridge, 2016). They describe positive social transitional outcomes for their higher-functioning participants, resulting in improved independent living, gainful employment, and the pursuit of higher educational opportunities. However, low-verbal participants did not achieve similar levels and remained stagnant within the program.

Thus focused programming for individuals with lower functioning social communication behaviors is warranted. In participants with limited verbal outputs, a more inclusive and successful environment is necessary for the development of social growth. Purposeful and meaningful adaptations are required in order to increase successfully the inclusivity of this population.

Noteworthy modifications are identified, and improvements made to incorporate purposeful engagement are described. Person-centered planning was a pertinent modality towards creating social engagement. Engagement was increased in activities that took into consideration the interests of the participants. Person-centered planning succeeds when clinicians keep the client's interests, hobbies, and motivations at the center of goal-

planning and selected activities. With this strategy, clients who are lower-functioning were more willing to participate purposefully with both clinicians and peers within the social communication group.

Additionally, we present enhanced approaches for collaborative caregivers. Clinicians should actively pursue conversation and collaboration with the main communication partners in their client's lives. The reason for this is twofold – first, to understand the client's interests, and second, to generalize the client's achievements in the group to everyday functional communicative attempts. The main communication partners for these individuals interact with them on a daily basis, understand their primary wants and needs, and assist at a foundational level. Caregivers should be encouraged by the clinician to join the sessions themselves, as well as utilize learned skills in functional activities outside of the group.

Provided with these suggested modifications, one may improve programming for individuals with lower social functioning. Increased social communicative engagement in a structured program generalizes to other multiple communicative settings. This framework for social engagement can

be applied to a variety of group therapy programs. It may make a positive impact overall in the social communicative interactions of these individuals.